

JESUS PRAYS FOR US

John 17:1-26

Key Verse: 21, "...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."

John chapter 17 is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. We are familiar with how Jesus taught his disciples to pray in what is called The Lord's Prayer. But this chapter is Jesus' own prayer. It is said that a lot can be known about a person by hearing how they pray. This prayer reveals the mind and heart of Jesus and how he viewed himself, his disciples and the world. Martin Luther wrote of this chapter: "This is truly beyond measure a warm and hearty prayer. He opens the depths of His heart, both in reference to us and to His Father, and He pours them all out. It sounds so honest, so simple. It is so deep, so rich, so wide. No one can fathom it."¹ This prayer has been called The High Priestly Prayer, since in this prayer Jesus intercedes for his disciples and for all Christians to come after them. We will study Jesus' prayer in three parts: Jesus' prayer for himself, Jesus' prayer for his disciples, and Jesus' prayer for all Christians. Let's all come to the place of prayer with Jesus and learn to love and trust him more.

First, Jesus prays for himself (1-5). Verse 1 tells us, "After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed..." Jesus had given his last words of instruction and promise to his disciples. Jesus finished with a word of confident triumph that overcomes sad realities: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (16:33). In Jesus, we too will overcome.

Now Jesus turned his eyes toward heaven and prayed. Jesus spoke to his Father, the only true God, calling him Holy Father and Righteous Father. Jesus prayed for his disciples to hear, the prayer of his heart. Jesus prayed: "Father, the hour has come." Jesus' time or hour has been a theme throughout this gospel. Jesus lived and worked on God's time schedule. He did everything in sync with the Father's will. Jesus listened to his Father carefully and did and said whatever the Father wanted. Now the time had come for Jesus to give his life on the cross as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. Jesus prayed, "Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." To glorify means to bring praise, honor and glory to. Usually we don't for ourselves to be glorified. In one sense this is a prayer that only Jesus could pray: "Father, glorify your Son," because everything Jesus said and did was to bring glory, praise and honor to his Father God. We learn here that our lives are meant to bring glory to God. When our lives bring glory to God, we are happy in our souls for we are fulfilling our true life purpose. Imagine for a moment that you set your life purpose to gain as much praise,

¹ Quoted in "John Chapters 11-21," J.Vernon McGee, 1991, p.119.

honor, glory and pleasure for yourself as you possibly can. Aren't those the very people that you despise and do not want to be like? Who wants their tombstone to say, "This person received much glory in this world"? Wouldn't you rather have it say, "This person gave away much in this world"? Isn't that more glorious, desirable and beautiful?

Jesus' prayer "Glorify your Son" was not selfish. In fact, Jesus prayed this to save others. Look at verse 2. "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him." Jesus received glory and authority from God the Father not to lord it over people and demand their obedience. Rather, Jesus received glory and authority to give eternal life to all those who trust and obey him. What is eternal life? It is not an eternal extension of earthly life, with all its sorrows and regrets. Verse 3 defines eternal life for us: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Eternal life is not an eternal extension of worldly life. Eternal life is knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent.

To truly know the only true God is to believe, trust and love him, knowing that he sent Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Savior of the world, the Bread of Life, the Light of the world, the Gate, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the True Vine. Jesus Christ is the Holy One of God who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Do you know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent? Have you trusted him? More importantly, do you trust him now? If so, and I include myself here, then we have a high responsibility and privilege to share this message of salvation with others who still need to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

Jesus continued: "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do." What was the work that the Father gave Jesus to do? It was to reveal the only true God through his words and works. It was to show the world that God is living, God is holy and God is love. It was to die for us to take away our sins.

In verse 5 Jesus prayed, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus is eternal, one with the Father.

Second, Jesus prays for his disciples (6-19). In this longest section of his prayer, Jesus focuses on his disciples. There are many things that Jesus said about and prayed for his disciples. Rather than going through every verse in detail, let's consider five things briefly: (1) they accepted Jesus and his words, (2) they belong to God, (3) they will remain in the world, (4) they would be protected, and (5) they would be sanctified.

(1) Jesus' disciples accepted Jesus and his words (6-8). Jesus said that his disciples obeyed his word, they accepted the words that Jesus gave them, and they knew with certainty that he came from the Father and the Father sent him. Basically, they accepted that Jesus and his words were from God. Jesus was not an imposter or fraud, nor was he a deluded humanitarian. Jesus is the anointed King and Savior sent from God.

(2) Jesus' disciples belong to God (6,9,14,16). Jesus said several times that the disciples belonged to the Father and the Father gave them to Jesus. "They were yours; you gave them to me" (6). Jesus also said of 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" (14). We know the disciples were still weak and still had much growing and maturing to do. Still, Jesus said that they were not of the world, but that they belonged to God.

