

John 17-20

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you turn with me to the passage that we read in John's Gospel and chapter 17, and we'll be really jumping from the verse in chapter 17 that we highlighted and the very similar language that we find in chapter 20. This morning, those of you who were able to be here will remember that we were thinking about how John in his prologue describes how Jesus Christ relates to the cosmos or the world. And we notice some truths that John identifies in regard to that relationship between Jesus and the world. We notice that Jesus is distinct from the world, hence the language of him coming into the world. He is distinct from the world. We also notice that he is the creator of the world. God, through Jesus, created everything there is. We noticed also how he was rejected by the world, and very wonderfully that he is described as because he is the savior of the world. And this evening, we return to John's Gospel to pick up on the same theme, or certainly the same vocabulary, the same word, cosmos or world, but to consider how as disciples of Jesus, we are to relate to the cosmos or the world. What is the place that we have in this world?

And in particular, I want us to examine words of Jesus that we find in his prayer for the disciples in chapter 17. We've read a small part of it, and subsequently, following his resurrection, the same words that he uses for the purpose of commissioning his disciples. And we can maybe just refresh our memory, though it was only just a moment ago, with these two occasions when Jesus uses this very similar language. In John chapter 17 and verse 18, as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. And then the words of commissioning in chapter 20, as the Father has sent me, I am sending you. In these words, Jesus explicitly and revealingly draws a parallel between his being sent by the Father and our being sent by Jesus.

Now, the intention is not to suggest that the two sendings are equivalent. There are, as we'll notice, or we'll notice some of them, there are fundamental differences. But while we recognize that there are differences, we also recognize and contend that in the language that Jesus uses, he is indicating that his sending by the Father serves as a model or pattern for us being sent on our mission. His sending by the Father, his mission serving as a pattern for us. And we'll see the parallels that can be drawn, hopefully, in a helpful way, as we would come to terms with what it is we have to do as those sent by Jesus.

Well, I want to explore these parallels under the following headings. The first heading that we will use to guide us as we explore these parallels is as follows. The fact of being sent. That is the fact of being sent. Jesus was sent. We are sent. We want to notice some parallels in that, at that level, the fact of being sent. We could maybe find a better way of describing that, but that's the best we could do. The next heading that will guide us as we explore these parallels is the manner in which we are sent.

Or we might say the manner in which we go, having been sent. So, we can think of the manner in which Jesus was sent, the manner in which he responded to the Father's commission, how he did so, serving as a model, as an example for us as we are sent by Jesus. And then the third heading, the final heading that we can notice is the mission field to which we are sent. Here we'll find that it's not simply a parallel, but there is a direct equivalence. We are sent to the same mission field that Jesus was sent to. We'll come to that presently. First of all, then, the fact of being sent. What comparisons or parallels can we note in the fact that we are both sent? When I say we are both sent, I refer to Jesus being sent by the Father and the disciples being sent by Jesus. And I take it as a given that we are included in that. We are included among those sent by Jesus. What comparisons?

[5 : 37] What parallels? Well, really, we could draw so many and we'll have to be selective, but there's a number that I want to very fleetingly identify, maybe as tasters, as you would continue to maybe reflect on this matter. The first we can notice is the identity of the sender.

If Jesus is sent and if we are sent, then in both instances there must be the one who sends. Who is the one who sends? Well, who sends Jesus? Well, it's very clear. Jesus identifies who it is that he has been sent by. As you sent me into the world, he's speaking to the Father. He's saying, as you sent me into the world, you are the one who sent me. The Father sends the Son.

That's a simple thing to say, but it has huge implications as to our understanding of God and what he is like. God, our God, is a missionary God. He is a God who sends. He sends his Son. He is the director of the missionary enterprise, but also in Jesus, in his Son, God is the missionary who is sent.

