

## GOD'S GIFTS

John 17:1-11 Text vs. 7 *"Now they know everything that You have given Me comes from you."*

Today, we're going to explore a beautiful passage from the Gospel of John and look deep into Jesus' heart as He prays to His Father for us. It will help you understand what eternal life truly means. Where it comes from. And why it has been given to us. There comes a time parents should let their children grow up and take responsibility for themselves. No parent wants their children to depend on them for the rest of their lives. Neither do parents want their children to leave them too early to face the cold, cruel world on their own. Jesus knew exactly when, and how, to let His disciples assume their own responsibilities.

In His prayer to His Father in heaven Jesus said, *"I have brought You glory on the earth Holy Father, by accomplishing the work that You gave Me to do."* (John 17:4) Jesus was about to leave the earth. He was fully confident He had done a good job training His disciples to follow His example. *"Now, they know that everything You have given Me comes from you."* Jesus knew His disciples were ready to be out on their own. He told them to *take care of His flock*. And when He asked Peter one simple question, *"Do you love me?"* Peter was hurt, because Jesus had to ask him that three times *"Do you love me?"* Peter said, *"Lord, you know all things. Of course, you know that I love you."* Then Jesus said, *"Feed my sheep."* (John 21:15-17)

Jesus knew the disciples were ready when He gave them the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:19,20) He had done everything necessary to get them ready for a world-wide ministry. He had given them plenty of examples of what they could do if, and when, they faced difficulties. Jesus was their perfect *"role model."* He had promised His disciples, *"I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matt. 28:20) The disciples would never again feel alone or abandoned.

And so, it is with you. In your prayers and in your Bible studies He will make clear when it's time for you to assume your own responsibilities. Every Christian must learn to assume responsibility as they grow in Christ. The more you become a follower of Jesus, the more leadership responsibilities will come your way. Paul wrote, *"Instead of being tossed about by every wind of doctrine, speaking the truth in love let us grow up in all aspects into Christ."* (Eph. 4:15) Jesus had shown love and kindness to His disciples. Now, His prayer was for their safekeeping, which shows His disciples still had much to face. He was concerned for them. And when problems would come their way, Jesus would be there with them, even though they were on their own! They felt safe being in the Lord.

Psalms 121 gives a picture of God who *"never slumbers nor sleeps."* He's always watching over you. Ezekiel 34:11-16 gives a picture of a caring Shepherd who will always look after His sheep. Is there any safer place than being in the Good Shepherd's care? The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm says we are not only saved by the Good Shepherd, but we are *"kept"* by Him.

There's a great Christian doctrine called the *perseverance of the saints*. John Calvin believed those who are truly saved will persevere to the end and cannot lose their salvation. It doesn't mean a person who is truly saved will never lose faith or backslide at any time. It means they will continue in the faith despite failures, so as *not* to lose their salvation. It simply says, we are *"kept"* in God's name. God *wants* you to have assurance of your salvation. You should not live your Christian life wondering and worrying each day whether or not you are truly saved.

The Bible makes the plan of salvation very clear. Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved! (John 3:16; Acts 16:31) *Do you believe* Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins and that He rose from the dead? (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21) *Do you trust Him* alone for your salvation? If your answer is "yes," you are saved! *Assurance* means freedom from doubt. By taking God's Word to heart, you can have no doubt about your eternal salvation. God keeps you with everything He has, and is. No one can snatch you out of His hands.

A Church Educational Director was doing a community census of people's spiritual life. In one home, he began by asking the usual questions, "Do you attend church?" "Do you read the Bible?" "Are you a Christian?" The woman to whom he was speaking immediately answered back, "No, I guess I'm not." Her grown-up daughter was shocked at her mother's reply, "Mother! You *are* a Christian. Don't you remember you were baptized by that minister when he held the tent revival a few years ago?" The Mother paused, then said, "Yeah, you're right. I guess I forgot. Put me down as a Christian."

Unfortunately, that's the way it is today with many who call themselves Christian. *Put me down as a Christian!* Some think being a Christian is being friendly. Well, it is! Others believe some emotion took place in their lives which made them a Christian. But you need to understand what a Christian really is. In our lesson today, Jesus made it perfectly clear what it takes to be a Christian. *"They know everything that You have given Me."* Where do you stand today? Are you a Christian? What is being a Christian to you?

Well, for a starter, a Christian is an active follower *and* an *imitator* of Jesus. Imitators of Christ are people who copy the behavior and actions of Jesus by the way they think, speak, and act. That's the goal of conversion. The fundamental purpose of the Christian life is the imitation of Christ based on living the example of His love, self-sacrifice, and acceptance of others. Some Christians, such as Paul and the early believers, did that. Basically, a Christian will surrender his, or her, life to Jesus. Will have been baptized. Will have received the Holy Spirit. And is working to *"put on Jesus Christ."* That is, to walk and conduct life just as Jesus did when He was here on earth.

A recent report came out about the fastest growing crime in America. *Identity theft*. Someone steals your credit card number... Driver's license number... Social Security number... to take what is yours... and leave you to try and prove who you really are. This past year an estimated 15.4 million consumers were hit with some kind of ID theft. Newly released Federal Trade Commission data shows that consumers reported losing nearly \$8.8 billion to fraud in 2022, an increase of more than 30 percent over the previous year. Consumers reported losing more than \$3.8 billion to investment scams, more than any other category in 2022. 46% of all Americans have had their credit card information compromised at some point in the past 5 years. Mine was just this past week! Worldwide, there is a new victim every 2 seconds. But when you reach for your wallet or your purse, stop and realize, you won't find your *real* identity there. They may be valuable forms of identification that protect your material assets. But they really don't tell *who you are*.

Mark Wahlberg, an American actor whose work has spanned comedy, drama, and action has received multiple awards, including a British Academy Film Awards, nominations for two Academy Awards, three Golden Globe Awards, nine Primetime Emmy Awards, and three Screen Actors Guild Awards. When celebrating his 46th birthday, he stated one of the important features of his life has been his Christian faith, and the impact of his relationship with God. When Mark Wahlberg first met his wife, he asked her if she wanted to go to church with him the next day, which she did. Now, as a husband, father, actor, and producer of multiple movies, he goes to the local Catholic Church almost every day to pray. He says he prays for 15 to 20 minutes before he sets out on his day. When the interviewer asked him what he prays for, He answered, "*I pray to be a good servant to God.*"

Interesting! In of all the ways Mark Wahlberg might identify himself, he chose to be identified as a "*good servant to God.*" Now, that's *identity theft* in the best of ways! To copy the behavior, or actions of Jesus Christ the way Mark Wahlberg thinks, speaks, and acts, is saying it as the Apostle Paul said it in Galatians 2:20, "*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 up for me. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*"

That's it! Your identity with Christ becomes *your* personal witness and commitment to the values and beliefs related to Jesus. Your own life becomes hidden in Christ. You become focused on a heavenly agenda with kingdom building through your church. (Col. 3: 1-3). Every member of this Church has something to offer in building the kingdom of God. And the best place for this to begin is in your home, your town, and your country. Helping others understand that in serving the Lord, it's not *where* you serve. It's *how* you serve. Being actively engaged in the work of the kingdom, at any level, will bless your life and provide you with growth in so many ways. You help build up the kingdom of God by living righteously. You and your family are strengthened by being active in the Church. Attending regularly. And being willing to serve wherever you can. You can start right here in this church. All you have to do is ask. And blessings will come to you as you serve in the kingdom of God. "*Now you know everything that You have been given, and it comes from God.*"

That's His gift to you. Accept it! **AMEN**