

January 24  
Lesson 8 (NIV)

## **CALLED FOR THE WORLD'S BELIEF**

**DEVOTIONAL READING:** 1 Timothy 2:1-7a

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** John 17:14-24

### **JOHN 17:14-24**

<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

<sup>20</sup> “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

<sup>24</sup> “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

### **KEY VERSE**

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. —John 17:20*

## **CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

### **Unit 2: Jesus and Calls in His Ministry**

LESSONS 5-8

### **LESSON AIMS**

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List Jesus' desires as expressed in his prayer.
2. Explain the intersection of the themes of suffering, unity, and witness in Jesus' final prayer.
3. Commit to adopting Jesus' prayer priorities as his or her own.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Why Don't They Come?
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Different like Jesus (John 17:14–19)
  - A. Kept from Evil (vv. 14–16)  
*Stay in the Game*
  - B. Sent to the World (vv. 17–19)
- II. United as One (John 17:20–24)
  - A. With One Another (vv. 20–23)  
*Unify to Multiply*
  - B. With Christ (v. 24)

### Conclusion

- A. The Streisand Effect
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Gethsemane Geth-*sem*-uh-nee (G as in *get*).

Pharisees *Fair*-ih-seez.

sanctifications *sank*-tuh-fuh-**kay**-shun.

Tertullian Tur-*tull*-yun.

## Introduction

### A. Why Don't They Come?

In August 2018, the Pew Research Center published results of a survey on religious behaviors. The study had polled more than 1,300 individuals who identified their religious preference as “nothing in particular.” Fifty-one percent of respondents explained their preference by saying, “I question a lot of religious teachings.” In two separate questions, 47 percent said they were not involved because “I don't like the positions churches take on social/political issues,” and 34 percent said, “I don't like religious organizations.”

The survey results suggest that individuals who choose not to affiliate with any religious group do not view such gatherings as safe and welcoming places to explore personal religious beliefs and lifestyle choices.

While the results of this survey may not be surprising, they are nevertheless tragic. The church is the body of Christ and the vehicle through which God is working to reach a lost world. It can be discouraging to realize that many choose to avoid the church because they view it as irrelevant, or even as hostile, to their well-being. Yet this is not what Christ intended the church to be. Today's lesson explains why.

## **B. Lesson Context**

Matthew 26:36–44; Mark 14:32–40; and Luke 22:39–46 give brief accounts of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Their focus is on his agonized petition that he might be spared the crucifixion. John's Gospel, by contrast, doesn't include that prayer. Instead, it features Jesus' lengthy and detailed prayer for his disciples.

That prayer comes at the end of a lengthy section known as the Farewell Address (John 13–17), the longest recorded speech by Jesus. After washing the disciples' feet and dismissing Judas into the night (13:1–30), Jesus told his confused followers that he would not be with them much longer (13:33). He gave them a "new command" to be followed after his departure from the world: "As I have loved you, ... love one another" (13:34).

The remainder of Jesus' goodbye speech builds on this theme by explaining how God would express his love for the disciples (examples: John 14:8–21; 15:26–27; 16:5–15), why "the world" would hate them (example: 15:18–25), what it means for Christians to love one another, and why it was essential to do so (17:20–24; see commentary below).

In the opening section of the prayer (John 17:1–13), Jesus reflected on his pending death and reminded the Father that the Son's mission would continue through the disciples. Therefore Jesus asked his heavenly Father to equip the disciples in certain ways so they could continue his work. The form and content of that equipping is the subject of today's text.

## **I. Different like Jesus**

**(JOHN 17:14–19)**

### **A. Kept from Evil (vv. 14–16)**

#### **14a. I have given them your word**

This phrase summarizes Jesus' ministry to this point. God's *word* is the truth that Jesus has been teaching. In John's Gospel, this message focused particularly on God's revelation in Christ (John 1:14). He is superior to any other revelation, including the teachings of Moses (example: 1:17–18) and John the Baptist (example: 3:27–30).

#### **14b. and the world has hated them,**

God loves *the world*—so much so that he gave his only Son so that believers could receive eternal life (John 3:15–16). Yet this love was and is largely unrequited, as the majority of people *hated* Jesus and those who believe in him (3:17–21). All people are called to make a decision

about Christ. Those who do not accept him place themselves in the same category as the Pharisees, chief priests, and others who actively persecuted Jesus. There is no middle ground.

