



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Gospel of John
Part 9

Deacon Jerome Yorkshire, Sr., Sunday School Superintendent
Deacon Eric Dolce, Director of Discipleship
Reverend Patrick J. Walker, Senior Pastor

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Lesson 33: A Doctrinal Look at Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (John 17)

Rather than divide the chapter as our pattern has been throughout the Gospel of John, we will look at John 17 twice: a) through a doctrinal lens and b) through a devotional lens. As you study, consider this idea - *giving a name to biblical teaching is not the same as inventing a new doctrine.*

Doctrine #1: The Trinity The moment we receive/acknowledge Jesus as fully divine, we have entered Trinitarian waters. The distinctions made in this prayer, "I" vs. "You," are clear: the Son speaks to Another, calling Him "Father." Still, Jesus speaks of glory shared with Him. Though there is no reference in John 17 to the Holy Spirit, Jesus has already told us the Holy Spirit is "like" Him by calling the Spirit "another Counselor/advocate" (John 14:16). The opening verses of John 17 invite us to wrestle with the reality of the Pre-incarnate Christ. By His prayer to the Father, Jesus teaches us at least two things: 1) The Son is not the Father. Jesus' prayer, if authentic in any way, must be addressing someone other than Himself and 2) the Son, prior to His human life on earth, was equal in glory with the Father (see 17:5). **Related Scriptures:** Isaiah 41:4 & 42:8, Titus 2:13, Revelation 1:8. **For Discussion:** Based on John 17:1-5, what is Christ's focus? Based on the same passage, what are relations in the Trinity based on? How do the Persons in the Godhead relate to One Another? Is there anything we can learn from Them to apply in our relations with one another (especially in the church)?

Doctrine #2: The Incarnation of Christ. The incarnation is defined as "the voluntary and humble act of the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, taking upon Himself full humanity and living a truly human life without loss of his divine nature¹." This doctrine is seen in this passage through Jesus' many assertions that He was "sent" into the world. While the doctrine of the Trinity explains Jesus' natural state of divinity, the incarnation explains His earthly status and makes His mission possible. **Related Scriptures:** Isaiah 9:6 & 43:11, John 1:1-2 & 14, Colossians 1:15-20, 1John 4:14. **For Discussion:** List the verses that specify Jesus being sent by the Father. How does Jesus describe His mission and work? Also, in John 17, how does Jesus connect the mission of His followers (present and future) to His own? How does Hebrews 2:14-17 describe Jesus' mission and explain what is to come in John's gospel (after this prayer)?

Doctrine #3: Union with Christ. The New Dictionary of Theology sums up Union with Christ this way, "The Christian's knowledge, experience, and enjoyment of God are through Christ, [including] our baptism into Christ, our standing [before God] and every blessing are in Christ, and our destiny is with Christ. The church is to be one with her Lord, as He is one with the Father, and as He calls us to be one with one another."² The unity of believers, according to Jesus' prayer, is based on His prior union with the Father (John 17:21 & v.23). **Related Scriptures:** John 14:20-21, Acts 9:1-5 (Isaiah 63:9), 1Cor. 12, Ephesians 1:3-14 & 2:11-22. **For Discussion:** What does union with Christ also include according to John 17:22? What additional benefits are attached to this doctrine according to 17:23? Where does union with Christ ultimately end (17:24)? How does John 17:26 describe the ultimate purpose of union with Christ?

