

Eternal Attention
Series: The Eternal
John 17:9-26
April 1, 2021

Tonight, we conclude our series, “The Eternals.” We have been studying the things we can hold onto in our faith, especially in a time of chaos and uncertainty. We have talked about the Eternal Word, Eternal Life, Eternal Nourishment, Eternal Comfort, Eternal Love, and Eternal Hope. I invite you to turn to page 4 in your bulletin or if you are watching at home, pull out your journal.

Recently, talk radio station in San Francisco conducted a call-in poll. They invited listeners to express their opinion. 35% percent said “Yes”, 33% said “No”, and 32% were undecided. One listener, aghast at the large number of undecideds, protested, “It’s this sort of apathy that’s ruining America.”

The only problem with all these responses was that the radio station never posed any question. The people were listening, but they weren’t attentive. They really weren’t tuned in.

Sometimes, we wonder if God is paying attention to us and our lives. Well, let’s look at a very important passage of Scripture from John 17. The context of this chapter is probably the Upper Room¹. John opens chapter 17 this way:

*After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come.”*²

Jesus said, “The hour has come.” This is not simply the hour Jesus has been preparing for. It’s the hour the entire world has been anticipating. It’s the fulfillment of a promise made in the Garden of Eden that God would send a Rescuer to save humanity from sin. It’s the moment when everything will change; when sinful creatures can once again enjoy fellowship with their Creator, when spiritual life triumphs over spiritual death. At the climax of the story, Jesus stopped to pray. He paused at the doorway to the cross to take a moment and cry out for the Father’s help.³

Beginning in verse 9:

My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold. Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the

¹ See John 18:1

² John 17:1a (NLT2)

³ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in John 17:1-19

*world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began! O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.*⁴

John 17 is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in any of the Gospels. For many, this prayer is called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, because in this prayer, Jesus is interceding for His church just like a High Priest in the Old Testament would have interceded for God's people. So, write down "Jesus' High Priestly Prayer."

One commentator suggested, and I can see his point, that **this** prayer should be called, "The Lord's Prayer." Now, you think, "Wait a minute. We already have a Lord's Prayer." That's right. However, what we usually call "The Lord's Prayer" would be better called "The Disciples' Prayer". The "Lord's Prayer" cannot be the Lord's prayer, for the Lord could never pray, "Forgive us our sins,"⁵ for He never sinned.⁶ See what I mean? John 17 should be called "The Lord's Prayer" because followers of Jesus could never pray many of the things in this great prayer in John 17 that Christ prayed. But rest assured, I will not break from tradition.

When I look at this wonderful prayer, one of the things it tells me is tonight's eternal: **Eternal Attention.**

As Jesus was approaching the cross, He prayed for His disciples and us as well. He was bringing them and us to the Father's attention, and we know that the Father will always keep His attention on us. So, what did Jesus pray?

First, He prays for our protection from the evil one.

Once Jesus left for heaven, the church would be in the hands of His followers. And when that happened, there were going to be dangers to be faced. And so, in the vital prayer, just before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for the Father to protect the church from those dangers.

And the number 1 danger is our arch-enemy, the evil one, or Satan. Jesus prayed in verse 15:

*I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.*⁷

Now understand; Satan is real. Not everyone believes that. Several years ago, the New York Times reported on a survey where Americans were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "Satan is not a living being, but just a symbol of evil." Two-thirds of those questioned agreed with that statement.

⁴ John 17:9-26 (NLT2)

⁵ See Luke 11:4

⁶ Analytical Bible Expositor – John 17

⁷ John 17:15 (NLT2)

But no! Satan is not “a symbol of evil.” He’s quite real, and he is a formidable adversary.

We have an enemy and he doesn’t like us. In fact, he intends to destroy us. Satan’s intention is to take us out. He hates God so much that he has made it his personal agenda to destroy believers because we are precious to God. Satan figures that if he can take us out, he can hurt God. And that would satisfy his desire for vengeance against God.

But here’s the deal: Satan can’t touch you if you stay close to God. Paul wrote: *But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.*⁸

So, the first focus of Jesus’ prayer was that the Father keep us close to Him, and safe from the Evil One!

The second focus of His prayer was that we would be holy by His Truth.

Verse 17:

*Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.*⁹

Now, why is that important? Well, Jesus talked about Satan in John 8:44. He said:

*He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.*¹⁰

Thus, one of the most important things that can protect us from Satan is Scripture. Scripture is truth and Satan is a liar! Scripture our best weapon against his tactics.

