

The Immortal God's Bucket List

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Preacher: Stephen Ballingall

[0 : 0 0] Now this evening, Stephen Ballingall is going to be preaching to us, and we're beginning a short series in one of the center chapters in John's Gospel, John chapter 17.

So, do turn with me there, we're going to read together now. We're looking particularly this evening at the first part of this chapter. We're going to read the whole chapter because it all fits together.

We're going to spend, as I said, the next three weeks looking at this, and it will be very good for us to have this chapter well imprinted in our minds. I'm going to read just the last little bit of chapter 16.

Jesus said, In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

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.

[1 : 1 3] And this is eternal life, that they know you, 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.

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 have given me out of the world, you as 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'm praying for them. I'm 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'm glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I'm coming to you.

[2 : 4 1] Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. 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. And that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I'm 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.

[3 : 48] And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me.

And love them, even as you love me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given to me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Your righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know, that you have sent me.

I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me, may be in them, and I in them.

[5 : 24] Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us, his word. Well, good evening everyone, and please do have John chapter 17 open in front of you, as we go through this wonderful chapter together.

Last year, a film was released called Nowhere Special. It's not that well known, it's not a blockbuster, but it was based on a true story. In the film, the lead character is a single dad.

He's a window cleaner from Northern Ireland, who finds out that he has a terminal illness. And even though his impending death isn't directly spoken about much in the film, you don't even find out what illness he has, its weight is felt upon every single scene.

It's what drives the story along, as he spends the whole film in search for a family to adopt and care for his four-year-old son. Because of that, the director gave the actor playing the father, he gave him a small black rock to just put in his pocket while he was filming, which represented his death.

So even when it wasn't directly addressed, when it wasn't in the dialogue or mentioned in the scene at all, he would physically feel the weight of death in his pocket as he was acting every scene.

[6 : 51] And every decision he made would be made deliberately in light of that. If we're going to understand what Jesus is praying here and how the disciples felt about what was happening, then we need to feel the weight of that small black rock in our pockets.

We need to feel with every word that he prays to his heavenly father that Jesus is going to the cross. He's been in public ministry for three years now and all of that is coming to a climax in the time around our passage because Jesus knows that his time has come and he is ready to die.

The hour is a regular fixture in John's gospel. Up to chapter 12, Jesus repeatedly says that the hour has not yet come, that it's not time for him to be glorified. But something changes at the beginning of chapter 13.

John writes that Jesus knew his hour had come to depart out of this world to the father. And this sets in motion the rest of the narrative in John's gospel.

Jesus knew that his hour had come. He knew that Judas was going to betray him. And he knew that in 24 hours time his lifeless body would be hanging from a tree.

[8 : 11] So knowing that, knowing that he was about to die, Jesus decides to spend the evening with his friends, with his disciples, having the last supper with them, which we read of in John chapters 13 through to 16.

This prayer we're looking at tonight is the culmination of all that Jesus has expressed in those chapters in his farewell discourse. Everything he says in this prayer, everything he says in this chapter, can easily be found in the preceding chapters, as this functions as the closing points on the most interesting dinnertime chat of all time.

And for the disciples, the main headline, the bombshell that Jesus drops, is that he is leaving them. He's going.

And they feel the weight of that. The disciples are shell-shocked and they can't quite get their heads around why Jesus has to leave. How could he be abandoning them when they were just starting to pick up momentum?

How could they keep going without him leading them in person? Jesus knows that. And it's that situation that he is addressing in his prayer.

[9 : 23] With the weight of his impending death, casting a shadow over every word. John 17 splits neatly into three sections. Firstly, Jesus prays for himself in verses 1 to 5.

That's what we're looking at this week. Then in verses 6 to 19, he prays for his disciples. And finally, in verses 20 to 26, he prays for his church through the ages.

So what is Jesus doing here? His disciples are worried. They're confused. And they don't want him to go. So how does he want to impact them as they say a hearty amen to all of this?

That's the core question we need to be asking over the next three Sunday evenings. How does Jesus want to impact his disciples and us through this prayer? In a word, reassurance.

As they were stepping out into the night to see their saviour arrested and killed the next day, facing all the hostility that came along with it, they were to be reassured that God would be glorified in everything that took place.

[10 : 37] He wanted to remove the disciples' fear and worries by giving them a deeply reassuring window into the Trinity, into God himself. This isn't just a one-way prayer.

