



SERMON TITLE: Who Me, 'Holy?'

DATE: January 17, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 17:6-19

PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

SERIES SUMMARY

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

It seems like each day, there's more bad news. A recent poll finds that four out of five Americans feel that America is falling apart. The deep political divide in this country is causing families to blow apart. It's causing life-long friends to part ways. But worse, the churches across this country are divided. The MAGA movement and the #Resist movement have come to church and the same demonic spirit of division that dominates the lives of people who could care less about God, now characterizes the people of God. The question is—What is the church supposed to be and do in times like this? A start would be for the church to clearly say that riots and violence and lawlessness and conspiracy theories are out of step with the Word of God and that we will not get caught up in any of that. We need to stand against allowing politics to be the characteristic mark of our lives. We must resolve to not let what's going on in this country divide our families or our church—that's a start. But there is more we can and must do.

We are in a 6-part mini-series on the Lord's Prayer found in John 17. As Jesus faced his own suffering and death, as he looked into the faces of his 11 disciples knowing they would face growing hostility and hatred in the days to come, he prayed. He asked his Holy, Heavenly Father to sanctify us, to protect us, to unify us so that the world would be able to hear the Gospel, and by hearing, people in darkness would come to faith in Jesus. This is his prayer for us. And, we—as the Church of Christ, we here at Fellowship Greenville, are to be an answer to Jesus' prayer.

Last week, we began looking at Jesus' prayer that we would be "holy"—look at v17, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth," and v19 "for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth." And last week, we learned that the word "sanctified" is the same Greek root word as "holy." So, Jesus is asking his holy Father to make us holy. He's praying, "Holy Father, make my disciples different from the world—make them holy and keep them holy." Now, when we think of someone being "holy," we typically think of a special class of people—*saints, popes, priests, nuns, rabbis, monks, gurus*. We don't normally think of ordinary people like you and me as being holy. But in both Old and New Testaments, God says to his people, "Be holy as I am holy." And most of the time, when we hear God say, "be holy," we tend to think that means, "separate yourself from worldly influences" (cf 2Cor6:17). There is truth in that, but "separate from the world" is not the primary meaning of the word "holy." So, what does it mean for us to be holy? Here's Tim Keller's definition—"To be holy means to be wholly God's." It means to be wholly devoted, wholly committed to God. It means every area of your life belongs to him, every priority of your life is judged by him, and every part of your heart is open to him. So, let's dig into this a bit more—What does it mean to be wholly committed to God? Look at v19 again—Jesus says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself...." Now, it should be clear to us that when Jesus says, "I sanctify myself," he's not saying he's becoming a better person. He can't mean, "I'm becoming a more pure person—he can't mean, "I'm becoming a more righteous person." The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was already perfect and you can't improve on perfection. So, Jesus was already good and perfect and pure and righteous, so how in the world can he become sanctified? And the answer is: "Sanctify" doesn't mean to be a better, nicer person—it simply means to be set apart, to be separate, to be completely committed to something, so that all other concerns pale in comparison—that's what it means. Sanctify, to be made holy, is not as much about being separated *from* something as it is to be separated *to* something. When Jesus says, "for their sakes, I sanctify myself," he's saying, "I am taking all my resources, all my time, all my energy—I'm taking all that I am and all that I have—and I am committing to one purpose,

and that is, I am wholly committed to finishing the work of redemption that the Father has given me to do." So, let's break this down:

(1) *Being wholly committed to God is a matter of priority.* When a young athlete sets her heart on winning an Olympic gold medal, her focus is not so much on what she has to separate herself from as it is to separate herself to winning. Her focus is not on what she has to give up as a part of her training. Her focus is on what she's willing to do in order to win. What is Jesus doing in sanctifying himself? He is committing all that he is and all that he has TO one purpose. He's *wholly committed* to finishing the work the Father has given him to do. It was a matter of priority—it was so important to Jesus that everything else paled in comparison to completing his mission. (cf Number 14 for an OT example of this). The bottom line is—to experience the life Jesus died to give you, you have to make it your top priority to be holy as Jesus is holy.

(2) *Being wholly committed to God is a matter of focus.* Compare John 17:9 with Luke 9:51. The point is, Jesus is wholly focused on one thing. The way the Christian life/holiness was presented to me—I was taught to focus on avoiding sin in my life. It didn't work nearly as well as I was told it would because the harder I tried to stay away from wrong, the more I was pulled toward the wrong. And for many of my friends, a Christianity focused on being separated *from* resulted in their being pulled in and as soon as they got away from home, many of them chucked their faith and never came back. *Why?* Because it was a Christianity of sin management. Holiness is not sin management because constantly focusing on sin will pull you toward sin. Being wholly committed to God is a matter of being "holy" focused on God.

