

## 6) Connected and Protected

John 17:11-19 • 2021-05-16 • Easter Series: Connected



I think my wife and I have done a fairly good job of helping our kids see the importance of being safe—especially when it comes to preparing for crashes with buckles. At one point I remember we had a child who was old enough to walk on his own, but he would still sometimes ride the stroller. He would start to cry and scream in terror if we dared to place him in his stroller but forgot to latch all the buckles on him—you know, just in case that stroller would hang off the edge of a cliff or something. He knew that you need to prepare and plan for dangers. There are lots of things we do in order to protect ourselves from dangers. I'm sure many of you have more than just a lock, but a dead bolt and home security system. And some of you might carry or have in your home some form of firearm—just in case. But what sort of protection would be needed for your children, your spouse, your family in the worst-case scenario of danger? And what would you do to provide it if you were going to be leaving them to face it without you? That is exactly the situation which Jesus is in with his disciples in John 17. Before he leaves them, he makes sure they are connected and protected. And we see just what makes us connected and protected too.

The disciples would soon be disconnected and in danger. After Jesus' ascension their enemies would go after them. They'd be tossed into prison. One by one by one they would all die for their faith. The first one to go would be James, put to death by the sword. Only John is recorded as not having been killed. Of course, this is only the beginning. The Church will face all the threats that are pictured in the book of Revelation: the attacks of the enemy, the Antichrist, attacks from the world's authorities, and ultimately from the devil. What are we supposed to do?

There are lots of things that a Christian does for safety. But sometimes we might begin to forget where the real danger lies. After all, you can take a Christian and persecute him by humiliating them and throwing them to the wild animals in an arena. But you can't put them to shame when they still bear the title "belonging to God; not to the world." You can toss a Christian in prison just as the first disciples were. But you can't change the fact that they have been freed from sin's curse, freed from the devil's power and control. Who can condemn them when God has declared them innocent through Christ? Christians are actually indestructible. You can even chop off their head. But God will give them a new one. All these types of attacks are not the greatest danger. We sometimes forget that the far greater danger is the devil's attack against our faith. He attacks in order to sever our connection with our Lord.

The devil knows his best chance is finding a Christian who is isolated. The Scriptures describe the devil like a lion, looking for someone to devour. Have you ever seen how a lion goes after its prey? A lion on the hunt looks for the unprepared. It looks for those that are separated from the rest of the herd. Then after it separates them and singles them out, it can more easily apart from the stampede and defense of the herd take down its target. The devil finds Christians who are not united with others to be an easier target.

That's one reason why it is important for all Christians to be united and one. But don't misunderstand what unity in faith means. The devil desires a shallow unity which makes believers weaker in faith. He rejoices when believers are content to unite weakly and let God's Word slide in importance. When a disciple of Jesus is divided in doctrine, it doesn't mean that they are outside the flock of Jesus. But those who walk away from any part of Scripture are just one step closer to losing their confidence, their security in faith. They lose their connection to a faithful body of believers.

How do you plan and prepare against such attacks? Pray. It is a spiritual struggle and the power to overcome the devil's attacks won't come by or own efforts. So often we can find ourselves praying over the lesser things but forget the importance of paying over the most important matters. We might pray, "Lord help my mom to get over this sickness," or "Just help my husband to make it safely through his night patrol shift," or "Help my daughter to drive back save from college." These are good things to pray about. But what about also praying about the spiritual dangers of Christian friends and family face? Our prayer should also include: "Lord keep my child strong in faith. Let my daughter withstand the lies and pressies to abandon her faith in college." How often do you find yourself praying that God would protect the faith of your Christian family and friends? "Lord help my friend to find a faithful Christian church and unite with them in mission and growth in faith." "Lord let our congregation, its older members, its youth group, its leaders, everyone be one in faith." The real danger is more than skin deep. It is where the heart is. The real enemy is stronger than an Isis death squad. It is the evil of the devil and his attempts to use reason, apathy, sin, despair, or any other means to pull us away from faith in Jesus.

And it is one thing to pray for oneness and safety. It is another to also act accordingly. Frederick Douglas once explained how important it was to act in line with what you ate praying for. He was a slave in the southern slavery of America before the civil war. Then he became a freeman who lived in the north. He once said, "for twenty years I prayed for my freedom and got no answer. Then I also played using my legs." What good is it if we do pray, "Lord keep my daughter strong in faith as she goes to college," but don't ever encourage her to connect with a campus ministry or local church faithful to God's Word? What good would it be if we pray for a child or grandchild to be strong in faith but don't share the word with that child, make sure they have the gift of baptism, and teach them the truth?