None of our prayers are. Jesus isn't just praying into thin air going nowhere. And he's not exclusively speaking to his disciples around him. But he is praying to his heavenly Father.

So we get a look into what the eternal word made flesh, Jesus in his human nature, speaks about with his heavenly Father. We're looking into the mind of God.

And in the content of this prayer, Jesus is reassuring the disciples that God will be glorified through everything that was going to unfold, not just in the next few days or weeks, but through the rest of history.

God would glorify himself through the Son's work, through the Apostles' message, and through the united witness of his church. His gospel was going to have incredible success.

[11 : 44] Through that, God would be glorified as he brings people in to see his glory through a transforming relationship with himself. The prayer is evangelistic in every verse, for it seeks the glory of God made known in sinners being joined to him and receiving eternal life in the name of his Son.

That's a reassurance for the disciples as they were about to continue witnessing to Jesus in the world which had just crucified him and would treat them with great hostility.

And what about us? How does John want us to be impacted as we say amen to this? We are not disciples, but we have many of the same worries and concerns. We too are living in a world which crucified Christ, and those same powers are still alive and thriving today.

We feel the pressures of that acutely, from neighbours who think that we're fundamentalist maniacs, to schools putting pressure on our young people to conform to a way of thinking that we don't agree with, to other churches and others who profess to be Christians, saying that we should be far more focused on things other than the gospel, like social action or climate change.

That's what Jesus was really on about. And we too are living without Jesus by our side every step of the way. But we can be reassured that through everything, God's going to do what he said he will.

[13 : 17] He will glorify himself through all that he does, and we will have the privilege of sharing in the well-trodden path of glory with him. Well, let's get stuck into these verses.

We're just looking at the first five verses of our chapter this evening, which we'll look at in three sections, which, with each of them giving us a different aspect of God's glory. Firstly, in verses one and two, we see the glory of the cross.

And here we see that as Jesus approaches his death on the cross, his eyes are firmly fixed on bringing glory to God. We often speak about glory in the church, but it can be one of those words we use that just goes over our heads after a while.

So we should bring in some experts to help us. And in this case, football fans know quite well what glory means. They're not my first point of reference for most points of theology.

If I have a question about the atonement, I don't plan on asking the fine gentleman at a partic thistle match. It's Fur Hill for thrills, not theology. But football fans might be onto something when they talk about their club or their country getting glory.

[14 : 28] At Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, they have emblazoned on the side of the pitch in huge letters for all their players and fans to see this phrase. It says, the game is about glory.

And the players and the fans know what that means. For them to get the glory, they need to play the best football, be recognized as the best team and win the biggest games.

With the fans singing their praises and the rest of the world recognizing just how good they are. So even their fiercest rivals would wish that their team played like that.

They want their team to be established as obviously and undeniably the best team in the world and for everyone to know that. And Jesus is deserving of that kind of glory, of worldwide universal appreciation and adoration.

It's exactly what he deserves. He deserves to be seen as the one who has conquered death and who has won a people for himself at the cost of his own life.

[15 : 34] His glory isn't seen in some impressive victory in worldly terms, but is seen at the cross. His glory is seen as he was nailed to a cross taking the punishment for sins that he didn't even commit.

His glory that he rightly deserves is well earned through his faithful, obedient will to lay down his life for his friends. Not in a stadium with everybody chanting his name, but on a dusty hill outside the camp being mocked and ridiculed as his life slipped away.

This is his glory as he completed his gospel work. He was glorified on the cross. And Jesus' purpose in asking to be glorified is so that his father is glorified.

Glorify your son, verse 2, that the son may glorify you. Christ is a completely selfless glory. He wishes to bring glory to his heavenly father so that he is seen as God recognized for who he is, the creator, the redeemer.

And Jesus' glory is seen most clearly in the way in which God saves his people. And he wants his father to be glorified in it. That's the purpose of glory, that the father would be glorified.

[17 : 02] God. As God acts, he reveals himself. And as he reveals himself, he saves. It's striking that when Moses back in Exodus asks to see God's glory, God responds not with a great scene of bright light and impressive power.

He doesn't move a mountain or part the sea again, but he responds with a statement of how he has saved his people. When God reveals his glory, he says to Moses that he is the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

God's glory is seen in who he is and how he saves and how he reveals himself in that. One commentator helpfully puts it like this.

