

The Church's One Foundation

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good afternoon. Let's make a start to our lunchtime service this afternoon. It's great to see. Great to see everyone that has come along. Thank you for coming and you're very welcome.

This afternoon we continue in our series that we started last week and that we're running through January, the Lord's Prayer. Now that's not the Lord's Prayer from Matthew or Luke, but as we saw last week, it's the Lord's Prayer in John 17, as the Lord prays for himself and for his disciples and then for all who believe. My name is Richard Gamble. I'm one of the students at Cornhill and it's a pleasure to take these services. We look this afternoon at the second request of the Lord in John 17. We're going to look at verses 6 to 19. Let's read that together. It's on page 903 and we'll read from verse 1 just for context's sake.

John 17 verse 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. Since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on the earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. 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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you. And they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me. For they are yours. All mine are yours and yours are mine.

And I am glorified in them. 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. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me.

I have guarded them. And not one of them has been lost, except the son of destruction, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. And these things I speak in the world, that they may, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. Amen. The word of the Lord.

[3 : 55] Well, we look this afternoon at the second request of the Lord Jesus in his prayer. Our title is, Father, keep them. And we saw last week how the circles of this prayer move outward. Firstly, the Lord is praying for himself. Then he's praying for his immediate disciples and then for all who will believe in his name through their word. And the pattern that the Lord is praying in here is reminiscent of how the high priest would pray on in his preparation for the day of atonement. He would firstly pray for himself and his immediate family. And then he would pray for the whole nation of Israel and he would bear up the whole people of God in prayer. And as he did so, he would wear the tunic and the breastplate that bore the very names of the people of Israel close to his heart and on his shoulders. And we saw last week the great comfort that we have that the Lord Jesus bears us before the father close to his heart and on his shoulders. But we come this afternoon to really a transition, a pivotal moment in this prayer. We saw last week in verse one, how the hour has come and John, the hour is always not yet, but here the hour has come. And the pivotal moment where he would leave the disciples and he was going back to the father. We thought of the movement of Christ last week of how he came down to earth from heaven, but now he is going to the father and that root of glory is of necessity going through the cross. So he's leaving the disciples and that movement is perhaps captured in verse 11. I look at it there with me. Verse 11, I'm no longer in the world. They are in the world.

I'm coming to you. And on the back of that, then keep them in your name. So the Lord is no longer with his disciples. He has kept them. Now he's leaving them. And there's a transition of responsibility to the father to keep them. So there's a looking back to what the son has done. And then there's a looking forward to what the father will do. So as the son has kept the disciples, so the father will now keep them. That's the main thrust of this passage, that the son has kept the disciples. And so now the father will keep them. We'll think of this under three headings in texts like this. It's all speech.

It's all words of the Lord Jesus. And it's quite, it's quite dense. So it's quite hard to maybe just get a hold of, but we're going to think verses six to 10, six to 10, what the son has done. Six to 10, what the son has done. And then 11 to 13, the transition of responsibility from the son to the father. So what the son has done, the transition. And then 13 to the end of the chapter, 13 to 19, what the father will then do. So what the son has done, the transition in the middle, and then what the father will do. Well, six to 10 really reads a little bit like a report.

It's a tender and solemn report that the son is giving to the father about the progress of the disciples. And it's characterized by what he has done and what they have done.

There's a repeated refrain that I have, Luke verse six, I have, then further down verse six, they have, I have, they have. Verse six, I have manifested your name.

[7 : 59] They have kept your word. Verse eight, top of the page there, I have given them the words that you gave me, they have received them. Further on in verse eight, I came from you. They have believed that you sent me. Then verse nine, I am praying for them. And then we have this phrase, those whom you have given me. I was looking through the whole passage and the Lord refers to his disciples, his people, as four times, four times, that they are those whom the father has given to him. And that what, that is what gives the disciples their great value, isn't it? Sometimes a gift is not so much precious in the gift itself, but also in the giver, the person who has given. And the Lord uses this very tender expression to describe his disciples, that they are those who have been given to him by the father. It's a wonderful expression, isn't it? And it shows the great love and affection that the father and the son have for the disciples and for the people of God as a whole. He goes on to say then that I am glorified in them. Verse 10, amazing that the Lord is glorified in his disciples and how he has revealed the word to them and how they have believed it and how they are growing and being kept in that word. But this detailed description, how he could say, I'm praying for them, those whom you have given me, I'm glorified in them. This detailed description leads to what is a rather simple request. There's an elaborate description that then leads to a simple request, which is, father, father, keep them, keep them. And we can all talk about things that we are interested in.

