

“Into the World,” John 17:6-19 (Last Sunday after Epiphany, February 11, 2018)

<sup>6</sup>“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. <sup>8</sup>For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup>I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

## PRAY

We are studying the gospel of John each Sunday morning leading up to Easter. We are specifically in John 17, which is commonly referred to as Jesus’ high priestly prayer, or his prayer of consecration. It’s the longest recorded prayer of Jesus anywhere in the Bible.

In verse 18 we read that Jesus prays to the Father in heaven and says, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Jesus prays for his twelve disciples, and even though we aren’t members of the twelve I think it’s clear from the rest of the Bible that this prayer applies to us as well. We learn from this prayer that if you are a Christian, you have been *sent*. The Greek word translated as *sent* is the word *apostello*, or “apostle.” Therefore, all Christians are in some sense apostles. And in the Latin Vulgate, which was the Bible used by the church for a thousand years, *apostello* was translated as *missio*, from which we get our word “missionary.” Verse 18 tells us that if you are a Christian, you are a missionary, a “sent one.”

Probably, when you hear the word “missionary,” you think of someone who gets on a boat, sails halfway around the world, and walks for weeks into a jungle to find some tribe that’s never had contact with the outside world. And when they finally reach that tribe, they open up a Bible and preach to them.

Now, certainly, that’s missionary work, people are “sent” for that purpose, and we must support that kind of work. If you feel at all led to cross cultural boundaries and live among people who are different from you for the purpose of telling them about Jesus, whether it means going to Las Vegas like Casey and Lauren Russell and Matthew Beasley (that’s a different culture from Mississippi) or Laos or Laodicea, we want to help you discern that call from the Lord and, if it’s confirmed, do what we can to get you there. Talk to us.

But that kind of missionary work is just a very, very tiny fraction of all missionary work done in the world and it can be unhelpful to hold it up as the ultimate standard of Christian faithfulness, as if they are the only missionaries. They're not! If you call on the name of Jesus then you also are missionary, even if you never leave the town you were born in. If you live in the same town for one hundred years, you are still one of the "sent ones," and the Lord has work for you to do. Three points: first, the work of a missionary. Second, the resistance missionaries face. Third, the way God makes a missionary.

First, the work of a missionary. Let's read verse 18 again: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." What is the work of a missionary? It means we go *into the world*.

Some of you are old enough to remember the Branch Davidians, led by David Koresh, and the tragedy that occurred at their compound outside Waco, Texas 25 years ago. They had fences and walls and guns to keep the world out. If you go on Highway 30 toward New Albany, you'll see on the right a Jehovah's Witness building. The thing about a Jehovah's Witness building is that it does not have any windows. Why is that? I don't know, you'll have to ask them. But I know why Christian churches have windows. We want the world to see in and see us worship and we want to be reminded, even while we worship, that we are sent into the world. Nor do Christians have compounds. We are to go out there and live and serve among those who don't believe. Of course, where we are meeting has no windows, but we didn't design this building – if we ever build a building of our own, though, I assure you we will have windows.

Religious cults say, "The world is bad, the world will contaminate you, stay as far away as you can from it." But Jesus says, "The world is broken, the world is hurt, and that's why I'm sending you there. I don't want you to just let the world rot while you hole up in your compound. I want you to do something about it."

*When Christians are sent into the world, what are we to do?* In verse eight we read Jesus sent his disciples into the world to tell people Jesus came from the Father. More on that in a few minutes. And that's the same message we are sent into the world with today.

In 2 Corinthians 5 the apostle Paul uses a vivid metaphor to describe the role Christians have in delivering this message. He says that Christians are ambassadors of Christ. If you've ever visited or lived in Washington, D.C., and walked down Massachusetts Avenue, you've seen dozens and dozens of embassies from other countries, and each one of them has an ambassador who lives there. The ambassador is not a citizen of the United States. She lives here, but she is a citizen of her home country, and she is the official representative of her country to the U.S. Her job is not to make policy for her country nor to argue the wisdom of their policy. It is to faithfully represent and communicate the policy of her country's government to our government.