Lesson 34: A Devotional Look at Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (John 17)

¹ Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms; Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling; p.65; IVP Academic; 1999

² New Dictionary of Theology; Ferguson, Wright, and Packer; p. 697; Intervarsity Press; 1988

Having looked at some of the central doctrines in John 17, we will look at the chapter a second time for devotional purposes. As you study, ask yourself: **how closely do your priorities and desires in prayer match with those of Christ?**

Jesus Eagerly Seeks the Father's Glory. Note that even in His request to be glorified, Jesus' purpose is for the further glorification of the Father! Despite having shared in the Father's glory, Jesus does not seek glory for Himself *alone*. Instead, He seeks to not only glorify the Father but also to share that glory with those He has purchased with His own blood (John 17:20-22). Of course, Jesus' desire for the Father's glory and submission to His will are nothing new (John 4:31-34). Additionally, He has already warned His enemies that their desire for self-glory would not only be their undoing but prevent them from seeing God's salvation in Him and His ministry (John 5:44 and 8:50, 54). Though Jesus was consistently about His Father's business in His earthly life, this astonishing humility was made even more beautiful in the last 24 hours before His death. Therefore, it can literally be said that He lived and died for the Father's glory.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 6:9, Philippians 2:5-11. **For Discussion:** Almost every church member will agree to the phrase, "God deserves the glory." However, how much time do you personally spend in prayer, seeking and pleading for God's glory in a particular circumstance? Finally, when you pray for God's glory, how often does your own glory or comfort equate to what "glorifies" God? Consider what glorifying the Father would mean for Jesus a few hours after His prayer!

Jesus carefully sought the sanctification of His people. Our everyday usage of the term joins the concept of moral excellence with sanctification and holiness. This pairing is accurate, and yet the avoidance of sin and accomplishment of good works does not fully explain the heart of sanctification. At its core, sanctification involves an association and communion with God that inevitably calls one to be separated from carnal goals/desires and to be set apart for what matters most to God. Holiness, then, involves growing and progressive devotion to God. **Related Scriptures:** Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 2:9-10 (Exodus 19:5-6). **For Discussion:** How many times does Jesus refer or allude to believers being apart from the world in John 17 alone? When was the last time you asked the Lord to make you holy—not merely in position (because of being in Christ) but in practice? How often are you tempted to let the promise of forgiveness lure you into sin rather than actively pursuing godliness and holiness? How might John 17:19 be connected to the last week's discussion on "Union with Christ?"

Jesus longed for the unity of all believers. Earlier in John's gospel, long before He declared Himself the unique pathway to God (John 14:6), He said, "unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). In John 10, He spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd willing to lay down His life for His sheep and finally to gather all that was His into one flock (10:16). Finally, in this prayer, we see Jesus' heart is not merely for Israel, but "also for those who will believe in me." It is now clear that Jesus has in view successive generations of His followers worldwide, whatever their ethnicity, economic status, or other earthly affiliations. Jesus prayed that those given to Him by the Father—from all times and all places—would come to faith knowing that He was sent by God (17:20-23) would be one. In fact, John 17:24 reveals that Jesus has loved these sheep "before the foundation of the world." **Related Scriptures:** Matthew 25:33-34, Acts 13:48, Ephesians 4:3b-6, Revelation 5:9-10. **For Discussion:** There will always be distinctions in economics (Matt. 26:11)—but is that distinction an excuse for division? Revelation 5:9-10 tells us that God's people are from "every tribe, language, people, and nation," and yet they are "a kingdom," not many kingdoms. When was the last time you prayed *fervently* for unity that respects but is not hindered by cultural differences and overcomes historical hurts?

Lesson 35: The Son of Man Delivered Over to Men Part 1

Primary Verses: “Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I Am he.’ Judas who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, ‘I Am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground. So, he asked them again, ‘Whom do you seek?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfill the word that He had spoken: ‘Of those whom You gave me, I have not lost one.’ (John 18:4-9 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 18:1-18

Supporting Texts: 2 Samuel 15:13-23 &30-31, 1 Kings 15:1-15, 2 Kings 23:1-4, Mark 14:32-42, John 11:45-53, **Psalm 116³**

The Apostle John admits to his failures to understand what Jesus was doing during His earthly ministry throughout his writing. At different points, John gives us details as if to say, “If I was only thinking about it then, I would have figured it out. How did I miss it?!” One of those seemingly minor details is on the night He was betrayed, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley.