He says that the cross becomes the visible visible presentation of the redeeming love of God. In the anguish of the cross, we see the lengths that God will go to for the sake of saving his people and we see his great glory in that.

And Christ's basis for asking for the glory is seen in his next prayer. Verse 2, he asks for glory since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

[18 : 25] This suggests that the Father in full knowledge of the Son's perfect obedience has decided to grant him the authority to give eternal life. The Father has granted this to Christ based on the foreknowledge of his perfect obedience through his glorification on the cross.

And the purpose of that authority is so that he may give eternal life to all who believe in him and obey him. That purpose is dependent on his obedience to the will of the Father.

If he were disobedient then he would not have had the authority to grant life to us and his sacrifice would have been unacceptable to the Father. This starts to show us how Jesus is always looking outwards.

He wants to be glorified so that his Father in heaven is glorified. And he wants to have this authority so that he may give eternal life to all who believe in him.

The world we live in it doesn't look at the cross and see glory. It doesn't. It looks at the cross and comes away with a whole range of reactions.

[19 : 34] It thinks it's weak. It's unnecessary. It's the sign of a failed Messiah or any other number of things. And even some within the church say worse that the cross is an act of cosmic child abuse that it's barbaric.

Or they might swing in the other direction and just reduce it to being an act of love meant to inspire a more loving nature among people. The message of the cross just be nice. But let's remember that as we look at the cross of Jesus we see nothing less than the glory of the triune God in action.

We see God reveal his nature to us in his act of salvation. It's not a low point it's nothing to be ashamed of but it's the highest point of human history so far as God's glory is seen in his son taking on the form of a servant and obediently following his father's will even to the point of death.

If you want to know what God is like look at the cross and you will know him you will see his glory in action. Jesus' glory is seen in how he has bought eternal life for those who trust in him but how are people going to see this glory for themselves?

How will God be glorified in the world today? That leads us on to verse three where we see God's glory made known God's glory made known and in this verse we see that God's glory is made known through real relationship with Jesus.

[21 : 13] Follow along verse three with me. And this is eternal life that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Before we get into what this means it's worth saying that this isn't just a random explanation of what eternal life is. Jesus isn't just giving us the dictionary definition because it's helpful to have although this is a perfect explanation of what eternal life is.

But how does it link with what Jesus is already praying for? Well Jesus is showing how he makes God's glory visible to people. There's a reason that when you think about Easter you see your salvation meanwhile your neighbours only see chocolate eggs and extra bank holidays.

The reason is that they don't know God so are utterly incapable of seeing his glory for what it is. We need Jesus to bring us into relationship with the Father so that we may see appreciate and worship him.

Jesus is showing us how the glory of God lands in the life of real people of real believers. Now we're going to see two aspects about this life that Jesus speaks of that it's both relational and restricted.

[22 : 35] So firstly eternal life is relational. Very simply knowing God brings eternal life. To know God personally and intimately brings transformation to a person and introduces him to eternal life that he could not otherwise experience.

It's all about who you know. I'm sure we've all heard that or experienced a bit of rank nepotism in the workplace at some point. You know the situation there's a colleague who is underqualified absolutely terrible at their job wildly incompetent rude to the rest of the staff as well known as lazy and turned up to the office drunk and trouserless on one occasion.

But they never get fired because they just happen to share a last name with the boss. And they might even just happen to be the boss's son. So they coast along without the fear of being punished because the boss is too enamored with his wee boy to ever think he could be bad at his job.

And that understandably makes us angry because the person isn't being punished as they deserve to be. But in the Bible it really is all about who you know.

Because any kind of meritocracy would leave us unable to stand in judgment deserving of death. It's only because of Christ's perfect obedience that we can be thought of as righteous in the eyes of the Lord.

[24 : 01] We are miserable sinners who repeatedly fail the Lord again and again who fail to give him his due, fail to give him the glory he deserves. Yet we know the father.

We are in relationship with him and are united to his son by his spirit. So he sees us as being righteous in his eyes. Father, son, and Holy Spirit are all working as one to bring our salvation into effect by bringing us into relationship with God himself.

Secondly, eternal life is restricted. The way in which people receive eternal life is by coming to know God the Father through the Spirit, uniting us to the Son.

