

34. The Prayer of Jesus

John 17:1-26

The Gospel According to John

Preparing the Disciples Through Prayer

In the last four chapters of our study in the book of John, John the apostle is recalling the words and actions of Jesus as He prepared His disciples for the three days of grief at His crucifixion, and what would take place after His ascension to the Father. After Judas left the upper room of the Last Supper, John gives us the intimate conversation before they left the upper room (14:31b) for the mile walk to the Garden of Gethsemane. Chapters 15 and 16 continue Jesus' last words as they stopped somewhere near the temple. In chapter seventeen, Jesus turned His heart toward the Father in prayer.

It says a lot about the character of Jesus that as He faced His last hours, His concern was for His disciples. He sought to give them words that would comfort them in their distress. He knew that their faith would take a battering when they heard of Christ's torture and crucifixion at the hands of the apostate Jewish leadership. The Scriptures record that only one of the eleven disciples was there with Him at the crucifixion, the apostle John, the one writing the words before us. Chapter seventeen now takes us up close and personal as Jesus prays with them one last time before the darkness descends. There are three parts to His prayer to the Father. In the first part Jesus prays for Himself, verses 1-5. The second part is focused on prayer for the disciples, verses 6-19, and the last part is His prayer for all who will believe through many ages, verses 20-24. Let's focus on each part of this most intimate prayer of Jesus.

Jesus Prays for Himself (John 17:1-5)

¹After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:1-5).

Over three years before, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus spoke of an hour, a period of time, where He would greatly glorify God. At the wedding in Cana in Galilee, He said to His mother that "my hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). Three times also, in John chapter seven (vs. 6, 8, 30), He said that His time or His hour had not yet come, but now, just a few hours before His crucifixion, He said in prayer, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you (John 17:1).

What did Jesus mean when He spoke of the Cross as His glory and glorification? (v. 1). How does the cross bring glory to the Father?

Glorifying God

What does the word “glory” mean? In the Old Testament, the most common Hebrew word translated *glory* is the word *kabod*, which literally means, “heavy in weight.” In the Book of Exodus, Moses said to the Lord, “I pray you, show me your glory!” (Exodus 33:18). What was he asking for? Moses longed to see the brilliance, beauty, splendor and majesty of the Lord this side of heaven. In the New Testament, the Greek word used is *doxazo*. This word is used to describe “Solomon in all his *glory*” (Matthew 6:29), and also “all the kingdoms of the world and their *glory*” (Matthew 6:8). To glorify someone is to recognize the importance or the weight of some desirable quality that person possesses. When Jesus talks about His desire to glorify His Father and to be glorified through the cross, it is to show or magnify the uniqueness of the love and mercy of God through Jesus being crucified.

The many religions of the world project God as a stern and angry God, but here we see that Jesus’ obedience to the Father reveals what God the Father is truly like. Yes, He is an awesome God, and One who executes justice and judgment, but He is also a God of love; mercy and kindness revealed through the vast cost that He was willing to pay in order to bring us guilty sinners to Himself. If Jesus had stopped short of the cross, it would have proved that there were limits to the degree of love to which God would go. Jesus went all the way to the cross to show us that there is no limit to the love and mercy of God. If there could have been another way, don’t you think God would have taken it rather than give His Son to die on a cross? The cross reveals the weight or the glory of God and speaks loudly of the Father’s character.

Jesus then prayed about the gift of eternal life that He gives to all the Father gives Him (v. 2). This eternal life is more than something that has no limit in time. It is more of a quality of life as well as a measurement of time. All men will live forever; it is just a matter of where we will live in eternity. Upon our repentance and belief in Christ, the gift of life changes our eternal destiny and begins a transformative process that changes us from the inside out: “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We only see the result of this transformative process when we pass from this life into the true life. We are eternal creatures living in the tent of the body:

For while we are in this tent, (our temporary physical body) we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (2 Corinthians 5:4).

Jesus then described the essence of this gift of life He gives His people; it is to know the Father and the Son.

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (v. 3).

When we receive the gift of life, the Spirit enters our lives and begins His work of opening our mind and hearts to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and at the same time showing us what the Father is like. This is more than an intellectual knowledge based on an understanding of the character of God; this is also the beginning of a love relationship where we become, over a period of time, in love with God. When Adam lay with his wife in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 4:1), the English King James Version uses the words “Adam **knew** his wife.” The Hebrew word, *yada*, means “to know” in the sense of “to experience.” In this context, it denotes the most

intimate of relationships between a man and woman, a relationship of heart to heart knowledge that leads inevitably to the expression of that love by the act of sexual union. Unfortunately, today this type of intimacy is not always given the honor it deserves in the confines of a marriage covenant. In verse three, Jesus is saying that the true believer can know God in a close heart to heart relationship. He is using the picture of marriage to illustrate the covenant relationship God wants with His people.

