

- ***READ John 17:9-19*** Just prior to Jesus's betrayal and eventual crucifixion, we find our Lord deep in prayer not only for what He is about to go through, but we also find Him giving great consideration to those whom He is about to leave behind. In these verses that we have just read together, we find our Lord petitioning the Father that He would protect His closest disciples from the evil one (**17:11,15**) while they make their journeys throughout this life in this world. It isn't Jesus's wish that they be taken out of the world as Jesus was about to be taken out of the world (**17:15**), but He earnestly desired that they be able to do the great work that was set before them to do.
- The other key portion of this text that I would like to highlight is Jesus's mentioning of these disciples having been previously prepared for this work of being in the world by Him having given them the Word of God. (**17:14**) It was by this word of God, which Jesus declares as truth, that these men could be sanctified or set apart for this great work in the world, and it was to this world that Jesus was preparing to send them out. Jesus was confident that the truth of God's Word would be enough to establish and equip these men for the work they had been assigned to do out in the world. (**17:18**)
- While Jesus ends up expanding His petitions to all of those who would *"believe in Me through their word,"* I would like to take this section of Jesus's prayer and bring these desires of Jesus into our own lives as we ourselves are out in the world. Within the next few days, the vast majority, if not all, of our school-aged young people will be making their way back to school for the beginning of another school year. I have heard the usual and expected moans of dread, but I even heard a couple of young folks excited to start back! While we certainly will be busy praying for their success in another school year, let me suggest that we ought to be praying even harder for them that they be committed to Excelling as they are out and about within this world.
- In fact, we all ought to be praying that every single one of us finds great success in excelling as we are all out and about in the world. While there is time for the youngsters might be off to school again, and the rest of us have continued to be busy on the job or taking care of other responsibilities. Additionally, we are all surely thankful for those times where we do get to take a load off and relax in whatever way we enjoy doing such a thing.. Regardless of what we find ourselves doing in this world, it is imperative that we seek to fulfill these wishes of Jesus that we be set apart from this world that we find ourselves living in, and I will suggest that this can be done just as Jesus spoke in this text. We can excel in this world when we remember some very important truths that can be found within God's Word.
- This morning, I would like to use our time of study to encourage those returning to school and remind the rest of us that there are 5 Key Truths that we must remember and implement if we want to be a people that are excelling in the world while we are at school, at work, or at play.

5 Key Truths To Remember While At School, At Work, & At Play

I. I am a disciple of Jesus before all else.

A. While living in this world, we are naturally put in the position to wear many different hats.

1. For those who are school-aged, over the next few months much of your attention is going to be directed towards your efforts to make good grades and earn the opportunity to continue your education. You are a student and being such demands your attention and effort.
2. For many others, you are going to continue on wearing that hat of a hard worker in whatever area of work that you find yourself doing. Sure you'd probably rather just stay at home and relax, but you recognize that is not an option because of things such as bills...therefore the hard worker hat you must continue to wear.
3. Then there are times where we get to put the school or work behind us and put on a hat that we enjoy wearing because it represents our times of relaxing. We all have our ways of blowing off steam, and we are certainly thankful for the times when we get to participate in such things.

- B. At the end of the day, those hats must only be worn on the head of a person identifying first and foremost as a disciple of Jesus.
1. It can be very easy for us to find our primary identify in simply being a student, a worker, or a person that participates in this or that, but as we are out in the world participating in these areas of life, we must remember that we have an identity that takes precedent at all times. That identity sets us apart from those of the world because this identity influences everything that we do while living in this world. That identity rests in the fact that we belong to God.
 2. I really love the writing of Peter in **I Peter 2:9-25** because it lays out very plainly that we are to remember who we are in Christ before anything else. This identity should influence everything that we do. Though we might be students, employees, employers, moms, dads, grandparents, or retirees...we who are of Christ must first and foremost remember that we are *"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* (**I Peter 2:9**)
 3. When we remember that we have been called out of the darkness of this world into the marvelous light of Jesus then that should greatly influence everything that we do! It influences how we behave as students, employees, employers, parents, grandparents, and even retirees! It ought to have a profound impact on everything that we are about because we who deserved no mercy have received mercy through Jesus. No matter our responsibilities or accolades in the positions we currently hold, there is nothing that beats being able to identify first and foremost as a chosen child of the Most High God. But with that blessing comes responsibility.

II. My Lord expects for me to be a positive example.

- A. Living in a world that is ruled by the evil one presents the opportunity for many negative examples to be seen.
1. It is no accident that Peter takes time in this text of **I Peter 2:11-25** to list all of the positive ways that we ought to behave, and it all stems from the fact that there are too many people not behaving in a positive way in the world. During Jesus's day there were people who were constantly giving into sinful desires. There were people who were living very dishonorable lives. There were people who refused to submit to authority, who used their freedoms for evil, who dishonored others, who hated their brothers and sisters, and who failed to fear God.
 2. Sadly, it doesn't seem as if much has changed. The exact same type of negative examples can be seen all around us within our own society and culture. It is no surprise to see shockingly hateful, disrespectful, and unhinged behavior all around us. It seems at times as if all ability to practice self-control has been thrown out the window. What are we to do when we look all around us in the world and see people behaving in such a poor manner?
- B. Regardless of the negative examples, Jesus expects for us to set a positive tone for those around us.
1. We are to do exactly as the text tell us to do. We are to be the people who live as strangers and exiles in this world. We don't live as if this world is our home. We do everything in an honorable manner. We submit to those who are in authority over us. We strive to honor everyone. We love our brothers and sisters, and we do it all with a fear of God motivating us. We are to remember the example of Jesus and follow in His steps. (**2:21**)
 2. But you might have noticed that we skipped over something back up in **v.12**. Peter states that we are to do all to this *"so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day He visits."* If you're like me then your mind goes to one place and that is **Matthew 5:14-16** where Jesus speaks of His kingdom's people being the salt and light of the world. Through our good works and positive influence, it is expected that others would see the way we walk as the better way and desire to walk in it, as well. Though we live in the world, we are not to be of the world, and others should take notice of this being the case.

