

## **The Closeness of Father & the Son means the choosing and protecting of the disciples.**

John 17:9-12

Don't many love fairy tale type marriages and families? Maybe you do. Perhaps because they sort of represent to us the closeness and love and intimacy we deeply long for. Perhaps that's one reason why there's such as fascination, even in republican nations, with royal marriages, and family pictures of royals. And maybe that's one reason for the feeling of disappointment when it became known it wasn't working out between Charles and Diana.

But there is love and a relationship that never fails. We have been hearing from Dave and Dan in the last 2 weeks that Jesus' most amazing prayer in John 17 reveals that God the Father and God the Son are, with God the Holy Spirit, in the Trinity, in the closest possible perfect intimacy and love. And blessings flow out from this perfect love. Last week Dan told us about two of these blessings: that Jesus reveals His Father, so that we can know Him in a deep and personal way, and that He does this by giving us His words.

This week, from vs 9-12 we'll think about two more of these blessings: God chooses us and that He protects us.

### **First, God chose us – v9&10**

The four Gospel accounts record Jesus choosing His first disciples to follow Him. These are the disciples who would accompany Jesus and learn from Him while He was on earth teaching and doing His miracles.

But v9 indicates *why* Jesus chose those *particular* disciples: because the Father had given them to Him. He chose the disciples because the Father had already chosen them to belong to Him.

And as these disciples were the beginning of the Church which we, if we're Christians, are part of, the same applies to us. God chose *us* to belong to Him. God has a special love and care for *us*. So through faith in Christ, we are *included* in God's love, the love between the Father and Son. Jesus has brought us into this love.

Yes, this raises the difficult question about those who don't come to faith in Christ – what about them? We're not given all the answers here but we told in the Bible that God chooses those who come to faith in Jesus. However this truth isn't to make us doubt whether people we love and pray for to come to faith in Christ, are chosen or not. We're to assume that everyone we have an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with are potentially chosen by God. God's call to repent goes out to every person. The Bible says He commands all people everywhere to repent. (Acts 17v30)

When we first put our trust in Christ, it's a bit like walking through a doorway, over which the sign says, "repent, turn away from sin, turn to Christ". We then repent and go through, and now know God in a personal deep and intimate way. We look behind at the door, and the notice on the this side of the doorway says "chosen by God". You see, we turned to Christ only because we were chosen by God in the first place.

That we are chosen by God is a truth that is meant to be tremendously encouraging and reassuring to us if we're believers – can you see and feel that this morning.

Remember these verses do not say anything about the quality or the ability of the disciples Jesus chose. This is very different to people chosen, for example for a school sports team, who are inevitably those who can play the best. (Needless to say I wasn't chosen for *any* school sports teams!!). And of all the applications for a job, it's the person most qualified to do the job is the one the employer would want to choose.

But Jesus' choice of His first disciples was not on their ability or quality. It was only according to the Father's choice. In fact the disciples didn't have much to commend themselves. They were a bit of a motley crew. For example, they argued which one of them is the greatest (Mk 9:34). And they were slow to believe and understand about Jesus.

It's the same for us. Unlike being chosen for a sports team or a job, God's choosing of us to belong to Him is not because we're qualified or deserve to be chosen. Rather, God's choice of us is undeserved, out of His grace, out of the love of the Father and the Son. You see, there's no quality or virtue in us that attracts God to us and makes Him choose us. While we all share God's image and can do and say good things, the fact is these things don't commend us to God or force Him to save us.

At the baptism earlier, we were reminded that we *all* need forgiveness. Sin has tainted and spoilt every aspect of our lives, even the good things we do. The Bible says all our good works are actually like filthy rags (Is 64v6) compared to God's glorious holiness.

So we're naturally totally unqualified to belong to God. The amazing thing is despite, this, despite our sinfulness, if we're Christians we can know for sure that God still loves us and chose us. Why? Because of Jesus' death on the Cross which made God's choice possible by Jesus taking God's wrath against our sin in our place. Jesus paid that incredible price to choose us – we're of *that* value to God.

Sometimes we may feel we're slow to understand things about God, or feel we have too little faith. Or we may be aware of our sin and failings, or that we'll never make the grade to be good enough for God, that our lives are too much of a mess for God to have much time for us. Actually it's true that none of us can ever be good enough for God to choose us, but the amazing fact is, if we're Christians He has chosen us anyway out of His love and grace.