That is the only way, and it's something that Jesus has said earlier in the same evening when he said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Salvation is exclusively found in Christ, and it's one example of how everything we see in this prayer, in this whole chapter, draws on what Jesus has already shared with his disciples that evening, in chapters 13 to 16.

Because of his obedience, he is the one with authority to give eternal life. So of course it's only through him that salvation comes. Knowledge of God is eternal life.

[25 : 30] To know him is to have eternal life, and that only comes through knowing Jesus. He's got the keys. He's got all authority over all flesh. Our world wants to disagree with that.

Claims that salvation are only found in one person, in the person of the Lord Jesus, well they are hated in a pluralist society. But we have to be willing to bite the bullet on that and tell our neighbours that their religion is false.

Submitting to Allah and following Muhammad doesn't bring you into relationship with God the Father. Being a generally good person doesn't bring you into relationship with God the Father.

Going to church at Christmas and Easter doesn't bring you into relationship with God the Father. Just believing that there's a God of some sort doesn't bring you into relationship with the Father.

only through knowing Christ may we know him. And that's offensive in the culture we live in but it must be said because without it people are facing judgement without a leg to stand on, without Jesus pleading their case based on what he has already done.

[26 : 46] This will naturally cause offence in our culture and our neighbourhoods and our families. there will be hostility that results from standing firm in Christ.

The only way we may see God's glory and be in everlasting union with him is through the Holy Spirit uniting us to his Son and trusting in Jesus name. That's the only way we'll see and share in God's glory in the new creation and it's the only way anyone we ever meet will see and share in God's glory too.

that's what Jesus prays for in verses 4 and 5 too as we see the glory of the crowd. And here Jesus is looking forward to his glorification as it will return him to what he has always been, the eternal word dwelling with the Father in glory forever.

Cast your eyes over verse 4 with me. I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. Jesus is speaking before the cross knowing that his obedience is such a sure and certain thing that he can speak of it as already being done.

God the Father sent his Son to live as a man for this time and to die on the cross as the payment for sins so that we might know him and receive eternal life in his name.

[28 : 11] And Jesus did that. He took on flesh, he lived among us, he ate, he drank, he got tired, he slept, he grew in strength, he grew in wisdom, he cried, he spoke, he had friends, he consoled them, he encouraged them.

He did all these things. The eternal word of the Father took on all of this so that his Father would be glorified. Often we as Christians like to think that Jesus' sole motivation and the incarnation and going to the cross was love for us.

And he does love us a great deal. He still loves us more than any other person could and we take great joy in that. But this passage makes clear and helps us to see that his priority in doing so was to bring glory to his Father.

His primary motivation for doing everything that he did, for obediently submitting himself to a human frame and all its weaknesses and limitations and submitting himself to death on a cross was so that God would be glorified.

And since he has been faithful to his Father's will, verse five, Father glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

[29 : 29] Jesus wants to return to his former glory dwelling with his Father in heaven where he belongs. That's his goal. His mission doesn't just end at the cross but is continued as he sits at the right hand of his Father forever.

Jesus is right now seated at God's right hand, ruling over all creation with all authority over all flesh. That's why even though the disciples were deeply worried about Jesus leaving and not being with them in person anymore, it was far better that he left.

Because he wasn't just in one place, limited to a human body, as a man who gets tired and needs to sleep, spending his time with a small group of people. Instead, he is right now reigning at the right hand of the Father, ruling over all creation with all authority.

That's where his hour of glorification ends. It starts as Jesus humbly and obediently approaches the cross and ends with him ascended in glory, sitting at the right hand of the Father, with him being seen to be what he is, the one deserving of all glory and all praise.

And it's on this basis, the basis that Jesus is seated on the throne at the right hand of the Father, that he can go on to say everything else he does in this prayer. He makes some very big claims that we'll see over the next two Sundays.

[30 : 55] But it's because he is the glorified son with authority to give life that he may do those things, that he may keep and care for and unite his church to himself.

We'll see that over the next couple of weeks. As we close, how should this section of Christ's prayer impact us today?

He's praying for himself, so what can we learn from his prayer as he approaches death? Well, we can learn firstly that even in the most unlikely situation, God will be glorified.

The disciples had just heard this prayer for the glory of Jesus and they very, very quickly lost faith that he was going to deliver on it. They scattered and deserted him as soon as the world was hostile to them.