Is hard to plan ahead. It's harder to plan ahead for safety. Probably the hardest is to plan ahead for spiritual safety and to take the right action. The dangers are real and come daily. I know what it is like when the day is long. Just yesterday a little voice handed me a book about Jesus and said, "Read me this book." For a moment I hesitated. How easy it is to say, "It is getting late. I'm tired. You have to go to bed now." I begin to feel that there is no danger. I forget the enemy. I sometimes don't even pause to pray, "Lord, protect them by your Word."

Where does planning, praying, action, need to start? Is it when it is panic time or sooner? Is it when they are older and you try to have a family devotion and they say, "do we have to do that now?" Is it when they no longer want to hear a bible story? Is it when they start to question why it is so important to go to church? Maybe it is when they show apathy at learning confirmation assignments. Or maybe we start seeing the danger if they go off to college and put reason and pride over the truth of God's Word. Do we prepare for the real spiritual attacks to come? Where is it that you have found you have left a son, daughter, grandchild, or Christian friend to face attacks on their faith without your prayers and your ongoing support in words and action? "While I'm still here on this earth, Lord help me to faithfully build up others in faith. Let me use all the time you've given me. Forgive me when I have failed."

Jesus saw the danger. He knew attacks were going to come against his disciples. It was the night before Jesus would complete his work. Soon he would be leaving. They would no longer see him after he ascended into heaven. What would he do to ensure they were able to remain spiritually safe? It starts with prayer to the Father. What we read earlier this morning in John 17 is the longest recorded prayer by Jesus. Of all the things Jesus prayed for on earth this topic is really the most frequent. And what he is praying for is spiritual protection for his own in the world.

*"Holy Father, I pray that you keep them safe by the power of the name which you have given me."* He isn't praying that they be kept safe by the sword, by the government, or by their own cunning and wit. It is good if God uses those things for physical safety. But he is praying for a far greater protection. One that can only be given by the revelation of the name of the Lord. This Jesus prayed for. This he gives you!

His goal? *"That they may be one as we are one."* This is his will for you: that you are united in faith. And it may not be a perfect unity now. Sin and false teaching have divided the Church. But it starts here. It starts with those who say with you, "Amen." It starts with the ABCs of the faith. It ends when we all reach maturity to Christ our head. It doesn't end after confirmation, or after high school, or in college, but when we are forever at peace in his eternal kingdom. Your oneness with the fellowship of believers helps protect you from attacks against your faith. Unity with fellow believers is only given as the Spirit guides us in his Word. This Jesus prays for. This Jesus gives you.

*"While I was with them, I kept those you gave me safe in your name"* He adds later in his prayer to the same effect "I gave them your Word." For all the times we failed he did not. He prayed for his disciples' spiritual protection, and he acted accordingly. He spoke the Word of God tirelessly with his disciples. He did not fail to include their spiritual protection as he prayed to the Father before his departure. And he did not fail to act by providing that protection in full faithfulness. His perfect sharing of the Word prepares us for the devil's attacks. Because he was faithful, we have his Word, know it, and trust it—so we stand against the devil's attacks.

And don't misunderstand. Having God's Word doesn't mean that there won't be spiritual attacks on your faith. It means rather the attacks of the enemy will only increase! Having and trusting the Word of God makes the world look at believers and hate them. The unbelieving world will see what a believer has and believes and cannot stand it. As you live out your Christian life and do what God has called you to do you will be hated. Why? Because you will be different just like Jesus was different. Jesus doesn't say "you should be not of the world." He says of his disciples "they are not of the world." Though you may struggle with sin, you have a new self that hates sin. A new heart of faith makes you vastly different from the world. You love God's Word. The world hates it. This means that you will face attacks, hatred, and a powerful spiritual enemy.

But don't be alarmed if you do. You are connected and protected. Jesus prayed, *"But now I am coming to you, and I am saying these things in the world, so that they may be filled with my joy."* He knew that he would be returning to the Father in glory. But he shared this prayer so that we might know the heart of our God. Jesus came to this world to defeat the devil and to connect us to himself. He made us one with him by offering up himself as the sacrifice for our sins. And as our great priest he also intercedes on our behalf. He prayed for you. He prayed that you would be connected and protected in this world. By the power of his name and his Word you are.

If you are alive and a Christian don't think you are here because you belong to the world. But you are here now because God wants you in the world for a purpose! Just like Jesus: we are sent into this world! That's why we are here! To pray for protection for fellow believers, to offer protection and security from evil through his Word, "Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world." All believers have this charge, "Go into all the world, to all people, make disciples by baptizing, by teaching them everything."

I want to conclude our brief series on being connected with this prayer: Lord, you have made us one. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. As your son made us one and prayed that we might remain one forever, keep us all safely in your care along with all your church until we remain connected and protected in your eternal home. Amen.