Our God is not a spectator who looks on from afar. He's not simply that distant creator God who's created the world and then steps back and watches on from afar with some passing interest in what is going on. No, that is not the God we have. Our God is a God who sends. Our God is a God who, in his Son, goes. He comes into the world, as we were reflecting on this morning. Our God is a sending God. One writer on the subject has expressed it very beautifully in this way. God is a fountain of sending love. God is a fountain of sending love. So, the Son is sent by the Father. And what's the parallel with us? Well, we also are sent, and we are sent by Jesus. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For the disciples of Jesus, the one who sends is Jesus. We are all sent by Jesus. And even as we just pause for a moment to reflect on that, we may think, and perhaps rightly so, that our sending by Jesus is but a pale reflection of that pivotal sending of the Son by the Father into the world. That sending that was conceived in eternity and realized in the fullness of time, the Father sending the Son into the world. And we say, well, our sending, surely that's a pale reflection. Well, perhaps it is a pale reflection, but it is a reflection. And that in itself gives us great dignity. You see, just as the Father sent the Son, so the Son sends us. And if we consider that the Father's sending of the Son is of epical importance as it is, we can say that in a measure, our sending by the Son into the world also enjoys great importance in the purposes of a God.

And so as we look at the comparisons, the parallels, we can notice this first one, the identity of the sender. But we can notice another element, and it is this, the setting apart of the sent one.

[9 : 15] Jesus was set apart by the Father for His mission, for His sending, if we want to use that language. If we just backtrack a couple of chapters to chapter 10 in John's gospel, and notice the language we read there in verse 36. In John chapter 10 and verse 36. And we're interrupting into a sentence, and that's not ideal, but we don't want to detain ourselves here. And we just want to notice the language used.

What about the one whom the Father set apart as His very own and sent into the world? Notice the language Jesus uses there. He speaks of Himself as one who was set apart by the Father. And why was He set apart? Well, He was set apart that He would fulfill this mission, that He might be sent into the world on this mission of redemption, set apart, sanctified, set apart by the Father, that He would be sent into the world. The picture is of a solemn, divine decision by the Father to set apart Jesus for His work in the world. Jesus was set apart. And we too, as disciples, indeed we could think of this corporately. We too, as the church, as the church of Jesus Christ, we are set apart for our mission to the world. In the very prayer where Jesus quotes, or not quotes, expresses this truth of being sent and of sending His disciples, this language of the disciples being sanctified, of being set apart by God, is prominent. We notice that in verse 17, sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. We are sanctified. We are set apart for this holy calling. For those of you who have the church

Bible, you'll notice how that word sanctified has a footnote where it's identified, the Greek verb, *agiatso*, and there that alternative or fuller meaning of the verb, set apart for sacred use.

And it gives an alternative, or make holy and back. Both of these things are there. So, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we, like Jesus, who was set apart for His mission, we too are set apart for the mission that we have been given. And that sanctifying, as the footnote suggests, has both a historic and a continuing aspect. There was a point in time in which God sovereignly and graciously set us apart for this mission. But there is a continuing setting apart, a continuing making holy that we would be fitted and suited for the mission that we have been given.

So, we have that parallel too, as we think of the Son being sent and of ourselves as disciples being sent. But another parallel I want to suggest is one that refers to the authority that is granted to the one sent. But what about Jesus? What authority was He given? Well, the authority that Jesus was given is grounded in the identity of the one who sends. Why is it that Jesus enjoyed authority? Well, He enjoyed authority because of the one who sent Him. It's the Father who sent Him, and it is the Father who grants Him authority to fulfill His mission. We were thinking about that in the passing, or I think a little bit more than in the passing, just last Sunday in the same chapter at the beginning of this same prayer.

[13 : 27] Notice the language of Jesus in verse 2, for you granted Him, that is, your Son, you granted Me, authority over all people, that I might give eternal life to all those you have given Me. Jesus was granted authority to perform His mission. He didn't claim it for Himself. He was granted it by the Father.

Well, that was true of Jesus. What about us as disciples? If Jesus is saying that, as I was sent, so I sent, what is the parallel there? Well, we as disciples too are granted authority by the one who sends us. Our authority to go into the world and to preach the gospel, that authority resides in, proceeds from the authority of the one who sends us. Not our own authority, but rather an authority that is granted to us. The very language of authority is used in the alternative, I wouldn't say version, but, well, I will say version, of the commission. This is a commission, a great commission, but perhaps the great commission that we're more familiar with is in Matthew chapter 28, and there this language of authority being granted is prominent. Notice there in Matthew chapter 28 and verse 18,

Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. So Jesus says, I've been given authority. As one sent by the Father, I've been given authority. But then what flows from that? Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. And the implication is clear. I have been given authority, and I in turn grant to you authority to perform your mission. So another parallel.

