

John 17:5-19

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[0:00] If you're a Bible, turn to John 17. John 17. I don't know if you've seen the film *Master and Commander*, with Russell Crowe in it.

! It's set in the Napoleonic Wars. Russell Crowe is the captain of a small British frigate called *HMS Surprise*.

It's a good film. And *HMS Surprise's* task was to try and intercept the much larger and more powerful French vessel. And the whole film is about this incredible chase between two ships around the coast of South America.

I don't know if you've seen the film. But life at sea is kind of portrayed as a grim struggle for survival. And sometimes life feels like that, doesn't it? A grim struggle for survival. And certainly the Christian life sometimes feels like that. Crew members are lost overboard.

[1:13] They're all at me this morning, aren't they? We love noisy children. It's a joy, honestly. All right? So there is a room out there. You can hear me.

You can see me and hear me if you want to go out there. But that's great. Don't feel bad now that I've embarrassed you. All right? It's good. So where am I?

So *HMS Frigate*, the film is basically about how it's difficult on board a ship. It's a grim struggle for survival.

And often, as Christians, we can feel like that. There are times out there where it seems like everything will be lost. All along, the question which the crew and audience are asking themselves are, will this ship make it to the end of its mission?

Will she keep going despite the huge odds against her? And there's got to be times, isn't there, when I think as Christians, we're tempted to think the same. How can I keep going?

[2:15] There are times when you look at the church in this country and think, is it on the brink of oblivion? Often the Christian life, it feels like, doesn't it, a voyage at sea where there's huge waves and we're just about to be swamped.

And if we put ourselves into the shoes of the disciples in John 17, I think that's where they are. There's only 11 of them now. One of them has betrayed them, hasn't he?

There were 12. But one of them has gone overboard. Judas has already defected, just as the scriptures prophesied. And so you can imagine how they felt.

It's Thursday evening, and Jesus is preparing to hand over the ship to these 11 disciples. You can imagine what they felt like. He's warned them, I'm going to be crucified.

They don't want to hear that, but he's told them that. And in a few hours' time, it's going to happen. And the little ship of the disciples' faith is going to be plunged into the most dark and severe storm that they'll ever have to face.

[3:21] And so these 11 men are asking themselves, will we survive? How will we keep going? I think it's one of the great unused arguments for the Christian faith.

We don't use this argument very much. But the sheer fact that the Christian church exists all around the world today, that there are billions of followers of the Lord Jesus, but then there were just 11. And the survival of the church and the growth of the church is a massive phenomenon. How is it possible? How did it all survive? How has it spread to healing? And the answer really is this prayer in John 17.

We began to look at last week. And you'll notice, first of all, we saw that Jesus prays for himself. And he's just got one petition, and he prays for glory.

But now he's going to pray for the 11 in this middle section. Verse 12, Judas is referred to. He's defected. And so there's just 11. They are facing incredible odds.

[4 : 22] I think it was Erasmus, the Renaissance scholar. He told this parable about Jesus returning to heaven, going back to heaven. And as he returns to heaven, the angels gather around Jesus, and he tells them what has happened, all about his miracles and his teaching, his death on the cross, and his resurrection.

And when he finishes the story, Michael the archangel asks, but what happens now? And Jesus says, well, I've left behind 11 faithful disciples.

And these people will build my church. And Michael says, but what if they fail? And according to the story, Jesus says, I have no other plan.

There is no plan B. What if they fail? I have no plan B, Jesus says. There's a story. It's an illustration. It's a parable.

But it's based on fact. There are just 11. And Jesus puts the whole weight of his enterprise onto the shoulders of the 11 men. And before we start finding things for us, before we start applying this directly to us, I want you to put yourself in the shoes of these 11 men.

[5 : 31] And so there's three things we're told about the 11 in this chapter. We're told, number one, that they are saved out of the world. Number two, that they are safe in the world.