Knowing the truth about God is a great blessing, but it comes with a cost. Although the disciples had not been persecuted directly thus far, they were with Jesus on several occasions when his life was in peril (see John 7:1, 30; 8:58–59; 11:45–54). The story of the man born blind reveals that at least some people who associated with Jesus were threatened with, or may have actually experienced, excommunication from the synagogue (9:1–41). As the church was established (Acts 2) and Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman world, persecution became a universal experience (Acts 8:1; etc.).

#### *What Do You Think?*

In what ways can you prepare yourself for times of discrimination against Christians?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What situations call for passive acceptance (example: Matthew 27:14)? for self-defense or explanation (example: Acts 25:8)? for pushing back (example: Acts 16:37)? Explain.

### **14c. for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world**

The cause of the world's hatred for Jesus and his followers is stated in terms of group membership or identification: it is because *they are not of the world*. Their whole set of values was different (Ephesians 2:1–10).

Jesus had come down from the Father (John 3:13, 31–36) and was about to return to Heaven (13:33; 16:28). Unlike Christ, the disciples were natural human beings, made up of both human flesh and human spirit as all of this world are. But the disciples had been “born again” (3:3). Therefore, they were no longer recognized as family by the disbelieving world. The disciples had made themselves outsiders, citizens of Heaven who temporarily resided in a foreign land as unwelcome noncitizens (1 Peter 2:11).

### **15. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.**

The disciples wanted to be wherever Jesus was (John 14). But they could not accompany Jesus in leaving *the world*, no matter how bad things became. They needed to remain because they would be the vehicle through which others could hear the good news and receive salvation (15:26; 17:18, 20).

Jesus did ask, however, that they be kept *from the evil one*—that is, the devil. He works through worldly people to intensify persecution and suffering in an effort to silence godly witnesses (John 15:20; 16:1–4; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 2:9–10; etc.). This divine protection did indeed come, but not in the form of stopping the sources of pain. Rather, it came by the strength of the Holy Spirit to endure (John 14:16, 25–27).

## **STAY IN THE GAME**

As a young man, I joined a recreational basketball league. One night, only five players showed up—the minimum needed to play. Near the end of the first half, I leaped for a rebound, got tangled with another player, and landed hard on the back of my head.

Today we understand the dangers of concussions, and we pull players off the court for their own safety. But every successful athlete understands that there are times to stay in the game

when injured. I was groggy, but I didn't want to let my teammates down. I played the entire second half, and my team won a narrow victory.

Jesus knew his disciples would face hatred and pain, but it wasn't time to remove them from the world. They needed to keep serving him and helping others. Do you ever feel like imploring the Lord to let you "sit this one out"? Are you willing to "stay in the game" anyway? See 1 Corinthians 4:11–13; 2 Corinthians 1:8–10.

—D. F.

### **16. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.**

The language of John 17:14c (above) is repeated for emphasis. Taken as something of a unit, 17:14–16 explains why Christians suffer, sometimes even to the point of death. In the early centuries of the church, passages such as this were used to support the argument that people who experience martyrdom receive special eternal blessings.

Today, these verses are sometimes cited as evidence that believers who are not experiencing suffering must be deficient in their faith in light of Jesus' comment that the world loves its own (15:19). The logic is that if you experience love from worldly people, then you must be one of them.

Jesus' statements should be taken not as abstract principles but rather as prophecies of realities. The original readers of this Gospel came to know persecution firsthand. Many believers today live in cultures where their faith is not legally protected; they experience persecution as a result. But we should not conclude from these verses either that (1) true believers will *only* experience persecution or that (2) *only* true believers will experience persecution. Jesus' larger point is that we should be prepared to continue to witness, no matter what. And the key to being able to do so is to focus on the fact that we *are not of the world*.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What personal deficiencies will you address to be better equipped to be *in* the world but not *of* the world?

#### *Digging Deeper*

Which of John 1:10; 15:19; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 5:9–11; 2 Corinthians 10:3–4; James 4:4; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:20; and 1 John 2:15–16 speak to you most clearly in this regard? Why?

## **B. Sent to the World (vv. 17–19)**

### **17. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.**

The Greek verb translated *sanctify* means "to make holy or set apart." Things in the ancient world that were set apart were often found in temples or other sacred places. Jesus, however, asked God to sanctify the disciples themselves (compare 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). It was through their knowledge of *truth* that this sanctification would come. Such knowledge concerned faith in Jesus—faith that is based on evidence (John 14:11; 1 John 1:1–2; etc.). Jesus himself was and is both the *truth* (John 14:6) and the one who proclaimed the *word* of truth about God to the world (8:31–32). Jesus' life and words revealed God perfectly (14:9). Those who abandon falsehood to accept Christ and his words are set apart by their faith.

