

Jesus prays for eternal life

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Now, if you turn with me to John chapter 17, page 1085, we return to this prayer, often! known as the High Princely Prayer of Jesus. And we hear him in verse 2 and 3 pray about eternal life.

We'll again read the first five verses. After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed, 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.

Now, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

So, we're thinking about eternal life. And let's paint a picture as much as we can to create a sense of longing, to build anticipation, and to give focus. It's something we do in everyday life. We have summer holidays coming soon, perhaps. So, at some point, we will look at the holiday brochures, we will check TripAdvisor, or we're going to the cinema. So, we might find ourselves looking at the reviews of new films, watching trailers, or maybe we've got just a day trip planned. So, we'll check the weather. We'll make sure we've got our picnic supplies. There are things that we do that create longing, that build anticipation, that give focus. And it's really important for us as Christians that we do that with eternal life. This really lies at the heart of our faith. So, what is eternal life?

At one level, it's the promise, the reality of a happy life forever. A life where there are no troubles or fears, where there will be no losses, there'll be no unmet longings, there will be no intermissions or intervals to break our perfect happiness forever. It is also going to be a glorious life forever. It is a future reality without disease or death. There will be no aching joints or chronic ailments. Every single person will have a perfect, glorified body, and that picture will never fade forever. Eternal life also speaks to us of a loving life forever. It is a community where there will be no envy, no gossip, no arguments. Nobody will ever be misunderstood. No one will ever be slandered.

[3 : 16] We will never find ourselves crossing the street to avoid that awkward neighbor. Rather, everyone will be sharing perfect, open, loving relationships. Even as we begin to paint the picture, who doesn't want this?

There is a goodness to this that we all recognize, and the book of Ecclesiastes tells us why. Speaking of God, the author says, you have set eternity in our hearts. That's why we ache for joy like this. That's why we find ourselves searching. That's why we have sadness when those good things go in this life. And Jesus says to us that when we find our joy in Him, we find joy that lasts forever. But we need to push further in our picture of eternal life and give it greater focus, because the Bible also says eternal life will be a holy life forever. It will be a life forever set free from sin. When we've been called and set apart for God and His worship, and we will find our joy in living perfectly in His ways forever. And we'll have no sense that that limits our freedom or our joy. eternal life will also be a God-centered life forever. The Lord Jesus, God our Father, they will always be the object of our love and joy and delight. They are what make heaven heaven for His people. When we come to know in a whole new way, we know in a whole new way that He alone, Psalm 73, can truly satisfy our souls.

And the truth is that made in God's image as we are, nothing else truly satisfies except life in Jesus. So when Jesus prays about eternal life, we need to recognize that He is praying for our eternal and ultimate joy. Jesus loves us, and so He prays for us. And what He prays for us is for our ultimate good. Just to remind ourselves of the logic of Jesus' prayer, so we began remembering the wonderful promise that Jesus prays for us. He is our mediator between us and God, and He's also our role model.

[5 : 48] He teaches us how to pray, but He prays for us and for our good. And we were thinking last week, as Jesus was praying about glory, that through His death on the cross, glory would come to Himself, God the Son, for completing the work of salvation. And in so doing, glory would also come to God the Father through the saving work of Jesus on the cross. And Jesus prayed that He would return to His rightful place of glory in heaven because He is the God of eternal glory. Well, this week, we see that glory belongs to Jesus because He is the one who gives the gift of eternal life to His people.

Glory belongs to Jesus because He brings us into life with God Himself. And again, we'll never understand Christianity and its goal without Jesus' prayer.

We need to recognize the concern of Jesus here. His concern for our good is so great that nothing less than our perfect eternal joy is His aim. And to understand that He prays this prayer heading towards the cross, He will go to the cross to purchase in His death our eternal life.

So, Jesus works and Jesus prays so that you and I, by God's grace and through faith, might enjoy relationship with God today and to enjoy that perfectly in heaven for all eternity.

So, two things, and they're very much related, and then a couple of points of application at each point. First of all, Jesus gives eternal life. Look at chapter 17, verse 2.

