

Tim Allen Sermon - Sunday 26 July 2020
Famous Last Words [7] Your Word is Truth (John 17:17)

Today we are finishing our series looking at Jesus' 'famous last words'.

Last week, Marilyn gave us a great overview about what is known as the High Priestly Prayer in John 17. It's a long intercessory prayer where Jesus prays for himself as he's coming to the cross and also prays for his disciples' future. And when it came to his disciples, we've looked at Jesus' desire that they would be unified, and this morning we're going to look at the request that they would not only be unified, but that they would also be sanctified.

Just one verse today: John 17:17, "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*"

What did Jesus mean when he was asking the Father to sanctify his disciples? What does it mean to be sanctified?

From the word sanctify we get the word 'holy' and also the word 'saint' but it isn't about glowing lots and growing a halo. It's about taking something pretty ordinary and setting it apart, consecrating it, in order for it to be fully devoted to a certain special intended purpose. We sanctify things all day long - you are sanctifying your chair at the moment as you sit on it. You are using it for its intended purpose. We sanctify food, we take a snack, select it from all others, set it aside for an intended purpose, and devote it to destruction as we eat it. For some of you when you brushed your hair with a brush - you use it for its intended purpose. If you attempted to brush your teeth with your hairbrush you certainly wouldn't be sanctifying it!

In the Old Testament, all of the vessels used in the temple worship were to be sanctified; the cups, candle sticks, alters and tables, were not to be used for any other purpose than in the worship of God. And once sanctified to God, they were never to be used for personal purposes. So when Belshazzar took the vessels that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple and he drinks wine out of them and praises the gods of gold and silver, his act is seen as defiling them. He spoils them, desecrates and ruins them.

The question each one of us has to ask this morning is: what are we set apart for? What are we sanctified for? What's our intended use? What purpose did God have in mind when he created us?

Genesis 1:26, *And God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.'*

What purpose did God have in mind when he created us - when he set us apart from all other creation. Let this simple statement sink in...God created you that you might manifest his character.

Sanctification is a progressive thing, it consists in us becoming more like God and less attached to the world over time. It's a process of weaning: we are being weaned off the world, weaned off all that we thought was true, all that we've been living off, all that's been feeding us and produced in us a distorted growth. And yes I'm happy to admit that in my devotion to being a father I've been watching workshops on the different styles of breastfeeding. It really is like a child being weaned off milk: it's the process of being more and more weaned off from earthly thoughts, objects, passions, pursuit and desires in order to be attached to eternal things which are unseen.

How do you go about doing that? How are we weaned off the world and all the wonderful things that it offers? And weaned onto something that is invisible, and yet of eternal worth?

How are we protected from the world, as Jesus desires for his disciples in v15, and yet also useful in and to the world, as Jesus' request in v18? How do we ensure daily that we are being conformed to the image of Christ and not squeezed more and more into the mould of the world? Jesus says: "*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*"

Jesus wants his disciples, these ordinary people, to be set apart, consecrated, and sanctified. Jesus knows there is only one way to keep the world out of them, there's only one way they'll be able to say no to the world. There's one way they can be guided, and then when they fall into sin, which happens, there's one way that can be guided out. And it isn't by a bunch of rules for life but by the disciples being rooted in the truth. Jesus had said to them earlier, "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free*" (John 8:32).

That's why we love the Bible so much, that's why we devote so much time to reading it, and as a church why we want to preach from it, it's why we want people to know the truth. Not because it's nice and makes us feel a bit better, it's not because it can make us a bit more moral, or can maybe give us religious kudos, it's not because it helps us to get by, not because it offers us an interesting philosophy. No! We want to know the truth and we want others to know the truth, because the truth, ultimately, is what sets them and us free!!!

Let's look at a few ways the Bible sanctifies us. How does it set Jesus' disciples free? We could look at a hundred - let's take a couple.