We thought of the one who sends, and compared and contrast. We thought also of the setting apart of the one sent. We thought now of the authority granted, but let me suggest another parallel, and that is the centrality of the commission that we are given. If we think of Jesus, the place that He is being sent occupied in His experience or in His priorities.

For Jesus, His status as one sent by His Father lies at the very heart of who He is and informs everything He does. Remember the language that He uses that we have in this same, or recorded for us in this same gospel in John chapter 4 and verse 34. My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work. Jesus is saying, my being sent by the Father is the heart of everything that I am and everything that I do. It is my food. There's nothing more important to me than the fact that I have been sent by my Father, and that I have been sent to do the work that He has given me to do. Jesus always understands that He lives and breathes as one sent. But what of us?

[16 : 58] As disciples. Jesus says that there is this comparison, there is this parallel. As I have been sent, so I send you. Well, what of us? Well, here really we have what you might call the challenge for us, that we too are to share that focus, that identity, as those who are sent. You, if you are a believer, if you are a Christian, if you are a disciple of Jesus, you have been sent by Jesus into the world.

And that must be central to everything that you do, that awareness, that realization that you are one sent. You have been sent by Jesus. You have been sent by your Lord.

Notice another parallel. We're still thinking about the fact of being sent. And another parallel that we could identify concerns the mission to be performed. What are we sent for? What are we sent to do? We've already noticed just a moment ago, Jesus speaking of finishing the work that He had been sent to do. Well, what is the mission? What is the mission that He received, and how does it relate to, or how does it parallel with the mission that we receive? Well, this is huge, and we can only comment on it fleetingly. And what we'll do is simply remind ourselves of what we saw in the morning concerning the mission of Jesus. What was it that we noticed this morning concerning the mission of Jesus? Why He came into the world? Well, we have the language of John the Baptist, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is why He came, to deal with the problem of sin. That was His mission. Well, what about ours? What parallels can we draw with our mission as those sent by Jesus? And here we might think that the parallel breaks down, and that we have real discontinuity between the mission of Jesus and our mission. And of course, in one sense, that is true.

But having recognized that in one very important sense, there is discontinuity between the mission of Jesus that was once and for all, and our mission, nonetheless, it is intriguing. That's maybe the best word I could think of to use. It is intriguing to notice the language that Jesus uses in chapter 20 and verse 21, where we can appreciate, and we'll read it in a moment, that though the atoning sacrifice of Jesus in the place of sinners, His taking away the sin of the world is unrepeatable, there is, nonetheless, real continuity between His work and the work of His disciples. Because notice what Jesus goes on to say, beginning at verse 21, as the Father has sent me, I am sending you. This is chapter 20 and verse 21, and He continues, and with that He breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.

And then what does He go on to say? If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Now that is a very difficult verse to deal with, and we're not going to deal with it with this evening. The only point I'm making is to identify that continuity. The mission of Jesus was to take away the sins of the world. And our mission is, if you wish, to build on what He has already done, to cooperate with Him in the application of the work that He has done in dealing with sin. I can think of the title of a book by Professor John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Jesus has accomplished redemption for the world, but now we live in a day when that redemption is applied to sinners. And that also is God's work, let us be very clear. But it is a work in which we participate. So the mission to be performed also allows us to draw parallels. One final parallel that we can notice in speaking of the fact of being sent. And that is the help that is afforded to the one sent. What about Jesus? What help did He enjoy in fulfilling His mission as one sent by the Father?

[21 : 24] Well, we can do no better than to turn to Matthew chapter 3 and verses 16 and 17, the account of the baptism of Jesus. And what do we read there? As Jesus is about to embark on His public ministry, as soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was open, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased. Jesus has granted at the outset of His public ministry this help in the person of the Holy Spirit who is sent down from heaven to rest upon Him, to empower Him, to empower Him for His work, for fulfilling the work for which He had been sent.

