

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Truth and Mission

John 17:17-19

Intro: As Jesus is praying in ch17, He begins to pray specifically for His disciples. In the midst of this section of His prayer, Jesus is identifying and laying down certain characteristics that should distinguish His true disciples from the world. Of course, He's not just singling out these disciples; He's also referring to the collection of future disciples that will eventually make up the Church, His Body on earth. Jesus is listing certain distinguishing characteristics that will mark His church as being different than any other gathering of peoples in any part of the world.

Last time we discussed the characteristics of joy and holiness. Both of these should mark the Body of Christ as well as everyone who claims to be a part of that Body. Now, the joy that should characterize our lives is not just any kind of joy that you might be able to scrounge up in everyday life. It's actually a particular type of joy; a very specific joy, it's His joy, the joy of Jesus Christ (13b)! What's that? Well, it's not the fleeting levity of a sinful world. His joy comes from an abiding enjoyment of the Father and His Word. Jesus never allowed outward circumstances to dictate His joy. His joy always came from the inward spiritual resources He possessed that were hidden from and completely unknown to the world. This is the kind of joy He wants and expects us to have and we can have it through His Word.

The Bible always equates joy with a mature knowledge of God's Word. But, it's not the study and learning of God's Word that brings joy, it's the study, the learning and the applying to your life by faith that ultimately brings the joy of Jesus. When you discover who God is in His Word and you then begin to live your life in light of the truth that you've learned them, well, let's face it – you're going to run into some problem: from the world around you, yes; but mostly from your own flesh. Here's the thing tho; if you persevere in your trust in God's Word and push through those problems by faith, you will come out the other side, maybe not comfortable, but joyful. Why? Because you will have seen God be true to His Word and you will have seen Him personally work some bad things to your good. This is the only scenario that allows [Jam 1:2-4](#) to make any sense. Joy comes from knowing and living out God's Word.

We also talked about holiness. Since holiness is the characteristic of God most mentioned in Scripture, it only stands to reason that it should also be a distinguishing characteristic of His people. We saw that holiness (sanctity) is not something attained by good works nor can it be bestowed on someone by an organization. Holiness or sanctification in the Bible merely points to something or someone who has been set apart by God unto Himself. So it's true that every person who has accepted Jesus as their Savior is a saint. They've been set apart by God as His own special people. It's also true that sanctification in the Christian is a lifelong process simply because we often fail to live up to our calling to be set apart unto God. God has declared it and as far as He's concerned, it's a done deal but, it takes a lifetime to remove and replace the world's values and priorities that were instilled in our sin nature.

What's the cure for our incorrigible sin nature? The Word of God (14b; 17)! It's by the means of the Bible that we are to gradually become separated from the mind-set and practices of this world and move towards God, all the while growing in practical holiness, the kind of holiness that daily affects our thoughts and actions to the glory of God. Without a regular, disciplined, and practical study of the Bible, the church will always be secular (II Tim 3:1-5). That's the secular church! But, with the Bible, God's people will be the opposite; they'll be walking and growing in holiness.

It's not by accident that God's Word is critical for experiencing true joy and real holiness. In fact, it's correct that it should be this way for this is the next characteristic that Jesus mentions in His prayer – truth!

17- As we have seen, Christian joy and holiness both depend almost entirely upon how well we know God's truth; or rather, how well we know and practice the principles of God's written revelation. So if someone is still wondering, "How can I obtain and keep His joy?" or "How can I be holy?" the only correct answer is, "By studying the Bible and applying of its truths to daily life." Jesus clearly makes this same point concerning sanctification in vs17.

God's truth has been given to us in 3 editions: His Word is truth (17); His Son is truth (14:6); His Spirit is truth (I Jn 5:6). We need all 3 if we're going to experience a true sanctification that touches every part of our inner

person. With the mind, we learn God's truth through the Word. With the heart, we love God's truth, His Son. With the will, we yield to the Spirit and live God's truth day by day. Learning the truth (the Word) and loving the truth (Jesus) should lead to living the truth, allowing the Holy Spirit to enable us to obey His Word. This is how we glorify God in the world. Think about the global implications of this truth. Nearly everything God does in the world today is done by the Holy Spirit through the instrument of His written revelation. This is true of sanctification, being set apart for God's use. Our text says the only way this will ever happen to anyone is by appropriating God's truth as recorded in Scripture.

As far as truth goes, the world lives under a false illusion. This will be a big problem for believers unless we have a surefire way of not just countering this false illusion but actually overturning its influence. Ray Stedman writes, "The world lives by what it thinks is truth, by values and standards which are worthless, but which the world esteems highly. Jesus said, 'What is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God' (Luke 16:15). That is how the world lives. And how can we live in that kind of a world—touch it and hear it, having it pouring into our ears and exposed to our eyes day and night, and not be conformed to its image and squeezed into its mold? The answer is, we must know the truth. We must know the world and life the way God sees it, the way it really is. We must know it so clearly and strongly that even while we're listening to these alluring lies we can brand them as lies and know that they are wrong." Stedman is saying that Christians should be the greatest of all realists, because their realism is the truth of God. This truth, by its very nature, should progressively lead us to greater sanctification.

If we're going to receive the blessings God has for His church, we must receive them in the way God has planned to give them to us. This means there are plenty of ways holiness will not come to us. It will not come through preaching or listening to preaching. Preaching doesn't bring holiness, it only brings instruction. Holiness comes when we yield to the Spirit and apply the truth of God's Word which then produces growth through our obedience. Holiness doesn't come through prayer. Prayer is valuable but it's not the God-ordained means for growth in holiness. It's preparation for that growth.

