

Thru the Bible Commentary
JOHN 17

THE LORD'S PRAYER—JESUS PRAYS FOR HIMSELF

I want you to notice that it is not out of line nor even a mark of selfishness to pray for one's self. I believe that when you and I go to God in prayer, we need to get our own hearts and lives right with God. We need to get in tune with heaven, as it were. Every instrument should be tuned up before it is played. Before you and I begin to pray for others, we need to pray for ourselves. That is not selfishness; it is essential.

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee [John 17:1].

"These words spake Jesus." Which words? The chapters we have just read, chapters 13–16. Now He stops speaking to the disciples, and He speaks to the Father. Although He is speaking to the Father in this chapter, He is speaking to Him for their benefit—and for our benefit also. He is our great Intercessor today. We may wonder what He is praying for. Well, here it is. This is the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that He prays to the Father.

The prayer in the Sermon on the Mount is not really the Lord's Prayer. It is the prayer that He taught to the disciples. When Jesus begins with "Our Father," He means this for all the believers. However, Jesus calls God "Father" in a different sense. After His resurrection He said to Mary, "I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). In other words, "I have not yet ascended to *your* Father, yours by the new birth, and to *My* Father, Mine because of My position in the Trinity." Also, it could never be the prayer of Jesus to say, "Forgive us our debts, our sins." He never had any sins. He could not pray that prayer. By the same token, you and I can never pray this prayer of John 17. This is *His* prayer.

Apparently our Lord prayed this prayer as He was walking along. It says that He "lifted up his eyes to heaven," which means that His eyes were open. Of course we can pray without bowing our heads and closing our eyes. We can pray as we walk or as we work or as we drive.

Now notice His prayer. It begins, "Father, the hour is come." What hour? Well, the hour that had been set back yonder in eternity. As He speaks, the clock is striking the hour that was set way back in eternity, because He was the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. It was arranged back there; now "the hour is come." Remember that when He began His ministry at the wedding of Cana, His mother said to Him, "They have no wine." His answer to

her was, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come” (John 2:3–4). Now the hour has come, the hour when He will pay for your sins and mine. It is the hour when all the creation of God will see the love of God displayed and lavished as He takes your sins and my sins upon Himself and dies a vicarious, substitutionary, redemptive death for you and for me. And it won’t end there; it will go on to the Resurrection.

“The hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” The death of Christ will demonstrate that God is not the brutal bully the liberal theologians talk about in the Old Testament, but that He is a loving Father who so loves the world that He gives His only begotten Son. Then the Son will be raised from the dead, ascend back into heaven, and He will be given a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow to Him. “Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” Oh, the wealth of meaning that is here!

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him [John 17:2].

This is a startling statement. He has power over all flesh! He could make this universe and every individual in it bow to Him. He could bring us all into subjection to Him and make robots out of all of us. Although that is the last thing He would want to do, He has the power over all flesh.

The church is God’s love gift to Jesus Christ. So He gives eternal life to as many “as thou hast given him.” This brings up the question of election and free will, and I don’t want to go into that extensively. There are extreme Calvinists and extreme Arminians, and the truth is probably somewhere between the two. If God would somehow reveal to me who are the elect ones, I would give the gospel only to them. But God does not do this. He has said that whosoever will may come. That is a legitimate offer to every person. You have no excuse to offer at all if you will not come to Him. It will be your condemnation that you turned down the offer that God has made to you.

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent [John 17:3].

Does election shut out certain people? No. Life eternal is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Do you have a desire to know the true God and Jesus Christ? Then you are not shut out. You must be one of the elect. He gives eternal life to those who have heard the call and have responded down in their hearts. They have come to Christ of their own free will.