(3) Jesus' disciples would remain in the world (11,15,18). Jesus was leaving the world and going back to the Father. But his disciples would remain in the world. Jesus did not pray that they would be taken out of the world (15). Rather, Jesus was sending them into the world. The Bible warns us about being attached to the world since it is in opposition to God. At the same time, the Bible commissions Jesus' people to be salt and light in the world, to preach the good news and to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

(4) Jesus' disciples would be protected (11,12,15). Jesus prayed twice in this prayer for his disciples' protection. While he was with them, Jesus had protected them and kept them safe by the name of the Lord. Jesus prayed for their protection from the evil one. The devil is not a myth. The devil works to slander, accuse and destroy. The devil causes division, strife and hatred. Then what is our defense? It is the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord is mighty. The name of the Lord is our refuge. Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

(5) Jesus' disciples would be sanctified (17,19). Jesus prayed for his disciples, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." To sanctify is to set apart for a holy purpose. Priests and temple objects were sanctified or consecrated to serve the holy God. Jesus' disciples are set apart for God by the truth of his word and the work of the Holy Spirit (Ro 15:16; 1Co 6:11).

Humanly speaking, it looked like Jesus had failed in raising disciples. In just a few hours all the disciples would scatter in fear. Even Peter would deny Jesus. But Jesus was thankful to God the Father and said that glory had come to him through them (10). He had complete confidence that the work of God that had begun in them would be carried

on to completion. He knew there would be opposition from the world, from their own sinful natures and from the devil. But he knew that they would be protected by the name of the Lord and sanctified by the word of truth. In Jesus there was no sense of failure or defeat. Even Judas Iscariot's betrayal was actually a fulfillment of Scripture. God was not taken by surprise. The work of world salvation would be accomplished through Jesus Christ and his disciples would be the ambassadors and messengers of this good news.

Third, Jesus prays for believers to come (20-26). Now is the interesting part for us, because it is here that Jesus prays for us, that is, believers to come. Look at verse 20. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message..." This refers to all believers in Jesus Christ, for it is through the message of Jesus' first disciples that the message of Jesus Christ has been passed on down to the present day. Did you know that Jesus prayed for you? Not only that, but he continues to intercede for us as our advocate and high priest. Hebrews 7:24-25 says, "...because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

So what did Jesus pray for us? It's in verse 21, "...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." Jesus did not pray that every person on earth would hear the good news, though that is a noble task and prayer. Jesus did not pray that all our enemies would be destroyed, though that could be quite helpful. Jesus did not pray that we would have a comfortable life, sort of like a divine "Take Care!" or "Best of luck to you all!" Jesus did not pray that we would have great success or win the lottery and impress the world, though again, that would be quite nice!

So what did Jesus pray for us? "That all of them may be one." One, like the Father and Son are one. Not one and the same person. Not cookie cutter versions of each other, all speaking and moving and dressing alike. That's uniformity. We don't need to wear a uniform. Jesus meant unity, which is one in purpose, spirit and love. Jesus repeats this prayer for oneness in verse 23: "I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity."

Wow! Complete unity! This echoes Jesus' new command: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love another" (Jn 13:34-35). Why did Jesus pray this? He explains the reason why twice in these verses. Verse 21: "so that the world may believe that you have sent me," and in verse 23, "Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Do you remember back in verse 9 that Jesus prayed, “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world...” If this made you think for even one second that Jesus doesn’t care about the world, then think again. Because twice here Jesus wants the world to believe. And how does he want them to come to believe? Not through their hard work, though hard work is good. Not through their prayer meetings, though prayer is good. Not through their private meditations on God’s word, though that is also good. Jesus wants the world to see him through his followers—that is, through those who believe the message of Jesus Christ. And what is it that he wants them to see?

[church picture – filler during P Kevin reflection] That they are one. That they deeply love one another like brothers and sisters. Maybe even more than brothers and sisters. Like spouses or children. Like closest family members. Inseparable friends. Friends, how are you doing...in that oneness, and love? Can Jesus say that his prayer is answered in you?

This really challenges me in my goals as a Christian. There was a time that I kept a list of all the people I brought to Bible study or church in one year. I can’t remember my best year, but it was about 40 people. I felt like that was a justification of my whole Christian life. I thought that I showed myself to be a Christian by bringing many people to church and Bible study. I’m not saying that’s bad or wrong. But I see here that that is not the most important thing. I must ask myself: “What am I doing practically to be one with my fellow Christians, beginning in my own church, and even with other church members?”

It seems to me, based on Jesus’ prayer, that Jesus will be most impressed not by the biggest churches or even those who invited the most people to church and Bible study. Jesus will delight in those who loved the most. Jesus will be happy with those who were the most “one” with other believers in him. I grew up in a Roman Catholic home. I regard myself as a Protestant evangelical. At least that’s the way I study the Bible and worship and identify myself. But one impressive thing about the Catholic church is that it has not divided into thousands of denominations like Protestantism. I’m not saying that all Protestants should merge into one denomination. But all too often minor differences between churches is what divides them. Are we one in Jesus? Growing up I knew a song: “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, and we’ll pray that all unity may one day be restored. And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

All Christians are, in fact, one in Jesus. We call this the Church Universal. This body of Christ consists not of one particular denomination but of all people who know and love Jesus Christ and trust him as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus has two more things to pray. Look at verse 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.” Jesus has invited his people to his place to be with him in glory.

Jesus concluded in verses 25-26, “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.” The greatest blessing of all for believers is to have Jesus’ love and Jesus himself living in us.

We heard Jesus’ prayer. Jesus prayed to glorify the Father. Jesus prayed for his disciples to be protected from the evil one and sanctified by the truth. And Jesus prayed for us to be one in the Father and the Son and one in each other. May the Lord’s prayer for us be fulfilled and manifested in us. Amen.

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