

Jesus Prays for his Church

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[0 : 0 0] Please have a seat, and if you can turn with me to John's Gospel, page 1085. We're thinking about this wonderful moment when Jesus prays for His church. Prayer, of course, is something that is vital for the Christian life. Martin Luther, hundreds of years ago, said to be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing. Simply put, prayer is vital for your survival if you're a Christian. So, why does it matter so much? Think about what prayer is.

Prayer is most certainly an invitation to a personal living relationship with God. So, we think about prayer as conversation. God speaks in His Word. We speak in prayer. But it's also encounter that we're brought into the presence of God. Prayer is knowing God. But prayer is also something that matters so much because it treats God as God. So, think about that. So, we've been reading and thinking about how great and glorious God is, and so our instinct then is to praise Him.

We think about how holy and perfect God is, and that leads us to confess our sin. We understand and believe that God is both powerful and He is present, and so we give thanks for those things that we receive in His world, and we ask for those things that we need. And we also discover in the Bible, and especially in the Gospels, maybe especially in Luke's Gospel, that prayer was vital to Jesus.

Jesus was the one who taught His disciples to pray. You will discover Jesus at so many of the major moments of His life, taking time to stop something and spend a whole night in prayer to His Father.

This, John chapter 17, comes the night before Jesus will die on the cross. 24 hours before His death, Jesus knows it. We find Him praying. And I want to suggest as we get into this prayer that we don't just think about prayer being vital to Jesus. I want us to recognize that this prayer of Jesus is vital for our lives. Because this is going to show us Jesus' heart for the world, but especially for the church, as He faces death, here are His priorities. And now as Jesus sits in heaven, and as the Bible tells us, He ever lives to pray for us, we understand that His heart is unchanged, and so Jesus is still praying with these same priorities today, and they're vital for the ongoing life of the church.

[2 : 5 8] So we've got three really simple questions to ask. The first question is this, who is praying? Maybe you've had this experience, you're going through a hard time, maybe hospital appointments, and somebody says to you, our message is you, says, I'm praying for you. And if you have had that experience, maybe from a minister or an elder or just a friend, you will know, I suspect, that it brings a measure of comfort and encouragement. There's a goodness in praying for one another.

But think about what matters, what happens when Jesus says, I'm praying for you. Because He does. That means everything for us as a church. So we're going to think about, who is this Jesus who is praying? We're going to think about His honor and His hour. We're going to be in the first five verses just for a few moments, just to think about, what does this tell us about the honor of Jesus? We thought about that with the boys and girls. Well, look at verse 1, and we discover Jesus is the Son of God. He speaks to God as His Father, and He describes Himself as God's Son. We also discover this. Jesus prays, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. So He recognizes in Himself and in His Father that they are glorious and deserve glory. In verse 2, we discover that Jesus has all authority. You granted Him authority over all people. We also discover that Jesus is the one with the authority and the honor to give the gift of eternal life, which isn't just a quantity of life, it's also a quality of life being brought into relationship with God. Here is more of the honor of Jesus.

Verse 4, He brings the Father glory by finishing the work you gave me to do. Jesus has got this work of going to the cross in order to save people, then to rise again, and He can pray even before it happens, and He knows He's going to complete that work. And He deserves honor because we discover in verse 5, that He's about to return to heaven to receive the glory that He's had from all eternity.

So when Jesus comes into the world, He already is the eternal Son of God. And so we speak about the honor of Jesus. And think about this, this is the Jesus who prays for His church, the eternal Son of God, the eternal Son of God, who has brought salvation, who sits on the throne, the one whose prayer is always heard and is always answered, the one who always cares.

This is the Jesus who prays. But I also want to notice, help us to notice the context for this prayer. So in verse 1, Jesus prays, Father, the hour has come. So we thought about Jesus' honor.

[6 : 00]

Now we need to think about Jesus' hour. This is like one of these major themes that runs through John's gospel. Jesus lives under the shadow of this hour. His whole mission, His whole coming connects to this hour. So what is this hour He's talking about? Well, He's thinking about the hour of His suffering and His death, followed by His rising again and then returning to heaven.