(3) *Being wholly committed to God is a matter of knowing whose you are.* Look one more time at what Jesus prays in v17—*Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.* And related to this (look back up in v11) he says—*Holy Father, keep them in your name, the name you have given me, that is, keep them in MY name. What does it mean to be kept in the truth of his name?* It means to *look at* WHO HE IS and WHAT HE SAYS and nothing else. It means to be *controlled by* the TRUTH of WHO HE IS and WHAT HE SAYS and nothing else. It means to be *shaped by* the TRUTH of *who WE are* and what he says *about us* and nothing else. And in v6 and v9 and all through this prayer, did you notice how often Jesus refers to us as "Yours" or "Mine"—v6—*they were yours and you gave them to me—v9—You have given them to me...for they are yours. See that?* In Exodus 19, God says to the people of Israel—*You saw what I did in Egypt, how I brought you on eagles' wings to myself so that you would be my treasured possession, a holy nation, and my own people.* And that's not only true of the Old Testament people of God, that same idea is reiterated in the New Testament. God speaks through Peter to the church, saying, *You are a chosen people, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession* (1Pet2:9). *What does it mean to be a holy people?* It means, God has set us apart to himself. It means, you are wholly possessed by God. It means, you belong to him as his most treasured possession. If you are wholly committed to God, wholly focused on God, and if you know you are wholly possessed by God, you can look at anything—you can look at trouble, you can look at your enemies, you can look at the devil, you can look at the world, you can look at even death itself, and you can say—"In him, I am safe, I am secure, I am HOLY. In Him, I have everything I truly need."

If we could get our minds around this kind of holiness, if this kind of holiness shaped our identity as a church—if we embraced it and believed it and lived like it was true—nothing would be able to divide us because nothing would ever be more important than the fact that we are the holy people of God.

Summary—To be holy is not so much about being separate *from* the world as it is about being separated *to* God. Being holy is a matter of being wholly committed *to* God. And what does that look like? It's a matter of priority, it's a matter of focus, it's a matter of knowing whose we are. But it's also a matter of wrestling down the answer to one final question and that is—How can you have a passionate interest in something, but yet remain separate from it? Being wholly God's doesn't mean that we are not concerned with social and racial justice. It doesn't mean that we are not concerned about what is going on politically in this country. Of course we're concerned about those things. But our different perspectives and opinions about those things must never divide us as God's holy people. What we need is discernment—*How can we have a passionate interest in something but not let that something become the #1 characteristic mark of our lives?* It's a matter of priority, it's a matter of focus, it's a matter of knowing whose you are. A discerning Christian will not have an allegiance to a social or political agenda that supersedes loyalty to Christ and his mission. He/she will not have an allegiance to anything or anyone that supersedes loyalty to Christ and the unity of his Church. And neither can a discerning, devoted Christ-follower blend the Gospel with a social or a political agenda as if they are one and the same thing. To do so is blasphemy—it's idolatry. My prayer for Fellowship Greenville is that we would be a "holy" people, wholly committed to the one who gave his life to save us from the corruption going on in the world right now. My prayer for this church is that we would be a holy people, set apart to God and that we would be an answer to Jesus' prayer in such a time as this. Tell me—really—*What could be more important than that?*

Discussion Starters — READ John 17:6-19 —

1. Begin by talking about what the people in your group are seeing and feeling about how the political divide in our country is impacting families and churches. DO NOT let the discussion get down to political issues. This is not a time to debate what's going on. Use this time and the discussion to discuss how our deeply divided differences are impacting the daily lives of your group members.
2. Discuss v19—"For our sakes Jesus sanctified himself so we would be sanctified." What did Jesus mean when he says "I sanctify myself?" This is important because whatever he means will define holiness for us.
3. Why is holiness more about being separated to God than being separate from the ungodly influences of the world? (Part of the answer here should tie to the answer of #2 above)
4. Why is a focus on being separate from the world not as powerful as a focus of being separate to God? Why does a holiness of "sin management" not work? (This didn't come up in the sermon, but can you think of any New Testament references that teach this same idea? Hint: think Romans 7).
5. How does "knowing whose you are" shape you into a person who is holy committed to God?
6. How can we have a passionate interest in something but not let that something become the #1 characteristic mark of our lives?
7. End by having the group pray for Fellowship Greenville—that God would work in our hearts and lives so that we truly become an answer to Jesus' prayer for his church.