How can this love relationship between God and His people be developed? How does the Spirit help us experience the love of Christ?

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

⁶“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. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For 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. ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹I 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. ¹²While 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. ¹³“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. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified (John 17:6-19).

Jesus now prayed concerning the importance of the Word of God He had spoken to the disciples (vv. 6-8). Twice He prayed that He had given the disciples the Word of God (vv. 8 and 14). The importance of the Word of God should not be underestimated. In the Middle Ages, as the Scriptures were translated into the language of England and Germany, all hell broke loose to ban the Bible’s publication and keep it chained to pulpits and only spoken in Latin so that it could not be understood by the common people. Satan sought to keep the people in bondage to a form of religion apart from the light of God's Word. Today, the invisible evil powers can no longer stop the Word of God being published into many languages, so our enemy strategizes to keep the common people so busy that they do not have time to read, meditate and grow in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

At one time, only one wage was needed to sustain a whole family and provide for their needs. Now, we need everyone, including the dog and cat to go to work in order to put food on the table and pay off our mortgages! Although the Word of God is more readily available to people today in most countries, so much media bombards us that it often obscures the Word of God. We need

to be aware that the primary objective of Satan to drown out the Word of God in whatever way he can. How important is it to you to hear God's Word? **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (v. 17)**. These eleven men had heard the Word of God and obeyed His Word (John 17:6).

How important was the ministry of the Word in the early days of Christianity? When a dispute arose among the Greek speaking Hebrews against the Jews living in the land of Israel, that their widows were not being fairly treated concerning the daily distribution of food, the apostles refused to give more of their time to properly administrate and oversee such things, instead they formed a committee to choose seven men to oversee such things, saying, **“We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4)**. They saw that the most important thing in the life and growth of the church was that its leaders were to be men of prayer and to continue teaching the Scriptures. Many churches in these modern days are expecting their pastors to be CEO's when the need is for them to teach the Word of God. The blessing and anointing of the Spirit will be on churches that have an emphasis on those two areas of their ministry.

Jesus then prayed about the protection of the disciples. He said, **“protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:11)**. In the days when the Old Testament was written, names were sometimes given to express things happening at the time. For instance, during a battle with the Philistines, when the High priest, Eli, and his sons all died, and the Ark of the Covenant was stolen, Eli's grandson born at the same time, was named *Ichabod*. Ichabod is a depressing name; it means *the glory has departed* (1 Samuel 4:21). How would you like to grow up with that name? Names were also given to express a person's character, such as the man who treated King David unkindly, a man by the name of Nabal, whose name means *fool*. How on earth did he get a name like that? How can a mother give a son that name? Would you ever name a baby boy *fool*? Was it a nickname that came later as his character was formed? We are told that his character was exactly like his name (1 Samuel 25:25). Jacob's name seemed to be given at birth, his name meant cheater, deceiver or swindler, and his character turned out just as His name described. No wonder that when the Living God finally confronted him and changed his heart and character, his name was changed to Israel (prince with God). What does the name of Jesus mean? It reveals something of the character of God. There is no letter *J* in Hebrew. The name Jesus in Hebrew is Yeshua or Yehoshua, which means Yahweh is Salvation, or Yahweh rescues. Jesus revealed the character of God and glorified the Father by His obedient act of self-sacrifice, the giving up of His life so His people could be saved.

Protect Them from the Evil One

Jesus then prayed in verse fifteen that the Father would protect us, not by taking us out of the world, but by protecting us from the evil one while we are living in the world. **“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (John 17:15)**.

The Lord knew that His disciples would need protection from the evil one at work in this present evil world. It is a wonderful thing to consider that Jesus was praying not just for their protection, but also for all who would one day come to know Him! Remember, that God lives outside of time. In this prayer on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, if you are one of His disciples, He

was praying for you (v. 20). You were the object of His concern and prayer during that night. How awesome! I would like to share a personal story of God's protection, which I will never forget:

My father had a shipwright build a new commercial fishing boat for himself. It took more than three years to complete. As the 45-foot vessel was nearing completion the winter sprat season began with huge schools of fish to be caught off of the East coast of Harwich, Essex in England in the North Sea. We very hastily got the new boat in the water and right away hit a big school of fish. We caught around thirty-four ton of fish that day and began to fill both boats that we owned. The huge net was towed between two vessels, the Why Worry and my father's new boat, Jane Marie. As the Jane Marie got lower and lower in the water due to the hold being completely full and sprats piled up on the deck, the weather became bad with a Force eight gale of wind. As we headed for our homeport, the waves started coming over the rails of the boat due to how low she was in the water. We then realized that we had made a terrible mistake, we had cut no scuppers (holes in the hull at deck level) to let the water run off the deck.

