

Jesus prays for you

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[0 : 00] I seek your prosperity. So if you have your Bibles, perhaps you can turn back with me to John chapter 17, page!

But before we get into that, just to think about the process of learning a language.

So we have just come back from another holiday in France, and every time we go to France, I come away with that desire to learn the language well, to get beyond the basics of, you know, shop, cafe, French.

But I know I'll never commit myself to the time. But it's always that chance to ask the question, how does language learning work? How is it possible for us to pick up a language?

Think about how that works for babies. How do babies learn to speak? It's a remarkable thing, I think. And we are told it's through listening.

[1 : 20] Lots of listening, especially listening to parents, but perhaps also to older siblings. And over time, all those random sounds begin to form into ideas.

Over time, a baby is able to give a basic one-word answer to certain prompts. And then there's the process of learning to repeat those words that are heard over and over.

And slowly, an ability to use language is being formed. As Christians, how do we learn the language of prayer?

I would suggest, in many ways, it's a similar process of slow formation. Of us listening to our Father. Listening to God speaking to us in His Word. We learn to pray in part by listening. Listening to what God says in the Bible, because then we know what He cares about, what He wants.

[2 : 20] Perhaps we also listen to others who are mature and who have grown up in prayer. So we listen, especially we listen to God's Word, and we learn to speak God's Word back to Him.

And if that's the case, slow formation, listening in, and learning to repeat, then that's especially true when we come to a section like John 17.

Because what we have here is nothing less than the Son of God in prayer. In prayer to His Father. Here is the man of faith, the man of prayer, and we get to learn a pattern and priorities for our prayers from Jesus.

And wonderfully, we discover as we listen in to Jesus, we find that all the time, Jesus is praying for us.

So our plan for the next few weeks is to work really slowly through this prayer, often known as the high priestly prayer of Jesus. We'll keep coming back to what is Jesus praying for.

[3 : 38] We'll look at certain themes each week. And we will especially remind ourselves who it is who is praying. Because I think there is for us as Christians a particular comfort and encouragement as we recognize Jesus, our mediator, is praying for us.

He's also our model teaching us how to pray. We're going to go slowly and reflectively. Martin Luther, the reformer, when someone asked him, Mr. Luther, help me to pray, what he would do with that person would be to encourage biblical meditation.

To take some words of the Bible, perhaps a verse or a couple of verses, and to reflect on them so as to bring one's thoughts and one's feelings to converge on God.

And so my hope and prayer for us week by week is something similar. That as we spend time meditating on some of these ideas that Jesus prays for, that we'll be helped in our own prayer lives. We'll find ideas and priorities from God's Word to fuel our own praying. But especially we'd be helped as we consider and as we hear the praying life of Jesus, the Son of God.

[4 : 59] So that's where we're going to begin. We're going to begin thinking about Jesus, the man of prayer. This is, you know, in John's Gospel. And it's a portrait that we find within John, and especially Luke, that Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, the chosen King, was a man of prayer.

And we know that he devoted considerable time, sometimes entire nights, to prayer. And we understand as we scan through his life that he made it a priority to spend time with his Father. Here is Jesus, in human form, taking on a true humanity. He could receive God's mercy. He could receive God's wisdom.

And so he prayed. He wanted it. He needed it. We see as we read the Gospels a pattern for his life at key points in his life. Facing the pressures of a busy ministry.

Facing the pressures of the devil when tempted. Having to choose disciples. He would take time to pray. So we understand from the Gospel writers that the Son of God prays.

[6:09] And that's highlighted for us here in John 17. This prayer takes place shortly after what we now know as the Lord's Supper or the Last Supper.

So this is perhaps just hours before his arrest, before his suffering, before his death. This is after he has given extended teaching to his disciples designed for their comfort.

Designed to strengthen them. He turns to pray. He closed his teaching, which runs from 14 to 16.

In 1633, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world.

And after Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and he prayed. All of this is happening in the presence of his disciples.

[7:10] Jesus knows he will shortly return to the Father. And that return will take him by the way of suffering and death on the cross before his resurrection, before his ascension.

And what we find in John 17 is that Jesus prays well aware that the cross will happen, but he looks beyond. He prays about the outcome of the cross.

And so he begins by praying, knowing that the cross will bring glory for the Father and glory to the Son. We hear him praying protection for his followers, for the believers.

We hear him praying about the mission of the church, his followers. So we hear the Son of God pray. And we hear him pray as our great high priest.

Back in the Old Testament, the high priest had a number of roles. A principal role would be to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people.

[8:14] But the high priest would also carry the names of God's people on his heart right into God's presence in the temple, and especially as he went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.

