

DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF CHRIST'S MEN

John 17

In John 17 is recorded our Lord's prayer to His Father in which He makes a recital of the work He has done -- the work that the Father had given Him, the work that He had finished, and also a work that He is continuing to do even now at the right hand of the Father. These words were spoken in the presence of our Lord's disciples, and it is now our privilege to draw near to listen to these words. As we draw near to this scene and see the High Priest in the holy of holies, we recognize immediately that man is incompetent to consider all that our Lord said to His Father.

During his last illness the great Scottish reformer, John Knox, was accustomed to have read to him every day John 17, a chapter from Ephesians, and Isaiah fifty-three. On his last day, shortly after noon, he requested his wife to read to him I Corinthians 15. When she had completed the reading of that chapter, he said, "Is that not a comfortable chapter?" Some four hours later Knox called for his wife and said, "Go read where I cast my first anchor," and she read to him again John 17.

Our Lord had ended His discourse with His disciples. Now He turns to the Father to put into the Father's hand these sheep of whom He said in John 16:32: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

The movement of this, the Lord's Prayer, goes thus: In the first five verses our Lord makes petition concerning Himself. And then in verses six to nineteen the requests are specifically for the company of disciples about Him. But in verse twenty through to the end of the chapter, the circle enlarges as He prays not only for those about Him but for all those who should believe on Him through their words.

Introducing His requests for His followers, our Lord gives some of the distinguishing marks of those who are His own. "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (John 17:6-9).

In praying to the Father, our Lord said, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world." Principally, of course, He was speaking here concerning the circle of disciples, those to be known as apostles. But in I Corinthians 15 we have the record that after His resurrection He appeared at one time to over five hundred. So certainly this reaches out beyond that intimate circle and takes in all of Christ's disciples. Then in verse twenty He said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."

What are the distinguishing marks of Christ's men?

I. The Name Of The Father Has Been Revealed To Them.

True Christians are those to whom the name of the Father has been manifested.

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom

of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). It was the work of the Lord Jesus as Son and Mediator to declare the name of the Father. Later on John writes, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father" (I John 2:13). "He that hath seen me," our Lord said, "hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

This name, or this designation of Father, was not used by the Israelites. At one time when some of the leaders of Israel were pushed into a corner, they said, "We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God" (John 8:41). But if you had asked them for the name of Israel's God, it is unlikely that any one of them would have answered, "The Father." But this is the name that Jesus Christ has manifested unto His own -- the name of the Father.

In verse three it is recorded that our Lord prayed: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." This is the Father the Son has manifested, the Father Who could give the Son of His love, the Son of His bosom, to pay redemption's price. This is the same Father Who has now sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts so that we are enabled to cry, "Father." And unless there has been manifested to you the name of the Father through Jesus Christ the Son, you have no right to call God, "Father."

II. They Are Men Whom The Father Has Given To Jesus Christ.

"Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." Here is this elect company whom God the Father has given. It is the company of which Simon Peter spoke in his first epistle and called them, "The elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30). There is something special about this group of whom Christ speaks in His prayer to the Father. You will notice that throughout this chapter He repeatedly uses this phrase in his prayer: "To as many as thou hast given him" (verse 2); "unto the men which thou gavest me ... thou gavest them me" (verse 6); "them which thou hast given me" (verse 9); "those whom thou hast given me" (verse 11); "those that thou gavest me" (verse 12); "they ... whom thou hast given me" (verse 24). Our Lord must attach great importance to this company of whom He speaks, those whom the Father has given Him.

One of the inexplicable wonders of God's grace is that God has determined that a company of people should be like His Son and He has given that company of people to Jesus Christ. That company known by Him before the foundation of the world He has given over as a love gift to Jesus Christ in order that the Son might redeem them from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own, zealous of good works.

Christ's men, being the Father's property, are not left to themselves to be saved or secured or preserved or glorified. The Godhead is wrapped up in the redemption of Christ's men. In John 6:37 our Lord said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Perhaps you ask, "How do I know that I am in this company of people whom God the Father has given to His Son Jesus Christ?" Let me ask you one question: What is your interest in the Son of God, in Whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead in the body?