Christians are ambassadors for Christ. We are citizens not first of Oxford, or of Mississippi, or even of the United States, but *of heaven*. And we have a commission to go into the world and tell people that there is a king on the throne of heaven, his name is Jesus Christ, and *he has a*

*claim on your life.* He calls all men everywhere to acknowledge his reign. We are ambassadors, and an old word for a visit by an ambassador to another country is a mission.

Christians are on a mission from God to tell the world about Jesus. What do we need to know about this mission? *First, it takes wisdom to do this.* Some Christians are too frightened of what the world around them thinks to ever actually tell someone about Jesus. That's wrong; that's being a bad missionary. ***We have to open our mouths to do this.*** But the opposite mistake involves thinking every time you meet a stranger you must immediately start talking about Jesus – if you don't vomit out a gospel presentation in the first five minutes you've failed the Lord. No, ambassadors are always chosen by their government because they are wise – they can't change the message of their government, but they do have discretion in how to deliver it. They're chosen because they've proven they are tactful and thoughtful. Matthew 10 is one of the great missionary passages in the Bible, and in verse 16 Jesus says to his disciples: "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." You can't be foolish or thoughtless or careless and be a good missionary.

*Second, being a missionary involves not just words, but deeds.* Some will say you're only doing missionary work when you're actually preaching the gospel. It's not true. Human beings aren't only souls that need to be saved, but we are also bodies that need to be healed. The job of a missionary is to minister as much as possible to the whole person. The good works authenticate the message of the gospel, as they show we really do care about people. We mean all this stuff we say about love. Plus it's hard for someone hungry or homeless or sick to give their full attention to a gospel presentation. Word and deed ministry go hand in hand. In Matthew 10, as Jesus sends his disciples out as missionaries, he doesn't say, "Just preach." Instead we read: "And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction." Matthew 10:1.

*Third, being a missionary involves your unique gifts.* Ephesians 2:10: "<sup>10</sup>For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." You know what that verse is saying? It means that God has brought everything together in your life – he's brought your race, your gender, your family background, your abilities, your successes and failures, the good things you've experienced and the bad things – and made you unique. We overuse that word – we use the word "unique" when we really mean "special," or "noteworthy." But unique means "one of a kind, none other like it." God has brought together everything in your life and made you uniquely prepared for missionary service. There is literally no one else on the planet who can do the good works you can do.

*There are hands only you can hold, ears that will only listen to you, needs only you can meet, and demons only you can cast out.* There are people out there whom I will never reach, but you can. And vice versa. When you try and communicate the message of Jesus, you can be sure your missionary efforts will never be wasted because you are God's unique workmanship. If you're a Christian and you're breathing, it's because there is a mission only you can complete.

One last thing under this point: we haven't really defined what the world is. What is it? In this context, "the world" means ***any pocket of unbelief you encounter.*** So going into the world does not only mean flying to a city where there are no churches and doing street evangelism, though

that's certainly missionary work. It also means that when your friend, who is a Christian, is having a bad year, and he's frustrated and feeling hopeless and he says to you, "I am so tired and I don't think God cares anymore – he feels so distant," you've encountered a pocket of unbelief. Your friend is a Christian, he hasn't lost his status as a child of God, but right now the unbelief is winning in his day-to-day life. So what do you do? *You enter into his unbelief*. You do the work of a missionary. You take him out to eat at his favorite restaurant and just listen; you don't have to offer advice. You certainly pray for him every day. And maybe in a gentle way when the time is right you remind him of God's promises to never leave nor forsake him. Are you looking for chances to serve others like that? Missionaries are sent by God into the world to serve.

Second, the resistance missionaries face. John 17:14: "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." In the gospels Jesus continually warns the disciples that the world will hate them. Why is that?

*Because Jesus' mission always conflicts with the mission of the world.* When you're in the world, unbelief rules your life. And the only path to happiness unbelief knows is personal success, pleasure, and recognition. Unbelief says, "You want to be happy? Then the world must revolve around you. Your life must be centered on your career, your money, your family. And inside your family, things must revolve around you. Your spouse must meet your needs. Your kids must make you look good."