Well, this is the help that is granted to Jesus. And what about us? Well, here again, there is direct equivalence, not only a parallel, not only a comparison, but direct equivalence. We've read already in chapter 20, what is it that immediately happens following Jesus' commissioning of His disciples. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, it doesn't even say following that, and with that, He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. So, we enjoy the same help as Jesus enjoyed in the fulfilling of His mission. We too are granted the Holy Spirit of God to indwell us and to empower us and to help us in the fulfilling of our mission. We move on, and more briefly, to think about the manner in which we are sent, or perhaps more accurately, the manner in which we go. So, there is the parallel in the very fact of being sent. Jesus was sent. We are sent. And we've noticed some parallels or comparisons, comparisons, or even equivalences. But there's also the matter of the manner in which we are sent. I think it is implied in the language of Jesus that it is in the manner in which Jesus is sent, the manner in which Jesus responds to His commission that is a model for us in how we go, how we go into the world into which we are sent. Well, what features can we identify of the manner in which Jesus fulfilled

His mission as one sent by the Father that can serve as an example for us? And we can think of this both in terms of how He relates to His Father as the one who sends Him, but also how He relates to the world to which He is sent. First of all, how Jesus relates to the Father. I think if we had to highlight one element of the manner in which Jesus relates to His Father in fulfilling His mission that serves as a model for us, if we had to highlight one thing, I would highlight obedience. This is the preeminent characteristic in the manner in which Jesus fulfills His mission. He unflinchingly and permanently acts in obedience to the Father. He was, in the words of Paul, obedient even unto death. And Jesus Himself speaks of doing exactly what my Father has commanded me. We find these words in this same Gospel in chapter 14 in verse 31. Jesus says, What do I do? I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. I leave nothing undone, and I add nothing to what He has commanded me. What do I do? I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. And we too are to fulfill our mission as those sent by Jesus in permanent obedience. Indeed, this comparing of obedience is something that we find Jesus doing in John chapter 15 and verse 10.

What does He say there? If you, referring to His disciples, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.

In the work of the Gospel, those sent by Jesus, and that would be you and me, those sent by Jesus are to be more concerned with obedience than with originality. Jesus wasn't particularly original. He did exactly what His Father commanded Him. Jesus didn't sit down and say, Well, what will I do today? No, He did exactly what His Father commanded Him. He wasn't original in that sense. Neither are we. To be so concerned with originality, to leave to one side that which is much more important, which is obedience. Obedience is the dominant characteristic in the manner in which Jesus fulfills His commission as one sent, and so it should be for us. But along with obedience, we can also speak of dependence. Now, these are themes that begin to overlap with some of the things we've already mentioned. But if we think just briefly of this matter of dependence. Jesus was entirely dependent on the Father in the fulfilling of His mission as one sent. In John chapter 6 and verse 57, we read, Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the

[27 : 04] Father. So the one who feeds on me will live because of me. Jesus uses language to demonstrate His absolute dependence on the Father as one sent by the Father. And He says, So it will be, or so it must be, so it ought to be for you. The one who feeds on me will live because of me. Or we think of the words that He uses on another occasion addressing His disciples, Apart from me, you can do nothing. So there are features of the manner in which Jesus goes in response to being sent. And these are features that in the commissioning of His disciples, where He says, As the Father sent me, so I send you. He is indicating to us that we too must go in that same manner. But we can also notice briefly how Jesus relates to the world in this regard of the manner in which He obeys His commission. And as we think of how Jesus relates to the world to which He is sent, the key concept or reality is the reality of incarnation. Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us in order to fulfill His mission. In order to fulfill His mission, the manner in which He is sent into the world is by means of incarnation. And this is the model or example for us. And from it, flow features of what we might call Jesus-shaped mission. This concept, this reality of incarnation, incarnation implies, first of all, identification and solidarity with the ones to whom we are sent. Jesus could not fulfill His mission from a distance. He had to dwell among us. He had to dwell among us in order to fulfill His mission. And we as His disciples are no different.

And is this not often our big problem? We don't want to dwell among those to whom we are sent. We're comfortable in here. We're very uncomfortable out there. But if the words of Jesus mean anything, where He speaks of, as the Father has sent me, so I send you, then is this not a requirement that is placed upon us. He was sent in this fashion. He became flesh. He dwelt among us in order to fulfill His mission. And we must do the same. We don't want to get our hands dirty. We are afraid of commitment.

We are uncomfortable among those to whom we are sent so often. So, identification and solidarity, it comes with a territory of incarnation, but also sacrifice and suffering in the world. Not only do we identify with the world, but we must endure suffering in the world. Our suffering is of a different order to the suffering that Jesus endured. Thank God that we do not have to suffer as He suffered.