[7 : 40] For you granted Him authority. That's Jesus speaking of Himself. The Father granted Jesus authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those you have given Him. So, we're thinking about eternal life.

So, let's begin here with the reality that God is eternal. Psalm 90, from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. And within this prayer, we're reminded that Jesus, as the Son of God, He is also eternal.

So, verse 5, glorify me with the glory I had before the world began. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. In verse 2, we're also reminded that Jesus has been given authority over all people. So, we're getting that sense that through His death on the cross, then His resurrection and His return to heaven, He is going to be appointed King of kings and Lord of lords. We've already heard Him say that the Father has given Jesus authority to judge all people. So, He is the King and the judge overall, whether we recognize it or not. And Jesus goes on to say that from that position of authority, He grants eternal life to all those that the Father gave to Him. And so, we have the wonderful interconnection between the Father and the Son. So, the Father and the Son planned an eternity past, the way of salvation. And an eternity past, the Father knows that the Son is going to come and Jesus will be obedient to His Father all the way to death. And because of Jesus' loving obedience, the Father grants Him authority, a wonderful authority to then be the giver of eternal life.

And He is given this privilege because He lays down His life for us. So, His giving of eternal life is rooted in the fact that He goes to His hour, He goes to suffer and die in our place for our sins.

And this gift of eternal life is a gift of God's grace given by Jesus to those given to Him by God, His Father. It's gift all the way along. Salvation is a work of God. And so, here is Jesus praying that glory will come to God the Father, glory will come to Him as the Son, as His chosen people trust Him, and as they receive this gift of eternal life.

[10 : 11] So, God is eternal and His Son is eternal. The plan of salvation is eternal. But we also need to recognize that when Jesus is praying about eternal life, it reminds us that we too, we're not eternal, but we are made to live forever.

C.S. Lewis captured it in a really striking way when he said, there are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. And Jesus in John's gospel gives us a lot of teaching about eternity. And from the standpoint of eternity, Jesus will say, basically, there are two types of people. So, we heard Him in John chapter 5. There are those people who hear Jesus and they believe.

Or in chapter 10, the image is the same. It's there are sheep who belong to Jesus and they hear and they obey His voice. But there are also those who are not His sheep.

There are those who don't hear and believe. But from eternity's standpoint, there's basically those two types of people. And we've been hearing from Jesus, there are two different eternal destinies, but both are eternal destinies.

[11 : 25] So, John 3.16. There is the wonderful prospect of eternal life in the presence and the joy of Jesus. But chapter 3.16, John chapter 10, also speaks about a different destiny.

The destiny, the destiny of eternal perishing in the misery of the judgment of Jesus. Two types of people and two eternal destinies.

Turn with me to John chapter 10 and let's look at it more closely. The context for what Jesus is saying, verses 22 to 24, Jesus is surrounded by opponents.

Nehemiah this morning, surrounded by opponents. So is Jesus. They have a question. If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. But they want to trap Him because they've already decided He's not sent by God.

He is a false Messiah and so they're seeking a reason to kill Him. Jesus knows this. Look at Jesus' answer. Jesus answered, on the question of Messiah, I did tell you, but you do not believe.

[12:29] The works I do in my Father's name testify about me. So Jesus is saying to them, every time I did a miracle, every leper that was healed, every paralyzed person that walked, every blind person that was made to see, every sinner that was granted forgiveness is an indication from God Himself, a testimony that Jesus really is God's chosen Messiah, Savior, King.

Every miracle was a powerful, wonderful work of God to display the glory of God and to give a window into the kingdom of God. That world free of sin and sickness and death and suffering. We get a glimpse in Jesus' ministry. But Jesus said to them in verse 26, But you do not believe because you are not my sheep.

Some of us are familiar with the idea of common grazing. There's land where many flocks or cattle can be there to graze.

And so if a farmer comes and he gives the command to his sheep to come, well, the rest will not bother because they don't recognize that farmer.

