

“Jesus’ Prayer”
John 17:1-26
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John 17 is called the “High Priestly Prayer.” Jesus had been teaching the disciples about prayer and its power in the previous chapters, and now He Himself prays. This is called the greatest prayer in the Bible by many and it’s great for these reasons:

1. Great because of the person who prayed it -- the Son of God who came to earth in human, but sinless flesh.
2. Great because of the occasion that demanded the prayer -- Jesus knew the cross lay before Him.
3. Great because of the petitions contained in the prayer -- one for Himself, seven (7) for His followers. It was divided into three parts. Vs.1-5 Himself; vs. 6-19 for the disciples; and vs. 20-26 for the whole church. In it He made four requests which could be summarized as glory--security--sanctity--unity.
4. Lastly, it was great because of the victory it can give us today. Jesus closed His teaching in the Upper Room with the words of John 16:33, “In this world you will have tribulation/trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” In His prayer Jesus used the word “world” 19 times! The world is the system of things you and I used to belong to before we were saved.

It’s a world deceived into thinking one religion is just as good as another. It will accept the cross as a religious symbol, but it has no concept of the Person of the cross or the purpose and power of the cross. It’s a world that is dangerous and defiled . . . seeking to ensnare the believer with every kind of temptation.

We can’t overlook the fact that it is also a divided world. Even saints have a hard time getting along with each other. We want to put labels on each other, quarrel and generally ruin our testimony before the critical watching world. One of the messages of John 17 is to show us how to overcome the world.

One of the important things about our personal study of John 17 is that it should make a difference in our daily lives. One of the tests of whether or not we are personally benefiting from this study is to ask ourselves these questions:

- “What is my attitude toward the world?”
- “Am I being deceived by worldly attitudes that rob me of the joy and reality of Christ in my daily living?”
- “Am I putting myself into a place of danger that could ruin my testimony, my work, my home?”
- “Am I secretly being defiled by the world?”
- “Am I creating unbiblical divisions instead of encouraging spiritual unity?”

We answer those questions privately, but we must remember . . . we are not blessed for our studying of the Word, but for our doing of the Word.

The first three verses of this prayer set forth the background out of which the prayer arises -- a background of danger and death. It was uttered just a few moments before Jesus left the Upper Room and, with His disciples, went down into the dark valley of the Kidron. Continuing across onto the slopes of the Mount of Olives, He found His way in the darkness of the night into the Garden of Gethsemane. To that garden Judas came with the guards and took Jesus prisoner and began the series of events that would lead to Pilate's judgment hall and to the cross.

As Christ prayed for His own glorification, He asked that His glory be manifested in three ways -- on the cross, in heaven, and in the church. Both Christ and the Father would be glorified on the cross because the cross would supremely reveal their nature and purpose.

To use a phrase like "My time has come" is resignation, but what Jesus has in mind here is realization. This is the hour He has been looking forward to all His earthly life, the hour to which He continually refers throughout the Gospel record.

This anticipation was based on the principle, as He put it, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This is why His hour had not come before: Jesus knew God's work is never accomplished apart from the principle of death.

Beyond the cross, Jesus knew, lay the glory of God. In Hebrews we read that He endured the cross, despising the shame of it, knowing that beyond it lay the joy which He was awaiting. Beyond the cross lies glory, but the only way to it is through the cross.

We need to apply this concept to ourselves. Such hours frequently come to all of us. We call them disappointments, setbacks, tragedies, perhaps. But if we see them as Jesus saw them, we will recognize that each moment like this is an hour of great possibility which, if we will act on the principle of giving ourselves away, we shall discover is an open door to the realm of service and blessing and glory.

It is significant that Christ did not ask for power to die or a lightening of the load. Neither did He ask for encouragement. He was not afraid of the cross with its suffering . . . He saw only a means of glorifying God. If he completed the work successfully and fulfilled the plans made in eternity before the world began, heaven would resound with the praise of His Father's name!

The idea of giving is important in this prayer. In vs. 2 three remarkable gifts are mentioned.

1) The Father gave the Son authority. It was decreed that, because the Son would suffer and die, He would be granted authority to give eternal life to those who trust in His name. The death of Christ was not an accident; it was an appointment. It was the willing offering of the Son of God on the cross for the sins of the world. Jesus Christ is the only One the Father has authorized to be the Savior of the world. The Father also gave Him the authority to judge. Those who will not receive Him as Savior must face Him one day as Judge. The fact that He ministered in a human body here on earth helps qualify Him as judge. No man can ever say, "You don't know what we experienced." Our Lord knows fully because He is the Son of God and the Son of Man.

2) Secondly, the Father gives people to the Son. Theologians call this the doctrine of "divine election." God the Father has decreed that God the Son shall receive a people -- the church -- because of His completed work on the cross. God the Son is the Father's love gift to a lost world, but the church is the Father's love gift to His beloved Son.