As the waves came over the rail, the water had nowhere to go so the boat began to sink. The Jane Marie (named after my sister) had two forward compartments that had watertight bulkheads. The back half of the vessel was completely underwater, with the rail and the rollers that were on the stern rail completely underwater. It is a weird thing to be on the deck of a boat and the boat being under the water. The net that was on the deck was floating away as were the hatches from the hold. I kicked off my boots so that if my thigh boots got full of water, I would not be dragged under if the Jane Marie sunk. The engine room and the cabin were keeping us afloat, but we couldn't move due to the angle of the boat now no longer able to power us forward. The Why Worry had to tow us in. It was then I decided that I really needed to learn how to swim! I have always looked back at such incidents in my life and realized that God had angels watching over me to protect me.

**Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?
(Hebrews 1:14).**

The above passage talks about angels as serving spirits sent to serve those that will be heirs of salvation, future tense. Even before we came to Christ, the Father was at work in our lives to protect us, even though we had not yet committed our lives to Jesus. The Father, who lives outside of time and knows all things, knows all those who will respond to the call of the gospel inside of time, and protects them from the evil one. Jesus prayed for us that God would protect us. Each of us believers can look back over our lives and possibly see the Lord at work in our lives even before we were believers.

**Share with one another the different ways that the Lord has protected you from the evil one?
Does He only use angels to protect us? Share your stories with one another where you think the
Lord has intervened to protect you.**

Jesus said that we are to be in the world and yet not of the world (John 17:15-17). A Christian is to be like my father's fishing boat, as long as the water is on the outside, all is good, but any time the water starts to seep into the boat, things start to go very badly. The world is to be on the

outside of our lives. Once we start allowing the things of this world to be part of our lives, we start to lose our joy and peace.

Jesus Prays for Unity Among All Who Believe (John 17:20-26)

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that 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. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³I 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. ²⁴“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. ²⁵“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶I 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” (John 17:20-26).

Jesus prays in verse 21 that those who believe in Him will be one. Do you think this prayer will be answered before Jesus returns? If so, how do you think it will be answered? Why is unity among believers so critical?

I believe that unity among believers will be something that the Lord will accomplish in the Body of Christ in the last days. The spirit of the world is rapidly turning very anti-Christian. I believe that we will see a time when it will not matter among believers if you are a Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian, Vineyard, etc. What will matter is that you are making a stand for Jesus Christ at the center of your life and that you love the family of believers. It will be a time similar to what the early church experienced, when the believers experienced a unity of heart: “*All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers*” (Acts 1:14, ESV). It was due to this unity that the Holy Spirit came in great power on the Day of Pentecost. The English NIV translates the Greek word, *Homothumadon*, as “*They all joined together constantly in prayer.*” *Homothumadon* is a compound of two words meaning to “rush along” and “in unison.” The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. Being in one accord or being together in unity of Spirit is similar to the instruments of a great concert blending together under the direction of the concertmaster, the Holy Spirit, where the members of Christ’s church were devoted to Christ and one another. When there is unity in the church, there is a special presence of God in the midst:

¹How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! ²It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe. ³It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore (Psalm 133:1-3).

This is where, I believe, the Holy Spirit will lead the church of the Lord Jesus. The Lord will allow troublesome times to come so that we learn to lean on one another and on the Lord in the midst of our need. In that time of need, there will be great unity and love between brothers and

sisters of Christ. Unity of heart and mind for the purposes of the kingdom of God will be like the anointing that came down upon the High Priest Aaron when he was ordained. The presence of the anointing oil indicated the presence of the Spirit upon his life and it was there that the Lord commanded a blessing, even life forevermore.

When we look back at the history of the Church of Jesus Christ over the last two thousand years, we see a shameful record of Satan's work of division among us. One thing I know is that every prayer that Jesus prayed will be answered, for every prayer came from the Father's heart. Jesus said, "For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken" (John 12:49). We are living in the days when God will fulfill the prayer of Christ and bring unity to His Church. Maybe you would like to pray for the Spirit to bring that unity, the one credential to the world of the divinity of Christ's mission on earth: "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" (John 17:23).

Father, would you equip, train and empower your people to be all that we can be in the days in which we live. Use each of us to manifest the unity of the Spirit and prove to the world that you have sent your Son into the world to reconcile men and women to yourself. Amen!

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