We can note in passing that sanctification has two aspects or phases. The first is the onetime event when an unbeliever joins the ranks of the saved (see 1 Corinthians 6:11); this may be called

*initial sanctification*. The second phase can be termed *progressive sanctification* since it is a continuing transformation (2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 3:3; etc.).

*What Do You Think?*

How can you better demonstrate that God's truth has set you apart while avoiding giving an off-putting "holier than thou" impression in the process?

*Digging Deeper*

How do John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; Philippians 2:1-11; 3:17; Titus 2:6-8; and 1 Peter 2:21; 3:15 help you frame your answer?

### **18. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.**

These words, spoken before the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), shed further light on the mission of the disciples and the church. Jesus had been *sent* from Heaven to testify about God to a hostile *world* (John 1:10-11; 5:23-24, 36-38; 8:42-47; etc.). Jesus handed this mission on to his apostles, who were then *sent* in turn *into the world* to testify.

The fact that the apostles were sent by Jesus provided them with a unique authority. For this reason, rejecting what the apostles say about God is equivalent to rejecting what Jesus says (compare Luke 9:1-6; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 5:20; Ephesians 1:1; 6:20; etc.).

### **19. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.**

This verse reemphasizes John 17:17, above. Because Christ is God incarnate, in one sense he is sanctified just by definition. Jesus, however, was likely referring to the example of holy living that he set before the disciples throughout his ministry. Jesus is consistently portrayed as consumed by a desire to do anything and everything that God has called him to do (2:17; etc.). Indeed, Jesus' very sustenance was "to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (4:34).

## **II. United as One**

**(JOHN 17:20-24)**

### **A. With One Another (vv. 20-23)**

**20. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,**

This verse extends the scope of Jesus' commission to include all believers in all times and places.

**21a. that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us**

Unity is essential to Jesus' vision for the church (compare 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 4:11-13; etc.). His prayer for future followers is tied to a statement about his own identity: Christ and the *Father* are *one*, and therefore believers should be united as *one*.

The focus here is less on Christ's identity with the Father as members of the Trinity and more on the notion that Jesus always acts in a way that shows that he is united with God in essence and purpose. Seeing Jesus is equivalent to seeing the Father (John 14:9-12).

***UNIFY TO MULTIPLY***

It was a beautiful day, and I wanted to be outdoors, not painting the basement. My wife and I had moved into the house a few weeks before. Now that the boxes were unloaded, this job remained.

I had figured it would take several days to paint the ceiling, walls, and trim. We had bought the paint, readied our drop cloths and paintbrushes, and prepared to tackle the task ourselves.

Then our friends showed up. Not just a few friends—nine of them, including people we had never met. These unified coworkers dove enthusiastically into the work, all of us talking and laughing as we went. By late afternoon, the entire basement was painted, and the supplies were cleaned up. My wife and I had time to enjoy a walk.

What happens when Jesus' disciples serve in unity? Work gets done. Friendships are forged. God is honored. Blessings are multiplied. Do your relationships with others demonstrate God's call to multiply, not divide?

—D. F.

*What Do You Think?*

What three specific things can you begin doing to foster the kind of unity among believers that Christ desires?

*Digging Deeper*

Frame your three responses in terms of what you can do locally within your church and how you can contribute nationally and internationally, one each.

**21b. so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**

The goal of the disciples' unity is effective witness, the result of which will be others drawn to Christ. Christ intends that the disciples obey his command to set themselves apart from the world in their unity in this regard.

**22a. I have given them the glory that you gave me,**

*Glory* here refers to God's divine nature and attributes. Christ and the Father are one by their very nature (Hebrews 1:3). The human Jesus has illustrated this by doing and saying exactly what God the Father desired. Now he passes that glory along to all present and future disciples (*them*).

The glory that Jesus passes along does not, of course, include what are called God's incommunicable attributes—things of his nature that belong to him and him alone (example: self-existence, John 8:58).

