

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Members of God’s Kingdom,

“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10). Stephen, mentioned in our first lesson, lived by those words. He was faithful to God’s Word even though it brought a death sentence. He was not afraid because he had the assurances and promises of God.

You and I, too, have the assurances and promises of God and that is good because life is not always easy for Christians. John wants us to find strength and comfort from God’s Word. That is why he records a special prayer in this portion of scripture. This is the prayer of Jesus – God’s Son – praying for his disciples – people like you and me. His prayer is to protect them and to protect us from the influences of this world and his prayer is that God would also sanctify us – that is to make us holy as he sets us aside for a special purpose in this world.

I. Did you notice how Jesus begins this section of his prayer? **“Holy Father.”** This is the only place that Jesus uses this title but with this title he implies that his Father has the power and ability to do what Jesus, himself, has been doing – protect them. As Jesus prayed this prayer, he knew that he would soon go to the cross and his disciples would be all alone.

While he was with them they were safe from the persecution of the world – the persecution of the Pharisees and church leaders. But we can’t ignore the fact that they still had to contend with temptation and Jesus mentions Judas, who gave into the temptation and let greed build a house in his heart. Judas chose evil and rejected faith and salvation. His greed led him to betray Jesus, and it doomed him to everlasting destruction.

But Jesus had prepared his disciples for what was to come by giving them God’s Word. The disciples were filled with knowledge, but not always with understanding. That would come with the work of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. But the world already hated them because of the Word. The Word set them apart as members of God’s Kingdom – they were in the world but no longer of the world.

And so Jesus prayed for their protection. It would have been easy to ask God the Father to take them out of the world, but there was still a lot of work for the disciples to do after Jesus ascended into heaven. His ministry would become their ministry.

So how was God going to protect his disciples? How does God protect us today? Jesus prayed: **“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name.”** We are so familiar with the name of Jesus that we might forget about the importance of that name. We might even forget about the power that that name Jesus has for every believer.

The angel appeared to Joseph and Mary and told them to name of their son Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. The name Jesus is the only name under heaven, given to men, by which we are saved. Scripture reminds us that this Jesus, our Savior, humbled himself unto death, even death on a cross! Beyond that humility lays the power of the very name of Jesus. **“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** (Philippians 2:10-11). Not every knee or every tongue does this today but all will recognize Jesus on the Last Day.

It is the very name of Jesus that provides us with eternal life. Faith in Jesus and what he has done for us brings us forgiveness for our sins and everlasting life in heaven. But we still need the divine protection of our heavenly Father in this wicked world today. Just as the world hated the disciples 2000 years ago, it still hates Christians even today. Our society is becoming more and more antichristian every day – from outright attacks on Christianity to trying to divide us and promote hatred and racism at every turn. The world right now is promoting division that destroys any prospect of peace. The world used to be more subtle when it came to trying to destroy the family as God designed it but lately the attacks have been quite evident.

But attacks on our spiritual life come in other ways too. In the past I might have pointed to events, activities, and the schedules of this world try to take over our times and day of worship. But in the last year it has been fear of disease, loss of friends, uncertainty with jobs and opinions on best practices, maybe loneliness and depression that have tried to divide us and separate us from God’s Word and God’s people. At times it seems easier to just give in and give up.

We need Jesus praying for our protection from this world but also praying for protection from our own “worldliness.” We spend more time in this world than in the church. It’s so easy to get caught up in our own selfish worldliness and find out that all of a sudden we are at odds with God and his Word.

Thank God, Jesus always intercedes on our behalf. Thank God that Jesus paid for all the times we let the world overtake our lives and thank God for calling us to repentance and urging us back onto the path of righteousness. For God has called us to faith and he has called us to be one of his disciples, he has forgiven our sins and he has sanctified us or set us aside for holy living.

II. “¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly

sanctified.” To sanctify something is to set it apart for a special purpose or a sacred use. Jesus set himself aside to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. As he spoke this prayer he was not only preparing his disciples for what was to come but also preparing himself to complete the work necessary for the sanctification of all believers.

Since Christ has been sanctified, we too are sanctified through his Word. We are called to faith and set apart for the special purpose of serving our Lord by going out into the world with the Word. On our own we are nothing, but with God’s Word we can be everything God wants us to be as his humble servants.

Jesus has sanctified you through his Word. He has given you different spiritual gifts. Be faithful to his Word and faithfully use the gifts he has given you. And as you use those gifts you are a witness to the world. The words you use and the priorities you have are a witness to what’s important in your heart. Keep Christ first in your heart and don’t forget the importance and the power of prayer.

The prayers we bring to God are important but even more important, the fact that our Savior is praying for us. This is Jesus – our Good Shepherd; the Way, the Truth, the Life; and our Brother – sitting at the right hand of God always interceding for us. Jesus is constantly pleading our case before our heavenly Father. Jesus prays for his disciples – for us! “Holy Father, protect us from this world and our own selfish worldliness. Holy Father, send us out and make us holy in this world.”

As Jesus stands up for us and prays for us be assured that nothing can stand against us. As Paul reminds us in his letter to the Galatians, **“The Lord Jesus Christ...gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever.”** (Galatians 1:4-5). Yes, to God be the glory! Amen.