III. They Are Out Of The World.

They are out of the world in the sense that they were part of this world before they became Christ's, in union and in relationship. God, in His grace, has gone into the quarry of this world, this world that is condemned, and has fashioned out of that quarry living stones and fitted them into the temple which is Christ's body. He has taken from among the unsanctified and the unregenerate a company of people and transformed them by His grace and made them alive in Christ Jesus.

On different occasions I have driven in the towns and cities in the mining areas and observed that they were almost obscured by a blanket of smog. The blast furnaces had simply filled the air with gases. But now they have harnessed those great furnaces. They have caught the escaping gases, and from the waste products, which once were thrown out, through the miracles of chemistry, they are now making almost as much money as once they made out of the raw materials. This is exactly what God has done. He has taken the waste products, we who were dead in trespasses and sin, and He "hath quickened us together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5). In that sense He has taken us out of the world.

But we have been taken out of the world in another sense also, for Christ's men are no longer part of the world. They are in it, certainly, but not of it. "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:16). Our Lord said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

If we have been taken out of the world, then we are not to be fashioned and conformed to that world. If we have been taken out of the world, then our language is not to be of the world. Not only our manner of living, but our conversation as well is to be centered in that place where Christ, our Life, now sits at the right hand of the Father. And if we have been chosen out of the world, then you and I are to have an affection for our countrymen -- those of like precious faith.

IV. "They Have Kept Thy Word."

The disciples had heard Christ's words and had followed Him. You remember that when a great group turned away from Him, He looked to this circle of disciples and said, "Will ye also go away?" And it was Simon Peter who answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:67-69). With the hearing of His words, they had received faith to believe in Him and with that faith had come knowledge. In the last portion of verse eight our Lord says, "And they have ... known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." Faith brings knowledge. We are sure. Christ's men are distinguished by this mark: They have received His Word. And with the reception of His Word has come knowledge -- knowledge that could not be obtained in any other way.

Christ's men are those who have received and kept the Word of God. And if our faith is to be strengthened, it must be strengthened by and from the Word of God. If spiritual knowledge is to be gained and applied, it must come from the Word of God. The word of God is applicable for the day in which we live. If you would have life, you must be born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Peter 1:23). If you

would grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, devour "the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2). If you would have victory in your life, bathe your soul in the Word of God, for our Lord prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (verse 17).

V. They Are Kept By Christ's Intercession For Them.

In verse nine our Lord said, "I pray for them." He spoke this, of course, as the Mediator of His people. Of the billions in the world just now our Lord, before the throne of grace at the right hand of God the Father, prays alone for them. This is His permanent office. According to Hebrews nine He has entered into heaven to appear in the very presence of God for us. It should cause great rejoicing in our hearts to realize there is One there interceding for us.

Think of the sad condition of those who are outside Christ today. There is no one in the presence of God to plead their cause. They do not have any advocate to represent them before the bar of God. They do not have anyone to intercede for them. The Lord Jesus said, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." This immediately erases the erroneous doctrine of universalism. Universalism is not found in the Word of God. Our Lord intercedes His own.

How are you and I going to be kept in the face of all the dangers? How are we going to be kept from such a crafty foe as Satan? How are we going to be kept from the hostile world that is about us and from the deceitful flesh that is within us? Our Lord said, "I pray for them." That is how we are kept. And only a genuine relationship to God through His Son warrants Christ's praying for you. Are you one of Christ's men? Do you belong to Him? If you do, Jesus Christ is praying for you. He is at the Father's right hand to intercede for you as you face the difficulties of life. He is there to remove your fears. He is there to calm your heart. He is there to meet your every need. As a Christian worker you may be discouraged. You may be overwhelmed by insurmountable problems. If so, I would encourage you by repeating the words of our Lord, "I pray for them." "He (Christ) is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). In writing to the Romans Paul said, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). "His life" refers to the resurrection life of Christ within us. But also it is the present life of Christ as He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father.

In the light of God's Word, those who have these marks which distinguish them as Christ's own can certainly take courage. Having been given to Christ, and knowing that to be a fact, it is encouraging to read what the Lord Jesus says to the Father, "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost." If you have been taken out of this world that is condemned and under judgment, then take courage. You have a Heavenly Father Who cares for His own. You are kept through and by Christ's intercession, and that is sufficient.