And number three, that they are sent into the world. Saved out of the world. Safe in the world. And then sent into the world. And they're kept. And to each of these things belongs our rescue, our protection.

And so it's through the word of God that we are saved. And it's by the word of God that we are protected. And it is with the word of God that we are sent.

So let's look at the three things. First of all, these 11, they're saved out of the world. We need to be really clear of what we're talking about. And when we talk about the world. And we're not talking about the kind of planet Earth.

It comes up really clearly, doesn't it? The most famous verse in the Bible. It says in the Bible, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. And when John says God so loved the world, it's not the world in its bigness.

[6 : 45] It's the world in its badness. God so loved the world in its rebellion against him. In its anger against him. In its anger against him.

God so loved the world, not so much in its bigness but in its badness. What kind of people does he love? That's what the word world means in John's Gospel.

It's not the planet. It is human beings organized in rebellion against God. That's what the word world means in John's Gospel.

And God loved that world so much. A world that is in rebellion against him. A human race that organizes itself in rebellion against him. God so loved that world that he gave his one and only son. But you notice something that you don't often hear. But it's clearly here in these verses. God gave us Jesus. But just look what it says in verse 6. God gave us Jesus.

[7 : 49] But in verse 6 Jesus says, I have manifested, I've shown your name to the people whom you gave me. Out of the world. How are we saved as Christians?

Obviously we're saved aren't we? Because God gave us Jesus. But there's another truth here in John 17 that's often tucked away. And you don't hear very often. We are saved not only because God gave us Jesus.

But we're saved because God gave Jesus us. Can you see what it says? I've revealed you to those you gave me. Out of the world.

They were yours. You gave them to me. And they've obeyed your word. So look again in verse 9. I am praying for them. I am praying, not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me. For they are yours.

Now I think that's staggering. We are used to thinking of Jesus as God's gift to the world. There'll be lots of sermons on that at Christmas time. But do you ever think of yourself as God's gift to Jesus?

[8 : 59] Because that is what you are. If you are a believer this morning. If you've trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. You are God's gift. Have you ever thought of yourself in those terms?

There's massive mystery here, isn't there? Let me try and explain the inexplicable. If you come to my study, you'll find there is a really tattered old book.

Which is a little bit battered in my library. It's called Young's Concordance. I don't need it. I never use it anymore. Because you can find all that you need on that kind of stuff online.

But it was given to me by my dad. And my dad used it loads when he became a Christian in the 1950s. That's why it's so battered. It was a gift from him to me.

And there's no reason for me to keep it. I should throw it out, really. But it's got great sentimental value. Because when I see that book, I think of him. And what Jesus is reminding us here is something that we don't think about a lot.

[10:06] But you and I, as believers, you are God's gift. You are the gift of the Father to the Son. And that is why you are saved. And God has given you to Jesus for safekeeping.

Now, of course, any illustration falls down. It's not just that we are objects passed from hand to hand. Think of the gift of an orphan child to adopted parents.

It's maybe better. Now, that is much more, isn't it, for the good of the gift as it is for the glory of the giver or the blessing of the receiver. That's different from giving someone a book.

When you give an orphaned child to adopted parents, everyone is blessed. The giver is glorified.

The receiver is blessed. And it's for the good of the child. And it's that sense, in that sense, that God has given us to Jesus. The Father has given us to his Son to be loved by him and prized by him.

[11:11] And so, when you and I go through great difficulties, like some of you are, and when it seems the little ship of faith is going to be swamped by many pressures all around us, remember who you are.

You are God's gift to his Son. You are God's gift to his Son. And that means, doesn't it, that you are indescribably precious to Jesus. He values you.

We are like that book of mine, which is tattered and not well kept and falling apart and in many ways worthless. We have no intrinsic worth.

We are sinners through and through. But God loves us in Christ. And our value and our worth and Jesus prizes us. So it doesn't matter what your background is.

