

Sermon Text: John 17:6-19

Well, I think so far in your lives you've been through a lot, and I think going to college is probably; the transition from high school to college is probably the biggest transition that you'll go through. We have marriage. We have career changes. So far, this transition is going to be the biggest one you've ever experienced. I think when we go through transitions like this it's a good time to kind of evaluate where we are. It provides us a good chance, and we can look back where we've been, and we can also look forward at where we're going. I look at you guys here, and you've been very blessed. You've been blessed with good friends and great families, good parents, and they've been blessed with you guys. They've been blessed with a great church that is active and has things going on. You guys have been nurtured and supported through this body of Christ that we have here.

Along with blessing, I think, it's a little bit tricky because it is easier to go to church when most of your friends are here. It's easy when your parents are encouraging you to go to church. It's even easy to follow the rules when your parents make them, and you have definite consequences for breaking them. What I want to talk about this afternoon is the fact that we can do all the right things on the outside. We can make it look like we have it going on. We go to church. We follow the rules. We can do all those things, and it doesn't necessarily mean that our heart is changed. It doesn't necessarily mean that our heart is changed. That's kind of what I want to look at today.

I want to look under two headings. We're going to look at the truth of the Gospel, which we're going to look at in verse 8 of our passage, the truth of the Gospel, and we're also going to look at the test of the world. The truth of the Gospel, and then the test that the world puts on all believers.

First, the truth. If you go back to our passage, this passage that I read is from John 17, and is also known as the high priestly prayer, and this comes after the Last Supper, and this is the longest recorded prayer that we have of Jesus and actually in the whole New Testament. I think it's a really good passage, and one that we can learn a lot from. The setting is Jesus is with His disciples. This is the last time He's going to be with them. Jesus knows that in just a few hours He's going to be arrested, and He's going to be crucified. You can consider this prayer kind of, His disciples are with Him, and He's praying to the Father, and it's kind of a charge for the disciples. He prays, He starts and prays for Himself, and He prays for His disciples. We can learn a lot from this prayer. The first thing we learn is the truth of the Gospel, and we see that in verse 8. Verse 8 says, this is Jesus speaking, it says, "For I gave them the words You gave Me, and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believe that You sent Me." Now, what He's saying is that God gave Jesus words to speak, and He spoke them, and those words were accepted by the disciples. Now, obviously with that comes, well, what words exactly did God give Jesus that He spoke to the disciples and they accepted? I think it's two-fold. Jesus told the truth about us and the truth about God.

Now, first the truth about us is that we are sinners. That's not a surprise to most of us in here. I think most of us, growing up in the church; we have that idea pounded into our mind. We at

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least intellectually know that we are sinners. I think that if we look deep down in our heart why we know that, I think we still, and I think that I'm really not that bad. You know, because I think what we do is we look around, and we look at ourselves, and then we look around us, and as long as we can find like one or two people that we're better than, you know, I think we feel pretty good. The best example I can think of was when you're in school, and you have this really big test tomorrow, and you study it, and you just kill it. You study all night, and you really feel good about this test. You take the test, and you think, aw, man, I did so good on this test. I worked so hard for this test. A week later, you get it back, and your teacher hands it back, and you look at it, 60. You're like aww, man. You're just totally crushed because you worked really hard, and you really did. You studied. I know we just say we study, but you really actually studied this time for this one. You're looking at it, and you got a 60, and so you're kind of wallowing in your sorrow. Then, what is the first thing you do? You pull one of these numbers. Right? We want to see what everyone else got. If we look over at Johnny over here, and Johnny got a 40 and Mary Louise over here got a 30, you know, 60 ain't too bad! We feel pretty good about ourselves. What's the first thing when we get home? How did you do on the test? Well, I got a 60, but let me tell you this, so and so got a 30, and they got a 40 so I'm doing pretty good. 60, it might not sound good, but believe me, it's pretty good. We do that all the time. I remember doing that numerous times a week. I'm sure y'all have done the same thing.

That's what we do with our lives. We look, and we say, okay, I'm not perfect, but I'm a lot more perfect than that guy is. That's how we decide that we're okay. That's how we kind of justify our actions. As long as I'm doing better than this person or that person over there, and we feel good about ourselves. I want to tell you that the idea of sin that is given to us in Scripture is not that. The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All have sinned. It doesn't matter; it doesn't matter if you kill anyone. It doesn't matter if you robbed a bank. Those are sins, but so is anger.