So He is facing the hour of the cross, and then what comes after it, and He prays to His Father, Your will be done. We encounter Jesus, the willing, obedient, loving Savior, who knows He is about to suffer and die, but He prays for His followers, in that setting. And I just want us at the beginning to think about that. When you and I face trials, when you and I go through suffering, it is this Jesus who has walked that same path and more ahead of us. He has walked in our shoes, and He is the same Jesus who says, I walk with you.

And it's this Jesus who in heaven prays for you. I said to the boys and girls, we would think about what's Jesus doing now. It's a really interesting thing to think about for boys, for girls, for everybody. Some of the things that we know about what Jesus is doing now, we know that He is keeping this world spinning.

This whole world is sustained by Jesus' powerful word. Jesus is keeping us alive at this moment. All across the world, as the message of the Bible goes out, Jesus is building His church. He's saving people. He's working out God's plans in the world. So Jesus is really active today, and Jesus prays for His church. The King on the throne of the universe, the one who died for you, is the one who prays for you, for the church around the world. So that's who is praying. The second question is this, who is Jesus praying for? That's a really important question. I don't know if you've ever had to scan a list of names to see if you were on the list. Maybe in a sports team, did I make it onto the team, or am I on the substitute list? And maybe for a particular event, you have to scan the guest list, did I get on? We all know situations where in order to get the benefits, you have to be on the list.

And that's a really important principle for us to recognize as we come to this prayer. Because I imagine, as I was reading it, you would have heard verse 9, that Jesus is praying for a specific group of people. Verse 9, I pray for them. So we need to think about who's the them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. So there's a particular group that's benefiting from this prayer.

[9 : 18] Now just before we get into that, we know that God loves the world that He has made. We know that Jesus loves the world that He came into. John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have eternal life. God absolutely loves the world and sent Jesus. But there is a particular group in view here.

There is a special saving love and a special relationship that Jesus has with His people, with His church. And so He takes some time to pray particularly for the Christian church.

So we need to ask ourselves, how can I know if Jesus prays this prayer for me? How can I enter into these benefits? How can I make sure I'm on the list? And there are two descriptions that run through the passage, two words beginning with B. It's to do with belonging and believing, and we'll see they're very much related. So if you look at verse 6, Jesus prays for those who belong to me, belong to Him.

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours, you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word. Verse 10, we heard it, I'm not praying for the world, but for those you have given me. All I have is yours and all you have is mine. So there's this idea that there is a people, the church, who belong to the Father and who belong to the Son. We might think of the idea of there having been a transfer taking place. We've just come out of a transfer window if you're into football.

There are some people who've been transferred from one kingdom, the world, to another, the kingdom of God. And in that transfer, there's now a belonging, in fact a joint belonging. There's joint ownership.

[11 : 19] They're all of God's people. Every Christian belongs to God the Father and God the Son. And those who belong to Jesus, they know certain things. Verse 7, they know that everything you have given me comes from you. So we're given the ability to understand Jesus has come from God the Father.

That when we look at Jesus, we recognize that he reveals God's glory to the world. When we come to read about Jesus, we come to understand and to believe that he is the Son of God.

When we read the whole message of the Bible, we recognize he is the promised King, the one who's come to save. So Jesus prays for those who belong to him, and he also prays for those, and they're the same group, who believe in him. Verse 8, in the middle of verse 8, they knew what certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. So here he's speaking about his first disciples. They accepted Jesus' words, and they believed. Now we know this as a fact. They didn't believe perfectly. They still had questions. They still had confusions. They still had doubts and struggles, but they had real faith that Jesus was God's gift to them, that he was the Savior, and they were trusting him as their Lord. Now look at verse 20. He's not just praying for the disciples. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

So Jesus is praying somewhere around 30 AD, about 2,000 years ago, but this is a prayer of Jesus that spans space and time and history, because he prays for every single person who will believe that Jesus is the Savior as they come to hear and believe the message delivered by the followers of Jesus.