III. I need to surround myself with positive influences.

A. We can find ourselves surrounded and affected by negative influences.

1. Of course, we would love for everyone to see our good works and make the changes necessary within their lives to be able to serve God as He desires, but we know that this simply isn't how things often end up being. Though we can control how we behave around others, we can't control the way that others behave around us, and those negative influences can affect us.
2. **Proverbs 22:24,25** makes this abundantly clear. *"Don't make friends with an angry person, and don't be a companion of a hot-tempered one, or you will learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare."* This is nothing new to us for Paul quotes very succinctly and rightly from Menander when he reminds the Corinthians, *"Bad company corrupts good morals."* (**1 Corinthians 15:33**) We might have all of the intentions in the world of being a good and godly person, but if we surround ourselves with those who are bad and ungodly, then we are only setting ourselves up for an uphill battle to remain pure because our environment is anything but such.

B. Our goal should be to mitigate those negative influences as best we can.

1. One of the ways that we can mitigate the negative influences is to spend time with those who are positive influences. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes made the benefits of good quality companionship clear when he wrote, *"Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken."* (**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**)
2. Simply put, if we want to excel in this world then we would do very well to find those who are seeking to do the exact same thing. We need to seek out and surround ourselves with people who are going to push us towards our godly goals and hold us to a high standard instead of pull us back into the pit of destruction that is the sin of this world. We need influences that will push us towards victory over the trials of life instead of people who will lead us to ultimate defeat.

IV. Difficult times can produce strong people.

A. Those who live in this world will experience difficult times.

1. No matter the position we hold, there will be times when we will face difficulties. As students, we will make a bad grade on a test. We will drop a pass, miss a shot, or not get the part in the play we wanted to get. We will fight with our friends. As workers, we will become overburdened at times. We will struggle with co-workers. We will become discouraged in various ways. How will we respond?
2. It can be a very strong temptation to allow for the difficulties of life to create a very dim and bleak outlook on life within our own minds. We might begin to see life as being too difficult to overcome. We might feel as if God has forsaken us. We might feel as if there is simply no use in pressing on past the difficulties that we are facing. And yet, we read within the Bible that disciples of Jesus ought to be those who take difficulties and turn them into times of growth.

B. Our Lord expects for us to be a people who are able to overcome the difficult times.

1. I've read it who knows how many times, but the first few verses of **James 1** always seem to leave me shaking my head because these admonitions continue to go against everything that we naturally think as humans. We think that trials and tribulation can and will only break us down and make us weaker, but James insists that the trials of life are opportunities for us to grow and be benefitted.
2. *"Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it*

will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:2-4) Clearly we are being taught that these difficult times offer opportunities to grow in our faith, endurance, and into a man or woman who is complete and lacking nothing.

3. This is exactly what Paul did in **II Corinthians 12** when he petitioned God that his thorn in the flesh might be removed from him. We might think this a reasonable request, but God didn't permit it to be taken from him because He wanted for Paul to recognize that it is in our times of weakness that God's great strength is recognized and experienced. When we recognize that our bodies are weak, there is an opportunity to be strengthened in our spirit! *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.” (I Corinthians 12:9)* There is tremendous value in the difficulties we experienced while living in this world, but we won't see that value until we begin to recognize the value of our trials...that they strengthen us to excel in this world.

V. Jesus loves me and deserves my love!

A. Through everything we experience and do in this world, we must remember that we have God who loves us enough to send His Son to die for us.

1. There are simply going to be days when it seems as if the whole world is against us. Our teachers and bosses might seem to hate us. Those who we thought cared for us end up being the first to turn on us. We might not seem to think that we are even capable of catching a break anymore.
2. If we find ourselves in this position then we must put things in perspective and remember the words of Jesus from back in **John 17** that the world would indeed hate us because we are striving to only be in the world and not of the world. Even the text in **I Peter 2** tells us that people will give efforts to slander us. What are we to do when it seems as if no one is here for us?
3. Considering what is found in **I Peter 2:21-25** ought to serve as a great reminder that God willingly gave up of Himself in order for those who were straying sheep might have a loving Shepherd take them under His wing because He loves them so much. Though the world might hate us, God and His Son love us, and that alone should carry us a long way.

B. This knowledge should lead us to be more than willing to do everything that we have spoken of up to this point.

1. But this isn't just a mental acknowledgement of God's love. Instead, it ought to be a level three type of gratitude situation. This means that we not only express our appreciation but that we then prove our gratitude through our actions. What better way can we express our appreciation of Jesus and His love than to do exactly what we have already talked about up to this point?
2. We can show our love for Jesus by making sure that His name is the only name we wear, and that it influences everything else that we do. We show our love by striving to be a positive influence on the world just as Jesus was. We show our love by striving to surround ourselves with the right types of people so that we might have the best chance of living up to Jesus's expectations for His people. Everything we feel must be expressed in action. Jesus loved us and expressed it on the cross in this world. Are we willing to display our love for Him and excel in this world by taking up our cross and doing the same thing?

As we go back to school, continue on in our jobs, or find ourselves at play...as we are out and about in this world...I do hope that we will seriously consider the importance of approaching these works with the mindset that God has expectations for me. He expects something great from the people that where the name of His Son and those expectations are nothing less than that of excellence. Whether at school, at work, or at play...may God be glorified through our excellence in everything we do as we live in this world.