“That they might know thee.” It is not the amount of knowledge you have, but the kind of knowledge that is important. It is whom you know. Do you know Jesus Christ? In the same way, it is not the amount of faith you have but the kind of faith that is important. There is a song called “Only Believe.” Only believe what? Only believe in the only One, the Lord Jesus Christ. I quote Spurgeon again: “It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee. It is Christ. It is not thy faith in Christ, though that be the instrument. It is Christ’s blood and merit.” It is Christ who saves. One can believe in the wrong thing. It is the *object* of faith which is so important. “This is life eternal, that they might know *thee* the only true God, and Jesus Christ.” Now faith comes by hearing, hearing the Word of God. What does the Word of God say? The gospel is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. Those are the facts. Our knowledge of the facts and our response to that knowledge is faith. Faith is trusting Christ as our own Savior.

Life eternal is to *know* God and to *know* Jesus Christ. Jesus is His name as Savior, and Christ is His title—the Messiah, the King of Israel. To know Him means to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. When we move on in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, we come to the place of assurance. Anyone without the assurance of salvation is either unsaved or is just a babe in Christ. They need to move on to the place where they *know* that they are saved. Life eternal is to know the only genuine God and to know Jesus Christ. This is the reason that the study of the Word of God is so important. Many people stay on the fringe of things and are never sure they are saved.

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do [John 17:4].

The Lord Jesus is handing in His final report to the Father. He hasn’t died on the Cross yet; but, as far as God is concerned, He speaks of things which are not as if they are. Future tense for God is just as accurate as past tense. Our Lord Jesus is going to the Cross to die and then will rise again. On the Cross, He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). That means our redemption was finished. He has done everything that was necessary. We can put a period there. We cannot add a thing to His finished work. Therefore, the gospel of salvation is not what God is asking you to do, but what God is telling you that He has already done for you. It is your response to that which saves you.

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was [John 17:5].

In Philippians 2, it speaks of Jesus emptying Himself. Some try to teach that He emptied Himself of His deity. John makes it very clear that the Word became flesh. That little baby in Mary’s lap

is God, and He could have spoken this universe out of existence. He wasn't just 99.9% God; He was, and is, 100% God. So of what did He empty Himself? He emptied Himself of His prerogatives of deity; He laid aside His glory.

At Christmas we make a great deal of the shepherds and the angels and the wise men who came to see Him. Friend, that is not the way it should have been. He is the Lord of glory, and the whole creation should have been there; every human being on the face of the earth should have been there. People will come from all parts of a country and even all parts of the world for the funeral of a great political leader. The whole world should have been at the birth of the Lord of glory when He came to earth. Although He could have claimed such homage, instead He laid aside His glory. Now He is ready to return to heaven, back to the glory.

JESUS PRAYS FOR DISCIPLES

I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word [John 17:6].

Notice this: "to as many as thou hast given him" (v. 2); "unto the men which thou gavest me ... and thou gavest them me" (v. 6); "for them which thou hast given me" (v. 9); "whom thou hast given me" (v. 11); and "those that thou gavest me" (v. 12). We are back to the great doctrine of election. Jesus talked to the Father about it. It was a private conversation, but He wanted the disciples to hear it and to know about it. I don't know as much about election as maybe I should know. I've read Hodge, Calvin, Thornwall, Shedd, and Strong on the subject, and they don't seem to know much more about it. The reason we know so little about election is because it is God's side, and there are a lot of things that God knows that we don't know.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to listen to this prayer and to know that Jesus is at God's right hand talking to the Father about us. The Lord Jesus has talked to the Father about you today, if you are one of His.

There is a mystical relationship between the Lord Jesus and His own. They belong to the Father and were given to Jesus Christ. I can't fathom its meaning. What a wonderful relationship!

Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me [John 17:7-8].

The Lord had given them the Words of the Father. That is important. He had not given them property or money or an automobile, but the Words of the Father. Jesus testifies here that these disciples believed that He came from the Father. They knew who He was. They did not understand His purpose and certainly not His death and resurrection, but they had made tremendous advances during the three years they had been with Him. They knew He had come from God, and they believed that God had sent Him.