We can talk freely and in great detail about something that we're interested in, whether that's our grandchildren or our children. And we can talk in detail about the stages that they're at and all the personalities that they have and exactly what it is they get up to, or whether it's a football team and you can talk about the twists and the turns of a season and all the results and the fixtures and the formations in such precise detail. And why can you do that? Why can you do that? Because you've got great love for it. You've got great affection for it and it's important to you. And so we see this elaborate description of the disciples and what has happened as the son is reporting back, at least a simple request to keep them. But the description in itself is telling of the importance of the work of the son and the affection that he has for the disciples. Then let's look at verses 11 to 13, the transition then in responsibility. We said that verse 11 captures something of the movement in this prayer that the hour where he was leaving his disciples, I'm no longer in the world, they're in the world. I'm coming to you. Here's the request, father, keep them. So as the son has kept them, so now the father will keep them. And the Lord has said something of that to his disciples already in the gospel of John. John 10, he could say, I give my sheep eternal life. No one will snatch them out of my hand. There's great security there, the son and his keeping power. But my father who has given them to me, there's that phrase again in John, is greater than all, no one is able to snatch them out of my hand, out of the father's hand. I and the father are one. So the son and the father working together in the keeping and the preservation of the disciples. Verse 11, we can see how the Lord says,

I'm no longer in the world, they are in the world, I'm coming to you. But then I'm coming to you, but I have sent them into the world. Verse 18, the disciples are being sent out. And verse 12, we see that while I was with them, I kept them. So again, that's what the son has done. I have guarded them. Not one of them has been lost. And any kind of guard, whatever comes to your mind, if you say the word guard, there might be different things. You could get an interesting collection of what pops into your mind when you hear guard, whether it's a mouth guard or a guard for the fire or even a military guard of any kind. A guard always protects something that is fragile and has great value associated to it. You don't guard something that isn't fragile or that isn't in danger or that isn't worth protecting. And there is that need to be kept, isn't there? There's that great need to be kept. And we then see as we look on that that is then what the father will do. The Lord is no longer with them. He has kept them. He has guarded them.

There's this transition. Father, I have kept them, but will you now keep them? And we see the security then, of course, he will, because we've seen already that no one can snatch them out of the father's hand. So what the son has done, then this transition of responsibility, and then 13 to 19, what then the father will do? Well, we see that the disciples are being sent out into the world. Verse 18, as you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. They need to be kept. They need to be guarded. Well, why is that? Why is that? Because they're not of the world. Verse 14, there is the hatred of the world that they will face. There's the reality of that. Verse 15, the Lord says, I pray that you don't take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. There's the reality of danger. That is why they therefore need to be kept. They need to be kept from the hatred of the world and the reality of the evil one. But this isn't a news flash, is it? This isn't something that is new to the disciples. How does chapter 16 end? The Lord spells out the reality of the dangers.

Doesn't he? He could say that I have said these things, 1633, I've said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. You will have difficulty.

[14 : 48] There will be opposition. There'll be the hatred of the world. There's the reality of the evil one who is opposed to you. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world. So the Lord is praying that the Father would keep them from the reality of these dangers.

But we could ask, how is that going to happen? How is that going to happen? How are the disciples going to be kept in their mission that is being sent out into the world? What is the prime resource for the keeping power of the Lord? Well, the prime resource for the keeping of his people is the word of God.

The word of God. We've seen already what the word has done. The Lord has been saying that I have given them the words that you gave me. And what has that done? Well, verse 8, it's told them the truth about God.

Verse 8 again, they have come to believe. The word has kept them. It's what's preserved them. And then verse 13 also, it is what has given them joy. I've spoken these things so that you may have my joy fulfilled in them.

So that is what the word has done. But the Lord now prays, Father, will you keep them? I'm no longer with them, but will you keep them? And how's that going to happen? Well, the Lord focuses in on how that's going to happen.