All three persons of the Godhead are involved in our salvation. What God ordained in eternity must be worked out in time. We may be “chosen” from the beginning for our salvation, but we are also called through the human instrumentality of the preaching of the gospel. The same God who ordains the end (salvation to lost sinners), also ordains the means to that end; and that is where prayer, witnessing, good works, and the gift of God’s grace all come in. If we deny God’s divine election, then we make salvation the work of man. However, if we deny human responsibility, then we make man a mere robot.

As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). I knew nothing of that choice. As far as God the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross; for He died for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). This is the message of the Gospel ---the good news that sinners can be saved. One Sunday I heard Ben Merold preach and I trusted Jesus Christ as my Savior and I was saved. So as far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, I was saved on June 4, 1978 when I responded to the Spirit’s call.

3) Thirdly, the Son gives eternal life to those who are given to Him. What is eternal life? Certainly it is more than extended life -- living forever, because even the lost will live forever, separated from God. Eternal life is not endless time . . . it is God’s own life shared with us starting now. What are the essentials of this life?

There can be no light without light (John 1:4) -- “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

Nor can there be life without breath (John 20:22) -- “He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Water is another essential for life (John 4:14) -- “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”

And a fourth essential is food (John 6:35) -- Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.”

In John 17:3 our Lord explained eternal life in terms of “knowing God.” It is only when we yield to Jesus Christ that we get to know the Father in the experience of eternal life. What are some of the things we know about eternal life?

1. It is the most expensive gift ever given -- it cost Jesus His life.
2. It is an eternal gift -- it doesn’t wear out or break down, it just gets better and better as the years go by.
3. It is an essential gift -- everyone needs it. If you could give a gift to everybody in the world, what would it be?
4. It is an expressive gift -- it is given as an expression of the Father’s great love for us.
5. It is an exclusive gift -- only Jesus Christ has the authority to give eternal life to those who trust in Him.

If we say that we know God and have received the gift of eternal life, it carries with that great knowledge, a great responsibility. Are you sharing the good news of this free gift with others?

The Lord Jesus asked just one request for Himself: “Return to the glory He had before the world began.” If there is any verse in the Bible which single-handedly and unmistakeably reflects the deity of Jesus Christ, it is this verse. Isaiah reminds us that God does not share His glory with anyone less than Himself. (Isaiah 42:8) “My glory I give to no other.”

What was going on before the world began? We know that Jesus existed as eternal God. He shared His Father’s glory. He was part of God’s eternal plan of salvation. He accomplished

a finished work on the cross and returned to His rightful glory at the right hand of the throne of God.

There are some important things to notice about the Word of God as we read vs. 6-10. The fact that Jesus called the Word of God “truth” is evidence of its’ divine origin. The Bible is not just true . . . it is truth. The Word is a gift from God that generates faith, reveals Christ to us, and gives us assurance. The disciples received the Word of God and believed. We need to think about the fact that the way we treat the Bible is the way we treat Jesus Christ, for He is the Living Word (John 1:1) and the Bible is the written word. If we ignore or neglect God’s Word, or if we treat it carelessly, we are admitting to God that His Son is not important in our lives. Study of the Word is never wasted, because the Holy Spirit of God can remind us of it when we need it. He does not give us new revelation, for the divine revelation is settled once and for all in the Scriptures, but He does give us divine illumination as He shows us new truths and new applications of old truths. The Christian who studies his bible is not searching for truth as much as he is searching into truth.

As Jesus continued His prayer for His disciples, we notice that he made seven requests on their behalf . . .

1. vs.11 keep them that they may be one
2. vs.13 that they might have My joy
3. vs.15 keep them from the evil one
4. vs.19 that they might be sanctified
5. vs.23 that they might be made perfect
6. vs.24 that they might be with Me where I am
7. vs.24 that they might behold My glory

The first thing that draws our attention is the plea that Jesus utters for His disciples, “Holy Father, keep them in Thy name . . . that they may be as one as we are one.” To be sure, Jesus was praying for His disciples specifically, but our spiritual oneness in Christ makes us a part of that fellowship.

Today the emphasis is on individual salvation. But even though faith in Christ is personal and individual, union with Christ involves all believers. That individual believer becomes a part of the Body of Christ, the church; and his life from then on must reflect that fact. The spiritual unity of believers is an important theme in this prayer. But more and more we seem to be living in the book of Judges where “every man is doing what is right in his own eyes.” Over-emphasis on personal salvation makes us lose sight of the grandeur and glory of God’s church. He is building us together and the glory and greatness of our personal salvation is but a reflection of what God is doing corporately in and through His church. The more we know of God, the more we are drawn to Him and the more we should be drawn to one another.

We need to comment on the “one doomed to destruction/perdition” which was, of course, Judas Iscariot.