I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine [John 17:9].

I will make a startling statement which is no more startling than what He made: Jesus Christ does not pray for the *world* today. His ministry of intercession is for His own who are in the world. He doesn't pray for the world; He *died* for the world. What more could He do for the world? He has sent the Holy Spirit into the world to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Jesus Christ prays for His own.

And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them [John 17:10].

The whole purpose of our salvation is to bring glory to Jesus Christ.

And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are [John 17:11].

He prays for two wonderful things. He prays for us to be kept. You will be kept because you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and because your Savior is praying for you.

His other request is that we should be one. He prays for the unity of believers. He's not praying for an ecumenical movement or that we all join the same denomination. There has been much wrong teaching about this. First of all, He prays to the Father that His own might be one. Notice that He isn't praying to us or to some church authority; He is praying to the Father. And He prays that we should be one "as we are"; that is, as the Father and the Son are one. The Father has answered every prayer of His Son, and He has answered this one. There is an organic unity which God has made. The Holy Spirit takes all true believers and baptizes them into the body of Christ, identifies them in the body of Christ. The disgrace of it all is that down here the believers are pretty well divided. But there is only one true church, and every believer in Jesus Christ is a member of that church. It is called the body of Christ.

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled [John 17:12].

“Those that thou gavest me”—we have election mentioned again. There are certain things which I believe that to me are not contradictory, but they certainly are paradoxical. Election and free will happen to be one of those. I wish you could have met me when I graduated from seminary. I was a smart boy then and I even had the answer to election and free will. But I have a little more sense than I had then, and I realize that we simply do not understand it.

Judas Iscariot is, of course, “the son of perdition.” He fulfilled the prophecies concerning him.

And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves [John 17:13].

Friend, God does not want us to be long-faced, solemn Christians. He came that our lives might be filled with joy—His joy.

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world [John 17:14].

The Word of God causes problems in the world today. The Bible is the most revolutionary Book in the world. It is revolutionary to teach that you cannot save yourself, that only Christ can save you. And you can’t make this world better. Only Jesus Christ can do that. That’s revolutionary, and the world doesn’t want to hear that. They’d rather plant a few flowers and try to clean up pollution. The problem is that the pollution is in the human heart.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [John 17:15].

This really should read “from the evil *one*.” Again it is startling to note that He does not pray that we should be taken out of the world. God gets glory by keeping you and me in the world today. We think of the Rapture as wonderful, and it will be. We think of the Rapture as bringing glory to God, and it will. But let’s understand one thing: God gets glory by keeping you and me in the world. If you knew Vernon McGee like He knows Vernon McGee, you’d know it is a miracle for God to keep me in the world. We long for the Rapture. In Revelation 22:17 it says that the Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” The Holy Spirit is weary of this world, He is grieved. He says, “Come.” We also are weary, and we who are the bride of Christ say, “Come.” But Jesus prays not that we should be taken out of the world, but that we should be kept from the evil

one, Satan. And I wouldn't want to be here for a minute if my Lord weren't keeping me from the evil one.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could really learn this lesson? We cry and whimper because things are hard down here. Sure they are. He said they would be hard—"but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). I suspect that every twenty-four hours there is a great hallelujah meeting in heaven, and the angels say, "Isn't it marvelous that McGee is still being kept. It would be so easy to take him out of the world, but it is a real miracle to keep him in the world." If we could learn that, it would enable us to endure more easily our problems and tensions and difficulties and temptations. The Lord Jesus has prayed to keep us in the world and to protect us from the evil one.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world [John 17:16].

The measure in which we as believers realize this, the more completely we fulfill His will and accomplish His purpose.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth [John 17:17].

Sanctify means to set apart. The believer is not of the world; he is set apart. The thought has reference to the task rather than the person; it is a commitment to the task. The believer is set apart by the Word of God. That is, the Word reveals the mind of God. As you read the Word, you are led to set yourself apart for a particular ministry. We can serve Him only as we know His Word and are obedient to it.

