

## JOHN 17: 1-11 SERMON AT HOME 24.5.20

Three years ago, a devastating bomb went off in the Manchester Arena. In a split-second decision when that bomb went off, one lady, Kelly Brewster, managed to shield her niece from the force of the blast. She died protecting someone she loved. When I heard this it left me wondering how I would behave in such circumstances: – would I be the hero I would love to be, or would that critical moment be governed by self-preservation or cowardice? As we start to come out of lockdown, the number of us potentially exposed to the virus increases, and we find ourselves choosing whether to make decisions based on self-preservation or to bring benefit of others even if we are more at risk.

It is in moments of crisis, and especially when death is approaching, that any superficial appearance is stripped away and we are seen as we really are. In John 17 Jesus was praying in front of his disciples just prior to his death in the cross. On the cross, in the humiliation and defeat, Jesus looks forward to God being fully revealed in him. The “Glory of God” that he refers to is the revelation of the character, nature and purpose of God. Recognising this – how when we gaze on the cross do we see God Glorified in Jesus?

1. In the sacrifice we see the amazing love that God has for each of us that this was what he was prepared to endure in order that you and I might have relationship with him.
2. In his forgiveness we see the compassion of God where no sin is so great that it takes us beyond that compassion. - not even driving the nails into the hands and feet of God’s son can take us outside the reach of his forgiveness
3. In his care from the cross for his Mother’s future we see the love of God which always looks outwards to the needs of others – even when pain and suffering could easily dominate his mind.
4. Finally, in his victory we see the route to eternal life – Eternal life isn’t just about length – it is about quality – it is about living in the same relationship with Jesus that he has with his Father.

Jesus went on to pray three things for his followers then – but also for all followers who believe their message - so it includes you and me. Jesus prayed:

That we would glorify God

That, living in the world, we would be protected from it

That we would be one as he and the Father are one.

These are not three separate prayers – but the same prayer from different angles:

1. That we would glorify God: Glorifying God – is to live out the same sacrificial, forgiving and caring life that Jesus did. Just as we know what God is like through looking at Jesus – people will look at us to decide what he is like.

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2. That, living in the world, we would be protected from it. So, in the middle of the Covid-19 epidemic what sort of protection can we expect? Well, I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that God doesn't offer a guarantee that you and I will be protected from the virus - but the good news is that he offers something more profound – that he will protect us from being shaped by the virus – nor by anything else which is not from him.

The Holy Spirit of Jesus gives us the power to proactive rather than reactive people. – to respond to what happens to us according to what is inside us rather than be shaped by what happens to us.

All parents will know that there are times when they are able to respond to their child's anger calmly, and perhaps see that the child is behaving that way because they are upset and so give them a hug rather than a shouting to. On another day, when we are too tired or distracted, exactly the same behaviour can make us shout angrily at them. The proactive parent is shaped by their strength as an adult parent to respond out of what their child needs – the reactive parent has handed control of their behaviour to the child.

Time again we will use phrases like: "He made me angry!" "It made me scared!" etc. When we do so, we are admitting that someone, or something, other than us is determining how we behave or feel – that is being reactive. When Jesus interacted with people and events his response was shaped by the peace of knowing his Father was in ultimate control and the Love of God for each person that came from who he is – and not from what was done to him.

When Jesus prayed that we would be protected from the world he was praying that we would be those who shaped the world by our love, our compassion and our peace rather than those whose behaviour and feelings are hijacked by the bad things that will be done to us. Every time I act in anger to what someone else has done to me I choose to give someone else control over my life. After a terrorist attack in London one person caught up in it chose to be proactive and said: "I will not gift them my anger!" In the strength of Christ we can choose to love and forgive.

3. Jesus prays that Christian would have the same unity that he and his Father enjoy. Unity is not the same as uniformity – Christians are not required to agree with each other – Our world and our country seem to becoming more politically polarised: –we saw it in the Brexit debate and see it now in the way we agree or disagree with the government over their handling of the Coronavirus pandemic. Recently I have been reading John Bercow's autobiography (He was the precious speaker of the House of Commons) which has some very telling descriptions of politicians. One piece of praise he restricts to just a very few politicians is to say that in debate "they play the ball, not the man." Christians should debate and discuss the difficult conundrums of life but, even when we disagree passionately that needn't diminish our love and respect for one another. For those of us who are baptised followers of Jesus, to hear the call to unity in our diversity has never been more important.