If Jesus knew from the beginning that Simon would become a rock, He certainly knew that Judas would become a traitor. Why then did He call him to be a disciple . . . because it was the will of God. Nobody, including God, forced Judas to betray Jesus.

Jesus made it clear that Judas never believed on Him (John 6:64). He made it clear that Judas had never been cleansed, that means he had never been saved, for salvation means being washed clean from our sins. (Revelation 1:5)

Jesus made it clear that Judas had never been chosen in election grace (John 13:18). That Judas had listened to John the Baptist and submitted to John's baptism of repentance is clear from Acts 1:21,22. Apparently, he did nothing while a disciple that even hinted at his true spiritual condition, nor did Jesus give any hints. If anything, Jesus did all He could to rescue Judas.

When you read the account the Last Supper, you can see how Jesus tried one last time to get Judas' heart. True to Jewish custom, Jesus kissed Judas and the other disciples when they came to the Passover Feast. He even gave Judas the seat of honor at His left. He washed Judas' feet. He gave Judas the token of friendship, the sop dipped in bitter herbs. Until the very end, Jesus protected Judas and gave him every opportunity to repent. The only ugly thing in the Lord's prayer of John 17 is the mention of Judas because he despised and defiled his special privileges.

What are some practical lessons we can learn from the tragedy of Judas Iscariot? Judas is a warning against allowing sin to grow in our lives. Sin comes in as a guest, then becomes a friend, and finally a master. He is an example of what can happen when people half-heartedly follow Christ and are not fully trusting in Him. Judas was not committing any gross public sins . . . he performed miracles and preached sermons, yet he died and went to hell. "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Finally, Judas reminds us how close a person can come to the truth and to salvation and yet be lost.

We have learned that the world is an important concept in John 17. We are 'in the world' to win people 'out of the world,' and we live with the glorious expectation of being taken from this world when Jesus Christ returns. Jesus Christ, Himself, provided for us the spiritual resources we need to overcome the world. His joy is our joy. Heaven is a place of all joy and no sorrow. Hell is a place of all sorrow and no joy. But this present life is a mingling of the two. The fact that Jesus could have joy in the midst of sorrow is assurance that we can have that experience too.

In vs. 15, Jesus speaks of keeping them from the evil one. The dangers awaiting the disciples were like those we face today. . . the danger of persecution, the danger of becoming weary in well-doing, the danger of backsliding, the danger of becoming spiritual autocrats (like those who lived preeminence among the brethren), and the danger arising from the evil scheming of Satan's followers. The Christian will always have to guard against these troubles in the world, but there is something else we must guard against . . . that is isolation, insulation and imitation.

We cannot isolate ourselves from reality. Both Joseph and Daniel became great men of God while living in pagan societies. While it is beneficial for us occasionally to "get away," -- to have a spiritual retreat -- it is not beneficial for us to stay away. Our place is in the world, fighting the world system, and seeking to win people to Jesus.

Neither can we fall back and insulate ourselves from the world. The priest and the Levite were willing to walk down the Jericho Road, but they were not willing to share the plight of the half-dead man at the side of the road. Because we no longer just hear of wars and rumors of war, but we see the actual battles on TV, we have desensitized ourselves. It is folly not to care about the havoc Satan is wrecking upon the world we live in.

So staying involved and active in the world is important, but we must also guard against imitation. The popular word "contemporary" can cover a multitude of sins, not the least of which is blatant imitation of the world. But history convinces us that it was when the church was least like the world that it did the most to change the world.

In verse 19 Jesus prayed that they might be sanctified. What is the difference between justification and sanctification? **Justification is the sovereign act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner while he is still in his sinning state.** It is something God does. Sanctification is the act of being set apart -- apart from sin and apart to serve the living God. Within every justified soul there still remains a corrupt principle we call the “flesh” which continually prompts us to sin. The eradication of this sinful urge is the process of sanctification.

Sanctification is both absolute and progressive. Absolute sanctification is by the one offering of Christ’s blood on the cross for sin. Progressive sanctification is done by the Holy Spirit and God’s Word.

Sanctification by the blood of Christ is ETERNAL and positional. It puts us “in Christ.”

Sanctification by the Holy Spirit is INTERNAL.

Sanctification by God’s Word produces EXTERNAL results and refers to the believer’s outward walk and ways. It shows to others how the Holy Spirit is working in one’s life and goes on progressively all through life.

Ray Stedman says, “When Jesus says to the Father, ‘Father, sanctify them,’ He means, ‘Lord, make these men and women fulfill the ideal that you have for them. Put them to their proper use. Let them find the reason they were born. Bring them to the place where they discover your program for them. How? By the word of truth.’”

Some believers practice a negative kind of sanctification. They are separated from sin, but not separated unto service. The Pharisees practiced a negative separation. They majored on “Thou shalt not . . .” but they lacked the positive fruit of the Spirit which are those God-like qualities that enable us to minister to others.

