

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 recalls the words and actions of Jesus as He prepared His disciples for the three days of grief at His crucifixion for and what would take place after His ascension to the Father. When they finished eating the last supper in the upper room, Judas got up and left, at which point John gives us the words of Jesus before they departed for the mile walk to the Garden of Gethsemane (14:31). Stopping somewhere near the temple, chapters 15 and 16 continue Jesus' last words of instruction as well as words of comfort. 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 arrest and crucifixion, He was concerned 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 His death at the hands of the apostate Jewish leadership. The Scriptures record that only one of the eleven disciples, the Apostle John, was there at the crucifixion. Chapter seventeen now takes us up close and personal as Jesus prays with them before the time of darkness begins. There are three parts to His prayer to the Father. In the first part, Jesus prays for Himself, verses 1-5. The second part focuses on prayer for the disciples, verses 6-19, and the last part is the Lord's prayer for all who will believe through many ages, verses 20-24. Let's focus on each piece of this most special 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 when He would greatly glorify God. At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, He said to His mother, “**My hour has not yet come**” (John 2:4). Three times also, in John chapter seven (vs. 6, 8, 30), He again shared that His time or 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 means, “heavy in weight.” In the Book of Exodus, Moses said to the Lord, “I pray you, show me your glory!” (Exodus 33:18). For what was he asking? Moses longed to see the brilliance, beauty, splendor, and majesty of the Lord this side of heaven. In the New Testament, the Greek word translated *glory* 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 a person possesses. When Jesus talked 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 Christ crucified for sinners.

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 enormous cost that He was willing to pay 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 eternal life. We are immortal souls living in the tent of the body:

For while we are in this tent, (our mortal 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 that 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 Holy Spirit enters our lives and begins His work of opening our minds and hearts to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and, at the same time, showing us what the Father is like. When we believe, it is more than an intellectual knowledge based on an understanding of the character of God; it is the beginning of a love relationship. When we understand the depth of God’s love for us, we respond by loving Him in return. 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 heart-to-heart knowledge that leads inevitably to the expression of that love by the act of sexual union. Unfortunately, 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, covenant relationship.

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)

⁶I 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^cI 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 that He had shared with the disciples (vv. 6-8, 14). The importance of the Word of God should not be underestimated. In the late fourteenth century, as John Wycliffe translated the Old and New Testament into the English language, all hell broke loose to ban the Bible's publication and keep it chained to pulpits and only spoken in Latin so that the ordinary people could not understand it. Satan sought to keep the people in bondage to a form of religion apart from the light of God's Word. Today, the supernatural evil powers can no longer stop the Word of God being published into many languages, so our enemy strategizes to keep the ordinary 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 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 we have little time reserved for its meditation. We need to be aware that the primary objective of Satan is to drown out the Word of God in whatever way he can. How important is it to you to hear God's Word? Jesus said that it was

God's channel or agency to transform the believer: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (v. 17). The eleven disciples heard, valued, and obeyed the Word of God (John 17:6).

How vital 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, i.e., that their widows were unfairly treated concerning the daily distribution of food, the apostles refused to give more of their time to administrate and oversee such things properly. Instead, they formed a committee to choose seven men to manage such situations, 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 crucial 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 CEOs 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 or aspects of a person's character. For instance, during a battle with the Philistines, when the High priest, Eli, and his sons all died, and the Ark of the Covenant 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? Jacob's name given at birth meant cheater, deceiver, or swindler, and his character turned out just as His name described. No wonder God finally confronted him and changed his heart and character; his name was changed to Israel, Prince with God (Genesis 32:28).

What does the name of Jesus mean? It reveals something of the nature of God. Jesus said in His prayer to the Father, "Protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me" (v. 11). In Hebrew, there is no letter *J*. 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, i.e., the giving of His life so His people could be saved.

Prayer of Protection for the Disciples 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 beautiful thing to consider that Jesus was praying not only 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, He was praying for you if you are one of His disciples (v. 20). You were the object of His concern and prayer during that night. How awesome! I want 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 forty-five-foot vessel was nearing completion, the winter sprat season began with vast schools of fish caught in the North Sea off of the East coast of Harwich, Essex, in England. We very hastily got the new boat in the water and right away hit a big school of fish. We caught around thirty-four tons of fish that day and began to fill both boats that we owned. The large net was towed between two vessels, the *Why Worry* and my father's new boat, *Jane Marie*. As we began putting the fish into the hold, the *Jane Marie* got lower and lower in the water with the hold full and sprats piled up on the deck. As the day wore on, the weather became windy with a Force Eight gale. 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 on the stern rail entirely underwater. It is a weird thing to be on the deck of a boat and the boat being under the water. The net 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. Our other boat, the *Why Worry*, had to tow us in. It was then I decided that I 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 help those who will be heirs of salvation, i.e., 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 who will respond to the call of the Gospel and protects them from the evil one. Jesus prayed for us that God would protect us. All 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 the different ways that the Lord has protected you from the evil one? Does He only use angels to protect us? Share your stories 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 was on the outside, all was good, but when the water starts to seep into the boat, things begin to go very badly. The world is to be on the outside of our lives. Once we start allowing the corrupting stuff of this world to settle into the inner part of our lives, we lose our joy and peace, and what's on the inside will flow to the outside: “What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them” (Matthew 15:11).

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

²⁰My 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, what must take place among believers for unity to become a reality? 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, 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 when the early church believers experienced 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; many 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 under the direction of the concertmaster, the Holy Spirit, where the members of Christ’s church are devoted to Christ and one another. When there is unity in the church, there is a unique 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).

Unity of heart, I believe, is where 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 the Lord amid our need. Unity of heart and mind for 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 forever.

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, i.e., 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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