[13:42] They don't recognize his voice. Now, Jesus is saying there are some who do not recognize me, who do not listen to my voice.

But why do some listen to Jesus? Why do some become his sheep? He goes on, verse 27, My sheep listen to my voice.

I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life. Jesus gives eternal life.

It is God's grace at work in a person's heart that causes them to be able to hear and to respond to the voice of Jesus. It's a gracious work of God. It's that work promised in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 31, the new covenant. That great open heart surgery that God would do in the gospel that he would take our hearts of stone, unwilling and unable to choose to respond towards God, to do what is good, to take out our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh, to give us the willingness to listen and to obey, to place his spirit within us, to write and to inscribe his law on our hearts, to hear the voice of Jesus and to respond.

[15:02] That's not natural. It's a wonderful work of God. It's a miracle of God's grace. Achieved by Jesus' death on the cross, that new covenant in his blood.

Left to ourselves, we would never listen. We would never follow. We would never obey. Rather, to use the language of R.C. Sproul, we are those who violate his holiness.

We insult his justice. We make light of his grace. These things can hardly please him.

Like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, we can easily flatter ourselves. We're not that bad. We don't really need a savior, or we don't merit God's wrath. And when we do that, we ignore God's holiness.

We ignore the depth of our own rebellion. But Jesus, when he says he gives eternal life, presents us with that humbling, but also wonderful reality that he has come to give that gift.

[16:12] So we need the work of our good shepherd, and he has come, and he has completed the work of the good shepherd in laying down his life for us. We need him to do that.

We need him to break the chains of sin and death, and he is willing to do that if we will trust him and ask him to do it in our hearts. He is the one who has come to exchange that stubborn heart for a heart made willing to love and follow him.

He must act in power so that we would become his sheep and listen to his voice, and he is willing, he is ready and willing to act in power. So there is a connection that Jesus must die so he might receive the gift of eternal life.

And so Jesus looks at the hour of the cross, and he is willing to go there because he knows it will bring us salvation. So that instead of death, we might know life.

Now, death is not something that we like to think about very much. The Bible is really clear. It is our last great enemy. Death brings with it real fear, and it brings with it real sadness.

[17 : 23] But it is something we need to use to go back to Ecclesiastes. It's better to go to the house of mourning than the house of laughter. It's really important for us to think about eternity.

Now, as a society, we don't like to think about death. We certainly don't like to think about eternity, so we treat it as that taboo thing. We spend a lot of time and energy trying to be distracted from the great realities of life and death.

Or we try and make light of death. We turn funerals into celebrations rather than times of mourning. And in this context, the church must be different. We must both live in light of eternity, but also be willing to speak about death and eternity.

And when we do, for us as the people of God, I would suggest that there are two things that follow. As we think about the fact that Jesus gives eternal life, as we think about eternity and eternal life, it leads us to worship.

I'm thinking about it this week. It's one of the things that makes Christian funerals really special. Because there we find ourselves at a place of sorrow and grieving, but also a time of worship.

[18 : 39] We're praising the sovereign God who is faithful in life and faithful into eternity. That collectively as God's people, we grieve, but we grieve with hope.

We find hope as we claim the promises of the gospel, the promise of resurrection and of new creation. We worship as we recognize Jesus, the one who left eternal glory, to become one of us, to give God glory by granting his people eternal life.

The one who paid the ultimate cost to give his bride the ultimate gift. That Jesus came into this world and he suffered and died and then he returned to the glory of heaven to prepare for us an eternal home, an eternal joy that we can scarcely imagine.

And so there's a wonderful source of worship that are truths to make our hearts sing, to give us hope even in the depths of sorrow as we consider the promise of eternal life.

But here's the second thing that I think considering eternal life does for us. It does something in terms of our mission. I spent part of Monday afternoon on a prayer walk around the neighborhood and doing that at the same time as asking God to be glorified in this community.

[20 : 06] Thinking about the various types of people that live here, thinking about the various churches. But when you're thinking about eternity, doesn't it give a sense of weight to our mission and a sense of urgency to our mission as we represent the one who came to give the gift of eternal life?

