

Jesus Prays for the Disciples

Key Verse: *“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I am in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”*
—John 17:21

Selected Scripture:
John 17:6-21

reward, as spoken by Paul: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:12

Jesus laid down his life for his friends, his enemies, and the entire world. Prior to offering a prayer on behalf of his disciples, as contained in our lesson, he had made this important statement: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:34) The Apostle John later provided an even more specific and practical declaration of this command, telling us that “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (I John 3:16) This statement hearkened back to the application of divine love as it was shown in the life and death of Jesus.

OUR LORD INVITED THOSE

who would be his disciples to follow him, stating, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matt 16:24) If we have made this our life’s chief aim, we know it requires that we daily give our all in service to the Lord, and as his disciples, we must bear our cross of sacrifice and suffering. If, in these things, we faithfully follow the Master’s footsteps, God has promised a

In obedience to Jesus, and under the directing influence of the Holy Spirit's anointing, the disciples began at Pentecost the work of laying down their lives in service and love for the brethren.—John 16:13; Acts 2:1-4

In our lesson, we note these words of Jesus' prayer for his disciples: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." (John 17:9) We note here that Jesus was not praying for mankind in general at that time because he knew the work of the Gospel Age was not to be for the world's conversion—that would be the work of the kingdom. Rather, Jesus prayed for "them"—his disciples, especially the eleven, who would soon be "sent" as Apostles. In verse 20, we see that Jesus' prayer also was to include his faithful followers all down through the present age. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." He prayed for all those who would be his footstep followers throughout the age, because he knew that times of trials and hard experiences would come to each of them.—Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-20

God's purpose during the present age has been the calling out of a people for his name. (Acts 15:14; Heb. 3:1; II Tim. 1:9) The object of this call is to find a group of more-than-overcomers who will be joint-heirs with Jesus in his coming kingdom. For this reason, we read, "They are not of the world." (John 17:16) The next verse identifies how these are prepared for their future work. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (vs. 17) Here the Lord asked that his Father "sanctify"—set apart from the world—those who accept the Gospel Age call, in order that they can be fully prepared for the future work of the kingdom.

This is what leads us to the oneness spoken of in our Key Verse. Let us strive to have the same mind, desire, and disposition of our Master, which allowed him to be at one with his Father, and do his will in every circumstance and experience of life. ■