They denied him and lost all faith that he would deliver on his own promise to rise from the dead. But we can take comfort that despite those circumstances, God was glorified.

[31 : 57] He knew what he was doing all along. Jesus died on the cross and the disciples abandoned him. But God was faithful to his plan of calling out people for himself and he was glorified through it all.

That's a comfort to us as we live in a world which is so anti-gospel and in which the church seems to be losing more battles than it's winning. When I'm reading the news anyway, I don't come away from it encouraged by the big strides that the church seems to be making in Scotland or further afield.

I tend to read more of churches giving up the gospel so that they can be liked by the world, liked by the cool kids, caving into the pressure to conform to the world they live in. Or I'm hearing of ministers falling below the standards we would expect of them.

It doesn't look quite glorious, does it? But we can trust that God will be glorified through everything. Jesus is right now seated, ascended, seated at the right hand of the Father, receiving all glory and praise in heaven.

And that's only going to increase. And we know that one day he will return as judge and savior to make all things new. And then all will see how righteous, how mighty, and how worthy of praise he is forever.

[33 : 22] There is great future glory for Christ and for all who love and belong to him. However, that doesn't mean that there is no glory today for Christians.

The pattern isn't no glory now, glory later. If we boil down God's glory to that, then we're being far too simplistic. The biblical pattern is glory in the midst of real suffering now and even more glory later.

Glory without the caveat of our own sin and fallenness and shame. For Jesus in his human life was glorified even when he was experiencing suffering at its worst.

In fact, he was glorified uniquely then. In the midst of the greatest suffering and injustice the world has ever witnessed. He was glorified and his father also.

That's why, as we'll see next week in verse 10, Jesus says that he's given his glory to the church. It's the glory of belonging to him, following the same pattern that he did, and being hated by the world.

[34 : 35] We, as we faithfully live for Christ in a hostile world, we share in his glory, bringing glory to God and pleasing our heavenly father as we do so. You might not feel like your life as a Christian is all that glorious as you go about sharing the gospel with your neighbors to varying degrees of success, as you live for Christ at work, and as you teach your Sunday school class when you feel like they're just not paying attention.

It might not feel all that glorious. But you are living as one brought into relationship with the king of glory himself, who was glorified as he took on a human frame like yours and obeyed the will of his father even to the point of death on a cross.

Your obedience is not exactly the same as Christ's, but as we faithfully live for him in a world that hates us, God is glorified.

We, as Christ's people, have the privilege of sharing in God's glory through that. That's why Christ's prayer is a great challenge to us too.

Since we worship the glorified Christ, our greatest priority must be to see him glorified. It's to be evident in our prayers and our lives also.

[35 : 59] So it leads me to ask you one question. What are you doing with your life? What are you doing with your life? You might not be approaching your end soon, but it is coming.

It is unavoidable. And what do you want to do before you die? We may not feel the weight of it, but we all carry that little black rock in our pocket, weighing us down.

For all of us will one day be called home. Our days are numbered. It's so easy for us to become stagnant as Christians, to lose focus in our service, lose focus in our prayer life, and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, and standing as a witness to him in a hostile world.

So when you get up in the morning, what's the first thing you think about? You know, after you've washed your face and had some coffee and your brain starts functioning. What is the first thing you think about?

What are you trying to do with your day? What are you trying to achieve? Are you parenting for the glory of God? Are you studying for the glory of God?

[37 : 17] Are you praying for the glory of God? Is your marriage for the glory of God? Are your friendships for the glory of God?

As Jesus approached his own death, God's grace for the glory of God. He was laser focused on what was most important, the glory of God. Let's pray for and encourage one another that we will all keep on looking to God's glory, seeking to live for him in our day-to-day lives.

If we all do that, then here, we as a church will be bringing great glory to our Savior who loves us.

Are you living for God's glory? Father God, we praise you that your son who displayed your glory by humbly submitting himself to death in the cross, before being raised and ascended, sit at your right hand.

Please, Father, conform us to his likeness so that we live not for the glory of our name, but your name. Help us to bring you glory in our church, in our families, and in everything we do.

[38 : 53] We know that in our own strength, our prayer should not be heard by you, that we cannot stand in your presence because of our sin and guilt, which is why we ask all these things in the name of our great and gracious Savior, Jesus, for your glory.

Amen.