Though he is equally inspired as his fellow gospel writers, John is perhaps differently inspired and makes sure to detail Jesus’ crossing of that brook which, outside of the rainy season, was probably more a ravine. Perhaps they expected their readers to know its location (or how to get there), but when Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention the Garden of Gethsemane, they leave out the detail of crossing the Kidron. Why does it matter?

Jesus Himself declared the Old Testament was essentially about Him (Luke 24:44-47, John 5:46-47). One of the stories that best describes the suffering and vindication of Christ is in the exile of David at the hands of his Son Absalom. When David was being rejected as the king over Israel by several leading and prominent men, many mourned him as he fled Jerusalem and crossed the Kidron valley. However, he would eventually return and reclaim his rightful place as ruler but only after enduring false accusations and humiliation. When we consider where Jesus is headed, what He will hear in the remaining hours of His earthly life, and the inscription/sign that will hang over His head, crossing the Kidron would have had exceptional significance.

Questions to Consider: How is Jesus portrayed in Gethsemane? According to John, what appears to be His main concern(s) while in Gethsemane? How does Jesus’ description, in Mark’s gospel, at Gethsemane compare with John’s description of Him here? Is there a benefit to having both portrayals and, if so, what is/are the benefit(s)? Does one account contradict the other? Why or why not? Why is Peter rebuked in this passage?

Challenging the Class: The Kidron Valley was also where kings such as Asa and Josiah burned or otherwise destroyed idolatrous images that lured God’s people into unfaithfulness. Idols are not always representations of false gods but can also be false representations of the true and living God (Psalm 50:21). When we attempt to make God in our own image -assigning to Him our cares, desires, goals, etc., rather than submitting ourselves to Him and His priorities - we become idolators. Is it possible Peter was guilty of this in Gethsemane? Is it possible you are or have been guilty of this yourself?

³ Can you picture Jesus praying through this psalm during the events of John 18:1-18?

Lesson 36: The Son of Man Delivered Over to Men Part 2 (Tale of Two Denials)

Primary Verses: “Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I Am he.’ Judas who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, ‘I Am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground. So, he asked them again, ‘Whom do you seek?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfill the word that He had spoken: ‘Of those whom You gave me, I have not lost one.’ (John 18:4-9 ESV)

Teaching Text: John 18:19-40

Supporting Texts: Psalm 66:7, Jeremiah 10:10, Micah 4:1-8, **Psalm 109⁴**

Denial #1: Jesus arrives before Pilate, having been denied a proper hearing before Annas, the former high priest and father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest. Ironically, Jesus is prepared to deliver a denial of His own; though acknowledging He is a king, Jesus denied rulership over an earthly realm in the manner Pilate would have understood the authority of human governments. Tertullian, an early Church Father who lived from 160-225 A.D., was best known for his contributions to expand the Christian understanding of the Trinity, nevertheless, made an appropriate and penetrating point of application in the quote below based on Jesus’ example.

“If Christ exercised no right or power... in short, though conscious of His own kingdom, He shrank back from being made a king—He in the fullest way possible gave his own an example for turning coldly from all the pride and outward trappings, as well of dignifying the pursuit power [and position] in the earthly realm.” --Tertullian

Denial #2: Peter has been a favorite target of criticism through the centuries. His bold and sincere assertions of faithfulness led to fantastic demonstrations of cowardice (or worse) on more than one occasion. Here we see him falling prey to the satanic scheme to destroy his faith in Christ (Luke 22:31-34). Though Jesus openly reveals the supernatural plot against his disciple, we should not ignore Peter’s own sinful desires and inclinations also play a role in his failure (James 1:11-15).

“Because the forgiveness of sins is difficult to accept and because the human race is so terrified by hell and by God’s wrath and judgment, the doctrine is depicted for us in Peter, for everyone is meant to take comfort in it. Peter, the greatest and best apostle, falls more shamefully than other apostles and yet is restored... so that sinners might not despair and to prevent saints from becoming presumptuous and proud.” —Martin Luther

Questions to Consider: How would you respond to the following comment? “Jesus’ confession before Pilate concerning the other-worldly nature of His kingdom may be consistent with His own teachings but are out of step with the prophetic OT predictions of what to expect of the Messiah.” Is it wrong to say, “If I were alive at the time, I would not have denied Christ like Peter,” or “If I were in the crowd, I would not have cried out in favor of Barabbas?” Why or why not?