And it doesn't matter however broken and however flawed you feel this morning. You are treasured from all eternity for all eternity.

[12:17] So look with me at verse 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.

Do you see, look how much Jesus prizes those he's died for. He says, I cannot wait to spend eternity with you. And we need to think like that, don't we?

Particularly when it's discouraging. When we're swamped by difficulties and problems, remember who you are. The Father has given you to his Son, not because of anything in you.

It's just an act of sovereign love and grace. And God has given you to his Son for safekeeping. And the Son cannot wait to spend eternity with you.

For those you have given me, I want them to be where I am. I want them to see the glory that I have, Jesus says, and for them to share in it.

[13:23] Can't you see that? In verse 24. You see from a human perspective, what happened to those 11, I don't know if you know the story.

Ten of them died as martyrs death. They were killed. Violent deaths. John, the apostle, he lived to a ripe old age, but he suffered imprisonment and exile.

But all the others, the other ten, they died untimely deaths. But do you see from Jesus' perspective, there's no such thing as an untimely death.

You and I are loved with an everlasting love. And if I can put it like this, you are going to get to hang out with Jesus for all eternity. And so there is no such thing as an untimely death.

And that's why as Christians, when our brothers and sisters die, we cannot grieve like those who are in the world. Sometimes Christians talk like that isn't true.

[14:33] We do not believe that this world is the only world that there is. And if you think that, you will grieve hopelessly.

But if you know that you've been given by the Father to the Son for safekeeping for all eternity, you will have a totally different perspective on things. The ship of the church in John 17 is to go into very deep and stormy weather.

And these eleven will face severe persecution and martyrdom. And Jesus wants them to know who they are and how much he delights in them. And how much he prizes them. That God has set his special love upon you in Christ from all eternity you've been loved.

For all eternity you will be loved. Carlos Voss talks about, doesn't he, that verse where you have been loved with an everlasting love. And he says, how do you know that God will never stop loving you?

You've been loved with an everlasting love. How do you know that God will never stop loving you? Because he never began loving you. It is an everlasting love. It is beyond our comprehension. And we have been given by God to Jesus to be rescued.

[15 : 49] And so by God's sovereign initiative we are called out of the world. And God has given us to Jesus for safekeeping. And we are saved by the electing love of God.

And I don't want to labour this point because we looked at it last week. But at the back of your response to the gospel is the sovereign electing love of the Father. And we need to hold those two truths together.

Two truths together. Salvation is not a human lottery. Congratulations, your numbers come up. No, it is divine choice. And if you have chosen Jesus, it was because God chose you first.

You love him today because he first loved you. Before the foundation of the world. He chose you to give you to Jesus to be saved.

It is not a lottery. It is not down to chance. It is the sovereign electing special love of God for his people. Saved out of the world. But then safe in the world, verses 11 to 16. Jesus prays for our protection.

[16 : 52] And the world is a dangerous place for Christians. And Jesus prays in verse 11. He says, I am no longer in the world. But they are in the world. Remember what the world is? In rebellion against God.

But they are in the world. And I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep them. Keep them in your name. Which you have given me. That they may be one, even as we are one. Keep them in your name. What does that mean?

How does that work? Is it some kind of mantra? Is it some kind of incantation? You know, a bit like abracadabra. In your name. How does the name of God protect us?

In our culture, our name is just a handle, isn't it? But in the Bible, it's much more serious than that. In the Bible, the name expresses the character of the person.

And so God changes people's names. When he meets with them. So, some people know the story of Jacob in the Old Testament. And Jacob is a pretty horrible bloke, really. He's a twister.

[17 : 56] He's a deceiver. He's a manipulator. There's nothing going for Jacob in all the Bible. And then Jacob met with God. And God changed his name. And says, from now on, you will be called Israel.

You will be called a prince who has found power and peace with God. He met with God. He met with God and Jacob was changed. Or think of Simon.

