

1. Jesus Prays

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- [0 : 00] Well, friends, I'd like to read to you from John's Gospel, chapter 17. And if you'd like to turn to that in the big Bibles, you'll find it on page 903.
- So John's Gospel, chapter 17, on page 903. I won't today read the whole of the chapter, but I'll read the first 19 verses of this great prayer that Jesus prayed.
- John, chapter 17, beginning at verse 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.
- Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you. Since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.
- And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.
- [1 : 14] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence, with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.
- Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you.
- For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them, and have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.
- I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.
- And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.
- [2 : 18] While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost, except the son of destruction, that the scripture might be fulfilled.
- But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
- I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth.
- Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.
- Well, may the Lord bless to us this reading from his word. Now, my plan, God willing, is to take this great 17th chapter of John's Gospel in three parts.
- [3 : 32] First of all today, and then in the last two Wednesdays of this month, on the 18th and the 25th of April. Now, John chapter 17, you'll be well aware of this from my reading of it, is a prayer.

And it is by far the longest of the prayers of Jesus, which is actually recorded for us and set down in the pages of the Gospels. But what a prayer it is. He prayed this some 12 hours or so before he was put up on the cross.

And as we listen to this prayer, we are in a sense eavesdropping on a small part of the great conversation between God the Father and God the Son.

So this prayer gives us a moment of insight into the relationships that operate within the Holy Trinity. How precious it is, therefore. I wonder if you ever eavesdrop on snippets of other people's conversations.

I do occasionally. I rather enjoy it. Out in the streets, perhaps, or in a train. People are so interesting, aren't they? But it's usually a disappointment, isn't it, to eavesdrop on snippets of other people's talk.

[4 : 38] Just a sound bite on the weather. Or how many goals the Partick Thistle goalkeeper let in last Saturday afternoon. Not necessarily world-shattering things are revealed. But to eavesdrop on what the Son of God has to say to his Father.

That is wonderful. And we are being allowed to listen in to this conversation. In fact, the Lord has caused this conversation, this prayer, to be written in the Scriptures for us.

He wants us, therefore, to read it and to think about it. Now, this prayer, as I say, was prayed at a critical moment in Jesus' life. And at this moment in John's Gospel, he is with the eleven apostles.

Judas has already departed and gone into the night to do his business. But he's there with the eleven and nobody else. And they have just had the Last Supper on this evening before the crucifixion.

And as the Last Supper comes to an end, and it's recorded in John's Gospel in chapter 13, Jesus then speaks at length to his disciples. And he gives them what you might call an extended tutorial.

[5 : 42] A long teaching session, which runs from the last few verses of chapter 13 right through to the end of chapter 16. Now, this is a block of teaching which is designed, clearly, to prepare the disciples for life after Jesus had left them, after he'd gone back to heaven.

So he tells them in this great block of teaching about the Holy Spirit, who's going to come to them as the new comforter or strengthener, who will teach them how to live their lives and what to say. He teaches them to love one another.

He teaches them to obey his commandments and to abide in his love and, not least, to be prepared for the persecution and hatred of the world, which will inevitably come to them.

And then finishing this, chapter 17, verse 1, when Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said. So this prayer follows the long teaching session.

And then as soon as the prayer is over, at the beginning of chapter 18, Jesus leaves the upper room where they've had the supper and then with his disciples he crosses the Kidron Brook, he goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and is soon arrested and taken to the high priests and then to Pontius Pilate and then the events unfold that lead to the crucifixion.

[6 : 58] So that's the setting of this 17th chapter. It is Jesus' final preparation in prayer for what lies ahead. Not only the cross, but he looks in this prayer beyond the cross too and he's praying for his disciples as they begin their ministry, which is nothing less than the evangelisation of the world.

Now the prayer falls quite neatly and handily for me into three sections. First of all, verses 1 to 5, where Jesus prays for himself and that's the section we're looking at this afternoon.

And then we have verses 6 to 19, where he prays for his disciples and then verses 20 to the end, where he prays for the future worldwide Christian church. So friends, let's put our best reading glasses on and we'll focus on verses 1 to 5.

Now what is it? What is it that Jesus is praying for in these few verses? What is he asking the Father to do for him? Well, quite simply, he is asking the Father to glorify him.

Look at verse 1. Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son. And again in verse 5. And now, Father, glorify me.

[8 : 11] That's the heart of the prayer in verses 1 to 5. Now does it seem odd that the Lord Jesus, who is characterised by his humility, should seek his glory at this point?