Does it give us a motivation for that ongoing task of making Jesus known? I was reminded of C.T. Studd's words, one of the missionaries to China.

He put it very poetically. He said, Some wish to live within the sound of church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. For C.T. Studd, the realities of eternity drove his mission, caused him to leave behind affluent England to go to China to minister there, to seek, to make Jesus known.

The realities of eternity are so important for fueling our kingdom mission. And it's important for us, I think, then regularly to ask, What is God leading me to do for his kingdom?

Maybe not like C.T. Studd to go to China, maybe, but what is he asking us to do as we share the gospel?

[21 : 33] We share the gospel, the good news that while we are made in the image of God and we are made for relationship, but that tragically and persistently we sin and rebel, God loved us and he sent his son, the Lord Jesus, and Jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice for us.

And through his death on our behalf, we can know forgiveness and peace and adoption and eternal life with never-ending glory.

We have good news and we have really important news. And so we pray and so we proclaim and we ask people, Will you believe?

Will you hear Jesus' voice? And will you follow? Because Jesus is the one who gives us eternal life. Second thing to think about, and as I said, it's related, is that Jesus gives us life with God.

Look back at John 17, verse 3. Jesus says, Now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

[22 : 49] So the beauty of eternal life is that it's not just a quantity, but it's also a quality. It's the gift of knowing and being known by God himself.

Jesus gives us everlasting life with the everlasting God of love. And this knowing that Jesus speaks of, it's not a mere head knowledge, well, I know about God.

I've read the Bible. I've come to church. I know about Him. I know about the Trinity. I know that Jesus died on the cross. I know that God is. It's a personal experience of a personal relationship. It says, I know Him as my Father. I've come to know that He is good and that He is for me and I trust Him and I listen to Him. He loves me and He leads me and He listens to me when I pray and He looks after me every day.

It's a different quality of knowing. It's the knowing of personal relationship. Let me use this by way of a poor analogy.

[23 : 55] It's a difference maybe sometimes you might see in an airport. So imagine you're in a busy airport and you're waiting for a loved one. Maybe you haven't seen them for weeks or for months and you know the plane is about to arrive.

And so while you're waiting at the arrivals gate eager to be reunited, you see a celebrity and you know that celebrity. But I imagine most of us, unless we're slightly extreme, the most we're going to do is maybe give an awkward smile.

Maybe if we're really confident, we might ask for a selfie. But the difference between that knowing of the celebrity where we kind of keep our distance and then the knowing when we see our family member and we run to embrace them and there's joy and there's tears.

That's the kind of knowing that Jesus brings for us with our God. That we are known and loved deeply.

That we enjoy a deeply personal relationship with God the Father, with Jesus the Son, through the Spirit, forever. And so as Jesus prays about eternal life, Jesus is really asking that we would shift attention from temporary pleasures that can take up so much attention but will always leave us restless to the eternal enjoyment of God that brings rest.

[25 : 25] Jesus came to give eternal joy to His people as we are welcomed into the loving arms of our everlasting God.

So let's explore two things about eternal life with God together. First, let's think about the protection that Jesus talks about.

Back to John chapter 10 and verse 28 to 30. I'm just going to read them again and listen to how definite and definitive Jesus is.

There is no room for doubt in His words. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one. Did you hear it?

[26 : 25] Jesus, what's the strongest force in the universe? The strongest force in the universe is the hands of God and those hands of God keep us safe from here to eternity.

That's what Jesus prays and that's what Jesus works for. So the promise of eternal life that Jesus gives to us is secure. Our salvation is secure because not only is it the work of God but also that we are kept by God the Father and God the Son.

Think about Jesus in His ministry. The same Jesus who took Peter by the hand when He was going under the water as His faith was shaken and raised Him up to safety.

The same Jesus who took Jairus' daughter by the hand and raised her from death is the same Jesus who grips and guards His people in His power and in His love.

He is the good shepherd and He makes sure that His sheep listen and He never loses one. Last weekend we took a trip to Dalscon Farm.