I'll give an example from myself this week. I help out with the cross-country team at Greenwood High School, and we had our athletic banquet on Tuesday night, and all the sports give out their awards that night. That's a pretty long service. We were about two hours through it, and I was just struggling. I thought aw man can this go any faster. I caught myself, and I said you know what, who am I thinking about? I'm thinking about me. I'm not even caring about these athletes who have worked so hard, training during the summer, off season training, who have put so much time into their competition, and you know what, they deserve to be recognized. They deserve to be recognized in front of the whole school and in front of their parents and in front of all the athletes. It hit me. That was very selfish of me to be frustrated at that point. That's a sin! Being selfish is a sin, and that's a sin I committed Tuesday night. That might not seem like a big thing, but it's a sin, and to God that is just as big an offense as if I were to rob a bank. I think what God sees of us is that he sees that we're sinners, and He sees us as that. He doesn't see us as degrees of sinners.

The best example I can think of is that we were in Mississippi with the youth, and we had just gotten done with a hard day's work. We showered and Chip Stockman and I were outside, and Chip, being the good Scoutmaster that he is, was looking up at the stars, and was showing me a few constellations. That's Ursa Major and Canus whatever minor. So he's showing me these

stars, and he's trying to point them out to me, and the thing about stars is that stars are a variety of sizes. Some stars are just a few thousand miles in diameter, and some stars are hundreds and hundreds of thousands of miles in diameter. They're all different sizes. Our sun, which we look at when we go outside, isn't really that big of a star, but they're all different sizes. You know what? If you go outside tonight, and you look at the stars, they look about the same. I can't tell one lick of difference. That's how God sees us because God sees me, and well, I've never killed anyone. I've certainly been angry with someone, and I've murdered him or her in my head, and when God looks at me. It's true! I probably did it this morning. When God looks at me, He sees, you know what, Jack isn't much different than the guy on death row. They're both sinners. In our natural state, that's what God sees. That's the truth about us. The truth about us is that we're sinners, and every single sin we commit separates us from God. The truth about God is that He is holy. Now, holy is kind of a churchy word, but what holy basically means is that God is set apart. God is completely perfect. There is no imperfection in Him. God is totally set apart from us. The problem with us is that we're sinners, and God is totally perfect. Those two don't mesh. God cannot come into a relationship with people that are flawed as we are, and so what has to happen is there has to be a sacrifice. Someone has to receive the punishment for our sins that we commit every day. That person was Jesus, and that's what we see in this passage that these disciples are gathered together. Jesus has proclaimed the word, or has told them that the only way for them to get to God and the only way for their sins to be paid for is through repentance of their sins and belief in Himself, in Jesus. That's the truth of the Gospel that we see in verse 8.

Now, the fact of the matter is that we are in Greenwood, SC, which is in the heart of the Bible belt, and most of you already knew that. There's no real bombshell there. That's preached in every church every Sunday, and that's the truth. That's the Gospel. That has the power to change our life for sure. In the Bible belt, we find that going to church is culturally accepted. What I mean by that is that it is ingrained into our society, at least right now. That's changing every day obviously. To be in church on Sunday is expected. It's Sunday morning, you go to church. It just happens. It's a habit. It's like brushing our teeth. Before you go to bed, what do you do, kids? Right. You brush your teeth. In the same way, I think it's just, well, it's Sunday morning, we've got to go to church. That's a good thing. What the test is, and what I want to talk about next is that there is a difference between knowing about Jesus in your head and knowing about Jesus in your heart.

Knowing about Jesus in your head and knowing about Jesus in your heart, and we can know that Jesus has really penetrated our hearts, not if we just go to church, but if Christ comes out in our actions when we're away from church throughout the week and in college.

Going back to the passage, the disciples have had it pretty good. They've had the Son of God with them, day and night, for three years. That's the best kind of seminary training I can think of. I mean, Duke's a great school, Jim, but I'd rather have Jesus, personally. Can you imagine? Jesus Christ with the disciples every day, day and night, eating and sleeping together, whatever, for three whole years. That is such a blessing. The disciples were so well trained, but the problem was that Jesus wasn't going to be with them in bodily form forever, and Jesus knew that.