And especially the book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is our great high priest. And we know that Jesus, when he goes to the cross, he is offering himself as the great, the perfect, the once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

But we also know that Jesus takes up this role of the priest in that he prays for us. That he carries the names of his people on his heart.

That he brings the people of God right into the presence of our Father in heaven. So we are sitting here and we are in the very throne room of God.

Because of the ministry of Jesus, our great high priest. Now why does it matter that the Gospels highlight that Jesus was a man of prayer? Let me suggest three reasons for our encouragement.

[9:23] First, when we think about the words of James in chapter 5, verse 16, as he closes his letter, he reminds his readers that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

And James at that point, he takes us to the story of Elijah. Elijah prayed before King Ahab, and there was no rain as a sign of God's displeasure.

And then three years later, he prayed and there was rain. Or we might think of Moses. The number of times that Moses stood in the gap praying for rebellious Israel.

And his prayer was powerful and effective. Jesus is the righteous man. So we have the guarantee that his prayer does contain nothing less than the power of God.

That Jesus' prayer must be effective. Recognize that when we come to John 17. If you're here and you're a follower of Jesus, that your confidence lies in this.

[10:32] That the Father does hear and he has answered this prayer of Jesus. Another way I think it matters for us that Jesus is a man of prayer.

Go back to a different Old Testament story. Think about Joseph. Book of Genesis. Joseph, remember, had been sold into slavery. But eventually, after many years, he ends up in the palace of Pharaoh.

And there's that point where his brothers come looking for food. And then his brother and his father come looking to settle down in Egypt. And what does Joseph do?

From his position of influence, he speaks in favor of his father and his brothers. Jesus is our greater than Joseph.

He is our friend in the core of heaven. He speaks for us. And we live every day under the benefit of his prayer for us, of his constantly praying for us.

[11 : 40] Here's another reason why it matters that Jesus was a man of prayer. We see, and John's gospel brings this out, Jesus always did the will of God.

And by extension, Jesus always prayed the will of God. And he encouraged us to do likewise in the Lord's prayer. Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Even in Gethsemane, as Jesus anticipated, what it would be like to become the sin bearer, to go under the curse of God, to suffer the judgment in our place.

He prayed, not my will, but yours be done. His life lined up with the Father's will at all points. And his prayers do likewise.

And because Jesus' prayer always lines up with his Father's will, his praying is heard. His prayer is answered.

[12 : 41] And again, we as the church, we enjoy the fruit of that prayer being answered. I've been reading, there's a collection of sermons by the Puritan Anthony Burgess on John 17.

And he describes the prayer of Jesus as the key of heaven that opens heaven for us. And what becomes clear as we get into John 17 is that our salvation, our sanctification, our growing in holiness, our eternal security, they all rest safe and secure in the prayers of Jesus for us being answered.

So it matters that Jesus pray. So Jesus was the man of prayer. Let's think secondly about the matters of prayer that Jesus picks up.

But before we get into the text, some of you I know will have read the autobiography of John G. Payton. He was the missionary to the New Hebrides, now known as Vanuatu.

And he tells in his autobiography the story really of his father as a great man of prayer. That every day, regardless of the working responsibilities of his father, every day, regardless of the company that might be in the house, there was always a time of family worship in which John, in which his family, in which the church, in which the nation and the nations would be prayed for regularly and fervently.

[14 : 25] In fact, his autobiography tells the story of the most notorious woman in their neighborhood who came dramatically to faith in Jesus.

And she said she came to faith in Jesus because she would often pass under the window of the Payton's house and she heard John Payton's father multiple times praying for her.

He didn't know she was there, but he prayed for her and he prayed for many. Now, I use that example just to remind us that there is power in prayer and there is power when someone prays with us and someone prays for us.

Many of us will know that privilege of having someone sat with us and prayed with us and for us.

There's power in that. Well, how much more when we come to understand that the one who prays for us is none other than the eternal Son of God and the High King of Heaven?

What weight there is then to his words and when we consider that his prayers are answered. So, as I say, each week what we're going to do is we're going to slow down and we're going to think about different ideas.

[15 : 42] But this week, just by way of overview, we're going to see three of the matters that Jesus picks up in his prayer and why each of these matters to you and to me.

For those of us who are here and we're believers in the Lord Jesus, let me encourage us to listen in with joy as we recognize Jesus prays for us. Remember verse 20, My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. But maybe you're here today and you're not a Christian. Let me encourage you to ask God to help you to listen in with a sense of longing that it could be true of you that Jesus, the Son of God, prays for you and is concerned for your eternal good.

That you might pray for the gift of faith. That this prayer would be true for you also. Three things that Jesus prays for his people. First, Jesus prays for your salvation.

