

Title: “Prayer of Jesus”

Chris Ryan

1 Peter 4:12-19 John 17:1-11

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Lesson: *Jesus has compassion for each of us. He cares about every detail of our lives.*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In Peter's letter to early Christians who were the midst of persecution, he wrote

¹² Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory¹² and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

We may read this text and feel that any suffering experienced *not* for the name of Christ, like the type that we experience today, right now, is ignored or minimized by God. We might reflect on the isolation that we are experiencing, being quarantined for so many weeks, unsure of when it might end and wonder what God thinks of our loneliness. We may be agonizing over our financial situation because our jobs have been lost or our hours have been reduced and question exactly how God might provide. Or maybe we are suffering a sense of diminished self-worth as we wander the empty aisles of the stores, searching for a replacement, some alternative for a basic necessity of life. And as we leave empty handed, unsure of how we will cope without it, we wonder if this inconvenience is too small for God's empathy. Maybe, just maybe, he only sees our bigger problems. Maybe, just maybe he only really focuses on the suffering that is done in his name. One could have that impression from this section of the letter.

But the Gospel passage tells us something different. It tells us that *all* suffering of any Christian is within the scope of his care and compassion. Even though we read only the first few verses, the entire chapter is the recorded prayer that Jesus speaks to the Father. And in these words, he also speaks to us today and he paints for us the completeness and fullness of that care and that compassion that he has for each child of God.

In this prayer, we hear that compassion. Don't miss it. He knows that in a short time he will be abandoned by all of his followers - they will flee in fear at his arrest. He knows that later he will be humiliated, beaten, and then whipped nearly to the point of death. He will then be nailed to a tree and left to die. But it won't end there. As if that were not enough, God himself will turn his head from his son and Jesus will be left completely and utterly alone. The only thing that will remain with him on that cross will be the full weight of God's punishment for every sin, from every person, from

every time. He knows all of this and yet, as he prays in the garden, he recognizes *our* suffering and petitions God on *our* behalf. He says:

⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Christ prays for you and he prays for me. And his prayer is one of concern for *all* that we go through. The petitions to the Father are not limited to our Christian suffering. In these last hours, Jesus turns over his universal concern for our lives into the hands of the father. He says

⁶ “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word... ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them... ¹³ But now I am coming to you... ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

You see, in these last hours Christ places us in his Father’s care but never asks that we be removed from the circumstances that we find ourselves in. When he spoke these words, he knew the eventual fate of the disciples - the pain and suffering that they would experience for his name. He also knew of the suffering of believers that would come after them, And, he knows of the suffering that we are experiencing right now, today. He knows of the loss of health and life. He knows of the loss of jobs and financial security. He knows of the pain of isolation. He knew *all* of this and yet he doesn’t ask the Father to intervene. What he does ask is that protection from the evil one be extended to us. Here is the last verse again:

¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

He asks for this instead of modified circumstances because knows that this is where we need God’s intervention and his protection the most. There is a war going on that is much bigger than our sinful selves, this virus, or even the universe. It is a spiritual war that is raging, and we find ourselves placed squarely in the middle by Satan.

Paul writes in Ephesians (6:12)

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world.”

Satan attacks us; he encourages us to rebel against God. He uses the situations of this world, of our society to drive us away from God. Just look at the growing number of Christians that are beginning to fight over when and how to reopen their churches! How cunning he is to persuade us to focus on each other - and fight over what ideological camp we belong to instead of focusing on God! Christ prays to his Father and says, “keep them from the evil one.” It is as if he adds, “Protect them from the Satan’s incursion into society, protect them from his attacks. Protect the church because they are powerless against him. Protect them from themselves because Satan is encouraging them to turn on each other!” This is where we need God the most! This is where we need his protection. We are part of a war that we can’t find ourselves, that we can’t find safety from within ourselves. We are on the battlefield and we are unarmed without God’s protection. But on the cross, Jesus will

remove us from the battlefield. We will no longer stand accused before God. But just because our relationship is restored and just because Satan will be defeated doesn't mean his attacks will cease.

So, this is the prayer of Jesus. It is a plea that as we live in this world, as a community of believers, that we be placed in God's care: the same care that his Father showed to him. I'd like to pause for a moment and let that sink in.

Christ cares so deeply about each one of us and he cares about every single detail of our lives. And his love is so complete, so deep, that the only one he trusts to continue that care is his Father. And so, he prays "keep them and care for them just as I have cared for them." But before he can place us in his Father's loving arms, Christ must reconcile the relationship that we broke with God. And he does this on the cross. Only then can we live under the mercy and grace and protection of our Father.

This is the compassion of Christ and it is available for you today. I look around the church this morning and it is nearly empty. And you look around your home today and you see the same thing. And maybe the suffering you are feeling right now is one of abandonment: by your friends, by your extended family, and by your church. But know this: because Jesus was abandoned by his father, because God turned his head while Christ was hanging on the cross, we will *never* be alone. God will never leave us; he will never forsake us. God will *always* be with us. And God will *always* care about every suffering of our life. Go to him in prayer because he is there with you, right now. Please pray with me.

Lord, into our hearts you speak these words from Isaiah:

[D]o not fear, for I am with you;

do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you;

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Lord, we find peace and comfort in these words today as we approach you with all that we suffer. We trust in your love and compassion and know that your care will see us through these difficult times.