And as God chooses the unlikely, including us, means we should never give up praying for and talking about Jesus to family and friends who often seem so far away from God and disinterested in Jesus. There's no type of person who's a Christian 'type'. God chooses and includes people from *all* backgrounds – including yours', to include us in the perfect love between the Father and the Son.

So God chose us.

Now we come to our second main point to think about:

### **Second, Jesus prays for our protection – see v11&12**

Is it not true that often the greater the value of some items or the more was paid for them, the greater the level of security to protect them? The largest houses often have the most security – electronic gates, alarms and so on. The most valuable museum exhibits or paintings have the more rigorous security protection. Or gold or jewels. The greater the value of an item the more elaborate and tight the level of security.

Look down at verses 11&12. Jesus prays “Holy Father, *protect* them by the power of your name, the name you gave me”.

This was not a promise of protection from difficulty or suffering – the Bible doesn’t promise that while we are in this world, and the disciples did go through difficult times and suffering for Jesus, even eventually martyrdom. Rather Jesus prays for protection for His disciples so that they may be one, and that none of them will be lost from Him. The reason He prays this is because He was going back to heaven while the disciples were going to remain in this world, which would often be hostile. So let’s look at each of these reasons Jesus prays for his disciples: unity and that none would be lost from Him.

First, unity. In 3 weeks’ time we’ll be thinking more about the unity Jesus has brought Christian believers into and its importance for our mission. But disunity is one of the evils they’ll need protection from. Look at the end of v11. Jesus prays we may they be one *as He and the Father are one*. This means this unity will happen because of the perfect unity between Jesus and the Father that Christians have been drawn in to share. And Jesus gets His prayers answered!

The second reason Jesus prays for protection for His disciples is so that none of them will be lost. Look down with me at v12: “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.”. “the one doomed to destruction” refers to Judas, whose betrayal of Jesus was the way God planned to ensure Jesus went to the Cross for our sins.

Apart from the special case of Judas, none of the disciples were lost. Think of some of the dangers they went through: being caught in a furious storm on the lake when they feared they would drown. They were with Jesus when He was facing hostility. And after this prayer, when Jesus was arrested, they fled, and Peter denied Him. But Jesus lost none of them. He restored them.

What Jesus is praying here is that as none of the other eleven disciples were lost while He was with them on earth, may none be lost in the future. We have seen that the Father gave to Jesus those people He chose. So it’s inevitable that it’s God’s will that none who belong to God, who are chosen, will be lost.

That it is God’s will that no believer will be lost is shown in another passage in John’s Gospel: Ch 6vs39-40: In these verses Jesus says this: “this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day”. So Jesus, out of the love and closeness between Him and the Father, and due to His death and resurrection, will ensure none of us who believe in Him will be lost – our eternal life in the new creation is certain.

So, this protection means God keeps the Christian believer safe with Him in His love forever.

And Jesus prays we’ll be kept safe by the Father’s name, the name He gave Him. In the Bible, someone’s name represents that person’s whole character, work and action. So being kept by God’s name, means we’re kept safe from being lost from Him, how? by the very being, character, love, faithfulness and power of the omnipotent, all powerful God. That’s the level of security that God’s protecting us by, in order to keep us safe with Him in His love for ever!

In the prayer in John 17, Jesus is looking forward to the ongoing mission of the disciples in the world, after He has returned to the Father in heaven. So, the prayer for the protection of the disciples is

particularly in this context of the church's mission, which is to proclaim the message of the good news of Christ. He is praying that they'll be protected in their mission in a hostile world.

We may sometimes feel alone and even vulnerable being the only Christian believer in the workplace. And if we do share about Jesus, we might wonder if we'll get into trouble. I remember that many years ago, I got told off by my boss for sharing my faith with a colleague. Nowadays, Christians are even being disciplined for speaking about Jesus.

Or we sometimes go through suffering or difficult times personally or in our families, when our faith comes under attack. But Jesus has prayed to the Father to protect us, so we are kept safe in Him by His whole being and power. And Jesus's prayers are answered.

We've seen in this passage that we have been chosen to belong to God and included in His love, and so He keeps us united, and safe in Him forever. What a wonderful such incredible love.

So to conclude, may I ask you: have you walked through that doorway, that says, repent and turn to Christ, so you know you are chosen and safe with Christ forever? It's a doorway open to all who genuinely turn to trust in and live for Christ. You may find it helpful to find out more by coming on the Identity Course which is to start in May, and which explains who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

Let's pray.