Jesus. So whenever somebody reads the Bible, hears it preached, hears it taught, and they believe it, Jesus' prayer is answered. That's an amazing thing, isn't it? So it's all who belong to him, and they're all who believe in him. And to just think about that for us as Christians, just for a moment, that we would recognize God's grace and kindness to us. It wasn't because of anything within us that we were able to see and believe in Jesus. It's a gift of God's grace. And part of that wonderful gift is that we get to enjoy life with God, and part of that is we get to enjoy prayer. It's vital to us.

[14 : 06] Think too about this double security that Jesus talks about. He talks about it throughout John's gospel. We belong to the gospel. We belong to the Son, and we belong to the Father. And Jesus promises that those who belong to him, he'll never drive away, and he will never lose.

Remember in the book of Revelation, if you've been around for the last few months, we've been in the book of Revelation. The picture is very honest from Jesus that life is hard. Life as a Christian is hard. That spiritual battle is real. Maybe you're here today, and you're the only Christian in your place of work. The only Christian in your classroom. Maybe the only Christian in your family, and you know this. But we also know this too. That Jesus is with us, and he is for us, and he prays.

Maybe you're here today, and you're not a Christian yet. You can't look at the list and say, I'm one of those who belong and believe. Recognize today Jesus is inviting you into a real, living, personal relationship with God. That you could accept his word, his word of promise.

That trusting in him brings forgiveness. That trusting in him begins a whole new life with God. It means being adopted into the family of God. It means the promise of eternal home and eternal security. And so there's an invitation to pray. To pray for that gift of faith.

And to pray that you would come to him. So that's who prays and who Jesus prays for. Now we want to think thirdly about what does Jesus pray for. But just before we get into that, I came across, I don't know who likes poetry here. I'm not a great fan of poetry. But I like this line at least from George Herbert. If you know George Herbert, he was writing poetry a long time ago. He has a poem called Prayer. And there's one line which I really like. It's called, it says, Prayer is God's breath in man returning to his birth. It's a great idea to think about. I think the basic idea, basically as much as I got anyway. I think he's making the point that we are made as people to know God and to talk with God. I think we probably all have that instinct at some point that makes us realize we are not alone in the universe. And we are not made to go alone in the universe. Rather, we were made for God. And it's really interesting. I came across some statistics this week that show a surprising number of people, including people who identify themselves as atheists or non-believers, who pray, sometimes regularly, sometimes often, find themselves praying.

[16 : 59] But maybe we shouldn't be surprised. Because we're all made in the image of God, and we're all made to know God and for life with God. And so there's that instinct that draws us at different times to want to connect with God. And one of the vital ways we do that is through prayer.

And here we have Jesus. And Jesus, of course, is the perfect image of God. And he perfectly wants to enjoy life with his Father. And he teaches us as well how to pray.

He prays out loud so his disciples can hear. This is prayer, but it's also instruction for us, showing us from Jesus' own heart, what should we pray for. So three things to recognize for our prayers. First of all, that Jesus prays for his glory. Verse 1 again, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. Now, if anyone else prayed this, make me seem glorious, that'd be really proud and boastful. But if Jesus is who he says he is, if he is the Son of God, if he is the creator and sustainer of the universe, then there is no one higher and there is no one greater than him, then it's wonderful that he chooses to reveal God's glory to us. And that's what we need more than anything else. And he prays something remarkable, because he prays about the hour. So he's praying that we would see glory in the cross. Jesus has this wonderful understanding that the cross is at the same time something profoundly painful and shameful in his death, and something glorious. It's a demonstration of loving sacrifice with saving effect.

It's the means by which eternal life is given. It's the means by which Jesus will accomplish the Father's plan of salvation. And so he prays that his glory would be seen through the message of the cross.

And he also prays that we would see his glory as he sits on his throne. Verse 5, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. So the second part of Jesus, our beyond his death, there is resurrection and there is the return to heaven. We've been in the book of Revelation and we've seen this picture of Jesus, the lamb on the throne, and everybody worshiping him. King of kings, king of the ages, working out God's plan from the throne. And Jesus teaches us to pray that we would see his glory as king. There is this great need for people everywhere to discover this, that we would glory in the good news, that God loved me and gave his son for me. That we would glory in this truth that Jesus died so that I can live, that by his wounds I can be healed, that he went under God's curse so I can receive God's blessing. That's our boast as Christians. All our boast is in Jesus.