[27 : 40] I recommend if you like farms and farm parks. A couple of things as I was sort of thinking about this text and then thinking about Dalscon. One point in the middle of the afternoon so Dalscon's full of lots of very cute baby goats baby lambs some cute baby donkeys as well really busy full of animals but there's one point where I was looking and I saw the farmer's wife and she spotted something and she jumped over a fence and then she signaled to her husband and he also jumped over the fence and so I was immediately interested in what was happening and they were looking to sort of corral and catch this one sheep and the reason why they were looking to catch that one sheep was because it had got a horn tangled in some bailing rope and so they were keen to set it free.

That's what shepherds do. Also on that farm park some of us will know the story of Fiona the loneliest sheep in the world. Remember that story the sheep near Brora fell off a cliff was there for ages until it got kind of airlifted up had lived in isolation.

Do you know what Fiona's not lonely anymore? She's got two lambs with her this year and again why is that? Because of the love and care of the farmers at Dalscon.

Just tiny windows whenever we look at a good shepherd or a good farmer into the much greater love and goodness of Jesus our good shepherd. God and what he promises to us here in John 10 is that we are entirely safe and secure in the double grip of God.

Now Hollywood loves and it's great the tension and the drama that you see so often usually in some kind of action movie maybe there's been a car crash and the car is heading towards the cliff and the person gets out just in time and they're grabbing on by their fingertips and you ask yourself are they going to survive or not and maybe somebody comes and catches their hand and still the question remains is it going to turn out okay or not?

[29 : 49] And you know from whether it's a good character or a bad character how it's going to go. Hollywood loves the tension and it makes for great TV but we need to understand it makes for terrible theology because when we respond in faith to the call of Jesus we have the promise that he holds us firm he will not lose one of those that have been given to him the father assures us that he will not lose his grip look at verse 30 Jesus says I and the father are one they are one because they're both God but they're also one in purpose and their purpose is to protect Christians until we fully enjoy eternal life Jesus prays for the gift of eternal life to be given and he will shortly lay down his life to secure it for us and he continues to work for us now holding us in his grip so that none of us who are trusting in him will ever be lost the hands that hold us firm are the hands that were nailed to our Roman cross to bear away our guilt and shame to secure our reconciliation to God to pay in full our record of debt and with him that is the gift of eternal life so there is protection we are secure in the eternal life we're given by Jesus and so the second thing as we think about Jesus giving us life with God is to think about praise now I wonder as we think about eternal life if we were being honest does eternity ever sound a little bit dull do we ever find ourselves asking the question won't we get tired of it you know we're so used to things being temporary the idea of something that lasts forever that's really hard to imagine our capacity for joy in God our hearts as it were are so limited that it may not excite us like it should the reality of eternity millions billions trillions of years to enjoy

Jesus and to worship him together one day we might find that to be the most mind-blowing and exciting reality in the world and the very next day it might seem so mundane I think to help us we are to remember who it is that is praying for the gift of eternal life here is Jesus the eternal son of God who has spent all eternity enjoying life with his father sharing the glory of his father sharing of perfect goodness and glory and beauty and truth nothing lacking in eternal life and it's as the eternal and powerful son of God he prays the one with infinite wisdom and power and goodness he prays wanting the very best that he could ever give to his people he prays desiring that we would have life and life to the full he prays that we would know eternal life with him forever and for that to capture our hearts

I think we need to keep considering the Jesus that we meet in the gospels the nature of the friendship that he shared with his disciples the transformation he worked in people's lives the love that he demonstrated that changed people's identity and destiny that the one who prays for us is the one who is love and he prays and he works so we can share this love of God forever as Christians Jesus has destined us for eternal happiness there is an eternal weight of glory beyond compare there is a life free of sin and sickness despair and death a life lived with Jesus and as he prays he invites us to turn from sin to know him to trust him to live in light of eternity to live lives of eternal significance to live lives of joyful praise because

Jesus has invited us into eternal life to know the only true God and Jesus Christ the one whom he sent well in that spirit let's pray together