Here's one, it may not sound very in vogue, and it may not sound very positive and attractive, but it's so important. One of the things the Bible does to sanctify us is that it rebukes and corrects us.

2 Timothy 3:16: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*".

Reading the Bible is like going to visit the dentist - perhaps that's something we need right now. A difficult thing to do at the moment, but perhaps in the past we may have been quite hesitant to book a dentist appointment. Not because we don't think the dentist will give us something to deaden the horrible pain of that toothache in order to sleep. The problem is we are worried that they won't just deaden the pain but reveal a whole host of things in our mouth that needs to be put right. Not only are they going to deaden the pain they're going to set your whole mouth in order.

It's as though they open your mouth and the dentist has hit the jackpot. The point is that you can't go there and get what you want without getting something a lot more. C.S Lewis says this: "Our Lord is like the dentists. Dozens of people go to him to be cured of some particular sin. Well, he will cure it all right, but he will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if you once call him in, he will give you the full treatment."

When you read the Bible, you invite God in and you might invite God in for some inspiration. God will be thinking "yes I want you inspired" but that's not all, "I've got a lot of sorting out I'm going to get done. You came in for a toothache, I'm going to give you a new set of teeth!"

Lives are changed by this truth. We can trust the word because it is the truth. Often time we do not like truth, but our liking or disliking of the truth does not change the truth. The Bible will correct us and rebuke us, it will stop us from getting into some ditches, and making silly mistakes, it will help us when we've fallen into a ditch to find the way to get out, to get back on the right track. As D.L. Moody wrote in the front of his Bible: "This book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this book." That's why the Psalmist writes in Psalm 119:105, "*Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*".

Another way the Bible sanctifies is that - it will cause you to see the emptiness of the world, and its inability to satisfy your deepest needs. When you read the Bible, you'll see story after story of those who pursued the world, yet were left completely and utterly empty. You'll read about one of the wisest and wealthiest people who pursued happiness and pure satisfaction, and could have 'anything his eye wanted' anything he desired he had, and yet in his old age when reflecting on living for all that the world has to offer says "empty, empty everything is empty".

Of course, you'll see the flip side, you'll read about those who have consecrated themselves, set themselves apart, devoted themselves to God and all of his purposes, and you'll see the many blessing that come as a result. You'll read about people like the Apostle Paul who said to the Corinthians that in all his affliction, in all that he had gone through, he had been shipwrecked and stoned and beaten, "In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy" (2 Corinthians 7:4 ESV).

I remember when I was 17, I was at the intersection of my life. I was in sixth form when I realised that I was completely empty. That I was rudderless. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, that I had nothing in my life that had effectively gripped me. I had looked and longed and desired and pursued all the things that were in the world and yet it left me completely empty. I had done some things that I was deeply ashamed of.

One of the things I was apathetic towards was reading. I really didn't understand why people would devote time to reading a book. I remember reading the first two Harry Potter books, but by the time I came to the third one I couldn't get to the end as I was just so bored, I didn't have the motivation to do it.

When I became a Christian I was so hungry to hear the truth, I realised I had spent most of my life just filling up on rubbish, and I wanted to detox from that, to wean myself of that, and I was so hungry to read God's word. I went from someone who didn't care about reading, to reading the whole of the New Testament in a matter of a few weeks. I remember one of the Old Testament verses that I learnt straight away, that I had memorised, it's one that so many of us know, Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Now, what Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane reveals a wonderful hope for us - that just as the Father had set Jesus apart and consecrated him for God's intended purpose, anyone who is a disciple has a High Priest who is interceding for them as they are set apart and devoted to God's special purposes. That's why Jesus says, *"For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."* John 17:19. Jesus sacrificed himself ultimately that they may be truly sanctified, truly made holy.

Here's the good news... our great High Priest, prepared himself to be our sacrifice, to give his life.

So let us devote ourselves to knowing the truth because when we know the truth, we know the truth will help us to continue to be free. Let us know the truth and let the truth set us free! Amen.