

GOD WITH US

Part 8: JESUS

Message 22 – HIGH PRIEST: A Final Prayer

John 17

Introduction

Sometime after He left the upper room with His disciples (14:31) and before they arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane (18:1), Jesus stopped to pray. This prayer is found only in John 17. It has been called “the high-priestly prayer” of Jesus, because He takes His stand as the priestly intercessor, mediating the relationship between God and man. He intercedes on behalf of Himself, His disciples and all future believers. Some have rightly pointed out that the famous “Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13) is not really *the Lord’s prayer* at all, since Jesus gave that prayer as a model for His disciples to pray to the Father. Perhaps that should be called *The Disciples’ Prayer*. But John 17 truly is “The Lord’s Prayer” since this is a prayer that He prayed to His Father. We learn what is truly important to a person when we hear them praying. How fascinating and instructive it is, then, to sit in and listen as we hear Jesus praying to His Father.

Jesus Prays for Himself: John 17:1-5

After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him. Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent. I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began” (17:1-5).

Jesus acknowledged that “*the hour has come.*” The idea of a divine timetable for the events of Jesus’ life, particularly His death and resurrection (passion), appears often in John (see John 7:6,8,30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1,31; also Mark 14:35,41). Jesus’ own brothers and even His disciples urged Him, at times, to move at a speed or in a direction other than what the Father had planned. But the divine timetable could neither be hurried nor delayed. All would proceed precisely according to the will of the Father.

Jesus' statement, "*You granted Him (the Son) authority over all people that He might give eternal life . . .*" is significant. Earlier in John, Jesus claimed to have been given this same authority:

"Truly, truly I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Truly, truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself. And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:24-27).

(See Daniel's vision where he saw the divine "Son of Man" who would be given authority from the Father over all humanity – Daniel 7:13,14. And note Jesus' final words to His disciples concerning His authority – Matthew 28:18.)

Jesus twice mentions "*eternal life*" in His opening lines, and He defines what eternal life is: ". . . *that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent.*" Eternal life is not just life forever; rather, it is life *in true relationship with God forever*. Eternal life is a major theme in the gospel of John, who makes it clear that eternal life is a *quality of life growing out of connection to God* as well as a *quantity of life* lasting forever. The gospel writer, John, emphasized the theme of eternal life in his first epistle: "*God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; He who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life*" (1John 5:11-13).

The above passage from 1John 5:11-13 was revolutionary in my life, because it states very clearly that we can KNOW that we have eternal life. God does not want us to "wish" or "think" or "hope" that we have eternal life. He wants us to have the full assurance that we KNOW we have eternal life. How do we KNOW that we have eternal life? The answer is in those verses. If you have accepted JESUS as your Savior, then you have eternal life! If you have not accepted JESUS as your Savior, then you do not have eternal life. Ever since I first learned 1John 5:11-13, I have had the absolute assurance that I HAVE eternal life.

The focus of His prayer for Himself is found in the words “glory” and “glorify” (occurring 5 times in these first 5 verses). He seems to have two ideas in mind, one immediate and one future:

1) Immediate: That His death and resurrection would bring glory to the Father (just as He says concerning His previous works: *“I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do”*). Jesus will bring glory to the Father by finishing the most important work that the Father gave Him to do – offering His life as a sacrifice for sin. By doing the Father’s work in this world, Jesus brought glory to the Father by displaying the full range of God’s attributes (especially His love – Jn.3:16) to the world.

2) Future: There is a recurring sense in this prayer that Jesus is anticipating the restoration of His personal, eternal glory, when He ascends back to the Father. *“Glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began”* (1:5). At the end of this prayer He will ask that the disciples be permitted to see His heavenly glory (17:24). Note also John 13:1 where Jesus knew that the time was near for Him to return to His Father (i.e., back into heavenly glory). Jesus was with the Father in the beginning (John 1:1) and now He desires to return to His rightful place in heavenly glory by the Father’s side.

Philippians 2:1-11 speaks of the self-emptying of God the Son, as He came into this world to be our servant and to die for our sins. This self-emptying did NOT mean that He set aside His divine attributes *or* that He stopped being divine; rather, His self-emptying consisted in the laying aside of the *glory of His attributes* and the *right to display His heavenly glory* during His time on earth. Stated more simply, Jesus set aside His “glory,” and He is now anticipating the time when His glory will be restored.

Jewelry stores always display beautiful stones sparkling under high-intensity lights. The jeweler wants to show the full “glory” of the stones, thus the special lighting. When Jesus prayed that His life might bring glory to the Father, He was saying: “Father, let the light of Your character shine through the events of My life so that people might see Your full beauty.” The apostle Paul prayed something similar as he thought about his future: “. . . that Christ would be exalted in my body, whether by life or death” (Philippians 1:20). We can pray a similar prayer: “Father, I want my life to put You on display. Whatever happens, may people see Your beauty and glory in and through me.”

Jesus Prays for His Disciples: John 17:6-19

After praying for Himself, Jesus turns His attention to His beloved disciples. **First**, He affirms them, telling His Father how the disciples have *accepted* and *obeyed* His words.

“I have revealed You to those Whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me, and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me” (17:6-8).

The fact that the disciples received, believed and obeyed the words of Jesus was very significant to Him. It was for this very reason that He came into the world – to *reveal* the Father to them (see John 1:14,18). The disciples will soon become *the conveyors* of the words of God *to the world*. Thus, Jesus is both commending them for their receptivity, even as He prepares to *pray* for their protection and effectiveness in their coming mission.