If we look at verse 11 and 12, Jesus prays for protection. He says, “Protect these disciples.” In verse 12, He says, “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe.” If you think about the disciples being with Jesus all the time, it would be pretty hard for one of them to break one of the Commandments and feel good about it because Jesus is pretty much right there. Whatever they do, when they come home at night, they’re going to have to answer to Jesus. That’s a pretty tall order. I think that, not that it was easy for them to follow the rules and to obey the Commandments, but it was because Jesus was with them. Jesus told them exactly what to do. They knew if they messed up they were going to have to answer to Jesus, and he was right there. What we see happen is that Jesus knows that, after this prayer, it’s going to be just a few hours and He’s gone. Jesus is gone from the world, the person of Jesus, so what Jesus is praying for is protection. He said, “Look, God I’ve protected these disciples the whole three years, but I’m going to go, and they’re going to be tested.” Through this test is how we’re able to know if we have truly been penetrated by the love of Christ, if the love of Christ is truly in us. The test comes when we are put into situations that reveal our true heart. The test comes when we are put into situations that reveal our true heart. Jesus knew His disciples were going to be tested in a big way. They were going to be put into situations where they would be threatened, where they would be mocked, where they would be abused, beaten, thrown in prison, beheaded. Jesus knew that. It was going to be an uphill battle for the disciples. They were going to be presented with a choice; to follow Jesus and take a hard road or to follow their own ways, follow the crowd and kind of do whatever. That was the choice that was going to face all the disciples, and it’s the choice that faces us today.

As I said, we’re in Greenwood, and if you were to follow the crowd in Greenwood, it wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing because most of the crowd in Greenwood is in church on Sunday morning. I think most of our friends that we know and are close to us will probably say, “If they’re not at this church, they’re at another church in town.” In any other part of the world, that is not true. You take these four or five states in the south, that is the only part of the world of which I’m aware that going to church is cultural. The college campus is not in that. On the college campus, if you go to church, you are in the definite minority. I graduated college in 2003, and we’d get up to go to church, and the hall of our dorm was pretty quiet on Sunday morning. If you’re going to church, you’re in the minority. That’s a first test. When we’re in a situation where no one else around is going to church, do we still go? Do we still go, if the crowd isn’t going and our parents aren’t making us, do we still go? I think another example is up until now we’ve lived with our parents, and our parents have been great. I praise God every day for our parents, and our parents have given us rules. The rules we follow, and if we don’t follow them, we have consequences, and some of the consequences could be restriction. We used to call that grounding when I was growing up. Restriction is they take your phone. They could take your car. It’s kind of funny because I know when y’all have done something when I see you riding around with your parents because it means you’ve done something, and you don’t have your car, and your parents have taken your keys. I think when we’re put into situations where we could be doing questionable things on the weekend, I think in the back of our minds is this voice, “What if our parents found out? What if our parents found out?” While I don’t think that stops us a lot of times, I think it will hold us back. I think we hold ourselves back. We probably get away with stuff that our parents don’t know about. They’re going to find out about one-half,

maybe one-quarter of it, I don't know. They're going to find out about something. I think in the back of our minds growing up we have this voice that says, "What if my parents find out? What if they catch me? What are they going to do?" Am I not going to have the car for a few months or will they maybe take my phone for a year. That's a fact.

I think this is kind of an extreme example. As I was preparing for the sermon, I was listening to another sermon, and the pastor quoted an article from "Atlantic Monthly" by Jonathon Ralk. This article was about the whole idea of mobs and big groups of people that we've seen gather and basically loot town. We've seen this happen a lot over the last 40 or 50 years. In the Balkans, we've seen it on a big scale. Rwanda, more recently the L.A. riots with Rodney King, and more, more recently we've seen it with Hurricane Katrina. What we see happening is that people, who are normal people, average people such as you and me, and what happens with them is they, hundreds and thousands of people gather together, and they go through town and they commit robberies, and they break windows, and they loot, and they commit beatings, and sometimes they commit killings. What this article wants to know is why does that happen. In the past what we've done is we've said, well, there is this kind of hysteria or panic that goes on. Some kind of spark happens and there is a panic. These people lose control of what they're doing, and they're not really sure, and they just go crazy, and they loot town. What the article says, and it's very fascinating, the article says that is not true. The article says they've interviewed people who have been through this, and the people have confessed that they knew, and they weren't proud of what they did, these people knew exactly what they were doing at the time they were doing it. Why did they do it? The answer is they were doing it because there were hundreds and maybe thousands of other people who were doing it and there was no possibility that they would get caught. There were hundreds and maybe even thousands of people doing this behavior that was wrong, but there was no possibility that they'd get caught. I think that's exactly what happens in college. Honestly. We're not with our parents, and we can get away with a lot, and our parents are never going to find out. As I said, in college if you're going to church, you're in the minority. If you are practicing a Christian life, you're in the minority, and there are going to be a lot of people doing a lot of things in college. The party scene. Staying out too late. I could go on. You know what, Clemson University is not going to arrest every single person who underage drinks. It's impossible. That stuff is going to go on, and I won't say there are no consequences, but chances are your parents are never going to find out. You can keep your cell phones. You pretty much have as much freedom as you'll probably ever have in your life. That's a fact. I pray that doesn't happen, but that's what the university campus is like.