Challenging the Class: One great reason to follow Jesus: He lived by the code He expected of His followers. By denying His own comfort and life before Pilate, Jesus proved faithful when Peter did the exact opposite. Are there ways you have not yet denied yourself? How are you addressing those areas?

⁴ Can you picture Jesus praying through Psalm 109 while being dragged from judgment hall to judgment hall?

That the Scriptures Might Be Fulfilled

John Piper

The glory of Jesus Christ shines more clearly when we see Him in His proper relation to the Old Testament. He has a magnificent relation to all that was written. It is not surprising that this is the case, because He is called the Word of God incarnate (John 1:14). Would not the Word of God incarnate be the sum and consummation of the Word of God written? Consider these summary statements and the texts that support them.

1. All the Scriptures bear witness to Christ. Moses wrote about Christ (John 5:39, 46).
2. All the Scriptures are about Jesus Christ, even where there is no explicit prediction. That is, there is a fullness of implication in all Scripture that points to Christ and is satisfied only when He has come and done His work. Graeme Goldsworthy explains: “The meaning of all the Scriptures is unlocked by the death and resurrection of Jesus” (see Luke 24:27).
3. Jesus came to fulfill all that was written in the Law and the Prophets. All of it was pointing to Him even where it was not explicitly prophetic. He accomplished what the law required (Matt. 5:17–18).
4. All the promises of God in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. That is, when you have Christ, sooner or later you will have both Christ Himself and all else that God promised through Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).
5. The law was kept perfectly by Christ. And all its penalties against God’s sinful people were poured out on Christ. Therefore, the Law is manifestly not the path to righteousness, Christ is. The ultimate goal of the Law is that we would look to Christ, not law-keeping, for our righteousness (Rom. 10:4).

Therefore, with the coming of Christ virtually everything has changed:

1. The blood sacrifices ceased because Christ fulfilled all that they were pointing toward. He was the final, unrepeatable sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 9:12: “He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”
2. The priesthood that stood between worshipper and God has ceased. Hebrews 7:23–24: “The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.”

3. The physical temple has ceased to be the geographic center of worship. Now Christ Himself is the center of worship. He is the “place,” the “tent,” and the “temple” where we meet God. Therefore, Christianity has no geographic center, no Mecca, no Jerusalem. John 4:21–23: “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.’” John 2:19–21: “‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ . . . He was speaking about the temple of his body.” Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

4. The food laws that set Israel apart from the nations have been fulfilled and ended in Christ. Mark 7:18–19: “[Jesus] said to them, ‘Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him...?’ (Thus, he declared all foods clean).”

5. The establishment of civil law on the basis of an ethnically rooted people, who are ruled directly by God, has ceased. The people of God are no longer a unified political body, an ethnic group, or a nation-state, but are exiles and sojourners among all ethnic groups and all states. Therefore, God’s will for states is not taken directly from the Old Testament theocratic order but should now be reestablished from place to place and from time to time by means that correspond to God’s sovereign rule over all peoples, and that correspond to the fact that genuine obedience, rooted as it is in faith in Christ, cannot be coerced by law.

The state is therefore grounded in God, but not expressive of God’s immediate rule. Romans 13:1: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” John 18:36: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting.”

Let us worship the wonder of Christ, who unleashed these massive changes in the world.

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Simon Peter Denies Jesus

JOHN 18:25–27

“Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, ‘You also are not one of his disciples, are you?’ He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, ‘Did I not see you in the garden with him?’ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.”

Simon Peter and “another disciple,” most likely the Apostle John, followed the band of soldiers and religious leaders who arrested Jesus to the “courtyard of the high priest” (John 18:15). A servant girl soon asked Peter if he was a disciple of Jesus, and Peter denied that he was (vv. 16–18).