Do you remember when Satan tried to tempt Jesus in wilderness? Satan tried three different temptations on Jesus, but none of which worked. Every time Satan tried to tempt Him, Jesus responded by repeating the same 3 words: “It Is Written...” Written??? Written where? Written in the Bible! Jesus told Satan “It is written ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” “It is written: ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you worship.’”

IT IS WRITTEN! IT IS WRITTEN! IT IS WRITTEN!

Satan wanted to get Jesus into a theological debate, but Jesus wasn’t going there. All Jesus had to do was quote Scripture, and the argument was over. And do you know why? Because when you quote Scripture, you’re quoting God. You can’t get a higher authority than God.

God said in Isaiah 55:

*“The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.”*¹¹

No matter how clever any man or woman may have been throughout history, none of them have uttered words that have the power to do what God’s Words can do.

God’s Word is truth. It is powerful and it makes us holy. So, Jesus prayed that God would make us holy by His truth, the word of God.

Paul wrote:

⁸ 2 Thessalonians 3:3 (NLT2)

⁹ John 17:17 (NLT2)

¹⁰ John 8:44 (NLT2)

¹¹ Isaiah 55:10-11 (NLT2)

*Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.*¹²

Third, Jesus prayed we would be unified with God.

Verses 22-23:

*I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.*¹³

Jesus prayed that we would be unified. Ephesians says, “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all.”¹⁴

Satan’s objective is to destroy our unity – to divide us – because he knows that a unified church is his worst nightmare.

Now, lots of folks think about this as a prayer about unity should be all about unity between all churches everywhere. And that’s noble objective; it’s just that I’m pretty sure that’s not going to happen. The early church split 3 years after Jesus rose from the dead. There was a conflict over whether the Gentiles should be circumcised to be saved. And even though God said circumcision was no longer required, a group of Jewish believers went about trying to divide the church. And down through the ages, there have been repeated divisions in the church until now (just in the US) there are over 1,500 recognized denominations.

You know we in the United Methodist Church are facing a division, but that shouldn’t be our focus tonight.

I think Jesus cares more about if we are in unity with Him than with each other, although being together, unified in the faith, is also His desire.

I like what one pastor wrote about the guiding principles for unity in the church: “No Creed but Christ, no Book but the Bible, and No Law but Love.”

So, if we hold that Jesus is Lord, that the Bible is the Word of God and should be applied to our lives, and finally that love is our priority, then we will be unified with God.

Finally, Jesus prays that we will be with Him in heaven.

Verse 24:

*Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!*¹⁵

Let that sink in for a moment. Jesus prayed that we would be with Him for all eternity. He cared so much about that that He went to the cross to make the way available for us. Jesus died that we might live.

Likewise, Paul wrote to Timothy:

*This is a trustworthy saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him.*¹⁶

The wish of Christ is that all who believe, who love and obey, who persevere to the end, will be eternally united to God in the kingdom of glory. Jesus wants you in heaven with Him.

¹² 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NLT2)

¹³ John 17:22-23 (NLT2)

¹⁴ Ephesians 4:5-6

¹⁵ John 17:24 (NLT2)

¹⁶ 2 Timothy 2:11 (NLT2)

A faithful Christian man was dying. His wife and son and daughter, who were all devout Christians, came to his bedside. He hugged them and said, "Good night, I'll meet you in a better place."

He had another son, however, who never obeyed the Gospel. He was a good boy, but he just never saw the need to turn his life over to Christ. While giving him a hug, his father said very sadly, "Good-bye, my son, good-bye." Having touched the young man's heart, the son said, "Dad, you said 'Good night' to mom and my brother and sister, but to me you said 'Good-bye.' Why is that?"

The dying man said, "Son, your mother, brother, and sister are Christians, and I know that one day we're going to be together again in heaven. So, to them I said, 'Good night.' But you know that as much as I've prayed for you and pleaded with you to obey the Gospel, you never have. I will never see you again, and as much as it breaks my heart, all I can say is 'Good-bye.'"

With tears welling up in his eyes, the young man said, "Dad, don't say 'Good-bye', yet. Don't go anywhere. Don't die. I'll be back." He quickly ran out of the room and drove to the church building where his parents were members – the very same church he grew up in, but now seldom attended. He found the preacher and told him he was ready to give his life to Jesus.

The preacher led him to Christ, then the two of them drove back to the hospital. He rushed to his father's room. Shaking his weakened father awake, he said, "Dad, dad, I finally did it. I've given my life to Jesus and promise I will serve him until the day I die."

The dying man, with his fast declining strength, put his arms around his boy and said, "Good night, son, good night. I'll meet you in a better place."

Jesus prayed for our protection, that we would be holy, that we would be unified with God, and that we would be with Him in heaven. And then, He went to the cross... for you and me.