



Sermon Transcript August 4, 2019

“God's Compelling Love For a Lost World” John 17

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 4, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by David Rucquoi. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text

John 17

17 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. ⁶ “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. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ 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. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 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. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.[a] ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them[b] in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself,[c] that they also may be sanctified[d] in truth.

²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Introduction

"*God is at work in the world reconciling a lost world to Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. God takes the initiative to invite you to be involved with Him. When you obey Him, He accomplishes His work **through you** in such a way that you and everyone else know that God has been at work ... **You come to know Him as you experience Him in your life.**"* This quote from Henry Blackaby's book, *Experiencing God*, is summarized in his theory that if we want to know God's will, if we want to be part of what He is doing, we should look where God is working around us and join Him.

The passage that we read earlier, from John 17, is just that. It's not a directive to mortals saying, "You should..."; rather, it is Jesus asking, "Please Father..." on our behalf. It shows us His priorities, His passion, and His plan to address His concerns. As we see, the ultimate desire of Jesus is that the World would know the Father, and have His love in them.

As a college student, I would ride home with friends, coming North on I95. After a week of exams I typically fell asleep; but, the industrial smell of New Jersey (right around Newark) let me know that I was close to home. In my grogginess, it became a habit to look for the New York City skyline, and hold the twin towers between my fingers, always amazed that perspective can dwarf something so grand. It became a recurring reminder that when God seems small, when I am not staggering and marveling at his grandeur, it is because I have wondered far from Him, until he appears no more marvelous than a dot in the horizon.

Knowing the Father's Love

This is why Jesus begins his prayer "Father...glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you" (17:1). In fact, all through His prayer are constant references to "glorify" or "manifest" or "know." All of these are references to revealing, illuminating, recognition, and awareness, acknowledging Him for who He is. Even the repetition of "*name*" is a reference not just to what we call Him; rather, this captures everything He represents, the fullness of His character. Why would Jesus be asking for this? Is He seeking clout? Consider how Paul characterized Jesus, in Phil. 2, "*... though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" This doesn't sound like someone seeking glorification by bravado. There is, however, another explanation.

Whether they know it or not, the disciples finished their last Passover with Jesus. Jesus washed their feet. Judas has left. Jesus taught them, and then (in John 17) we see him ending in prayer, after which they went to a garden. There he was betrayed. His disciples fled. Before the evening was over, Peter would deny him three times. The next morning Jesus would be before Pilot, and by that evening Jesus would be dead. Jesus knew that these dear friends, who had left everything out of loyalty to Him, and hope in Him, would soon witness the greatest spiritual conflict in History. They would see their Rabbi, friend, and hero brutally treated by both Roman and Jewish leaders, and they would watch Him die. And He's not just thinking of them. Look who Jesus prays for (v. 20) when He says, "*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.*" He's thinking of His mother, of His friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He's thinking of the Man once crippled, who Jesus healed in the temple. He's thinking of the woman caught in adultery. He's thinking of people who rest their hope in Him. If you believe in Him, his prayer here is with you in mind. Jesus knows that what lies ahead will be brutally hard. But He also knows what a little Dutch lady discovered and spent her life proclaiming. Corrie ten Boom spent nearly a year in Ravensbrück concentration camp as a political prisoner of the Nazis, for hiding Jews. She lost many of her family, who died in the camps. But there, in what seemed like the very pit of hell, she learned that "there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still." Why did Jesus ask to be glorified? He wants to encourage those who believe in Him, and He wants them to realize He is bigger than whatever may threaten them. And, eventually, he wants them to effectively embrace His mission, to draw the world into relationship with the Father, and to know that He loves them.

What is it about Jesus that He wanted them to know? Perhaps there are clues in His prayer.

v. 1 - "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you." He is the Son of God.

v. 2- "*since you have given him authority over all flesh,*" He is the King of Kings.

v. 2-3 - "*to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God,*" - He wants them to wrestle with the notion that He is eternal; or, in the words of Isaiah (9:6) that He is "*the Everlasting Father.*"

v. 3 - "*and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*" He is the Messiah.

v. 4 - "*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.*"

He is an obedient son, whose finished work is not defeat, but victory.

v. 5 - "*And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*" He is God incarnate (see also v. 24).