But though it is of a different order, it is related to the suffering of Jesus. We think of the difficult language, certainly, but the language of Paul in his letter to the Philippians, where he speaks of the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like Him in his death. And there Paul does speak of a level of continuity between the suffering of His disciples as He is sent to suffer. So, we are sent to suffer in the world and for the world in a measure. But then one other aspect we can mention when we think of the manner in which Jesus is sent, the manner in which Jesus goes, in the manner He relates to the world, and it is guided by or grounded in compassionate and loving service to the world. Incarnation involves identification, it involves sacrifice, but it also finds expression in compassionate and loving service to the world. And of course, the gospels are full of this. Time doesn't allow us to explore that at all.

We simply make the point and leave all of you to draw the implications for ourselves as those sent by Jesus. But finally, the third heading that we mentioned, and this we will mention only in the passing, is the mission field to which we are sent. We thought a little bit about the fact of being sent and parallels that we can draw. We thought a little of the manner in which Jesus is sent, or perhaps more accurately, the manner in which He goes, in which He responds to being sent. But then finally, the mission field to which we are sent. And here, again, we don't have a parallel, but an exact equivalent. We are sent to the same world that Jesus was sent to, a world that is alien and hostile to God and to God's people. The language of the prayer in John 17 is very vivid and eloquent in that regard.

[32 : 47] I leave it to you to read the verses that precede the verse we're considering, but it is full of the language of the language of a hostile world. Jesus was sent into a hostile world. He was not received.

He was not recognized. He was rejected. He was crucified. Well, we are sent into that same hostile world, a world that is alien to those who now by grace are citizens of the Kingdom of God. But that is the world into which we are sent. That is the nature of the mission field. But it is also world, not only alien and hostile, but lost and needy. Lost and needy. And that is how Jesus saw this world into which He was sent, as lost and needy. And so He looked over Jerusalem and He wept over Jerusalem as He saw the lostness and the great need of the world into which He had been sent. And we too must share that understanding.

We must be careful and aware that the world we are sent into is alien to us. It's hostile to us. We have to go with our eyes wide open in that regard, but also a lost and needy world, and a world for which we have answers. We have the gospel. We have good news for this lost and needy world. So, the mission field to which we are sent, not only a parallel, but exact equivalence.

As we conclude, one final question. We are speaking of the way in which, or we are grounding everything that we have said in these words of Jesus. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

And the words of Jesus, and the occasion on which these words are expressed, be it in the prayer or subsequently following His resurrection as He commissions the disciples, the words do rather beg this final question that I want to pose and briefly answer. And that is, do we as disciples of Jesus replace Jesus as the sent ones? Maybe if I could explain what I mean by that question. Is it the case that Jesus has done His bit? He was sent and He responded. He came into the world.

[35 : 06] And now He has done His bit and He is passing on the baton to His disciples? Is this the picture that is being painted? Is it the case that Jesus' time of being sent is over? And He now sits comfortably ensconced at the right hand of the Father, directing the missionary operation from afar.

Well, I don't believe that is the picture at all. The verb that is used in chapter 20 and in verse 21, where Jesus speaks of being sent by the Father, there in verse 21 of chapter 20, as the Father has sent me, the verb that Jesus uses, or rather the tense that He uses of the verb, implies a past action. And that makes sense. The Father sent Him. As He speaks here, and as recorded in John's Gospel, He's looking back to the occasion when He was sent by the Father. That's in the past.

But it implies a past action continuing into the present. One commentator has put it this way, not very delicately, but in order to get across the idea, Jesus is in an ongoing state of sentness.

So, the picture is not of Jesus saying, well, you know, I've done my bit, and I pass on the baton to you. You know, I was sent by the Father. I obeyed. I was dependent. I did what I had to do. Well, now it's your turn.

That isn't the primary picture. Rather, what we have is that Jesus, as the head of the body, is also sent into the world with us. He has promised to be with us always to the very end of the age.

[36 : 50] In the very alternative commission in Matthew's Gospel, there is that promise. I will be with you always to the very end of the age, and He keeps His promise. The picture, if we want to picture it, and pictures are always sometimes helpful, but always inadequate in terms of not giving the full picture, if I can use the word again. But the picture is not so much of an athlete passing on the baton to others, and he can then rest because he's done his bit.

But rather, the picture is of one who continues to run and invites us to run with Him. Jesus continues His mission in the world, and He invites us to participate with Him in that mission.

And the question for us as disciples of Jesus is, will we run with Jesus into the world into which He has sent us? As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Let us pray.