This did not end the matter, for John tells us in today’s passage that Peter was questioned about his association with Jesus again. Apparently, more than one figure posed the question a second time, for John reports that “they” asked Peter whether he was one of Jesus’ disciples (v. 25). Perhaps the servant girl had been unsatisfied with Peter’s response and was able to get several people in the crowded courtyard to think that they had seen Peter with Jesus before. In any case, Peter denied knowing Jesus a second time (v. 25).

The disciple’s denials did not stop there, for one final person asked Peter if he knew Jesus. In so doing, this person, whom John identifies as a relative of Malchus, stated that he believed that he had seen Peter in the garden with our Lord (v. 26; see v. 10). Peter, afraid of what might happen if people knew he was Christ’s disciple, denied Jesus a third time, just as Jesus predicted (v. 27; see 13:36–38).

By moving back and forth between Peter’s denials and Christ’s testimony before Annas, John allows us to see a stark contrast between the Savior and one of His most well-known disciples. Jesus did not back down when His life was at risk but stood up to the high priest and his kangaroo court (18:19–24). Peter, on the other hand, could not bear witness to the truth under less severe circumstances. He was not questioned by a person with authority like the high priest but only by servants. He was not facing a tribunal seeking his death (vv. 17–18, 25–27). Jesus could stand for justice against the powerful when He knew it would cost Him His life, but Peter proved himself a coward.

Jesus’ perfection and Peter’s failure are instructive. Lest we think that we must prove ourselves worthy before Christ will save us, we recall that Jesus died for sinners, even sinners such as Peter who deny Him. Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary John that Jesus “had no need to die for people who are sinless, for there are no such people. He gave Himself for people who have it in them to betray Him, people like you and me. However, He will never betray those on whom He sets His love, but will love them faithfully for all time.”

Coram Deo

Even some professing Christians act as if they must prove themselves worthy before Christ will receive them into His kingdom. Yet, the whole point of the gospel is that Jesus died for the unworthy, for sinners of all kinds. We need not make ourselves worthy before Christ will save us, for indeed we could not make ourselves worthy even if we tried. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That is the good news of the gospel.

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Making Jesus in Our Own Image

Sinclair Ferguson

Many years ago now there was a scholarly movement that became known as “The Quest for the Historical Jesus.” Scholars said “Let’s try to get behind the Gospels to find out who Jesus really was, and what he was really like.” So they took bits and pieces of the Gospel testimony and made a picture of Christ. One of the shrewdest things that was said about this movement was that these scholars were like people looking down a well to find Jesus, but didn’t realize that the “Jesus” they saw was really just a reflection of themselves from the water at the bottom of the well!

Sometimes I feel this is actually what has happened in popular evangelicalism. Our “Jesus” is actually a reflection of ourselves. This is the constant danger when we don’t simply open the Scriptures and listen to their testimony about Jesus: we make a Jesus in our own image, usually domesticated. Sadly, much that dominates the Christian media seems to fall foul here. Any Jesus who isn’t both Savior and Lord, Sacrificial Lamb of God and Reigning King, cannot be the Jesus of the Gospels. And any Jesus who does not call us to radical, sacrificial, and yes, painful, discipleship, cannot be the real Jesus.

I sometimes think that our danger as evangelicals is that we use what I sometimes tongue-in-cheek call the “Find Waldo Method” of reading the Gospels. Remember Waldo—the little fellow in the red and white sweater in the midst of the vast crowds? The whole point of the Waldo books was to try to find him. Many people read the Gospels that way, always asking “What does this have to say about me?” But that means that at the end of the day we’re looking for what they have to say about me, and my life, and my improvement. Yes, the Gospels have much to say to me. But they aren’t about me... they’re about Christ. And we need to listen to them and master them, or better be mastered by them and by the Christ they describe.

Yes, the Gospels have much to say to me. But they aren’t about me... they’re about Christ.

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