

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the news a lot today is the unprecedented permission given to our government to eavesdrop on the conversations of its citizens. The government wants the authority to do this because when you overhear a conversation, nothing is hidden. They know people's true intents when they can listen in undetected. Many politicians and crooks have been caught over the years when their "secret" conversations were recorded and then later used against them.

In our text today we are going to eavesdrop. We will eavesdrop on God almighty. But don't worry... he wants us to! The vast majority of what we have in Scripture is God speaking to man and man's response to that Word from God. But in John chapter 17 we have a rare place in Scripture where we get to wire tap into a conversation taking place within the holy Trinity. Jesus, God's Son, is speaking to his Holy Father. He is praying to him and he is praying *for* you and me. Jesus spoke the prayer out loud for the benefit of his disciples and for us. Let's listen.

Now, the timing of this prayer is important for us to know. It was spoken on Thursday evening, the night Jesus was betrayed. Jesus would soon be arrested, tried, and put to death. This would be a time of turmoil for the disciples. Everything was changing. He would no longer be with them. He would rise from the dead, but shortly after he would ascend into heaven. The disciples needed help... and they needed it in a big way. They would need help from the heavenly Father. And so Jesus because of his great love for them... and us... prayed. When you go home today, take some time to read through all of John chapter 17 and read with fascination the rest of this prayer. For now we take a look at verses 11 – 19.

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, **protect them** *by the power of your name*—the name you gave me—so that **they may be one** as we are one. While I was with them, **I protected** them and **kept them safe** by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have **the full measure of my joy** within them.

I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

What did Jesus pray for his disciples when his departure was imminent? For over three years Jesus had watched over their disciples and kept them safe and secure. Sometimes that included physical safety, like when they were out on a lake during a storm. But mostly he kept them spiritually safe. He did that by sharing with them everything they needed to know about God so they could be right with him now and in eternity. He pointed out their sins and showed them God's love and forgiveness. He revealed to them God's saving plan... a plan that necessitated that he leave them. Be crucified on a cross for the guilt of their sins. Rise, and

ascend on high. This word of truth kept them safe from Satan's attacks. And he did keep them safe! None of them were lost! None succumbed to unbelief... none except Judas, whose betrayal was prophesied in Scripture. But he wouldn't be there in person to teach that word any more. So he was concerned for their well-being. So he ensured they would still be protected. He prayed.

"Holy Father, **protect [keep] them** by the power [*lit. in the sphere of*] of your name—the name you gave me -- so that **they may be one** as we are one. While I was with them, I **protected** them [was keeping them in the sphere of your name which you have given me] and **kept them safe** [was **guarding them**] by that name you gave me.

Jesus asks the Father to protect his disciples as he had. The protection that is needed is provided by power of or in the sphere of God's name. What does this mean? Jesus isn't talking about a magical power in pronouncing God's name. The magician uses the name "abracadabra" to perform his magic and we use the name "almighty God Jehovah" for our magic spell of protection. No, that's not what he means at all.

God's "name" is a symbol and representation of everything God has revealed about himself. Like the flag represents our country and is thus revered, so God's name represents all he has revealed about himself. And what has God revealed about himself? Well, more than we can talk about in one sermon. But we know he is holy, just and righteous. He tolerates nothing less from his creatures. We know he is loving, compassionate, merciful and gracious. We know he loves us enough to give his son as a sacrifice for our sins. This and everything else in all of Scripture makes up the sphere that is God's name. Inside that sphere is protection. Security. And total safety. Jesus prayed that we stay in the sphere of God's name where we will be safe.

Outside of the sphere of God's name is all kinds of evil: primarily fueled by man's rebellious desire to put self ahead of God. From that rebellion flows selfishness, greed, violence, jealousy, gossip, disrespect, and more. Jesus loves us too much to leave us exposed to that evil. He prays that God keep us safe in his name by faith. In the sphere of that name which is holy and righteous and pure and merciful and forgiving... in the name of the one who redeemed us and set us free from our sin and guilt.