[20 : 32] So we need to pray that we would see and that people would see God's glory. That we would pray like Moses. Moses in the Old Testament prayed, show me your glory. And he discovered wonderful things about God's character. That we would discover more of the glory of Jesus' loving sacrifice. That we would discover more of the glory of his royal rule so that we ourselves would give him glory, that loyalty would go to him, that loyalty would go to him, love would go to him, obedience would go to him, trust would go to him, and we would pray and work so the people around us would also give him glory as we recognize that nothing matters more than this. And we are never more truly human than when we are connecting in fellowship with our God and our Savior. So Jesus prays for his own glory and invites us to do the same. Secondly, Jesus prays for protection for his followers. So again, just to take us back to the book of Revelation, Revelation reads in many ways like a graphic novel, a really vivid picture of spiritual battle between good and evil, spiritual battle between good and evil, and spiritual battle rages, and it doesn't just rage out there, it also rages in here in our hearts. And one of the reasons why we need to see the glory of Jesus is that we would appreciate in the midst of battle, who is it who is on our side? And also Jesus invites us to remember who is at war against us. And also, we need protection in what

Jesus calls the church to do. So look with me at verses 11 and 12. Jesus prays, first of all, for protection by God's powerful name. He says, I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

There is something about God's name, something about God's character that serves and stands to protect his church. God's name reflects what is true about him, what's true about Jesus.

Jesus came to reveal the truth about God and God's name and God's character to us, that he is supreme, that he is the life giver, that he is the one who is able to save from sin and death, that he has such a firm grip on his people that he loses none who truly belong and believe, so that as a Christian we are kept always by the Lord's powerful name, by the Lord who is with us and for us, and that matters because we are protected from a powerful enemy. Verse 15 says, my prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. Now he's already in verse 14 told, spoken to God of the fact that the world will hate his followers just as they hated Jesus. So there's this group of people who follow Jesus and they're now living by a very different value system, a very different form of worship, and they're coming under intense persecution and opposition. And then Jesus prays recognizing that there is the devil, the evil one, and he is also warring against the people of God. And so Jesus prays for protection. But did you notice, verse 15, he doesn't pray, Father, remove them from the heat of battle. No, he prays, protect them in the heat of the battle. So we should expect, and Revelation tells us this, we should expect suffering and trouble and challenge and opposition, and we should expect, and we will receive help and protection from Jesus. He will protect us in verse 13, so that we have the full measure of his joy. He will keep us in joy as we look to him as he gives us strength. And the third thing about this protection that Jesus prays for is that we are, he is praying that we be protected for the mission of the church.

In verse 17, we come across a holiness word. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. The idea of sanctifying means setting apart for God's purpose. And there's a logic in these verses. Jesus was set apart by his Father for a particular purpose, sent into the world to be the only Savior for sinners. And then Jesus says, just as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. So the Father sends the Son, now Jesus sends the church. And the church's job, our job, is to continue the mission of Jesus by proclaiming Jesus as Lord in the face of opposition. And then we come back to the sanctifying word. Verse 19, Jesus says, for them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

[26 : 13] And Jesus is telling us that the effect of his coming, he has set himself apart in order to complete his mission. And one effect of that is that he transforms his people so that they are set apart to serve him. Those who belong to the world, to the Lord, are brought into him and then sent out for him into the world, to bring good news, to invite people like Andrew the disciple, come and see Jesus. Or like the man who was released from all those demons, go and tell what the Lord has done for you. And so Jesus sets himself apart, completes his mission, sets us apart as belonging to the Lord, and sends us on mission, and he promises his protection. And so it says to us as a church, we must stay close to Jesus, to live under his protection, to make a priority of worshiping him, of hearing from him in his word, the Bible, of speaking to him in prayer. And we must come under the protection of Jesus. There is the reality of spiritual battle, there is a winning side, that's Jesus. To be on the winning side, we need to trust in him.