True sanctification is balanced: we are set apart for God that we might be sent out by God on behalf of others.

In the closing portion of His prayer, Jesus emphasizes the matter of spiritual unity. He had mentioned it before, but now it becomes the burden of His prayer. Bible and church history bear record to the sad fact that believers do not always get along. Then the disciples argued with one another.

We must understand that our Lord’s prayer for unity cannot be fulfilled in some man-made organization. Putting groups together, regardless of what they profess to believe will not solve the problem. Disregarding doctrine and watering down everything to the least common denominator is not what Jesus had in mind. Doctrine is an essential part of unity: there is one Lord and one faith (Ephesians 4:5). The unity Christ had in mind is a spiritual unity that comes from within. He compared this unity with the oneness of the Father and the Son in their relationship in the Trinity.

The Lord gives us every encouragement for spiritual unity by reminding us of the bonds that tie us together:

We trust the same Savior (20,21)

We bear the same witness to the world (21)

We share the same glory (22,24)

We enjoy the same love (23)

The great objective of the church is so the world may believe that God the Father sent Jesus Christ. The church is left here so that the world may be convinced that Jesus Christ is the authentic voice of God; that He is the authoritative Word concerning what God intends to do in human affairs; that He is the revelation of the invisible God and the only way for man to see

God. Our task is not to save the world; our job is to bring an awareness of Christ so they may either accept Him and be saved or reject Him and remain in their lost condition.

Well, if that is the objective, then what is the strategy? That we may all be one. We should make Christianity so attractive that the world should be like homeless orphans with noses pressed up against the window longing to join the warmth and fellowship of the family circle. "Behold how they love one another" was the testimony of the early church which the world saw. It is significant that love is an important element in Ephesians 4:1-6, that major passage dealing with Christian unity. We need to speak the truth in love. Truth and love together build the Body of Christ.

In analyzing essential qualities of Christian love, we notice that there must be contact. We are to love each other simply because we are Christians, and we are not to be selective about it. Also, genuine love involves mutual concern. Every contact is to be marked by a readiness to help, to share, to listen, to pray -- a willingness to bear one another's burdens in the Lord and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We need a sense of contribution . . . we need one another and we minister to young and old alike. We should add one more thing -- love is not something we work up. It is given to us. It is in us by virtue of the fact that Jesus Christ is in us, but it does require our consent. The Lord is ready to love another through us anytime we are ready to let ourselves be the channel of that love.

When Christ reached the end of His high priestly prayer, He made no requests. He simply reaffirmed that the Father was righteous and that the Son had done what He was sent to do . . . reveal truth and love.

Truth has to do with doctrine. Love has to do with dynamic. Love is the greatest force for good in the world. If Christians do not learn to love one another, how will we ever learn to love the lost souls or even love our enemies? How can we claim to be "born again" and still refuse to love God's children? Christian love is practical . . . it expresses itself in words and deeds.

Christian love means that we treat other people the way God treats us. God has forgiven us, so we forgive others. God meets our needs, so we try to help meet the needs of others. God listens when we talk, so we listen when people speak to us. Christian love is seen in our attitudes, otherwise what we call love is just shallow sentiment.

Truth and love help to unite the mind and heart of the believer. The mind grows by taking in, the heart grows by giving out. As the mind receives truth, and as the heart shares love, we grow to be more like Jesus. It is our personal communication with Christ through the Word that enables us to balance truth and love.

So what do we learn that we can apply to ourselves in this prayer?

1. Everything God permits in the life of believers can be used to His glory.
2. Jesus Christ is the truth and we must love Him. We must cultivate a personal relationship with Christ. The Word of God is truth and, as never before, we need to be saturated with the Word. The Word enables us to see the world as it really is, and to avoid the snares the devil sets for us. We examine ourselves in the light of the Word and discover those areas that need spiritual therapy.
3. We must always speak the truth in love.

4. Knowing that we have been given the Son by the Father should motivate us to loving obedience. Knowing Jesus prays for us should encourage us to fight sin and be faithful to God.
5. Jesus finished the work the Father gave Him to do, but His church has not yet finished the work that the Savior gave us to do. Too often we are entertaining saints when we ought to be evangelizing sinners.
6. Unity allows for variety and diversity, but uniformity demands conformity. Unity grows from within; uniformity is forced from without. Spiritual unity does not come naturally to God's people, we have to work hard at it. But are we working hard enough?
7. How strange it is that we have so much Bible study and so little holy living. Christians today don't look for holiness as much as they look for happiness -- measured, of course, on the world's terms. If we could see this chapter as a personal call to holiness, the Lord would be glorified. Can one Christian make the difference? Yes! God does not call committee meetings, He calls individuals to overcome the world and glorify His name!