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## *Eavesdropping: Protect Them*

John 17:6-19

Have you ever walked past a room at a party and heard your name mentioned? What did you do? You eavesdropped, didn't you? You know it's naughty, but it is so tantalizing to listen in on what someone really thinks of you. Obviously, it can be embarrassing or hurtful. But if you catch someone bragging on you, doesn't it swell your heart?

That is exactly what is about to happen to the disciples. They are eavesdropping on the "Real Lord's Prayer"—the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. Last week, Jesus began by talking to His Father about their relationship. Now, Jesus changes topics. He prays for his disciples. And listen to the good things he has to say about them!

[Read John 17:6-10]

Wow! If you heard Jesus praying for you like that, wouldn't you be proud? They may be simple, uneducated peasants, men who have failed Him at times, but you wouldn't know it by the way he speaks of them in prayer. In Jesus' eyes, these men are a precious gift from the Father who have believed and obeyed and glorified him as his disciples. How would you like to overhear Jesus pray this way about you? Part of you—the honest part—would have to admit, "I hardly recognize the person he is describing. I don't feel so confident or obedient or brave, but I sure like hearing Jesus describe me that way."

You know, there is a powerful principle here: That which you bless, you multiply. If you want more of a certain behavior from your kids, your spouse, your employees, your friends... bless it when you see it! Catch them doing good, being brave, acting heroically and selflessly and call it out! It's like dumping manure on a garden; great things will grow! Let's continue with verses 11-18.

Jesus returns to a familiar theme. Remember back in 15:18? *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."* How many of you, when you were growing up, were warned by your parents to avoid certain parts of town? In Yakima, it was Front Street. The notorious Blue Banjo Tavern was there—drugs, violence, prostitution. For all kinds of reasons, it was unsafe for us to go there. Our parents protected us by warning us to avoid that place.

Unfortunately, for the disciples, the whole world was Front Street for them! The whole twisted world, which God loved so much... hated and killed the Son He sent to save it. And Jesus warned, "They will hate you, too." That they had already heard. But as the disciples listen, something else becomes clear: this world that they have been called out of—this world that hates them because they represent a living, breathing criticism of its value system—this unsafe world is their mission field! They were called out of it to be saved from it. Now, they are being sent right back into that dangerous world. They aren't supposed to avoid Blue Banjo Tavern; they are supposed to live there!

So knowing He is sending "His boys" into harm's way, what does Jesus pray? Protect them! <sup>11</sup> "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..."

What is the name that will protect them in this hostile world? Think about it: what is the name of God that John mentions seven times in his gospel... the divine name that Jesus claims for himself? "I Am!" The name God revealed on Mt. Sinai. "I Am," God told Moses when he asked his name. *"I am the Bread of Life, I am the Good Shepherd, I am the Resurrection and the Life, I am the Light of the World, I am the True Vine,"* said Jesus to his disciples. The disciples will not be protected because the name of God has magic power. They will be protected because God's name declares His character; His faithfulness as revealed in Jesus. Remember 16:33? *"In this world you will find trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!"* says the great I Am!

If you want an illustration, just turn ahead to Gethsemane. When the soldiers come they ask, "Who is Jesus of Nazareth." He replies, "I am!" Do you remember what happened next? "When Jesus said, "I am," they drew back and fell to the ground." I am! Bam! The God whose very name speaks of his protective presence will keep them safe.

But the target of Jesus' intercession is not human, is it? <sup>15</sup> *"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."* This brings to mind the last petition in the "other" Lord's Prayer: "...but deliver us from evil!" Many today scoff at the idea of real devil. But when they do, they ignore the teaching of scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus began his earthly ministry battling the devil in the wilderness and ended it on his knees in Gethsemane, resisting Satan's temptation to avoid the cross. As Paul puts it, "We battle not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Never forget: ours is a spiritual battle that can only be won by spiritual power. Jesus asks for that power from the Father.

So imagine you are eavesdropping as Jesus prays for you. You know He is sending you into a dangerous world. But you hear him pray three times... "Father, protect

them!" How encouraging would that be? Who would you rather have pray for you than Jesus? And if Jesus asks His Father for your protection, what better assurance could you have that you will be protected? Right?

But there's a problem. Within a few years, all but one of these 11 will be martyred... crucified, clubbed, speared, and stoned. If Jesus asked the Father to protect them and all but one died a martyr's death, maybe Jesus wasn't a very good pray-er. Or maybe He and the Father aren't as tight as we thought? And when we look at the Christian Church down through the centuries and see hundreds of thousands who have died for their faith, Jesus' prayer for "protection" didn't seem to slop over on them very well, did it?

When I read this passage it makes me think about my own prayers for my children. How many times have I asked God to protect my kids; to keep them out of harm's way? We know this world is dangerous. We know there are all kinds of evil and predatory influences out there and we long to keep our kids safe. We want God to surround them with His hedge of protection. This is one of the reasons I wanted Rachel at Whitworth. To protect her from the influence of a secular university that would seek to tear down her faith. It is what motivates some parents to send their kids to Christian schools or home school them. We want our kids to be safe. I want Jesus to keep my kids safe.

I realize the disciples were not Jesus' kids, but they were precious to Him. He felt a responsibility for them. Our kids are precious to us. As I think about how we pray for their protection, I think we intend one of three things for our kids: we intend either to hide them from the world, blend them into the world or send them out to the world.