We might be tempted to think, isn't this rather self-seeking of him? Wouldn't it be more appropriate for him to be content with remaining humble? Well, to think like that would be to misunderstand him.

Glory is his prerogative. It is his right. To be glorious, to be splendid and radiant, that is the truth about him. Because glory is his eternal nature.

You know that lovely Caribbean, I think it's from the Caribbean, that Christmas song that we sometimes sing, He comes from the glory. He comes from the glorious kingdom. I won't get you to sing it, but you know the thing.

And it's right, isn't it? He comes from the glorious kingdom. So he prays for the glory to be restored to him that he had with the Father before the world existed.

[9 : 12] That's the way he puts it in verse 5. So glory is his birthright. Glory is his native element. He is the King of Kings. We recognise this in the shorter catechism, that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

And of course, if we're to glorify God, that applies to the Lord Jesus as well. When believers see him in the end, he will be glorious. We shall see his glory.

And we too will be glorious if we're believers, because we shall be made like him. No longer shall we have these present lowly bodies, which are subject to heart trouble and arthritis and all manner of decay, as you know very well.

On the contrary, we shall be glorified with him if we belong to him. That is the true destiny of Christians. So when he prays here to be glorified, he is praying that the veiling of his true nature, and his glory was veiled, wasn't it, for those years on earth, he's praying that that veiling should now be removed, that his glory, as it were, should be reinstated, and that the universe should once again see it and know it and acknowledge it.

Now let's notice our Lord's motive in asking to be glorified. His motive, do you see, is that the Father should be glorified. There it is at the end of verse 1.

[10 : 36] Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you. So his own glory is not Jesus' ultimate goal. His further goal is that the Father should be glorified through the Son's glory.

How he loves the Father, therefore. Because love desires honour for the one who is loved. A husband who loves his wife longs to see her honoured, and he hates the idea that she might be dishonoured.

Love longs to honour the loved one. And Jesus prays that as glory is given to him, so his Father should be glorified as a result.

Earlier in John's Gospel, in chapter 5, Jesus speaks of all people honouring the Son just as they honour the Father. So the Son's glory brightens the Father's glory, enlarges it, and vice versa.

So of course it is right that Jesus should be glorified. How could we wish that his glory remained veiled? I remember when I was a young leader years ago on a Scripture Union boys camp in the south of England.

[11 : 48] We used to have a prayer meeting every evening for the work of the camp, the summer camp. And so all the leaders, old and young together, would gather round and we would pray for about 20 minutes or half an hour. And I remember one particular prayer that the senior leader of our boys camp prayed.

He was quite an elderly man at the time and he'd been a warrior for the Gospel for many years. I quite forget what it was that he asked the Lord for in this prayer. But as he sat there in his chair with his hand over his head like this, he finished his prayer by saying, he did not say we ask it in Jesus' name.

He prayed, we ask this Father so that the name of Jesus should be covered with glory. Amen. I shall never forget that. I thought to myself, this senior man, he knows a thing or two about the Lord which I have not yet learned, that the name of Jesus should be covered with glory.

So that is what you might call the bottom line of Jesus' prayer in verses 1 to 5, that he should be glorified so that the Father should be glorified.

But he goes on to explain a great deal about how the Father's glory is revealed. It isn't simply revealed in some great shining forth, some dramatic and splendid self-revelation.

[13 : 08] No, it is revealed, the Father's glory is revealed in action, in historical action, in his wonderful saving of men and women. So it is as the gospel plan is unfolded in history that the Father's glory is revealed.

And we see this in these five verses in two ways. First of all, we see the Father's glory in verse 2, in the gracious authority that is given to the Son.

And secondly, in verse 4, in the great accomplishment worked by the Son. And we'll look at these in order. First of all, from verse 2, a gracious authority given to the Son reveals the Father's glory.

Let me pick it up partway through verse 1. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

Now, have you got that? It's not easy to follow, is it? It's a very difficult sentence, but it is possible. So forget everything else and put your nose in verse 2 for a moment and we'll try to follow what the Lord is saying here.

[14 : 18] Well, we discover from the first part of verse 2 that the Father has given Jesus authority over all flesh. That means over every human being. That authority is not inherent in Jesus.

It has been given to him by the Father. In John's Gospel, the authority of Jesus is always a derived authority. And what does this derived authority enable Jesus to do?

Well, the next part of the verse tells us his authority enables him to give eternal life. To everybody, without exception?