In the Gospels, Jesus says, from now on, you will be called Peter. Simon is a pretty unstable, up and down person. But Jesus says, from now on, you will be called the rock, Peter.

Because you've met with me, you are now a rock or soul of Tarsus. His name was changed to Paul. Because in the Bible, when people meet with God, God changes their name to show he's changed their character.

And that's what the Gospel does. That's what a name is. A name stands for the character of that person. And so, God's name is God's character.

[19 : 01] And that's where our protection is found. Our protection is found, not in ourselves, not in how clever we are, but in the character of God, in the name of God. How do we know what God is like?

Well, Jesus has revealed himself to us. Look at verse 6. Verse 6. I have manifest, I have shown your name to the people. I've revealed your name to these guys.

Whom you've given to me out of the world. Yours they were, and yours you gave them to me. And they have been kept by your word.

And so, he says, protect them by the power of your name, by all the force of your character. By who you are.

One of the great, kind of, finance institutions is JPMorgan Chase. JPMorgan, the founder of the bank, was once asked, what is the best collateral someone can give for a loan?

[20 : 02] And his answer was, character. Character. I guess, like me, if you've got an email address, you get spam email, don't you?

I got one this week. It offered me hundreds of thousands of dollars in the spam email. It was from a widow in southern Nigeria, whose husband was a multi-millionaire.

And in his will, like unbelievably, he left me a considerable sum. It's absolutely astonishing. It's an extraordinary thing, isn't it? And all I had to do was give him my bank wallet.

I thought, this is just incredible, isn't it? Do you know what is astonishing? You know what is absolutely astonishing? I had the same email from someone in Nigeria two weeks ago. It's absolutely remarkable.

And so, what do you do when you get an email like that? Do you ring up your wife and say, darling, it's just remarkable. We can pay off the mortgage. No, you don't, do you? You think, what a con. You're not taken in by that sort of spam.

[21 : 13] Why? Because of the name. You don't know the person. You've got no reason to trust that person, have you? You've got no reason to trust that person, but you've got every reason to trust the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's the point, isn't it? Here are the eleven and Jesus is about to leave them and they're on their own in the world. And where is their protection? It is in this God who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ. And I say this often, don't I, that there is nothing un-Jesus-like in God.

I find that hugely comforting. How do you know what Allah is like? How do you know what Allah is like? You can't know actually because Allah is fickle, isn't he? Very fickle.

But how do you know what the real God is like? He's like Jesus. So you read the Gospels. And you see in the Gospels that there is nothing un-Jesus-like in God. And so it's okay then, isn't it, in this scary, hostile world to trust a God like that.

That is where your protection lies, in the name, in the character of God. And we are saved out of the world and we are safe in the world.

[22 : 26] Just how safe are we? Turn back with me to John chapter 10 and verse 27. And Jesus there talks about laying down his life for the sheep. And he says, And he says, And do you see what he's saying?

He's saying there are two hands out there. And no one will be able to snatch them out of my hand. And no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. And I and the Father are one.

So do you see what that means? It means this. If you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are in the palm of Christ's hand. And you are in the hand of God the Father. And I and the Father are one.

You can't jump out of it. You can't be snatched out of it. You can't be taken out of it. You are in the grasp of omnipotence. And if you have trusted in the Lord Jesus, that is how safe you are. Saved out of this world.

But this world is scary. But you are protected and safe in the world by the power of his name. Look at verse 11.

[23 : 47] Do you see what it says? It says, 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. So that is the focus of Jesus' prayer.

And as Jesus prepares to leave the 11 in this world on his own, as he looks down the years ahead, the first danger he sees is what? The first danger there is disunity.

We will look at a little bit more of that next time. And before we go on, like why aren't we involved in all sorts of things, don't go there yet.

But think about the 11 that he is speaking to. Because the 11 he is speaking to are a pretty disparate lot. There is Simon the Zealot, who is a Jewish terrorist.