Before I close, let me just answer something real quick. I think for a few of you, it's probably gone through your minds, come on, Jack! This is college. Let's have a little fun. Can you just chill, Jack? We've done everything right for 18 years, can we just go out to college, just have a good time, do our own thing? I've heard this from youth. I've heard this from parents. I've even heard this from professors. Jack, just let them do it! They have to sow their wild oats, if you will. I don't think it's that simple. If we take that to the extreme, let me show you what's going to happen. Okay, well, we're in college, and I'm going to have my fun now. After I graduate college, then I'm going to get serious. Then I will really start thinking about God and that kind of stuff. Well, after you graduate college, you've got to look for a job. Yeah, after I

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find a job, then I'm really going to settle down and really start to think about where I am with God. You're going to get that job, and then you're going to meet a girl or a guy. Well, as soon as I get married, right after I get married, that's when I'm going to really buckle down and really think about God, and start going back to church. Then you're going to have children. Yeah, well, I've been meaning to really think about God, and as soon as my kids go off to college, that's when I'll start. Just to go on, before you know it, you're going to be dead. I'm sorry. That's how it's going to happen. I'm not saying it has to happen that way. I'm saying don't wait. Don't wait! Make that decision.

2 Corinthians 6:2 says, “Now is the day of salvation.” It's now. It's not when you graduate. It's not when you get married. It's not when you have kids. It's not when you retire. It's now! Make that commitment today to follow Christ. Make that commitment for the first time. Recommit yourselves. I promise the blessings you receive from a relationship with Christ are better than anything this world can offer you, anything that a college party can offer you, anything that a job can offer you, anything that athletics can offer you. That's a promise. God says so, too, so you've got to believe it.

In closing, really quick, how do we know if we pass this test? How do we know that Christ has really penetrated our hearts? We see it in verse 14, and verse 14 says, “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them for they are not of the world.” What that means is the world is going to hate, it says, the world is going to hate followers of Christ. I think hate is a strong word. What that means is for us to live a Christian life, the things we're going to do are going to go against what everyone else is doing. It's going to be an uphill battle for us to follow Christ. It means we're going to have to say no to things that everyone else is saying yes to. We have say no to the party scene, to alcohol, to gossip, to bad language, to skipping class, etc. Everyone in college is going to be doing those things. Maybe even in your workplaces they're going to be doing those things. If we're really following Christ, if Christ has really penetrated our hearts, we're going to say no to those things because God says they are wrong. Not because we might get caught, but because God says they are wrong. We're going to say yes to things like Bible study, to prayer, to going to church, to college ministry. Those are the things we're going to be saying yes to. As I said, college students are not saying yes to those things. They are saying no. If Christ has penetrated us, if Christ has filled us up in a deep way as only He can, we're going to say yes to those things. Not only that, we're going to try to convince other people to say yes to those things as well. That's my challenge to you guys. Think about where you are with God. Think about this test that comes when you're put in situations that really reveal your true heart and where your true heart is and where your true heart is following. Let us pray.

Dear God, we love you so much, and just thank you for this chance for us to come together. God, I pray for these guys right now, and I care about them so much. God, I love them, and I want to see them grow and just become great men and women. God, I want to see them continue their journey with you. Christ, I pray you protect them, keep them safe. God, show them that You can fulfill them in a deep, deep way, God, in a way that no other thing in this world can do. We ask all these things in your Son's Holy precious name. Amen.