Look at how his prayer begins. Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

[16 : 57] Now, what's this glory that Jesus prays for? There's many aspects to it. It's certainly the glory of God's mission of salvation being accomplished.

It's the glory of God being worked out as the eternal plan of salvation is now being worked out in history through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, the Lord Jesus.

Jesus also understands that every time a person turns from sin to trust in Christ Jesus, glory belongs to God.

We believe that we're saved by grace. It's a gift of God so that all glory in salvation belongs to our God. He also prays recognizing the gift of eternal life.

What is that gift? It's that by God's grace we are brought into a personal living relationship with God. That we get to call God as our Father because Jesus has come and he's forgiven our sins, so the barrier is gone and we can be adopted in God's love.

[18 : 05] That we can know Jesus as our Savior, as our King, as our brother, as our friend. And so Jesus has come with this specific purpose to bring glory to his Father by completing the work of salvation.

Jesus has come to do God's will and he did not fail. And we hear him praying for our conversion, for our life of holiness, that we would be saved to the end.

And that prayer of Jesus, it cannot fail. John chapter 6, he'll never lose any that the Father gives to him. Some of us, as parents, some of us as kids, we have stories of getting lost.

We were talking about this in our community group this week. Sometimes kids get lost in shops or in busy cities. Sometimes kids even get lost in churches. But we have the wonderful promise in the prayer of Jesus that our almighty, all-wise Father in heaven never loses any of his children.

He never even takes his eyes off us for a moment. So Jesus prays for our salvation. And tied to that, secondly, Jesus prays for your protection.

[19 : 23] Just to continue with the parent-child analogy, we will be familiar with this. You come to a new place, you go to a busy place, perhaps the risks are thought to increase.

And if you're with young children, instinctively you'll say something like, take my hand. Verse 11, as Jesus prays, 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. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe, that name you gave me.

None has been lost, except the one doomed to destruction, so that Scripture would be fulfilled. In Jesus' prayer, we have the assurance, as the people of God, that we will always be protected.

That we rest safe and secure in the double grip of God the Father and God the Son. Just to remind ourselves of Jesus' words, John 6, 37.

[20 : 36] Here's assurance. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. We are protected, Jesus prays, by the powerful name of God himself.

We are marked as belonging to him, and we cannot be lost by him. And we see so many stories in the Old Testament of God acting for the protection of his people.

Think of the story of Daniel's three friends, even there in the fiery furnace. Those held by God's power and God's goodness will not be burned.

We go through life, and sometimes maybe it feels a bit like a fiery furnace. There are trials, and there are troubles, and there are temptations. But for the child of God, our protection, our eternal protection, is guaranteed.

As Jesus said to his disciples in chapter 16, verse 33, those troubles that we face, they do not have the last word. They are real.

[21 : 54] We will face troubles, but we can take heart, because Jesus has overcome the world, and if we belong to Jesus, then our protection is guaranteed.

So Jesus prays for our salvation. Jesus prays for our protection. And he goes beyond there to pray, too, for our future glory.

One challenge that we might face in our own prayer lives is that often don't we find that our prayers can seem so narrow and limited and small and weak.

And we turn to this prayer of Jesus, and we see how expansive it is. This prayer takes in the whole of our salvation. Past, present, and future.

Look at verse 22. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity.

[23 : 01] Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 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 loved me before the creation of the world.

Jesus has given us glory. We are united as God's people in the love of God.

And we hear the longing of Jesus as he prays that his people would be with him in glory, that we would be made like him and that we would see his glory and we'd find then all of our joy and all of our longings met.

And we recognize that as Jesus prays and he prays that we'd be united in love and that we would be filled with that, that awareness of God's glory, that that's something that we experience now. That our normal, local church, by God's grace, is a preview, an imperfect preview, but a preview of that perfect, redeemed community.

[24 : 24] So that as we spend time together and as people walk in, there should be a sense of the love of God among us that binds us together, that there should be that ability to get a sight of the glory of God in our worship and in our lives.

And let's recognize too something of the amazing love of Jesus in that he connects his eternal happiness to ours.

His longing is that we are with him forever. There is that sense in which Jesus' joy will be incomplete until all of his people are gathered together in the new creation to enjoy his love and happiness forever.

Jesus prays for us. And his prayer is wonderful. And it takes in our salvation from beginning to end. And just to remind ourselves, so we're going to keep coming back to these two ideas, to think about Jesus as our mediator. And thirdly, and this is just by way of reminding us, you know, we know that who speaks for us can be so important at different times.

[25 : 52] If we're applying for a position of some kind, a job perhaps, then the references that we get, the letters of recommendation that we can supply, they might be the difference between getting a job, a post, or not.

