

John 17:6-19 – “Jesus Prays for the Eleven”

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Intro: Truth matters. Even in a post-modern world enamored with the idea that truth is relative – that each one of us can define what is true for ourselves – people still go to courts of law, a place where discovering what is true can make the difference between life and death. Christianity is a faith based upon absolute truth claims – that Jesus Christ was a real person, who lived a real life at a certain place and a specific time, died a real death for our sins and literally rose from the dead three days later. For our faith to be credible, it must be based on more than imagination. It must be based on fact, and facts, to be accepted, must be testified to by eyewitnesses. So, what about it? What are the facts that can lead a normally observant person to conclude that Jesus lived, died and rose again? Are who are the witnesses? Should we consider their testimony credible? Where did they get their information? How do we know they didn’t change the story? These are some of the issues we’ll face as we listen to Jesus pray for His apostles.

Proposition: The witnesses to the gospel were chosen by God, kept by God, and commissioned by God, so we can conclude that the story they passed down to us is true.

Billboard:	(vv.6-8)	Chosen
	(vv.9-16)	Kept
	(vv.17-19)	Commissioned

(vv.6-8) Chosen – Turning from praying for Himself, Jesus now turned His prayer toward the needs of His disciples, the eleven faithful ones still with Him that night. Judas by this time has already gone to the Temple to gather the soldiers and officials that would follow him to Gethsemane later that evening to arrest the Savior. Jesus began His prayer, saying: **John 17:6–8 - 6** *“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. 8 For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. These verses contain crucial information for you and me because these eleven men are the unique source for all the gospel truths essential for our salvation. What does Jesus tell us? He tells us first that these men were chosen by the Father to be given to the Son. In the eternal council of God, these men were selected by the Father, not only to be His children, but to be appointed to the ministry of transmitting the gospel to the whole world (cf. Ephesians 1:3-9). Let us be clear that they were not chosen because of any special virtue in themselves. They were ordinary men just like you and me, but God chose them for an extraordinary mission. The power of God to redeem the world NEVER depends on the human instrument, but always on the miracle of God working through ordinary men and women. They were ordinary men, but they were also extraordinary because *“They have kept your word.”* Let us be clear about this as well: It is not normal for men and women to keep God’s word. This only happens when God has transformed the hearts and minds of His servants (cf. Luke 24:45), and that is what had happened for these men as verse 7 shows us: **7 Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.** How had they come to this conclusion? Jesus tells us in the next verse: **8 For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed***

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that you sent me. Jesus revealed Himself to them through His words. Life transformation is the result of the Word of God, spoken by the People of God, and brought home to hearts and minds by the Spirit of God. How did the disciples enter in? They *received* the words Jesus spoke to them and they *believed* (committed themselves to the truth). These men received the Gospel from God Himself.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] These ordinary men, chosen by God, were personally transformed in an extraordinary way.

[ILLUSTRATION] People who understand these things tell me that if you take an ordinary lump of carbon and put it under pressure and heat for an extended period, the result will be extraordinary – the lump of carbon will be transformed into a beautiful diamond. God chose eleven ordinary men like you and me, transformed them by the message of the Gospel into something precious beyond the telling and turned the world upside down with them.

[APPLICATION] The men to which Jesus entrusted His gospel were ordinary people just like us. The power to change the world is never in the instrument chosen, but always in the extraordinary hand that puts the instrument into action. A lump of carbon is just carbon until forces greater than itself transform it into a precious gemstone. God is glorified in this world through ordinary people like you and me whom He transforms into His messengers.

(vv.9-16) Kept – Having revealed the source of their message and their faith in that message, Jesus now began to ask the Father for certain gifts on their behalf. What does Jesus ask for them? He began by noting that His prayer at this time was not for the whole world in general, but for these eleven men particularly. **John 17:9–10 - 9** *I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10* *All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.* Does this mean that Jesus has no concern for the world He is not praying for here? That cannot be true, as Scripture shows (ex. John 3:16). Rather, we are to understand that when Jesus prayed for these men, He was praying for the means through which His love for the world would be made known. His concern here is for these men in their mission to show His glory and the Father’s glory to the whole world. What does He ask for them as they face this mission? He asked the Father to keep them: **John 17:11–13 - 11** *And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. 12* *While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13* *But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.* Recognizing that He was about to leave them alone in the world, Jesus asked the Father to “Keep them in your name,” that, “They may be one, even as we are one.” Jesus knew all too well that the World, the Flesh, and the Devil would come after the eleven like hungry wolves the moment He ascended into heaven. While He was with them, He protected them – He guarded them against the enemy’s attack so that they continued in fellowship with the Father through the Son (“Keep them in your name, which you have given to me”). The “name” of God refers to His character, so Jesus is asking for

