
Day 319 - November 15

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)

Final Discourse

Readings: *John 15:1-17:26*

Reflections:

- John alone captures the final words of Jesus. These words in many ways complete the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount makes it crystal clear what doesn't work. Here we see Jesus make it crystal clear how to experience true intimacy and union with God.
- Vine and branches: In the Old Testament, Israel was consistently called a vine (Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1). Ezekiel 15 makes it clear that if a vine doesn't bear fruit, the wood is good for nothing other than for burning in a fire. Here we see again Jesus is taking a clear image from Israel's story and applying it uniquely to himself. His body is the temple. He is the vine. Every image of Israel's relationship to God and their role in the world is being absorbed into Jesus' identity and personhood. He is the fulfillment of the story of Israel, he is the substance and Israel is the shadow. We are to live in constant intimate communion with Jesus and allow God's voice to resonate through our lives. As we live in him with complete dependence and submission, then he will prune us so that we bear increasing amounts of fruit. There is a kind of difficulty and pain that comes from non-essentials in our lives being removed so that we can focus exclusively on what really matters. This intimacy with God runs two ways though. His words remain in us and motivate us to action. Yet God also allows our requests to him to have an impact and he promises to respond to what we need. With this comes a warning. Anyone who wants to do their own thing will be cut off and experience judgment. This is what happened to the religious leaders. They bore no fruit and as a result were judged.
- To love one another: Jesus continues these themes of depending on him, fruitfulness that flows from intimacy and the two way communication of living as a friend of God. He highlights here the centrality of being loved and offering love. This love is a love that lays down life. It is a self-sacrificial love. In the ancient Greek speaking world, they had three words for love: 1) Storge – Family love; 2) Phileo – deep friendship love or brotherly love (where we get Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love); and Eros – sexual, romantic love (where we get Erotic). The early Christians took a word that virtually no one used, "agape" and infused it with new meaning. Here we see Jesus be perfectly clear that his love is not just family affection or friendship love or romantic love. His love is a divine love that is

willing to give up everything for the other person. It is a love that chooses the other person and then loves them with everything you have.

- Preparation for persecution: Jesus is clear that all of his followers must be ready to be hated by those who embrace the self-centered values of the world. They hated Jesus and they will hate all Christ-followers who are true to him. He quotes Psalm 35:19 and 69:4 to underscore that the Messiah would be hated. The role of the Spirit in our lives is to testify to the truth. Even though persecution will come, the presence of God will work through us so that the truth is proclaimed. The book of Acts captures the fulfillment of these statements of Jesus as the Spirit empowers the first Christ-followers to be witnesses even as they are persecuted and killed.
- Necessity of going away: Jesus notes the disciples are sad or worried about his statement of him leaving. He encourages them that unless he completes his work and goes, the Spirit will not be released to fill their lives and welcome them into true intimacy with him. Jesus then points out the role of the Spirit to help all people come to grips with the truth about sin, righteousness (particularly the Lordship of Jesus), and the reality of judgment (particularly for Satan). The Spirit turns on the light switch of our understanding so that we can grasp the true nature of reality. Without the Spirit we fail to perceive the true spiritual battle God is initiating to see people set free.
- Holy Spirit's guidance: Jesus again details the true nature of relationship with God – God talking with us. Relationship means communication. This is the role of his Spirit entering our lives: to enable us to hear God speak and know what is on his heart and mind, particularly experiencing his deep love for us.
- Disciples perplexed: The disciples simply don't get it.
- Joy out of sorrow: Jesus warns the disciples that they will have deep sorrow but that it will turn to joy. Like a woman giving birth, the pain will be great but in the end she is filled with joy. As they enter into intimate relationship with God, they will be empowered by his love for them and free to partner with God in a whole new way. The life of the Spirit is one of joy. As Christ-followers partner with God and find all their needs met in him, their joy is made complete.
- Speech will be made clear: This is an important affirmation. Jesus used parables and it was common, right up to that moment that the disciples didn't get what he was trying to say. He wants them and all Christ-followers to know that when the Spirit speaks, the Spirit will be clear with us so that we can understand exactly what God wants to do in us and through us. Jesus also underscores again that our intimacy with God flows from our trust in Jesus.
- Disciple express belief: The disciples in that moment believe but Jesus warns that it will be short-lived. It will ultimately take the work of the Spirit to deeply root the disciples in a new character and unshakable trust relationship with God. Jesus affirms his security in his relationship with God and authority over the world. Jesus is not insecure but is confident in

his relationship with his Father and his authority over the world. When we are secure in Christ, we have true peace.

- Jesus prays for himself: Jesus looks to the sky or heaven and a gesture of looking to his Father. We see in his prayer that he lives in intimate communion with the Father and models for us what talking with God looks like. Jesus is both glorified through his suffering and crucifixion as well as through the resurrection. Jesus' obedience unto death is also brings glory to God. Jesus' universal authority is stated here as well as in Matthew 28:16-18. Those who are rescued by Jesus are described as being given by the Father to him. This is to underscore their complete security rather than to suggest a type of sovereign election where God decides independently who is saved and who is not. What is eternal life? Living in intimate relationship with God. Eternal life starts the moment a person enters into intimate relationship with God. Death then becomes a doorway rather than a conclusion. Jesus also here reaffirms his eternal pre-existence as we see affirmed in the introduction of John, Philippians 2:3-11 and Colossians 1:15-20. In just a few verses we see Jesus' deep security with God as he knows his identity, he knows his purpose, and he knows his ultimate destiny. All those who enter into intimate friendship with God are offered this same sense of security and purpose for their life.
- Jesus prays for his disciples: Jesus expands the focus of this praying and yet we also see a further explanation of his intimacy with the Father. Jesus' entire communication of his Father reveals complete interdependency and shared mission together. To follow Jesus is to enter into this same intimate communion with God. Jesus gave them the words (truth) the Father gave him and they have responded by trusting in him. Faith comes from hearing the message of truth (Romans 10:17). Jesus now prays for their protection, a protection that will allow them to live in unified relationship. The enemies work it to not only kill, steal and destroy but also to divide. Jesus prays that the disciples may be fully unified and set apart (sanctified) by the truth. Jesus prays his disciples would be in the world but that they would stand out from the crowd (be sanctified means to be set apart, not be isolated) because of the way their lives reflect the truth of God. Jesus stood out in a crowd and he calls his disciples to stand out from the crowd. In this prayer, Jesus also makes it clear that he is praying all of this and telling this to the disciples now so that they may have complete joy. When we know what God is up to and we can see where his will is leading, we can have joy even in the midst of difficulty and struggle. Our joy comes from knowing God is in control and we can trust him that he is intentionally leading us to the fulfillment of his will. If we don't know where he is leading and what his purposes are, it is very easy to be filled with fear and insecurity because we are disoriented by the pain and suffering (the disciples will definitely model this).
- Jesus prays for believers: Jesus now prays for all people who will become his followers. Jesus looks into the future and prays in advance for those who will believe. Jesus' prayer is simple. He prays for his disciples to enter into an intimate union with God that would result in unity. This process of being brought to complete unity is fundamental to the world knowing and

responding to the truth of Jesus and his message of love. If we are not unified, our lives and relationships deny the truth we supposedly proclaim. Jesus' desire is for all his followers to be with him. His prayer reveals the complete union and intimate love that God desires all believers at all times to experience. This deep intimacy and security in God is at the very core of all that Jesus taught and lived. Jesus concludes his prayer: "I...will continue to make you known (revealing God to his followers) in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I may be in them." How incredibly beautiful and wonderful is that? This is all we need. This is all our hearts long for.