Holiness also doesn't come by special (spiritual) experience. There's

nothing wrong with special experiences of God's presence and grace but holiness doesn't come by them. Besides, those who are always looking for an experience are usually on the wrong track and possibly in spiritual danger. Holiness comes from always seeking to have Jesus exalted in your life in an ever increasing way. We can only do that as we discover what He wants of us and desires for us in His Word. Holiness comes from applying God's Word so the 3rd mark of the church is truth!

What does a church that is marked by God's truth look like? First, we must be clear on where our authority lies. We must do what we do because the Bible says to do it. The Bible must be our only standard for conduct in life and ministry. In every situation, our first response should be, "What does the Bible say?" It doesn't matter what the world thinks or what the majority of church members expects; find out what the Bible says on the matter and go from there.

We must be distinct and biblically accurate in our theology. It might not be popular but those who hunger for the truth of God's Word will be drawn to it. We must be different in our priorities and in our lifestyles. We must be distinctly different in our visible dependence upon God. we can show a doubting world that our dependence on God changes things, not because we deserve it or our theology is better but because we know God and depend on Him.

18-19 – Joy, holiness and truth: characteristics that are very important and largely attainable in this life but, wouldn't we attain them more quickly and completely if we were just taken straight to heaven? How much more joy will we experience when we finally see the source of our joy face-to-face? The Bible tells us that in heaven all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes (**Rev 7:17; 21:4**). It says when we see Jesus we'll be just like Him: perfectly sanctified (**1 Jn 3:2**). It also says that on that day, we will know the truth fully – we will know even as we are known (**1 Cor 13:12**). If that's what the Lord wants for us and that's where it is to be fully attained, why not go to heaven immediately?

The answer is found in the mark of the church that we have now come to. The church is not just to look inward and find joy, to look Christward and find sanctification, to look to the Scriptures and find truth. The church is also expected to look outward to the world and find the object of her God-given mission. In fact, this is in one sense why all the other marks of the church

are given to us – to affect our mission.

Mission comes from a Latin verb that means to send or dispatch. A mission is just a sending forth. If the church is being sent forth on a mission – where is it being sent and to whom? Jesus tells us we're being sent into the world! What does it mean for a Christian to be in the world? It doesn't mean to be like the world; the marks of the church are there to make the church different. It doesn't mean we're to abandon Christian fellowship. All it means is that we are to know non-Christians, befriend them, and enter into their lives in such a way that we begin to infect them with the gospel instead of allowing them to infect us with their worldliness, which is the wrong way around. We are to be separate from the world but not separated from it. If so, how would we carry out our mission? No, our best bet, our actual calling is to infiltrate and influence our neighbors and co-workers with the gospel of Jesus Christ

What should be the nature or character of those who are to carry out this mission? We are to be like Christ in the world! This is where our joy, holiness and truth are the most effective and most beneficial. The lost world cannot see God but they can see Christians. What they see in us is what they will believe about God. Are you living what you're professing? Have you ever seen a fitness company use an overweight and out-of-shape guy to sell a piece of fitness equipment? Never! They always use lean, toned models to sell their products because they want to project an image of what you could look like if you bought their product. These models look like they're using what they're selling.

How about us? Do we look like we've been using what we're selling? To do that, we need to look more like Jesus. We are to be like Him in every way, especially in these marks of the church that He's giving here. Jesus is our pattern in each case. As His life was characterized by joy, so our lives should be characterized by joy. As He was sanctified, so we should be sanctified. As He was characterized by truth, so are we to be. He is our Savior and His life is our example of how we are to be in this world. If we would strive for that goal, not only would our witness for Jesus be more effective but our joy, holiness and stance on the truth will grow and be strengthened greatly.

But, how will the lost be drawn to God? Will it be by our abounding joy, our

visible holiness or our unwavering stance on the Word of God? No, if the lost are to be drawn to God, they will be drawn by God to Himself. No matter how much and how carefully we strive to actually live out the character of Jesus Christ in this world, it's still God, not us, who must move men and women to turn to Him for salvation. This truth is seen nowhere clearer than in the record of the early church in Jerusalem ([Acts 2:42, 42-47](#)). After listing all the many things the believers in the early church were busy doing, all great and necessary things, Luke says it was "the Lord" who "added to their numbers daily..." The Lord did it! Guess what, He'll do the exact same for us to the degree that we accept the God-given task that we've been sent into the world to do and that we strive to live like Him as we do. That's His desire for us; is it ours?

We are called to win the world for Christ and our mission field starts immediately as we leave out the front door. But, it doesn't just include our neighbors and co-workers – when Jesus commissioned us to "go into all the world," He meant just that. That's why, as a church, we've been committed since day one to setting aside 10% of all offerings that come into the church to foreign missions. If you are a regular giver then a portion of your financial gift goes to missionaries and mission outreaches around the world. We can't win the world by ourselves but we can do what we can do and by God's grace and the Holy Spirit's power, we can strive to do even more.

How can Christians change the world? By being salt and light! Salt has a lot of good uses but only if it has retained its saltiness. If we've been called to faith in Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit, we really must be Christ's people; and it should be clearly evident that, by His grace, we're not who we used to be. Our values should be different. Our commitments, our theology, our priorities should all be different, sanctified. There must be a new element in us and, because of us; there will also be a new element in the world.

We are also "light." If salt refers to what we are, light refers to what we do. The purpose of light is to shine out. We're to be lighthouses in the midst of a dark world. Being a lighthouse won't change the rocky contours of the coast—the sin is still there; the perils of destruction still threaten men and women—but by God's grace the light can be a beacon that will bring the ships into a safe harbor. That's what it means to be set apart unto God, to be sanctified. We're to be beacons, knowing that as we are such, there will

be great cause for rejoicing. 😊