No. Rather, to all whom the Father has given to the Son. The language of John's Gospel uniquely describes Christian believers as those whom the Father has given to the Son.

Now, you only find it expressed like that in John's Gospel. But just think of what it means. It is very wonderful. It means that if you are a Christian, if you belong to Christ, the Father, in eternity, has made a gift of you to Jesus.

[15 : 30] So he's not given Jesus gold or silver or jewels or armies or stock exchanges or golf courses. He's given him you if you're a Christian.

Isn't that wonderful? And once you are given by the Father to Jesus, what happens next? Well, verse 2 tells us Jesus then gives to you eternal life.

So verse 2 is recording two supreme gifts. First, a gift from the Father to the Son and that gift is you if you're a Christian. And then secondly, a gift from the Son to you and that gift is eternal life.

So the Father gives the Christian to the Son, the Son gives eternal life to the Christian. Therefore, if you're a Christian, what is the most important thing about you?

What can you rejoice in most about your life? Well, let me ask what people like us might be tempted to rejoice in greatly or even to boast about.

[16 : 35] One person might say, my ancestor was the MacDonald of the Isles. Or somebody else might say, my father built ships on the Clyde for 40 years.

No one knew more about shipbuilding than my father. Or someone like me might say, I'm a lob of the lobs of Cornwall. The name means a clodhopper, by the way. So I could say, I'm an original Cornish clodhopper.

We could take pride in all sorts of human things, couldn't we? The prowess of our ancestors, the noble deeds of our parents and our grandparents, even our own achievements. But all that is trashy stuff compared to the reality here in John 17 too.

If you are a Christian, the reality of your existence is that the Father has given you as a precious gift to his Son and the Son has then given to you eternal life.

Who's bothered about Cornwall if he belongs to the new creation? If you're a Christian therefore, brother or sister, rejoice in your real identity.

[17 : 39] And if you're not yet a Christian, come to Christ today. Don't put it off, even for 24 hours. You might step into eternity this very afternoon under the wheels of a Glasgow City bus.

Mightn't you? Come to Christ while you can and you'll discover that you have been given eternal life by the Son of God. So, there's the first way in which the glory of the Father is revealed in the gracious authority given to the Son by which he gives eternal life to those whom the Father has given to him.

Now, second, the Father's glory is seen in the great accomplishment worked by the Son. Look with me at verse 4. I glorified you on earth, says Jesus, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

I glorified you on earth. So, Jesus is referring here to everything that he has done during his earthly ministry. He's speaking, therefore, of his matchless teaching.

He's speaking of the example of his shining integrity, the attractiveness and loveliness of his life. He's referring, too, to his miracles, the astonishing foretastes, as they were, of the power of the world to come, the dead being raised, the sick being instantly healed, demons being mastered and thrown out, the very forces of wind and storm being instantly subdued by him.

[19 : 08] So, he's referring there to everything that he has done. And he's saying in verse 4 that in all these works he has glorified the Father. All these things have heightened the honour and praise of God in the eyes of men.

So, men and women have seen Jesus at work and they've heard him speaking and they have said, isn't God wonderful? Now, I think as well that verse 4 also includes the work of the cross, even though the cross still lay before Jesus.

The fact is that at this stage, on this Thursday evening, he was so deeply resolved to go through with it that he was able to speak of it as something already accomplished, even though it wasn't going to happen for a few more hours.

And of course, accomplished or finished was the very word that he used on the cross moments before he died to describe the way in which the job of bearing and taking away the sins of the world was now done.

And to know that he accomplished the work given to him by the Father, that is a great comfort to us. Just think again of those events, especially Good Friday. He sidestepped nothing.

[20 : 20] As Isaiah chapter 50 puts it, he set his face like a flint to go to Jerusalem, knowing full well what awaited him there. Isaiah says that he gave his cheeks to those who pull out the beard.

He did not hide his face from shame and spitting. And then finally, he allowed those Roman soldiers to hammer great four-inch sharp iron nails through the very flesh and sinews of his wrists and his ankles.

he then allowed them to hoist this hideous gibbet upright and drop it into the hole in the ground that had been dug for it. And then later, hours later, just before he died, he cried out, accomplished, done, paid for.

That's what he meant. He went through with it. And that was the moment, verse 4 is saying, when the Father was glorified. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

Isn't it strange that the glory of God was revealed through that horror? But it's true. We look back on that Friday, the most horrible Friday of all Fridays, and yet we rightly call it Good Friday, the best Friday of all.