[16:19] Verse 17, he could say, Father, would you sanctify them in the truth? Your word is truth. Sanctify them in the truth.

Keep them, preserve them, set them apart, equip them for service. Sanctify them and prepare them in that truth. Your word is truth. Your word is truth. It's almost a throwaway remark, isn't it? And sometimes they can be the most telling that what did the Lord Jesus think about the authority of Scripture? What did the Lord Jesus think about the word of God? Well, he said it's truth. It's truth in the whole and it's powerful and able to equip and to sanctify. And all through John 17, there has been this focus on the word, this progression of the word. You could see verse 8 that the origin of the word is from the Father.

For I have given them the words that you gave me. So the first link is from the Father to the Son. And then it doesn't stop there, obviously, because the Son then gives those words to the disciples.

And it doesn't stop there either, because the disciples then in turn are to pass that on to future generations. And that is how all who come to believe, believe through the word. We're borrowing slightly from next week's when we touch on that. But verse 20 would say, I don't ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. So the request is keep them, but then sanctify them. How's that going to happen? Well, it's going to happen by the truth of God's word in verse 17. And what does it mean to be sanctified? Well, it means to be set apart for service. It means to be shaped in character by the word of God. It means to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. It means to be growing and to endure and be stable.

So we could then say, well, what is it that we're really driving at? What's so important about that for me? Are you going to tell me that the Bible is important? I've got a fair idea that the Bible is important. I could even quote some verses to you and tell you that didn't the Lord Jesus quote the scriptures and say, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. I know that. I know that. How can that, what more is there to know? Well, it's possible that we can get into a mindset where, yes, we are reading our Bible. Yes, we're listening to the word of God.

[19:15] We're listening to sermons, but our hearts can grow callous and hard. We can get into a mindset of duty that we read our Bible just to tick off the reading on our daily calendar. We can listen to a sermon and almost come to enjoy it and how it's put together and we can analyze it and critique it and say, that was really good or no, I'm not so sure about that. But we lose the power of the word of God.

Our hearts grow hard and grow cold and cease to be shaped by its power. Well, the Lord Jesus, in the shadow of the cross, that heightens the moment, doesn't it? The Lord Jesus, in the next few hours as the day would unfold into the next morning, then he's going to face the cross and what is on his mind and what is on his heart in these hours before the cross, that the people of God would be sanctified by the word of God. That surely adds a weight and a resolve to that meaning, doesn't it? When he says, sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth. The moment that this is happening in is in the very shadow of the cross. So we here see that Christ is praying for those who follow him, that the father would keep them and the provision for that keeping is in his word. And it's not possible really to fully understand the depths of what the Lord is praying here. Really, we can only dip our toe in the water, as it were, of this ocean of truth.

But we should want to press into it and we should want to see the vital role of the word in the keeping and the nourishing of our Christian life. As we said, we can sometimes become so familiar with the scriptures that can almost become academic. It can become head knowledge and we can say, John 17, I know that. I know that. I know that the Lord prays for himself and the disciples and all who will believe. But in the shadow of the cross, the Lord is praying that his people would be kept.

That they would be kept by the father, that they would be sanctified. And how's that going to happen? Well, it's going to be through the word of God and through the keeping power of that word. So we see then, this is a long section and it is quite dense. Hopefully that breakdown is helpful that we've seen 6 to 10, what the son has done. And then 11 to 13, we then see the transition that is involved from the responsibility of keeping from the son to the father. And then how the father is going to keep and preserve them. And how's that going to happen? It's going to happen through the word that the son has given. So we see the great security in that, but we also want to see with fresh eyes what the Lord prays. Draw great strength from the fact that the father and son are involved in the keeping of the disciples and of his people as a whole. But we also want to be challenged again to just see with fresh eyes and come with fresh understanding for the vital work of the word of God. And we see that it must be so important because that was what was on the very heart and mind of Christ before the cross was the work of the word in the sustaining and keeping of his people. Amen.

Father, help us to be people who desire to be shaped by your word. Give us fresh understanding for its vital work in our life. And so we pray that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship and the blessing of the Holy Spirit would be with us all now and evermore. Amen.