Or if we find ourselves in a court of law and we're on trial, then we want to get the very best defense, the very best person to speak for us.

And so it's true when we think about standing in the court of heaven. And here, as we listen to Jesus, we find comfort and hope as we understand that the one who speaks for us at that point in time is the one who always speaks for us now in heaven.

Our Savior, our King, our brother and our friend. Recognize that as we listen to Jesus, we're listening to the God-man who prays.

And so there is infinite worth and there is infinite merit in his prayers, there is an infinite value and effectiveness in his prayers, that his prayer can no more be refused than his blood could be refused.

[27 : 10] That we know that the blood of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, is the basis for our acceptance into the Father's presence. Likewise, his prayers guarantee our access to our God.

Our mediator is none other than the beloved Son of God. When he prays to his Father, he prays to the one who has been loved and who has loved his Father from all eternity.

We know that the Father denies nothing to the Son whom he loves. We know that Jesus is the beloved Son, he is the perfect Son, and he offers up perfect prayers and those prayers are certainly answered.

And the one who mediates is our great high priest. To go back again to another idea from the Old Testament, back in the Old Testament temple, the high priest when he was in the tabernacle or the temple, he would sometimes offer incense on the altar.

And the smell that would go up to heaven and the smoke that would go up to heaven was a picture of God being pleased to hear the prayers of the priest on behalf of the people.

[28 : 28] Jesus' prayers are acceptable to his Father, but also, Revelation chapter 8 verse 4, we hear this, the smoke of the incense together with the prayers of God's people went up before God.

So this isn't just an Old Testament temple idea, this becomes an imagery of life in the church that our prayers like incense are going up to God, and do you know the altar for our prayers is also the Lord Jesus.

It's as we pray in his name that our prayers are accepted. Not only is Jesus the high priest who prayed for us on earth, he's also the high priest who prays for us in heaven, he's also the one in whom our prayers are accepted.

He perfects our prayers and he presents our prayers before our Father. Our praying needs the prayers of Jesus.

And so I hope week by week we're going to recognize this truth that it's this Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the beloved Son, the great high priest, this is the one who prays for us.

[29 : 41] And when we hear him pray, we know that his prayers are accepted and answered, and so we can have confidence as he prays. And when we think about our own prayers, we acknowledge, yes, our prayers are weak, but we pray in Jesus' name, and Jesus' prayers are infinitely strong.

And so we find encouragement from Jesus how to pray and to keep on praying because his praying is the foundation for our salvation, it's our security in this life, and our guarantee of eternity.

And the fourth thing is to just think about Jesus offering us a model of how to pray, a great example of how to pray. And we'll come back to this week by week.

As Christians, we're to be like the disciples. Remember the disciples coming to Jesus and saying, Lord, teach us to pray. We're to take the attitude of little children where we need to learn how to pray.

And as we come with that kind of instinct and humility, we understand that we've been given so much to help us to pray. We've been given the whole Bible, the whole Word of God telling us about His character and His promises.

[31 : 02] We've been given the Lord's prayer as a model that we can follow. And here in John 17, we have a prayer that the Lord Jesus Himself offered.

And we are invited to listen. Like children, we are invited to copy. Like children, we are invited to have our language of prayer formed from His example.

Because as we listen to Jesus, we're listening to the man of faith. We're listening to the righteous man, the pattern, the example, the forerunner we follow after.

And so I hope week by week as we come back to this text, we'll recognize this. If Jesus prays for something, it is good. it is God's will.

So we should pray it too. So we'll find fuel every week to pray for ourselves, to pray for our families, to pray for our church, to pray for our city, and to pray for the world.

[32 : 06] So even just thinking about what we've covered, we can follow Jesus this week. Father, please will you grant eternal life to my family members and to my friends who I'm praying for, who don't as yet know Jesus as Savior.

We can pray, Father, thank you for the glory of salvation that you have revealed in Jesus, but also that you've revealed in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you for every example of lives transformed and being transformed.

We can pray following the pattern of Jesus for others. Father, I know this person is having a hard time. Please will you protect them through their trouble.

Please will you let them know that you love them and you're watching over them and you will keep them. Father, I know this person is facing suffering.

This person is anticipating death. Please open the windows of heaven so they sense your coming glory and your loving commitment to keep your people from now you until eternity.

[33 : 19] So I hope this prayer is really going to help us in coming weeks and we can give thanks as we recognize that the one who offers this prayer is the one who will shortly offer up his life in our place for our sins to open up the way of heaven for us, who teaches us to pray, the great Savior who prays for us.

Let's pray together now. Lord God, we thank you for this remarkable opportunity that we have to listen to Jesus praying for us.

And we thank you for the privilege that we have.