[21 : 43] And we glorify God because of it. We sing about that Friday. Preachers preach about that Friday all over the world every day of every year. We thank God for that Friday because we know that without it we would be lost forever.

The events of Good Friday have bought our eternal salvation. Without that Friday, all of us would be eternally condemned. but because of that Friday, whoever comes to Christ, whoever, however great that person's burden of sin and misdeeds may seem, that person will be saved and forever.

So the Father's glory is seen, verse 4, in the great accomplishment that Jesus completed on earth, and verse 2, in the gracious authority given to him to give eternal life to all his own.

But let's look finally now at verse 3 because verse 3 gives us perhaps the most clear, concise description and definition of eternal life to be found in the Bible.

Here it is. And this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

[22 : 59] who are the they of verse 3? Well, it's the they of verse 2, the ones given by the Father to the Son. In other words, all who are believing Christians.

Let's notice what Jesus omits from this definition of eternal life. He says nothing here about it going on forever, though of course it is everlasting. The Bible makes that quite clear, but it's not emphasized here.

And Jesus says nothing about the pleasures of eternal life, though we may be sure, especially when you think of the way it's pictured as a banquet in the book of Revelation, it will be overflowing with joys and delights.

What he focuses on here in verse 3 is the very heart and soul of eternal life, the central focus of interest in the world to come, and that is to know the Father and to know Jesus Christ.

Now let's allow our jaws gracefully to drop open at this point. Isn't this the greatest joy and privilege to know that we can know the Father and the Son?

[24 : 10] I asked my young daughters the other day who in the world, either living today or perhaps in past history, they would particularly best like to know or meet. I think suggestions were the Queen, Helen Keller, Winston Churchill, and one or two others whose names are forgotten.

Well yes, it would be very interesting to know people like that, wouldn't it? But the Christian is able to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom the true God has sent.

And this knowledge begins now. We don't have to wait for the new creation. Our knowledge of God begins here during our earthly life. If you're a Christian, you can truly say, I am coming to know the Lord better and better.

Now just set this knowledge of the Lord in the context of other knowledge. Just think of the accumulated knowledge that there is represented in all the heads and brains of the people in this building this afternoon.

How many people are here? 150 or more? 200? I don't know. Average age about 49 and 3 months I should think. Now just think of what all of us together know about the life of our world.

[25 : 24] I imagine here we have both still working and retired. We have teachers, engineers, architects, lawyers, doctors, nurses, office staff, clerks, mothers who have brought up bucketfuls of children.

We've got accountants and chefs, careers officers, information technology experts, musicians, photographers, sound engineers. We've got gardeners, we've got interior decorators, we've got librarians, we may have one or two PhD students, we may even have some breeders of budgerigars.

What a lot of knowledge is packed into the massed brains of the people here in the lunchtime congregation of St. George's Tron. But the most important knowledge open to us is none of that.

It is rather to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. So friends, let us vigorously make use of every opportunity to get to know him better.

Let's devour our Bibles like ravenous men. Half a teaspoonful twice a week will never be much use to us, will it? Let's listen to tapes and CDs of good Bible preaching.

[26 : 38] Let's join Bible study groups in our churches. Let's pack into our churches Sunday by Sunday to hear the word of the Lord. Let's read books which will open up to us the depths and riches of the scriptures so that our big aim in life, our big aim, is not to work hard or to bring up a family well or to live as a model citizen, though those are all excellent secondary aims.

Our big aim in life is to know the one who made us and to know the Saviour whom he sent and who loves us so deeply. This is eternal life as it begins this side of the grave and beyond it gets much better.

And although eternal life is so wonderful for Christians and so much to be enjoyed, even eternal life is set by Jesus in this much bigger picture and much bigger context whereby most important of all is the glory of the Lord Jesus and to him more important even than his own glory, is the glory of God the Father.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. And this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Our dear Heavenly Father, we rejoice in this amazing privilege that it's possible to enjoy eternal life, that sinful men and women who have behind us a whole catalogue of sins and misdeeds in our lives can yet be forgiven because of the death of Jesus on the cross and can now come to know you and to know him.

[28 : 32] So please, dear Father, open up to us this knowledge and our prayer is that our life and our life's purpose from now on may be above all to know you, to live for you, to adore you, to delight in you, to spread the news about you to others, and then in the end to see you face to face.

And all this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Friends, do stay and enjoy refreshments. Stay as long as you like. Have a chat.

Thank you. Thank you.