And then you have got Matthew the tax collector, who is a collaborator with the Romans. He is a traitor to Judaism, both in the same church. And you take Jesus out of that, and what is going to happen?

[24 : 48] They are going to be at each other's throats. And so think of this church here, this morning, all the different temperaments, all the different personalities. And just think, without Jesus, what would we be?

Inflated egos, misdirected zeal, relational tensions, left to ourselves, we fragment, we scatter, wouldn't we? That is what churches do.

And Jesus prays, and he says, protect them by your name. That they may be one, as we are one. He is not praying that they will all be really happy in each other's company, and like each other.

It would be lovely if church was like that. But most churches aren't like that. That is not what it means. He is not praying that we would all be arm in arm together, and all get along together wonderfully, and all agree on every decision.

It would be lovely if church was like that, but it isn't. It is more profound than that. He is saying, I am leaving you in the world, and I want you to keep together on the same page, on the same mission.

[25 : 56] They know that I have come from you, that you sent me. And they know what the mission is.

Don't let them forget that, Father. That is what the Lord's Supper is all about, isn't it? Proclaiming Christ until he comes. It keeps us on mission. And I think if you look at the scene in the UK, what do you see about the church?

You see that the church has forgotten who they are, and why it exists. And Jesus says, Father, protect them from that. In verse 15, I am not praying that you take them out of the world, because there is a job to be done in this world.

And it would be lovely, wouldn't it, if we could all just go up to heaven. I would love that. And we long for that. But we shouldn't long for that in a kind of escapist way, because there is a job to be done.

To proclaim Christ until he comes. He says in verse 15, He says, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. Do you remember what Jesus said to Simon Peter?

[27 : 08] Jesus always calls Peter Simon by his old name when he is behaving like how he used to. And he says, Simon, Satan, the devil has desired to have you.

But do you remember what Peter says? When he writes his letter, he says, the devil is like a roaring lion prowling around, seeking whom he may devour. And Satan wants to get into churches like ours and scatter people.

To bring the cause of Christ to nothing. That's his strategy. And Jesus says, but I've prayed for you. I've prayed for you that your faith will not fail. That brings me to my last point.

We are sent into the world. What are we here for? What is this being one as we are one? What is the mission of God to the world?

Why did the Father send the Son into the world? Why does he want the disciples to be on the same page? And not sort of confused and bewildered and scattered. Well, look at verses 17 and 18.

[28 : 25] Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. You see, there's a job to be done.

There's a task for Jesus' disciples. And that makes it important for them to be in the world. But they're in the world, not of the world. And I think that's a knife edge.

There are two extremes, aren't there? There is isolation from the world. And there's, on the other side, imitation of the world. And you and I can fall down on either side of that.

Jesus doesn't want us to be kind of holier than thou. But neither does he want us to be worldlier than thou. We are to be like the Lord Jesus, who came into the world to save the world.

And that demands, doesn't it, an attitude of separation from the world and sin. And yet, identification with the world and its need. And that's how we're to position ourselves.

[29 : 29] Separation from the world and its sin, but identification with the world and its need.

Without separating ourselves from the world, we will have an audience, but we'll have nothing to say.

And without identifying with the world, we may have something to say, but nobody will be listening to us. We are in the world. Jesus has left us in the world. So let's not withdraw into kind of false pietism, longing to be in heaven, kind of running away.

No, we're in the world, and Jesus wants us in the world. Literally, you are immortal until your job is done, and Jesus has got a job for us to do. And he's left you here in this world to get on with it.

But we're not to be caught up in that way of living that is hostile to God. We're not of the world, aren't we? So it's a bit like a ship in the sea.

A ship is meant to be in the sea. That's where it's meant to be. But if the sea gets into the ship, well, then you're in all sorts of trouble. And that's what Jesus is praying for his church, isn't he? That we would be in the world, but the church shouldn't be like the world.

[30 : 43] I was told the other day that Christians have neither the luxury of compromise nor the safety of disengagement. And that's the challenge for every church at the moment.