As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth [John 17:18–19].

We have been sent out into the world to bear a witness. He sets Himself apart to be identified with us, and we ought to be identified with Him in this world.

JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS CHURCH

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word [John 17:20].

He had you and me in mind. Now, many centuries later, we can know our great High Priest is praying for us.

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me [John 17:21].

This prayer has been answered. The church is an organic unity. Believers are one in Christ, for the church is one body. The minute any sinner trusts Christ, that sinner is put into the body of Christ. If believers would manifest that union to the world, the world would be more impressed with Christ. Too often the world sees believers hating each other which may well be one of the reasons they will not accept Christ.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me [John 17:22–23].

“I in them, and thou in me.” How wonderful! Only the Spirit of God can accomplish that. The unity that exists between the Father and the Son is the unity that is to exist between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ! “And hast loved them, as thou hast loved me”—means that God loves *you* as much as He loves the Lord Jesus Christ. That boggles the mind!

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world [John 17:24].

It will be heaven to be with Him in perfect fellowship. I take it that this was God’s purpose in creating man. There are other creatures in the universe and on the earth, but God made man a creature with whom He could have fellowship. God created man with a free will; and, even though man sinned, God wants his fellowship. Heaven is going to be wonderful, and it will be important that every one of His sheep is there with Him. Each one will have his contribution to make.

To behold the glory of the Lord Jesus will be the satisfaction of the believer. Moses asked to see the glory of God. Philip asked to see the Father. Sometimes we get a glimpse of glory in a rainbow or a sunset. Think what it will be when we come into His presence and behold His glory! That is the goal to which we are moving.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me [John 17:25].

Being sent from the Father actually embraces His entire mission of redemption. Anyone who is a believer knows that the Father has sent Him, and the purpose was for Him to die for our sins.

And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them [John 17:26].

The last thing He mentions is that His love might be in our hearts and in our lives. We talk so much about grace and about faith, and rightly so; yet the great desire of His heart is that His love should be manifest in the lives of those whom He has redeemed. That should put us down on our faces before Him. My friend, how much of His love is manifest in you?

In review, this is what this prayer says about believers and the world:

1. Given to Christ out of the world (v. 6)
2. Left in the world (v. 11)
3. Not of the world (v. 14)
4. Hated by the world (v. 14)
5. Kept from the evil one (v. 15)
6. Sent into the world (v. 18)
7. Manifest in unity before the world (v. 23)

These are the requests of Christ for His own:

1. Preservation (v. 11)
2. Joy—fullness of the Spirit (v. 13)
3. Deliverance—from evil (v. 15)
4. To be set apart—“sanctify” (v. 17)
5. Unity—“be one”—(this is not union) (v. 21)
6. Fellowship—“be with me” (v. 24)
7. Satisfaction—“behold my glory” (v. 24)

The Lord Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. This is the great truth of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the Old Testament economy the high priest wore an ephod of beauty and glory, which was joined on each shoulder by two onyx stones with the names of the tribes of Israel engraved on them. Thus he carried the names of the children of Israel with him when he went into the presence of God. This speaks of the strength and power of the high priest. Hebrews 7:25 tells us about Jesus Christ, our High Priest: “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Christ is *able* to save us, you see. He has strength and power.

Also on the breastplate of the high priest were twelve precious stones, arranged three in a row in four rows across his breast. On each was the name of a tribe of Israel. When the high priest went into God's presence wearing the breastplate, he pictured the Lord Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God interceding for us. The Lord not only carries us on His shoulders, the place of strength and power, but He also carries us on His breast, on His heart, which speaks of His love. He has all power, and He loves us!¹

¹ J. Vernon McGee, [*Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels \(John 11-21\)*](#), electronic ed., vol. 39 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 120–132.