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“abiding” or “remaining” in fellowship with God’s character and person. What about the “*one of them who had been lost*,” Judas? Why wasn’t he kept? How could it be that Satan had tempted him to betray Christ? It is simply because Judas had never really belonged to Christ, but was “*the son of destruction*,” given to Christ as one of the Twelve so that prophecy would be fulfilled. Jesus’ request of the Father for these men was that the Father would, “*keep them from the evil one*.”

[DOCTRINAL POINT] These ordinary men were not only chosen by God, but they were also kept by God.

[ILLUSTRATION] What would you think of an individual who worked for years to amass a fortune, then tossed it carelessly away on trinkets, or permitted his goods to be stolen from under his nose through inattention? We might admire this person’s work ethic, but we certainly would question his values, wouldn’t we? No one wise would ever permit such a thing to happen to the riches he worked so hard to acquire. In just this same way...

[APPLICATION] God doesn’t choose men and women to be His people, then let the evil one carry them back into the world. Whom God chooses; He keeps. As we discovered in our recent study of assurance in Romans, one of the greatest assurances a believer can rest in is the truth that even now – today – Jesus is praying for you and me (cf. Hebrews 7:25). Just as Jesus prayed for His disciples, Jesus is now at the Father’s right hand, praying for you and me; and we can rest assured that the Father will hear willingly Jesus’ request that we be kept in fellowship with Him, just as He granted Jesus’ prayer for the eleven.

(vv.17-19) Commissioned – Along with keeping them in the world, Jesus asked the Father for another gift: That He would Sanctify them for the work He had called them to do: John 17:17–19 - 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. To be “*sanctified*” is to be set apart for a specific purpose. God had chosen these men; He would keep these men. Now Jesus asked that the Father “*sanctify them in the truth*” – that He would set them apart for the ministry of the Word – that He would commission them in other words. No one can effectively do the work of God without the call of God. In the same way that Jesus had consecrated Himself for the work that the Father had called Him to do, Jesus now consecrated these men to the work He was sending them to do.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] These ordinary men, chosen by God and kept by God, were also commissioned by God – called to the ministry of proclaiming Christ to the whole world.

[ILLUSTRATION] Why do these things matter? Why should we care that these eleven men who lived over two thousand years ago were chosen, kept, and commissioned? Is this important to you and me, or is it all just interesting ancient history?

[APPLICATION] These three truths are crucial for your salvation and mine. Everything we are given in Jesus for our salvation has come to us through the testimony of the apostles. Christianity is often called

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an “Apostolic Faith,” meaning that it is defined by the doctrines taught by Christ’s apostles – men who were eyewitnesses to the life and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our New Testaments contain only the books that can show a link to one of Christ’s apostles. For a book to be included in the New Testament it had to be authored by an apostle or by a close associate of an apostle. Even in the case of the apostle Paul, who was not one of the eleven, his choosing, keeping, and calling are beyond dispute. For our faith to be true it must have been received from God through Jesus the Son; it must come from witnesses that were kept by God, even to the point of dying for the faith; it must have been transmitted through those who were commissioned by God – sent out by Him. Here’s the point: God has authored the Gospel; guarded the gospel, and God proclaimed the gospel through ordinary men under the watch-care of an extraordinary God.

Conclusion: Chosen, kept, commissioned. These apostles are the witnesses God commissioned to bring the good news of the gospel to the world. If the gospel story is merely a human creation, all who put their faith in it are deceived at best and fools at worst. But the Gospel didn’t come from men. True, men have always been its conduit. But the Gospel originated in God’s eternal council and was taught by the Son of God to chosen witnesses. These witnesses were guarded by God against the wiles of the evil one and commissioned by God to spread the story far and wide. It all depends on God, and God never makes a mistake; never tells a lie. Jesus prayed for the eleven, and we who believe are the proof positive that His prayer is being answered.