And so God, in his sovereign providence, has placed you here. You as families and individuals, you are in the calling that you are because God has placed you in them.

And the question that all of us have to ask is, well, why has God put me here? So that I can actually bring the message of Jesus and live out what it means to honor Jesus in this world.

I have a story about a taxi driver who picked up a minister from the airport and they got into a bit of an argument on the way into town. And the taxi driver was boasting that he had a more effective ministry than the preacher.

And he said, you preach and everyone falls asleep. I drive and they pray like crazy. And that's true of many of you here today, isn't it? If you're a doctor or a surgeon or a nurse and you're wheeling the patient into the operating theater, they are praying.

[31 : 58] And you can get people to pray more effectively than I can. Do you see where God has placed you in his sovereign providence? That's the question, isn't it? It's not my career, really.

If God has called you to be a doctor or an engineer or a housewife, whatever it is, you've got to ask the question, why has God put me here? And that is what sanctification means. I've not got time to kind of go into that.

But sanctification really means that we are set apart by God. We're made different. We are saints. And there is a growing process where we become more set apart for God. And so what does that sanctification, that growing more to be like the Lord Jesus, look like here in Ealing?

We've been washed. We've been justified. And we've been set apart for his use. But you're not going to be any use at all, are you? Unless you're progressively being changed more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus.

It is a massive mistake to think that to reach the world, we've got to be like the world. The more different we are from the world, the more effectively we will reach the world. And so as you've sent me, Jesus said, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.

[33 : 17] And as you've sent me, so I send them into the world. We are saved out of the world. We are saved out of the world. And then kept safe in the world.

And then we are sent back into the world. And so Jesus says, when I'm sending them into this work, keep them and protect them. Protect them from a thousand spiritual dangers, but set them apart for this one purpose.

What do we pray for our children? We'd really like them to do well in exams. We'd like them to work their hard, to do their hardest, do their best.

But it's not the end of the world if they don't get great results. We'd like them to go to university, maybe. But it's no biggie. We'd love them to have their own home. We'd love them to get married and have children and those sorts of things.

All those things would be nice, wouldn't they? But they're not the main thing. They are not the main thing. We'd like them to have a satisfying career, to have joy in their work and a lovely career path.

[34 : 25] They're good things. All that would be great. But actually our prayer is this, isn't it? Save them from a thousand spiritual temptations and dangers.

Protect them and set them apart. For one purpose, to make you known. They know, Lord, I've told them I've been sent by you. They're certain about that, that you've sent me into the world.

Father, protect them and keep them. So they might go into the world with that same message. In verse 13, this place that Jesus is preaching, it is the maximum joy. And so verse 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.

That's where real joy comes from. And so for our young people and for our children, where does maximum joy come from? Do you hear me, children?

Do you hear me? Where does maximum joy come from? It comes not from living for yourself. Do not believe that. It doesn't come from having the best phone, the best technology, making loads of money.

[35 : 32] You can run down that route and you will not find joy. You'll find emptiness. You see, maximum joy is living in line with what you were made for, to make Jesus known.

The pathway to joy is not self-indulgence, is it? It's not self-fulfillment. For so many of us, our prayers for our children, we want them to be happy and healthy and joyful.

And yet we follow the propaganda of the world. No, for the joy that was set before him, what did Jesus do? For the joy set before him, what did Jesus do?

Did he please himself? No, he endured the cross, despising the shame. That's what he means in verse 19. And for their sake, I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth. He sets himself apart. For the joy that was set before him, for the joy in bringing many sons to glory, for the joy of seeing people from every culture and every nation of the world being added to his church and coming to the Father.

[36 : 43] And he says, Father, I'm leaving them in the world and I want them to know that joy. I want them to share in that joy of the Godhead. It comes from making Christ known wherever he has placed you, in whatever circumstances you find yourself in life.

Let's pray together.