Protected in the name of God, we're not alone. There are others in the sphere with us. All who rely on the name of God are one... just as the Father and the Son are one, we are one with them and with each other. You can think of this blessed unity in many ways: we are members of a special family... we are all part of a gated community... of one body. However you describe it, the blessing is the same.

Now why does Jesus reveal these things? Why didn't he say this prayer silently? He prayed "so that they may have **the full measure of my joy** within them." God wants you to have complete joy in your life. And when you know and believe that you live your life in the sphere of God's almighty name, your joy is complete. No matter what the circumstances you may be facing, you are protected. You are secure. Nothing can truly harm you. Almighty God has his shields up around you. And that brings peace and joy no matter what's happening to you right now.

Now, our text goes on to show us that although Jesus prays for our protection and that we remain in the sphere of God's name, he does not pray that the Father remove us from this world. **"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it".**

Although Jesus prays that we be protected from the evil attacks of Satan and this world, he does not pray that we be taken from this world, or even that we live isolated from the world.

He wants us to live in the world, but not of the world... just like he did! We are not to live like the world does any more than Jesus did.

But how are we to understand this? How do we put it into practice? Think of how Jesus lived in the world, yet not of the world. Suppose Jesus lived among us today. Do you suppose Jesus would get drunk at a bar? Would he have been promiscuous? Would he have told dirty jokes? Could you envision him sitting around for two or three hours watching TV? Would he go shopping at the mall and buy stuff he didn't need with money he didn't have? Would Jesus have borrowed other people's money so he could have more stuff? I can't imagine Jesus doing any of this, can you? The world hated him because he was weird. He didn't do what they did. He made them feel bad because they saw they were doing wrong, but didn't want to stop. They so hated him they finally put him to death.

If my list struck a nerve and you identified something you're doing or have done in your life... it was supposed to. We are guilty of living like the world, aren't we? Let's confess those sins and bring them to our God in whose name we are dwelling. Think about his name again. And remember what he has revealed to us. And there you will again find peace and joy. Jesus who did not live of the world, counts his life as yours. And the guilt of your worldly living has been placed on Jesus. He endured his Father's wrath for you. God declares you not guilty, and his own dear child, in the sphere of Jesus name... in which you now live.

Having been cleansed by the blood of Christ, we don't want to get dirty again, do we? How do we keep ourselves clean in a dirty world? We're starting to see the appeal of monasteries, aren't we? To live secluded from the world, isolated from temptation, and with a regiment that forces you to stay in the word and obeying God... we can see why they were formed and why people might join them. But that's not God's will. God wants us to be set apart... but not by living in a monastery.

Jesus prayed: **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”** Jesus did not live in monastery, he lived in the world and talked to the people of the world daily. He wants us to do the same. He sends us into the world, just as he was. But not so we live of the world. He sanctifies us. “Sanctify” means to be made holy, to be set apart. Not physically, in a monastery, but spiritually. And what sanctifies us is God's truth... God's Word... which reveals God's name.

When you live in a “set apart” (sanctified) way, the world will think you're weird, just as it thought Jesus was weird. The world will hate you, just as it hated Jesus. But what's weird to the world is the standard to God. Let us stop living for self-gratification, fulfilling our own desires. We are different. We are set apart. We are living in the sphere of God's holy, merciful name. Let your life show it!

We got to eaves drop today on a divine conversation. And we found out that someone is praying for you! It's Jesus Christ speaking our Father on our behalf. The enemy is all around. But your ascended Lord Jesus has prayed for your protection in God's holy name. And God has granted it. Remain in his name. There you are safe and secure. Live in peace and joy whatever your circumstances. Remain in God's Word. For it is what sets you apart and sanctifies you that you may live in the world, but not of the world. The Father sent Jesus into this world to accomplish his plan of salvation. Jesus has now sent you and I into this world, set apart, but living in it, to be salt and light, and to bring God's holy name to everyone. May God renew us in our dedication to accomplish this great mission he has given us. Amen.