But Jesus says, "The world does not revolve around you. It revolves around me and my mission. Your part of the mission is to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me." A Christian comes into someone's life and calls that person to repent – to give up the only mission that person has ever known, personal fulfillment, and follow Jesus by faith. No wonder the world hates Jesus' missionaries.

Missionaries face resistance from the outside, from other people, but we also face opposition from within. No matter how long we live on earth, there will always be pockets of unbelief not just out there but in here. Paul in his writings calls this the "old man," or the "flesh," the remnant of our defeated, but still active, sinful nature.

These pockets of unbelief constantly struggle against the mission Jesus gave us. They tell us it's not worth it to love and serve others and stick your neck out and actually talk about Jesus. They are quick to take offense and complain when we feel neglected and quick to get angry when things don't go our own way.

So if you're here this morning and you claim to be a Christian, you should constantly feel resistance to the mission Jesus has given you. Resistance from without and within. Is that true of you? Or are you never willing to push a conversation with a friend to the point that you actually talk about the claims Jesus has on their life? You should, if you're a missionary. Are you never struggling with your flesh to really love and serve the people around you? You should, if you're a missionary.

Do people, even the people closest to you like your kids or your parents, never look at you like you have three heads when you talk about Jesus? It should happen, because we are ambassadors from another world, with a message from another king, and so we can't fit in here on earth.

The Christian life is a fight. It is a struggle. At the end of his life, after more than thirty years of being a missionary, the apostle Paul summed it all up by writing, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7. Being a missionary is really hard. Loving and serving other people, living for them, telling them about Jesus, fighting the flesh. The work of a missionary is all-consuming. So how can we do it?

Third, the way God makes a missionary. In John 17:17, Jesus prays to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." What does sanctify mean? Often it means something like cleanse or purify, and it can mean that but that's not what it means here. Here sanctify takes the sense of "to set apart for special purpose."

A lot of you have two sets of dishes and flatware in your house: the everyday set and the good china. Or, you might call them the set you actually use and the set you never use, the set you got at your wedding that turned out to be for display only. But that's not how it's supposed to be. The china is supposed to be set apart for special purpose, like holidays and honored guests.

The way God makes a missionary is by setting that person apart for his special purpose. He does it in two ways: objectively and subjectively. In other words, in one way God acts on you to set you apart, you are the object of his work, and he does it. In the other way, you are the subject, and it's through your work that God sets you apart.

The first way, the objective way, God sets you apart is through the cross. In verse 19 Jesus says, "And for their sake I consecrate myself [in the Greek, the same word translated as "sanctify" in verse 17], that they also may be sanctified in truth."

If you take consecrate or sanctify to mean purify or cleanse, verse 19 makes no sense because Jesus did not need any cleansing. He was perfect. He never sinned. He never made a false move, he never operated from impure motives.

But if you understand it to mean "set apart," the verse 19 makes perfect sense because on the cross Jesus Christ was set apart by the Father and by his own will to atone for our sins. We all have sinned, we have all offended God, and those sins mean we deserve punishment. But on the cross Jesus was set apart for the special purpose of bearing the punishment we deserve for our sins.

Being a missionary is hard, but Jesus being on the cross was much harder. The pain Jesus went through, not just the physical pain of the crucifixion but also the spiritual agony of bearing divine punishment, is unimaginable to us. But he did it, he did it for you and he did it for me. And in so doing he set you apart. If you believe that your biggest problem is that you are a sinner, if you hate your sin, and you believe Jesus died for you, then Jesus has set you apart for the work of a missionary. It's done, it's finished, it's over. You are the object, he is the subject, and he's done the work. You are a missionary, whether you feel like it or not.