If our idea of safety is that our children be hidden from the hostility of this world, our prayers for their safety will go something like this: "Lord, this world is an evil, ungodly place and I ask you to keep my kids safe from influences that would pervert and lead them astray." Or, to put it like the "other" Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

If our idea of safety is that our children blend seamlessly into the backdrop of this world—that they enjoy the prosperity and privilege that other Americans enjoy—then our prayers for their safety go something like this: "God, give my child health and wealth and a happy marriage and healthy kids and a great job and a nice house and three cars and long life and a peaceful death on their own terms." Or, to put it like the "other" Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread."

But if our idea of safety is that our children would be sent someday into enemy territory as God's emissaries—if we believe the primary calling for us and our children is to be God's ambassadors of reconciliation to a broken world—then our prayers for safety go more like this: "God, make my children brave and faithful and obedient to you so that wherever you send them, whatever you call them to

do, whatever adversity they face, whatever suffering they encounter, whatever calamity they endure... they will do so in the knowledge that they belong to you; that you will never leave them nor forsake them and that death is not the worst thing for a follower of Jesus. To put it like the Apostle Paul, "To live is Christ; to die is gain." Or, to put it like the "other" Lord's Prayer, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever! Amen!"

Either Christ is a charlatan or his idea of protection and safety is different than ours. By safety we mean wealth, comfort, little illness, no persecution and long life. But for Jesus, "safety" apparently means a life of courageous witness in a hostile world... a faithful witness that stymies the devil's attempt to discourage and destroy our faith. Our prayers for our kids—and for ourselves—apparently should not be, "Lord, save their lives." Our prayers should rather be, "Lord, spend their lives well, and don't let the devil steal their witness."

It is easy to say this, but I will be first to confess as I think about my own kids I want "protection" to mean safety from danger, peril, uncertainty, discomfort and suffering. To my shame I recall a night a few years back when I was tucking Rachel into bed. She was perhaps 13 at the time and had been learning about missionaries. As she lay there, she looked into my eyes and, in complete sincerity said, "Daddy, I want to be a missionary someplace dangerous. I want to take Bibles into a Muslim country." The earnestness of her words was inspiring. My response was not. "Rachel, I'm glad you are willing to risk your life for the gospel and you are welcome to do so... after you are out from under my roof. For now, it is my job to keep you safe." How many dads can imagine saying something like that? "My kid taking Bibles into a Muslim country... with a death sentence waiting? I don't think so. Not on my watch!"

Then I see a video like last Sunday where the Eubank children are behind enemy lines in Burma with their missionary parents. They have seen horrible atrocities and death. They have been warned by their parents what to expect if they are ever captured by enemy soldiers... including their possible assault and how to cope with it. They have been tossed by their dad into rapids to learn how to be brave and how to escape those who pursue them. And honestly, I find myself thinking, "I don't think I could take my children into such a dangerous place." or even, "There's no way I would take my children into such a dangerous place."

It is the most frequently asked question of the Eubanks. "How can you put your children in harm's way?" Here is Karen's response: [Jesus taught us,] "Don't be afraid of things that kill the body. Fear the things that kill the soul. [We do not want to be reckless, but we are] reconciled to the fact that the danger of being arrested is huge. But we are pursuing something greater with God for our kids. Like Abram leading Isaac up the mountain. I felt God saying, 'Don't try to insulate them so much that they don't want to reach out to me.' There are times when your hands are tied and you can't protect them as much as you want. That's when God says, 'Trust me.'"

Dave is more terse: “We tell our kids, ‘If you get captured, pray to the Holy Spirit. He will give you the right words.’ The ethnic people want us to bring our kids. Their kids are as precious to them as ours are to us. Read mission books. Kids died all the time. Our kids have had pneumonia, typhoid and malaria. If not for prayer, they would die. So we pray. But God still says, “Go!”

Of course, this passage isn’t talking just about our children. It’s talking about all disciples of Jesus—first century and 21<sup>st</sup> century—and it poses challenging questions, doesn’t it? What is our definition of safety? What is our idea of protection? What risks are we willing to take? What are we willing to put on the line for the sake of Jesus’ mission to a hostile world?

It comes down to those three words: hide, blend or send. Which of these describe you? Do you live your Christian life in hiding... quarantined like in a monastery... sequestered from the influences of this world? Or do you see your Christian life as blending—doing your best to fit in, to look just like your neighbors, to avoid standing out—so that you can pursue what this world defines as success? Or do you see yourself as having been sent by Jesus on a rescue mission into His broken world—not foolhardy or reckless, not taking unnecessary risks but taking all the risks Jesus intends? Into your school or workplace, into your family, maybe into the jungles of Burma or a Muslim country? Really, don’t you think Gig Harbor could use some riskier Christians!

Most parents protect their kids from danger. Jesus sends his kids into danger. He calls us out of a world under temporary evil management in order to send us right back into that same world with the offer of salvation. Martin Luther knew what was at stake when he wrote these lyrics to *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*:

And though this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us  
We will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure;  
One little word shall fell him.

That was what Jesus prayed for his disciples that night, “...protect them from the evil one.” Don’t you wish Jesus was praying for you right now? Did you know he is? Listen to this wonderful promise from Romans 8:

*“Christ Jesus who died —more than that, who was raised to life —is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor*

*principalities, nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other thing in all creation will be able to separate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"*

That is real safety.

### **Sermon Questions**

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
  1. The largest portion of the "Real Lord's Prayer" is devoted to praying for Jesus' disciples. How should we understand his prayer for the Father to "protect" them and "keep them safe?" Especially in light of the fact that all but one of them would die a martyr's death?
  2. Jesus speaks of protection from "the evil one." Who is he talking about? He seemed to believe that Satan was a real person. Do you? Share your view on this matter.
  3. Can you think of a time when you felt God's protection in your life? Would you share that? Close in prayer with gratitude for God's protective care over you!