

Saved, Sanctified and Sent
Sermon on John 17:6-19
May 16th, 2021

This week we have reached the end of what is known as Jesus' final or farewell discourse. Here He is praying for the disciples and for us – at the end He clearly includes all those who will believe in Him because of the message of the first disciples. It is a powerful prayer and in it He says that we are saved, sanctified, and sent by God.

We are saved because we have believed in Jesus, have believed, do believe that He was sent by God for the very purpose of bringing about our salvation by reconciling us with God. We are saved because we believe in Him and trust in His teaching.

Jesus makes it quite clear that He is not praying for the world but for those who belong to Him, and He asks the Father to protect us. Tom Wright reminds us that when Jesus talks about the world, He does not just mean the physical universe as we know it. It means the world insofar as it has rebelled against God, has chosen darkness rather than light and has organised itself to oppose the creator. In that sense Jesus obviously is not in the world and as we belong to Him, neither are we. We need protection from being pulled back into that world of sin and darkness so that we can continue to walk in the light of Christ, even as physically we continue to exist in the physical world. We necessarily engage constantly with a world that has spiritually turned away from God.

As I have said before, we live in the in-between world, where God's Kingdom has come in the person of Jesus and through His death and resurrection but isn't yet fully realised. The old order has not yet passed away and so as Christians we are citizens of the Kingdom of God but live in a world that is still, temporarily, ruled over by the prince of darkness. And Jesus did not pray that we would be taken out of this world, but that having been saved God would protect us from the evil one.

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Then Jesus prayed that we would be sanctified. Interestingly the word sanctified comes from the same root word as Holy. It means being set apart for a specific purpose. It is more complicated than that though because it isn't a one-off thing – there, you have been set apart. No, we are being sanctified, being set apart being made Holy, it is a process.

Rob Bell talked recently, in a podcast, about the enduring appeal of Disney Films. Why do they resonate with us? He suggests that it is because usually the main character is on a journey to remember who they really are, and they must grow into their identity, often by facing and overcoming adversity.

For example, in the film The Lion King, Simba a young lion, goes to live in the jungle when his parents are killed and his wicked uncle Scar takes over the pride. As the years go by Simba has to remember who He really is, the son of a King, Mufasa, and when he rediscovers His identity he is able to defeat his wicked uncle and become who he was meant to be, the rightful Lion King.

It isn't perfect but it isn't a bad analogy of the Christian life. We have to grow into our identity in Christ, and often we face adversity along the way, which the Holy Spirit uses to help us to develop Christ like qualities. We are becoming more like the people we are called to be, who we were always meant to be, becoming more like Jesus, becoming more like the sons and daughters of The King that we were born to be. John Wesley talked about the need for development in holiness, an ever-deepening process of moral change. It is one of the myriads of those Kingdom 'both and's'. We have been set apart and we are being set apart. We are growing in Holiness or set apartness.

We are saved because God loves us and Jesus died for us, but we are also saved for a purpose, we are being sanctified for a purpose. Just as Jesus was sent in

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to the world to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God, so Jesus is sending us. He does not say that some of us are sent, he doesn't say that the Vicars are sent, but that He is sending all those who belong to Him. Clearly there are those with gifts of evangelism, and we are not all called to be Billy Graham. But nonetheless, each one of us is called to offer and to use the gifts that we have. Each according to our ability, should demonstrate by our lives and tell with our mouths the Good News of Salvation and reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus, who lived, died and rose again for us. It may not be easy, but it isn't optional. And if we are no longer in a position to do anything else we can always do the most important thing, which is to pray for others. Always remember that we are not on our own, we have Jesus at the right hand of the Father, constantly interceding for us, (Romans 8:34). We have the Holy Spirit in us, who will give us words when we need them and guide us in every way if we cooperate with Him. And we have the protection of God the Father. Again, this protection is not necessarily from the consequences of living in fallen world. We may see God's hand in the wonderful and good things we see in the world, not least the beautiful countryside that we are so blessed to live in. But the Prince of darkness still causes chaos and suffering and people who aren't seeking God are still walking in darkness. We are not shielded from suffering in this world, we have no special privilege in that regard, any more than Jesus did, or Paul, or any of the disciples. But we have hope because we know that in the end the lamb wins - it is true, check out the end of the book. We have hope because we have believed, we do believe, we are saved, we are sanctified, set apart for God being made Holy, and we are sent to share the Good News, our lives have purpose and meaning.