

The Also Prayer

John 17:20-23

Our sense of identity with and kinship with the disciples has involved us in this prayer of Jesus from the beginning. We have felt all along that as Jesus prayed for the disciples, He has been praying for us. When Jesus prayed that the disciples would be kept by the Father, in the name of the Father, and given to Jesus that we (the disciples) might be one as Father and Son are one, we heard that as the Father also keeping us and for the same object, that we might be one. When Jesus did not pray that the disciples would be taken out of the world but that they would be kept from the evil one, we felt the tension of being in the world while not being of the world. We were reminded that we encounter daily the three great enemies of the Christian life, the world, the flesh and the Devil and that Jesus has prayed for us, that we would be free of the enslavements represented by these spiritual opponents of ours. When Jesus prayed for the sanctification of the disciples by the Word of truth, we heard Him pray for our sanctification by the same means. And just as the Word is the Scriptures which gave them the foundation for their entire world view, so it must be for us. But we also saw that Jesus was the Word, the primary Word for the disciples, as he was with them and directed them, correcting them along the way, so Jesus is also our companion and by means of the Holy Spirit He continues to interpret the Word of the Scriptures so that we are guided by God's truth.

But now, Jesus specifically adds "but also" to His prayer. The "also" are those who will believe in Me through their Word. This was at first a hint that the disciples largely missed as to the nature of their discipleship. They were still looking for an immediate coming of the kingdom in the sense of Jesus, as Jesus of Nazareth, the man they knew, becoming king in the world and displacing the Romans and all other authorities from their places. Remember that just before He ascended into heaven, the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus set the question aside and refocused their attention on the immediate gift of the Spirit who would give them power to be witnesses in

"Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth." But Jesus hint of "those who will believe in Me through their word" suggested an entirely different vision of what their life's work would be. They would be the witnesses who would declare all that God had done in and through Jesus so that many would also believe.

There is a modern fascination with ancestry. Technology has so altered our world that we have largely lost touch with our past. When at other times in history a person's past would largely be determinative of their future, today, our family history's have faded so that they seem to represent a world that no longer exists. It is surprising to us to discover that our personalities and life experiences are similar in ways to our families of origin. For example, on my mom's side I had an uncle Stanley who was a devoted Christian and a student of the Word. When I graduated from Bible College and went into the ministry, he gave me his library. At my Great Grandfather Kaylor's 90th birthday party I heard him getting after my cousins (who lived near him) for their neglect of going to church. And, in the Kaylor family history there was an itinerate preacher who had lived and worked in Texas. On my dad's side, there was a long attachment to life in California, and to an enthusiasm for very small scale investment in real estate. I have said that the enthusiasms of my life are the Bible, baseball, and boats and there is family history in each of these passions. Family history gives us a sense of where we have come from and even often can give direction toward a future that reaches beyond the present generation.

The also in Jesus' prayer has the effect of revealing our history as well as our destiny. We can see that our faith has a heritage. The "those who have believed in Me through their word" goes back ultimately to the original disciples but includes every generation of belief from then until now. We may not be able to trace our spiritual heritage as easily as our family tree but whatever we can know will reveal a heritage of faith that may or not be attached to our relatives. My parents were both saved through the campus ministry of Intervarsity. This fresh experience of God's work in their generation led them to become deeply involved in churches that were more evangelical and Bible based than those that were

attended by their parents. Jesus prayed for those who would believe in Him through their word.

So the hint that Jesus gave to the disciples is also suggestive for us. His intention is that there will be those who believe in Him through your word and mine. This is how the mission that began with cross and resurrection is carried forward. Those who believe through your word will hopefully include your children as they embrace the faith of their parents - this is not always a simple process as most of us are now learning. But those who believe through your word should also include those to whom you give witness of your faith, however you might encounter them in your life, as part of the ministry of the church, as those you meet at work or in the neighborhood, or through community involvement. The thing to hold onto here is that Jesus has prayed for you and for them.

How do you see yourself? How significant are you? Jesus' prayer speaks powerfully to these questions. Without the ones who spoke the gospel to you, it would not have reached you. Jesus' prayer was answered in their lives and through them in yours. Now Jesus wants to use you in the same ways. The heritage of faith must continue. It requires that our obedience and commitment be just as much as the spiritual generation that was before us. Jesus prayed for your spiritual legacy. His prayer is still an empowered prayer today. All efforts you make to spread the Word so that others may believe are prayed for efforts and Jesus is the pray-er. So, reach down deeply. Invest in your faith. Develop it. Become intentional in your spiritual walk. Don't be a haphazard Christian. Be a disciplined and purposeful follower of Jesus. And see yourself as who you are, a link from the faith of your spiritual ancestors to that of the generations who will follow.