Before graduating college I was able to join a mission team on a trip to NYC. At one point we visited the Twin Towers, these gigantic buildings I held between my fingers every time I drove up the New Jersey Turnpike. Given the opportunity, and being admittedly odd, I walked up to one of the buildings and put my nose against it. Then I looked up. I immediately lost all sense of balance and fell backward. The perspective gave me complete vertigo. That was cool; so, now prepared, I did it again. This time I marveled in the vertigo without losing balance. I realized that this was only one of the two buildings I once held between my fingers; yet, from this perspective I couldn't even see the whole building. I only knew that all I could see was the building. I was reminded of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, "*...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*" (Eph. 3:17-19). I couldn't see the whole building; but, all I could see was the building, and it was awesome. This is why Jesus wanted to be glorified. He knew what lay ahead would be daunting. He wanted them to be so close that His own grandeur would eclipse the hardship, lest they lose Hope. As Pastor Scott said last week, in his sermon comparing "an 'if' kind of faith [with] a 'though' kind of faith, ... like Habakkuk, we quietly wait for God to fulfill his purposes in us and through us. Often times, that involves difficulty and hardship." Here in John 17 we see, God wants believers to realize that what happened on Friday was not defeat, it was love.

Embracing the Father's Love

Jesus then prays for a second thing that will help the World know that God exists, and that He loves them. He spends a great deal of time discussing this with The Father, then asks, "*Holy Father, keep them in your name*" (v. 11). He later adds, "*keep them from the evil one*" (v. 15), and "*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*" (v. 17). The Psalmist wrote, "*How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word*" (119:9). He goes on to say, "*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you*" (119:11). D.L. Moody liked to say, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible." Scripture makes it clear that there is such a thing as good and evil, often using metaphors such as light and dark, sweet and bitter, clean and dirty, narrow and broad. The prophet Isaiah wrote,

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil..." (Is. 5:20). The ambiguity of good and evil isn't a function of modern thinking; Mankind has enjoyed deliberately confusing good and evil since the beginning of time. This is why understanding the character of God is so important. He is holy. He is just. And in the purity of His character, he can't comingle with darkness as though it didn't exist. In our modern culture we have tried to devise clever words for this, believing a virtue has evolved that is more sophisticated than the "old-fashioned" notion of good and evil. We extol such concepts as "tolerance," or "liberal thinking," we even proclaim them as evidence of love. Listen to these lyrics, put to a perky tune all in good fun:

*"Times have changed
And we've often rewound the clock
Since the Puritans got a shock
When they landed on Plymouth Rock
If today
Any shock they should try to stem
'Stead of landing on Plymouth Rock
Plymouth Rock would land on them*

It goes on to say...

*If driving fast cars you like
If low bars you like
If old hymns you like
If bare limbs you like
If Mae West you like
Or me undressed you like
Why, nobody will oppose
When ev'ry night the set that's smart is
Intruding at nudist parties
In studios
Anything goes*

Just to make the point clear, the song continues with this...

*The world has gone mad today
And good's bad today
And black's white today*

And day's night today...Anything goes.

These lyrics, by Cole Porter, were written in 1934. We've come a long way. And the God of justice and purity is not about to assuage our strong will for anarchy, lawlessness, and unhindered choice by embracing our untethered-will disguised as a virtue of freedom, or "vulnerable transparency." Quite frankly, God is more concerned with being honest and true than whether or not we feel good. He loves us too much to ignore the reality He knows. So for all the things that will ultimately harm us, for all the things that cause shame, or disharmony between us he has a simple name: "sin." And, because God is as honest and just as He is pure, our sin will keep us from Him, and He's not satisfied with that. He made us for fellowship with Him; but, He can't just make the wall of sin disappear. Sadly, neither can we. But our sin must be eradicated for fellowship to be restored. So "*God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8). Scripture tells us "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Cor. 5:21). Earlier I quoted from Philippians 2, where we are reminded that Jesus, as God incarnate, chose to humble Himself on our behalf. He took the responsibility for our sin, leaving the comforts and splendor of heaven, because of love. Sin is no friend, and Jesus is praying that we would not be deceived by it, so that we may be one with Him, and with the Father. This is why we are told, in 1 John, that "*if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). Our purity matters. The desire of Jesus for us to be "*kept in [The Father's] name*" is also for us to be reliable and effective representatives, as He states, "*so that the world may believe that you have sent me*" (v. 21). D.L. Moody said it this way, "Out of 100 [people], one will read the Bible, the other 99 will read the Christian." Jesus prays to The Father, "*As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world*" (v. 18). So Jesus is commissioning us with the mission God gave to Him, so that the World will be compelled to know and embrace God's love for them.