***But that's not the whole story.*** Now we'll go back to John 17:8, where Jesus says, "For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me." The Greek here is emphatic. The disciples' belief that Jesus came from God is so strong that you could call it **knowledge, certainty** – they don't just believe in some vague sense that Jesus came from God, they *know it*. They've given their lives to it. That's why Jesus is so happy in this prayer.

It's pretty easy to find people in our community who will say they believe Jesus came from God and died for their sins. It's much harder to find people who really live like missionaries, who build their lives around the belief that Jesus came from God. It's much harder to find people who can look you in the eyes and say, "I know, I am certain, Jesus came from God: I'm betting my life on it and the way I live proves it." Do you know the difference I'm talking about – between weak belief in Jesus and certain knowledge of him?

All the power for Christian living comes from knowing with certainty that Jesus came from God. If you know that, then you know your sins, no matter how great they might be, do not count against you. You don't just hope, you know! No more guilt, no more shame. If you know Jesus came from God, then you know he will provide for you every day of your life, and give you precisely what you need and, frankly, a whole lot more. You don't just hope, you know! If you know that Jesus came from God then you know one day he will return for you, one day he will right every wrong and wipe away every tear, and one day there will be no more sin or death or pain. Again, not a hope – a knowledge, a certainty that these things are true.

That's the kind of certainty verse eight says the disciples had with Jesus, and friends **we can have it too**. And then we will have the power to do missionary work. How? Because, second, we are set apart through the word. Here we are the subject and we do the work by God's grace to be set apart.

Look back at the whole of our text now and see all the different times some variation of "word" or "truth" or "name" is used: it's in verse 6, verse 7, twice in verse 8, verse 11, verse 12, verse 14, and then twice in verse 17. Over and over again we're told the disciples received the word and believed the word and accepted the truth and kept the name. It's clear from John 17 that the way the disciples came to this certainty about Jesus was not by witnessing his miracles, but through the Word! Jesus taught them diligently for three years and, finally they came to know with certainty that Jesus came from God.

Friends, this passage tells us the only way you will experience the power of the gospel in your life is to immerse yourself in the Bible. You must take it into your life by thinking on it and listening to it and discussing it with others and applying it to your life over and over again. You must work the Word into your life if you're ever going to feel the power you need to be an effective missionary. You can't just sit back and wait for God to do it all. You've got to take the Word and plant it deep within your heart.

If you're listening to this sermon, and you really do want to be a missionary but you can't yet say you are certain Jesus came from God, you can't honestly say that knowledge gives you power,

the best thing for you to do to respond to this message about being a missionary is probably not to buy a one way ticket to Tehran and try to tell everyone in the airport about Jesus. The best thing you could do might be to read the Bible, listen to sermons, or best of all get into Bible study with some close friends and at least one person who knows it well and devote yourself to studying it until you are *certtain* that Jesus came from God. Because once you *know* that, the missionary work will almost take care of itself. You won't be able to help yourself. You talk about what you think about, and you think about what you love. When you love Jesus, you will be his missionary.

Jesus taught his disciples, and they came to know with certainty that Jesus came from God. But even so, even with Jesus as their pastor, it took **three years** for them to subjectively experience this power. You've got someone a little less qualified than Jesus as your pastor. So don't be discouraged if you feel like you've been trying for months or even years to be certain that Jesus came from God. This assurance of salvation often takes time.

But the final result is joy. That's verse 13: "But now I am coming to you [the Father], and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." You know the old Gaither song "Because He Lives"? It goes like this – "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future, life is worth the living just because he lives." I would sing that as a teenager and I would think, "Really?" Because at the time I thought "I could face tomorrow if I had a girlfriend." Later in life I thought, "I could face tomorrow if I didn't hate my job." Now it's often, "All fear would be gone if I knew my kids would turn out ok." But when you are so immersed in the word that you can say with certainty Jesus came from God, you can sing that song with a straight face. You can face tomorrow, all fear can be gone, because Jesus is the king. Not just in some personal, in some abstract, spiritual way but actually on the throne of the universe. He is a good king, he takes care of his people. And if you know Jesus came from God, then you will go into the world and do the work of a missionary. Amen. Let's pray together.