So Jesus prays for his glory, he prays for protection for his church, and then he also prays for unity in his church. Verse 20, notice he says, I pray also for those who believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. The church must always be united in the truth. It's the message that is central. It's not a unity based on shared culture, or because there's a group of people who happen to get along with one another. No, our unity is based on belief in God's message that we find in the Bible, and in the message about Jesus.

That Jesus truly is the Son of God. That he is the only Savior. That he came in order to make a perfect sacrifice for sin and for sinners. That he rose again, and will return one day, as King of Kings. And so the church in every place, and in every generation, in every culture, and country, and language, must have the Lord Jesus Christ as the foundation upon which the church is built. We have no other foundation. It's Jesus and his Word. He is the head of the body. We need to be vitally connected to him to have any life, and to be able to be effective for him. So we must always have that unity that's rooted in truth, and so we pray for the message to be guarded in here, and as we take it out. We're also to be united in love. Verse 21 continues, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. Verse 26 concludes, I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them. So there's this wonderful truth that to be a Christian is to share in the overflow of God's love.

The love that God has within himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he pours out on us as people. That's amazing. And that love that he gives to us individually, he also gives to the people of God together as a group. And Jesus is making this point that for our mission to be effective as a church, we must be a united church, united in truth and united in love. It has been said that the local church is the greatest apologetic for the gospel. Because when a group of people get together and they love one another for no other reason apart from God has loved them and given them Jesus, then that says that God's love is powerful and transforms. And so within a local church, God's love should be both heard in what we read and sing and pray and preach, but it should also be seen in the way that we love one another. There should be, in other words, a consistency between the words that we use and the way of life that we practice. All those one another's that we read about in the Bible, love one another, serve one another, encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, that should be part of the life of a local church to make the love of God known to a watching world.

Because imagine the flip side, imagine walking into this kind of church where you see members not talking with one another, or you see little cliques and factions forming in different corners, where you get that sense that people are fighting for power and status and everybody wants the microphone.

[31 : 32] Nobody bothers paying attention to those who are new. If you walk into that kind of church, I imagine we'd be tempted to think, why would I want anything to do with those people and their message?

It would be profoundly off-putting. And so Jesus prays for a unity that's rooted in love to make the gospel visible. The kind of genuine love that becomes compelling. I want what they've got.

The kind of love that is counter-cultural. When we recognize so much of life is focused on, what can I do for me and for myself? To come into a place where everyone's focused on the other, I don't see this kind of love anywhere else. And it's good and I want it.

We need also to recognize that Jesus prays for unity within his church because unity is a fragile thing. Unity is a precious thing. Some of you maybe have sort of fine crystal at home that only comes out for the honored guests. And maybe you've got some wedding china that comes out for special occasions.

There are things that we handle with care. There are things that we value greatly. Church unity is to be one of those. And so we pray for it for our sake and for God's mission to the watching world.

[33 : 03] But there's one last thing to notice about unity. It's there in verse 24 that the goal is to be united with Jesus. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory.

The glory you have given me because you love me before the creation of the world. That's Jesus' heart. I want my friends, those who I've died for, to see my glory and to share my glory. And here he's taken us all the way to eternity. He's taking us to his return.

He's taking us to when we have resurrection life and resurrected bodies and we get to see his face and we get to be made like him. Jesus prays for our eternal joy, which is also his eternal joy.

Jesus and his church together forever. This is what one day everyone who believes and belongs in Jesus will experience. Perfect friendship, fellowship, communion with the Lord Jesus, where we live in a society of perfect love between our brothers and sisters in Christ, where we share in the overflow of God's love forever. Jesus prays it. Jesus prays it. And that means it's a guarantee.

So Jesus' prayer truly is vital for his church and for his people. As we leave here, let me encourage three things. First, that we would enjoy prayer. Prayer as a way to deepen our relationship with our God and our Savior. Prayer as conversation, something that's real. It's meeting with our Father, just like Jesus did. To recognize prayer as an experience and as an opportunity for more.

[35 : 07] More of his glory. More of that protection that he promises. More of that love and that unity that he promises to bring. And let me encourage us to echo this prayer for our church. That we would want one another and the people outside of these walls to see the glory of Jesus. That we would want to be protected in his love. And that we would want to be united in a mission to make Jesus and his glory known.