

October 23rd 2011: John 17:6-19 "Rough Diamonds in the Care of Jesus"

This morning we turn once more to John chapter 17 and to what is known as 'The High priestly Prayer of Jesus'. Last week we focused on Jesus as He prayed to the Father to glorify His name so that He in turn could Glorify the Father. Today we move to the central portion of this prayer where Jesus prays for His disciples.

This is what lies behind my title, for the 11 men that Jesus prays for were indeed rough diamonds who had by this time been close to four years in His care. 11, because Judas had already changed sides and John tells us, Satan had entered into him. So it was after Judas had left that Jesus prayed for the 11 who remained.

Eleven men from so many different ways of life. Men who you would never have thought of as potential leaders of Christ's kingdom on earth. They were a mix of fishermen, tax collectors, fanatical Roman hating zealots and philosophers. Amongst them were pacifists and activists, optimists and pessimists, extroverts and introverts. No one but Jesus could have molded them together as one group, for some of them had such diverse views that without His influence they may well have torn each other apart. Is it any wonder that I should refer to them as Rough Diamonds in the Care of Jesus!

Rough Diamonds which one web page defined as people having exceptional qualities or potential but lacking refinement or polish. That may well be true, but in this case it would seem that it took Jesus to bring out the potential that was there in them.

A woman called Mildred Bledsoe wrote on another web page: "I am writing a book called Rough Diamond about my struggles because I realized that I was valuable and precious all the time, however, during those early stages of life I was in need of polishing and refining."

There is no doubt that such could definitely be said of these 11 men. During their time with Jesus they were constantly in need of polishing and refining—just like you and me.

But the first and perhaps most encouraging thing we discover in Jesus' prayer concerning these 11 rough diamonds, **is that Jesus saw them as a gift given Him by the Father.**

Given to Him to disciple—to mold, fashion, change and develop. Given to Him to keep, to love, to protect and care for. Given to Him as His workers for the sake of His Kingdom.

John 17:6 says:-

⁶ "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

I am encouraged this morning, and you should be too, to think that what was true for those 11 is still true of each one of us here who have come to belief in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. We too are rough diamonds as far as being what we should be, but He sees in each of us exceptional qualities or potential that would astound us if revealed at the beginning of our journey with Him. He sees within us qualities and works that the Holy Spirit will draw forth in us that are incredible. We are a gift given to Jesus and surely such a thought should stir within us a desire to totally give ourselves over to Him, so that He can work His transformation mightily in us.

And it is that thought that leads us into the second thing we discover in Jesus' prayer concerning these 11 rough Diamonds—They were **Exceptionally Transformed.**

Especially is this obvious when we stop to think about how they started and some of the things reported about them in the Gospels. I'm sure that when Jesus called Matthew the tax collector to join His band of disciples the others would have quickly told Jesus why that wasn't a good idea. Matthew was a social outcast—a traitor—an extortionist. He would never fit in. But he did, as did the others, and here in this prayer Jesus tells about their transformation. verses 7-10:

⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.

Knowledge, acceptance, faith and they have already brought glory to Jesus through their lives. Not bad for a bunch of rough diamonds is it!

And the reason for this exceptional transformation is mentioned in v6:

6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

The reason is Jesus. He had revealed God in all His love, Power, Grace, and Holiness to these men. He had brought about the change in them, and their part had been to obey His word.

And Jesus still works the same way in His followers today. He is transforming me and He is transforming you if you belong to Him. I look back on my life and two things astonish me. The transformation in so many areas that the Lord has brought about, and the vast amount of transformation that is still needed.

The important factor in this is however, that transformation must be happening. Growth, change and challenge should be a constant part of our Christian life or God would not be pleased with us. And the factor that promotes transformation is our obedience to Him. If you are not being renewed and transformed as a believer then check your obedience to Jesus and you will find that it is lacking.

The third thing we discover about these rough diamonds is that they were **Prayed For By The Best**. There is something really wonderful about the Son of God pausing on the night before His crucifixion to pray for His closest followers. With all that was before Him He interceded on their behalf. v9 says

9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

There was none on earth greater than He. In the area of praying He was the best. And He prayed for them. A fact that means so much to us this morning because the Bible tells us that He still intercedes for us today. Hebrews 7:25 says of Jesus:-

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Whatever you are facing at the moment be encouraged that you do not stand alone. Jesus is praying for you. He knows you so well and He, the best of all, is praying for you

The fourth thing we find is that Jesus set apart His disciples to be different to everyone else. To be in this world of sin and evil but at the same time to be set apart from it by virtue of their connection with Him. In v16-17 we read:-

15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

When Jesus prayed for those men He knew that their belief in Him had changed their lives completely. They now belonged to a different Kingdom-not the kingdom of men but the Kingdom of God. His Kingdom.

Consequently, as far as the evil powers of this present world were concerned they had become the enemy and would need God's protection. And they would also need to be different to others because of their Faith.

So He prayed for the Father to sanctify them and that word sanctify means set apart. These followers were set apart to be God's people, living, working, and connecting with others who were not as yet God's people. And this difference between the two groups would need to be obvious and ongoing and based, not on man's ideas but on the Word of God.

The same is true for us and cannot be over emphasized. The Bible says so much about the way we should live as Christians empowered by God's Spirit, because we must be seen as different. Our conversation, attitudes, priorities, opinions should set us apart because our Master is the Lord Jesus Christ. Our obedience is to Him and He has set us apart to be different.

But Jesus' desire for those 11 rough diamonds and for us, is that they should be more than just different to others. His prayer shows that He also **Set Them Apart To Make A Difference.**

Look at verses 18-19

18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified

Peterson in the Message puts it like this:

***In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world,
I give them a mission in the world.
I'm consecrating myself for their sakes
So they'll be truth-consecrated in their mission.***

Jesus had this immense purpose in mind for His disciples. A mission that He had set them apart for. Even as the Father had sent Him on a Mission to save the world, now Jesus sends out His followers on a Mission of world evangelism. Of making a difference in this world because of the truth of the Gospel that they would live out and effectively proclaim.

He set them apart to make a difference and because of their obedience and the power of the Spirit they did just that. Not many years after the resurrection they were saying of the believers that they had turned the world upside down. What God the Spirit achieved through these 11 rough diamonds in a few decades was absolutely astounding.

And Jesus' plan for His people has not changed. He looks at us and I'm sure He is pleased with the difference in our own lives since we became believers. But I think He may be frustrated at times, with the amount of difference we are making in our world. His plan for us is that we spread the Gospel to others. In the words of Bill Hybels, that we become Contagious Christians.

It seems that those first disciples were not happy unless they were making a difference in their world. A very varied group they were also varied in the way they approached it. Some were very extroverted in what they did and some approached their mission in a quieter and more introverted way. But they had a passion to influence people for Jesus in whatever way they could.

Jesus expects no less from us. He sets us apart for the same mission and we have a responsibility to cultivate within ourselves that same passion for those who are yet to discover Jesus. How do we do that? By praying and asking the Holy Spirit to set you on fire for Jesus. By turning again to the word and reading through a book like Acts:-seeing all over again how God's heart is for the lost. And let me also suggest that you pick up this book by Bill Hybels—Becoming a Contagious Christian—and you will feel I'm sure, even as I did, God speaking to you through it.

In it Bill writes this, and I want to end with his quote this morning.(Becoming a Contagious Christian: Zondervan Press 1994 p216/17)

"It reminds me of the story of Steve Jobs.....(till) you'll never regret throwing yourself into building His kingdom."