**22b. that they may be one as we are one—**

Unity is described here as a result of the gift of John 17:21a, above. Elsewhere, unity is a command (example: Ephesians 4:3). The Farewell Address began with Jesus' washing the disciples' feet and telling them to follow his example in serving one another (John 13:2–17). Jesus also commanded three times that believers love one another as Jesus himself loved them (13:14; 15:12, 17). The love command is so significant that people can recognize us as disciples by observing whether we show love for other believers (13:35).

In Jesus' view, even the most hostile opponents of the faith should be struck by the love and unity that prevails among his followers. The love of the disciples is to continue as a sign to an unbelieving world about the good news of Jesus Christ.

**23. I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

The church's unity must be *complete* in the sense that it lacks nothing. But we know that unbreakable unity is not typically experienced anywhere. Yet this is the very reason why it can serve as supernatural evidence of the nature of Jesus.

Unity can only attract *the world* if it is more than superficial. It must go beyond the camaraderie that worldly people experience. It must rise to the level of an unwavering commitment to God and his church. When broken people are redeemed, brought together by God, and united in a common purpose, unbelievers must conclude that something special is happening!

## **B. With Christ (v. 24)**

**24. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."**

Jesus has already told his disciples that he was returning to Heaven and that he would prepare a place for them there (John 14:1–3). He wanted them to leave the fallen world eventually in order to be in that place of peace with him. Once we arrive there, we will *see* Christ's *glory* in the sense that we ourselves will witness what Jesus has been claiming to be true about his relationship with the Father (compare 1 John 3:2). The full extent the Father's love for the Son will then be clearest.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. The Streisand Effect**

Marketing companies are becoming increasingly interested in a phenomenon known as the Streisand Effect. This term is based on the name of singer/actress Barbra Streisand, and it refers to an episode in which she was involved in 2003.

A photographer was contracted to take a series of photographs that would document patterns of coastline erosion throughout the state. When Streisand learned that these included one picture of her seaside Malibu mansion, she sued the photographer to have its posting removed. Before the lawsuit was filed, the photo in question had been downloaded only six times, including two downloads by Streisand's own attorneys; but when the story hit the media, the picture was viewed by 420,000 curious web surfers within 30 days! This incident is now cited as a classic illustration of the principle of "psychological reactance," which means that an attempt to suppress information tends to increase people's desire to access and share it.

While the internet is a relatively new phenomenon on the time line of history, the Streisand Effect is not—people have always been curious to learn new information, especially when it seems to be available only to a small number of people.

The Christian apologist Tertullian (AD 160–220) realized something of a parallel to this principle in his famous observation that "the blood of the martyrs is [the] seed [of the church]" (*Apology* 50). Tertullian observed that public persecutions against the church by the Roman government had led even more people to become curious about the faith. Rome actually made the world aware of Christianity and thereby encouraged people to explore this new and emerging



religion. Those who looked into the church's beliefs and practices were impressed by the conviction and unity demonstrated by believers.

The result was that the church grew during periods of persecution. Against this backdrop, Jesus' prayer raises important questions for the church today: In a world where many people do not participate in church because they think there is nothing of value there, what would happen if they actually "looked under the hood"? Would they discover that, contrary to what they have been told, the church is a place of remarkable unity and love? Would they be forced to abandon their beliefs that Christians are legalistic and thereby be drawn to the spirit of love that exists among us? Or would encounters with Christians reinforce their belief that the church is not a safe place?

Our passage for today highlights several key themes that run through John's Gospel, two of which are particularly significant. First, Jesus stresses his own oneness with the Father. Christ demonstrated this unity through absolute obedience to God the Father in his resolve to fulfill the Father's mission of offering salvation. Second, Jesus presented his relationship with the Father as a model for the way his disciples should relate to one another. Christians are to be completely united with both Christ and one another so that Christ's mission can continue through the work of the church. It can't happen any other way.

*What Do You Think?*

What's the first thing you should do were you to find yourself in a situation where Christians are disunited, at odds with one another?

*Digging Deeper*

How should your reaction differ in situations that involve doctrinal essentials versus those that don't? Why?

## **B. Prayer**

Father, help us to love one another the way you love us so that the world can see you at work through us. May we be Jesus' hands and feet as we pray in his name. Amen.

## **C. Thought to Remember**

Christians are one in Christ Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thatcher, T., Faust, D., Taylor, M. A., & Nickelson, R. L. (2021). [Called for the World's Belief](#). In R. L. Nickelson, J. A. Kenney, & M. K. Williams (Eds.), *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2020–2021* (Vol. 27, pp. 177–183). Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing.