

“THE CHALLENGE.....SACRIFICE AND SERVICE”

John 17: 1-11

The challenge for the vast majority of us Christians is to immerse ourselves in this “Walk” our Lord was taking of sacrifice and service, as he moved towards his death on the cross – And try to imagine the inner turmoil and anxiety that was working within Jesus. Jesus was God, but he was also a man as well, who had to contend with every single emotion and temptation that we have to deal with. Christianity has reached a place in America where it has simply become something that helps us achieve our goals, dreams, and desires – Or, it has become something to help us cope with the hurdles and problems that sometimes cause us to thin we’re going to lose our minds – And our relationship with Jesus Christ should be so much more than that! When we arrive at moments like these, it helps us to look into the deeper price the Lord paid for our salvation. This “prayer” in our scripture lesson of John 17, is referred to as Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer”, and in this prayer, there are elements of sacrifice and service. The sacrifice will be fulfilled at the cross, and the service is the prayer for Jesus’ disciples and for his church. This prayer seems to be very much related to what the Lord had expressed to the disciples in the upper room at the last supper – words such as glory, glorify, believe, world, and love all seems to connect up with what is emphasized in John 13:16, when Jesus says, “No servant is greater than his master – nor is a messenger greater than the one who sends him, now know these things and you will be blessed when you do them!” What is remarkable about this prayer is that it is a prayer that follows the preaching the Lord gave that evening in the upper room at the last supper – We preachers should take this principle to heart – All preaching should be followed by prayer. Whether it’s formal preaching at an altar, or if a person allows their mind and heart to be saturated by a message in such a way that for a long while afterwards, the content of the message isn’t far from the depths of the soul. This prayer that takes place in John 17 is being done by the preacher Jesus – We can only be left to wonder if preaching might not have a much more powerful impact if more of us preachers would pray after we preach! How do we preachers process what happens in our own spirit, minds, and hearts after we hear the word being preached? This prayer is divided into 3 sections: Jesus’ prayer for himself, Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, and Jesus’ prayer for his church. A closer look at the prayer shows that Jesus spent 5 verses on himself, and the other 21 on his disciples and his church – which showed me how much mismanagement has gotten into place of my own prayers. The great Scottish preacher, John Knox, had this very prayer from John 17 read to him every day in his final days on his deathbed – Knox found this prayer of the Lord to be of great comfort and source of strength for him as he faced death head-on! It is my belief that looking at this passage can do the same thing for us as well.....A prayer for faithfulness – After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed – Even the Lord is recognizing that prayer has a requirement for reverence. Jesus is approaching God with a sense of establishing reverence – that God is higher than everything! Are our prayers marked by reverence? Do our prayers acknowledge that without God we can do nothing? Are our prayers marked with an understanding that there is a royal throne in heaven? It is crucial for men and women and the church to pray – everything we are and need is wrapped up in God’s ability to provide. Prayer should express the soul’s longing for God. Prayer is the cry of God’s people! In Jesus’ part of the prayer of the Lord, he is requesting that the son of God would be glorified (verse 1) – His reason for this is that God would be glorified (verse 5) – This matter of glorification brings to mind what the Lord had said at the beginning of his ministry – That those who were in the kingdom of God would have a light that would shine before men, so that God would be glorified! Therefore, this prayer for glorification is a prayer for faithfulness. All through his earthly ministry, the Lord had worked faithfully for this manner of glorification. But, what takes place is the biggest battle that sometimes comes when we bring glory to God, and it may be in the most bitter of circumstances that it happens. This would be true of Jesus as well when he went to the cross – He was dying on something that was cursed, and yet, what would bring the highest glory of God to the world – verses

2-4, emphasize a “prayer for fruitfulness.” This prayer of the Lord for faithfulness in verse 1 and 5 brings to light the fruitfulness that comes from the Lord’s faithfulness. Two things took place – Eternal-life for believers; and the Lord’s work on earth is completed – It revealed the righteousness of God – It proved the justice of God – It demonstrated the holiness of God – It displayed a perfect substitute to cover the wrath of God against sin – And a final verification of God’s grace, mercy, and love for mankind. All these things really make for the hope of eternal-life for all of us who will come and enter the kingdom of God! And, we must understand the fruitfulness that came out of Jesus on the cross – Jesus was born to die, so we could be born into new life – Jesus suffered temptation, so we can have victory – Jesus was betrayed, so we might know his faithfulness – Jesus was arrested and bound, so we could be rescued from bondage – Jesus stood on trial alone, so we could have an advocate – Jesus was wounded, so we could be healed – Jesus endured mockery, so we could know dignity and joy – Jesus was condemned, so the truth could set us free – Jesus was crowned with thorns, so we might crown him with praise – Jesus was nailed to the cross, so we might escape bondage – Jesus was stretched between 2 thieves, so we could know the reach of his love – Jesus suffered thirst, so we can drink his living water – Jesus said, “It is finished”, so we could begin our walk of faith – Jesus was God’s slain lamb, so we could claim his sacrifice – Jesus chose the shame of weakness, so we could know the hope of glory – Jesus shed his blood, so we can be washed white as snow – Jesus’ heart was pierced, so our hearts could be made whole – Jesus died and was buried, so the grave could not hold us – Jesus rose again, so we could have eternal-life – Jesus is known by his scars, so we might take up our cross and follow him! Eternal-life for us believers is not just a matter of quantity of life, but for the quality of life as well. We will be restored back to a correct and holy relationship with God that rivals what Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden – It will be an ongoing and everlasting relationship with God! And Jesus prays for his disciples in verse 6-11: “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. 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.” Jesus spoke with great compassion for his disciples and the church, to be fully invested and filled with the purpose of God – This should be a matter of prayer for every believer – We should be speaking to the Lord in prayer about our duties and whether we are fulfilling those with faithfulness – When we are willing to confess to the Lord that we can’t do any spiritual work without his empowerment, that work takes on a new level of purpose. Far too many in the church, are working under their own power and strength, and these kinds of things will not last in the long run. There’s a story from the life of missionaries Robert and Mary Moffat, and it illustrates “Their challenge of sacrifice and service.” For 10 years they labored faithfully in Botswana without one ray of encouragement – They could not report a single convert. Finally, the directors of their mission board began to question the wisdom on continuing their mission, but the thought of leaving their post brought great grief to this devoted couple. They felt sure God was in their court and they would see people turn to Christ in due time. They stayed, and for 2 more years darkness reigned – then one day, a friend of theirs sent word that she wanted to mail them a gift, and asked Mary what they wanted – “Send us a Communion set, as I’m sure it will soon be needed.” God honored Mary’s faith – The Holy Spirit moved upon the hearts of the villages, and soon a little group of 6 converts was united to form the first Christian church in Botswana – The Communion set arrived the day before their first Communion was held –The challenge of sacrifice and service – Give it to the Lord, and the Lord will provide! In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.Amen!