

John 17:18 As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world

This is a segment from the prayer Jesus prayed a few hours before his arrest and crucifixion, a prayer what we call “Christ’s High Priest Prayer”.

This is the longest prayer we have from Jesus in the Gospel, the most important prayer from the Son of God. Actually, we have the privilege to hear God praying in John 17. The prayer is divided into three segments: He prays for Himself (v 1-5); He prays for His disciples (v 6-19); and He prays for us (v 20 – 26). The prayer contains five specific petitions that He brings before the Father: Jesus asks the Father to protect the disciples and keep them safe, specially after He leaves this world (v 11-12); He prays for them to be sanctified by God’s word, God’s word is the Truth. He also prays that the disciples will stay united as He and the Father are perfectly united (five times unity is mention into this prayer); the fourth petition is in reference of His mission, He prays that they continue His mission on this earth. As the Father has commissioned Him, Jesus is also commissioning them to continue the ministry that He started, for the salvation of this world. Fifthly and finally, He prays that His disciples would be with Him in glory, the disciples, the Church would be with Him in eternity!

On this particular reflection we will focus on Church’s mission, as it was mentioned by Jesus in His prayer. Everything that the Son of God mentioned is his High Priestly prayer is very urgent and very important!

He did not pray that the disciples should be kept safe, isolated, and hiding from the evil of this world. He is sending us into this world with a power and a mission that His Father had sent Him. The term “world” appears 185 times in the new testament, and is referring to the world as the material creation (the universe), the world as a populated place (the humanity), and the world as a corrupt, twisted and evil system, controlled by Satan (the sinful system stained by death, sin, and evil).

Four special references are made in relationship to the world and our mission in it. First of all, Jesus refers to the fact that His disciples have a new identity in Him. As He is in this world, so are we in this world: **in the world but not of this world** (v 14,16) Through his death and resurrection He took us out of this world, every believer in Christ is now a new creation in Him, has a new identity, and lives a new life (2Cor 5:17). After He took us out of this world, He also took the corrupt system of the world out of us. He prepares and equips us, and then He sends us back into this world with a clear picture and mission in mind: like Him, (in Him) we are sent into this world, but we are not of this world.

Second imperative, in the same line of argument and principle, is that as we are sent into this world, we have a clear understanding that: **we are in the world but not like the world.**

We are not to resemble the life style of the world, not to behave like the world, not to have the same moral values, the same way of thinking. The new life in us, the Christ's character that we have in us, is produced by the Holy Spirit, is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). We are formed and transformed into His likeness with every day, with every step of this new journey, and the new master that now we have is: Christ in us the hope of glory (Col 1:27). If it is true that we are in Christ, its also true that we have the new life and the new identity in Him, and all this need to be noticed, observed, and have a great impact to the world.

The third observation we can see in this line of thinking, is that being into this world and not of this world, being into this world and not like the world, also means that the victory that we have in Christ points to a tension and a battle we have with the world, with our flesh and with the devil. The death and resurrection of Christ dealt with all those three levels of the war. He took us out of this world but more important, He took the world out of us (now we are a new creation, have a new mind, and a new way of thinking). But so many times we act and behave like we are not in Christ, and we let this corrupt world influence and oppress us. The death and resurrection of Christ also took our human nature (corrupt nature) and in Christ the old Adam has been crucified to the cross. Paul understands this and is able to explain it in a magistral way: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20) From such a great revelation and understanding Paul brings this cosmic reality to the earthly, daily living of the normal Christin life: in the same way, count yourself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desire. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourself to God, as those who have been brough from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (Rom 6:11-14). But this is not just a great way of understanding that Paul has towards this new dynamic of life, and all the rationale behind it, there is more. Paul signals the law of the Spirit helps us implement this new victory over sin: therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom 8: 12-14). We see clearly here what Paul brings up to our attention the principle and the law of the Spirit, and how through the Spirit we can put to death the sinful nature, and that being led by the Spirit is the true mark of the sons of God. John in his writings also underlines this principle in a language specific to the battlefield context: you dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one that is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1John 4:4). This helps us to conclude and to understand that **as we are in this world, we are stronger through Christ than the one who is in the world**. In the book of Revelation, the same disciple notices that: They overcome him by the blood of the Lamb

and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Rev 12:11).

The final imperative that Jesus brings up in his high priestly prayer, from John 17, is that as we are in this world and not of the world, as we are in this world and not like the world, as we are in this world, but through Him, we are stronger than the one in this world, we are also sent to this world by the Son of God, the same way the Father has sent Him, for the salvation of this world (here the term world refers to the world as humanity, refers to the people from this world). **So, we are in the world but for the salvation of this world.**

The true mark of the authentic Christian is a passion for the Gospel. The desire and hard work for the salvation of the lost souls. The desire to share the Gospel with the lost world, the lost people in this world. The Church is called to continue the ministry of Jesus exactly the same way Jesus did on this earth, calling people to Christ, calling people to repentance, calling people to this new way and new life. Sharing the true and whole Gospel of Christ, His death and resurrection, the whole plan of salvation. We are to minister to the world through the power of the Spirit, bringing healing, restoration and hope to the dying world. This is the mission of the Church, to share the Gospel and to make disciples for Christ, teaching them (first, by our own personal example) how to keep all of His commandments. Through truth and love, to share with them the heart of Jesus, the heart of the Father. We pray that this becomes a reality and a priority of our daily life and ministry.