Demonstrating the Father's Love

I have another lesson from the Twin Towers. Two weeks before 9/11/2001 friends from Florida came to visit and tour NYC. We showed them many sights in NY, and they wanted me to take them up the twin towers. Since I daily navigated the NY streets and subways for work, I was proud to take them from Grand Central Station, on the shuttle to Times Square. There we switched to a line downtown and got off, if I remember correctly, at Cortland Street. Coming up out of the subway station I was all

prepared for their awe as they saw the towers. Secretly, I was proud that I could get us right to the base of the towers, no problem. But, when we got to street level, the towers were gone! Those two big towers, completely out of sight. Embarrassed, I took out a map. Sure enough, they should be right in front of us; but, they were gone! Just before I did the unthinkable (and asked someone for directions), I began walking around a small, ugly building in front of us; and, there they were. My directions were right, the towers were where they should be; but, between me and those two big beautiful towers was this dinky, ugly building. We were just so close to that ugly building, and it was between us and the towers, that we simply could not see the towers. That's exactly how sin impacts us, and our perspective on God. He's still God. He hasn't gone anywhere, nor is He any less marvelous; but, when we allow sin to get between us and God, we lose sight of who He is, and where we are, and our fellowship is broken.

Have you ever noticed how scripture portrays love through such things as forgiveness, praying for your enemies, doing good to those who spitefully use you, being patient, taking the initiative for reconciliation when someone has wronged you? And have you ever wondered, if this is how I love my neighbor (the second greatest commandment), how do I love God (the first greatest commandment)? If "*love covers a multitude of offenses*" (Prov. 10:12), how do I apply this to God? Let me first say that this is a much bigger question than we can answer this morning; but, I have been granted the opportunity to teach on this topic (Love in the Bible) as an Adult Bible Fellowship, in the fall. Consider this a shameless plug for those who may be interested in learning more. For now, let's simply lean in to the words of Jesus when he said, "*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word*" (John 14:23). So when Jesus is asking The Father to sanctify them through the Word, he's asking the Father to help believers love him.

We've said Jesus' strategy for compelling the World to know and embrace God's love begins with *us* knowing who He is, and embracing God's love. Then He desires for *us* to be holy, set apart, living in the World but not of it, demonstrating our love for God through our obedience. The third aspect of His strategy, for compelling the World to know and embrace God's love, is that we be unified with other believers and with God. Merriam-Webster defines unity as "the quality or state of not being multiple: oneness." Their second definition of unity is, "a condition of harmony." That is to say, the sounds are different, but they are complimentary, becoming a whole. There is not "sameness," in fact there is diversity, and without the diversity there would be no harmony. So, when Jesus asks for believers to be one, just as He

and The Father are one, it is ample reason to pause. He is seeking for believers to replicate a component of the Trinity that makes the three distinct persons of the Trinity one. Twice in our passage Jesus refers to being with the Father before the world existed; and, in the second verse of the Bible we read how "*the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*" There they are, all three, right at the beginning. Not long ago I was studying this concept of love, and realized that there was a unique form of love within the Trinity. Intrigued, I decided to read through the Bible and identify any passage that referenced or illustrated love within the Trinity. After reading the first five words of the Bible, I put my pen down in awe. "*In the beginning, God created...*" Understanding the word for "*God*" to be in the plural, I saw that the very first byproduct of relationship within the Godhead was creativity and accomplishment that was literally on a cosmic scale. And here, in John 17, Jesus is saying He wants us to have that same unity. In fact, His emphasis on "*that they may be in us*" (v. 21), and Jesus giving us His glory (v. 22), it sounds like we are being invited to participate in this unity with the eternal Godhead!