Second, Jesus prays for His disciples as He prepares to depart from them and leave them “in enemy territory.”

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have given Me, for they are Yours. All I have is Yours, and all You have is Mine. And glory has come to Me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father protect them by the power of Your name, the name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name You gave Me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. I am coming to You now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of My joy within them. I have given them Your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 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” (17:9-19).

- **He prays for their protection (17:11,12,15).** The disciples are being left in enemy territory to advance Jesus' mission. Jesus does not ask the Father to take them *out* of the world; rather, to *protect them from the Evil One as they remain in the world.* Jesus regularly acknowledged that Satan was the "prince of this world." He knew that the devil would seek to discourage and defeat the disciples in their future work; thus, He prayed for their protection. (Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, became the instrument of Satan to help take Jesus to the cross; see 6:70,71. He was never a true believer, rather a pretend believer who was later exposed as a fraud. Jesus "keeps" and "protects" His true children; but Judas was not one of them).

- **He prays that they might have the full measure of His joy within them (17:13).** "Joy" is not the same thing as "happiness." Happiness is circumstantial, while joy is the deep delight that comes from living in connection with God and doing His will, irrespective of circumstances. Jesus was praying that His disciples would have His deep joy within them (even in the midst of enemy territory and difficult circumstances) as they kept God at the center of their lives and lived out His plan for them (i.e., abiding in the Vine and bearing much fruit - Jn.15).

- **He prays that they might be sanctified by the truth: 17:16-19**

The word "sanctify" means to "set apart as holy" or, more simply, to "cleanse." For example, "sacred" vessels in the temple were "sanctified" or "cleansed" with water, to be pure. The disciples would become God's sacred vessels in a world full of sin, temptation and evil. Thus, Jesus prayed that they might be sanctified (cleansed, set apart) as useful vessels to carry His word to the world. But notice the instrument for their sanctification: "*Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth*" (v.17).

Satan is "the father of lies" (John 8:44). His strategy to defeat me is to get me to believe his lies: "I am not wanted, or valuable, or loved." "God is not good, He does not care, He is not trustworthy." "People don't appreciate me, they don't want me, they are against me." Thus, it is critical for us to spend significant amounts of quality time allowing GOD'S TRUTH to sanctify and strengthen us against the schemes and lies of the evil one. How are you doing spending time in God's Word? Jesus prayed for you . . . that you might be sanctified (cleansed, set apart) by God's truth.

Jesus Prays for Future Believers: John 17:20-23

After praying for His immediate disciples, Jesus looked ahead and prayed for all future believers (including you and me).

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that you have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one—I in them and You in Me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me” (17:20-23).

Jesus prayed for one primary thing: the *UNITY* of future believers. And He prayed for this for one primary purpose: *so that the world will believe* that the Father sent the Son into the world. Jesus made an essential connection between the *witness* of the church and the *unity* of the church. If Christians are divided, the world will not see a clear representation of the essential *unity within the godhead* (between Father, Son and Spirit). On the other hand, if Christians are united, then the world will see something unique and divine through the Christian community and their love for one another. Recall what Jesus said earlier this same night: *“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).*

Even the disciples, earlier on this night, had been divided against one another as they argued over which of them was the greatest. Disunity happens when we try to put ourselves first; or when we hold an opinion and fail to respect the opinions of others; or when we talk about someone behind their back; or when we harbor bitterness and fail to forgive others; or when we fail to admit our own blind spots; etc. Read Ephesians 4:3-5 where Paul admonished followers of Jesus “to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.” What do you personally struggle with that causes disunity in the circles you move in? What can you do to protect and promote unity in the important relationships of your life (marriage, siblings, friends, co-workers)? Can you be an instrument (both through prayer and action) to promote unity?

Jesus Prays again for His disciples: John 17:24-26

As He concludes, Jesus focuses again on His beloved disciples.

“Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to see My glory, the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know You, I know You, and they know that You have sent Me. I have made You known to them and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (17:24-26).

Yes, Jesus wanted His disciples to be effective in their mission to make Him know to the world. Ultimately, however, He desired that they be WITH HIM in glory. Our BEING and our DOING are both important to Jesus . . . but if there is one thing that matters most to Jesus, it is our BEING in relationship with Him.

Do you ever stop to ponder how much Jesus wants to BE WITH YOU; how much He LOVES YOU; how much He longs to DO LIFE WITH YOU? The desire for relational intimacy is part of the triune godhead. God created us for Himself, that we might live in companionship with Him. This is why it is important to set aside some time each day to simply be with Jesus. I like to think of Jesus sitting in a chair, waiting for me to show up for our time together. As I open His Word to listen, as I speak to Him about the things on my heart, as I listen for the promptings of His Spirit, I am having fellowship with Him. He delights in this time of fellowship with Me . . . and I am renewed and restored by it. How are you doing spending time with Jesus? It is important to Him!

Discussion Questions

1. What aspect of Jesus' prayer stands out most to you? Why?
2. Review the things Jesus prayed for His disciples: protection, joy, cleansing (17:9-19); being in His presence (17:24-26). Why are each of these things *important* to Jesus? Are they important to you?
3. The unity of believers is a big part of Jesus' prayer. How have you seen the *impact* of either unity or disunity in the body of Christ?
4. How does Jesus' prayer shape your own desire to pray for those who are dear to your heart?

****STUDY AHEAD:*** *There is no detailed Study Ahead Guide for next week. In preparation for Good Friday & Easter, we invite you to read slowly, devotionally and prayerfully thru John 18-20 and Luke 22-24.*