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*, makes an interesting distinction between lovers and friends, pointing out that lovers tend to pair off and reject others coming into their circle, as an intrusion; but, friends tend to welcome others, realizing that other people bring out more of each friend. We see this especially at memorial services, when the deceased isn't even present. People tell stories about the beloved, we laugh, we cry and we leave feeling we know them better than ever before! Now, imagine a small group of friends, enjoying their interaction together, then looking out to you saying, "Please join us!" This is the triune God, from the beginning of time, enjoying interaction as three and deciding to grow the circle, because the interaction is so meaningful. And what did God do to increase the circle? He **created Mankind in His image**. Well, at first there was shared flawless wonderment in the garden; but, then humans added sin. Did that spoil God's intent? Think about it, suddenly there was the need for forgiveness, mercy, and an aspect of lovingkindness that was not needed before. Suddenly Jesus is needed to provide redemption and an example, and the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, and prompts people with the Word of God. And, just as intended, the members of the Trinity are able to marvel in their reciprocating love and attributes like never before.

I wonder, as we seek to grow the church, as we seek to plant new churches, what would it look like if we truly were one, as they are one? Jesus here tells us, that then the world would know that God sent us (that He even exists!) and that God loves them. There would be creativity and accomplishment on a cosmic scale!

Josh McDowell, was a young law student, an atheist, intending to write a book proving once and for all that Christianity was baseless. He travelled throughout the world studying the basis for the Christian faith, seeking the flaws that would indict Christianity as foundationally unsupportable. In his book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, he systematically explains his findings, and his conclusion that Christianity was, in fact, true. In the opening of his book he describes a group of people (8 Christians) on his campus that caught his attention, explaining that it was, "...their attitudes and actions toward each other. They genuinely loved each other - and not only each other; but the people outside their group as well. They didn't just talk about love; they got involved in people's lives, helping them with their needs and problems. It was all totally foreign to me, yet I was strongly attracted to it." He goes on to state, "You may think it was the irrefutable intellectual and historical evidence that brought me to Christ. No, the evidence was only God's way of getting his foot in the door of my life. What brought me to Christ was the realization that he loved me enough to die for me."

Conclusion

It's easy to look at this kind of love, this kind of unity and think, "yeah, I want some of that!" That is to acknowledge that Jesus' desire that we "*may become perfectly one*" (v. 23) is not where we find ourselves today. Two points I'd like to make about that: first, never underestimate how wonderful what we have is. The closer we get to the nitty gritty of our daily, inner workings, the more we see the very human side of our initiatives; and, like a spot on a bride's gown, it's easy to get distracted from the bigger picture. To a person who has never experienced community with those who truly embrace the teachings of Jesus, what we have here is a refreshing and a stark contrast to a dog-eat-dog world. Second, I'd remind you of Proverbs 13:10, which in the NIV states, "*Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*" And if, in hearing that, you find yourself thinking of someone else in the congregation, hoping they are paying attention, I'd encourage you to study Proverbs 13:10 some more, in humble prayer.

In John 17, we have the opportunity to hear a candid discussion within the members of the Trinity about us. In that, Jesus is not admonishing us; rather, he's making a request of the Father. In this request, the night before his death, we learn of Jesus' greatest desire, and what he's asking The Father to do to address that desire. And that is where the Father will be working. First, he's asking the Father to make known to us who Jesus really is, for us to be experientially aware of His identity. Second,

He's asking the Father to help us follow His example, to be obedient to the Word in loving the Father. Third, He's asking the Father to help us be unified.

Blackaby states, *"God takes the initiative to involve His people with Him in His work ... He is the One who is already at work in our world. When He opens your spiritual eyes to see where He is at work, that revelation is your invitation to join Him."*

Six times in this prayer, at least once in each section, Jesus makes reference to *"As you sent me into the world"* or *"so that the world may know that you sent me."* The emphasis is not on being sent, or the mission, or who is sent, or who they are sent to. The emphasis is on the sender: God. That is to say that the greatest evidence for a lost world to see that God exists, and to understand who He is, is not parting of the seas, fire from the sky, healing of the sick, or even raising the dead. The greatest evidence that God exists, to a lost world, is when they see His love on display. As Jesus said, *"so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you love me."*

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