

A Prayer for the World

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Preacher: Benji Cook

[0 : 0 0] So the reading this morning is found on page 1089 of the Church Bibles. That's 1089 and we're reading John chapter 17.

Beginning to read at verse 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come, glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.

Since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

[1 : 1 3] Now, they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me.

And they have received them, and have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them.

I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, give them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost, except the son of destruction, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

[2 : 2 0] But now, I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I will consecrate myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I am in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and love them, even as you loved me.

[3 : 45] Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, that you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Thanks very much for reading. Why don't I lead us in prayer as we begin. Diddle, thank you so much that the Lord Jesus Christ has made the unknowable God known, that because of him, every Christian has the immense privilege of knowing God because of your Son.

Amen. Now, I want to tell you a little story this morning. I think I probably had, two, three weeks ago, and I've mentioned this to some of you already, one of the greatest encouragements in my Christian walk over the last, at least, year or so, I think.

And it was when I met a lady called Jean. Now, Jean is in her late 80s, and Jean lives in the care home on Barry Road, called the Elm. Some of you might know it, just off of Lordship Lane.

[5 : 11] And Jean has been there for well over 25 years. Sadly, Jean was kind of, well, she was hit by a car when she was younger on her bike, and it left her with severe damage down her left-hand side.

So she had to have a leg amputated. She's hunched to one side, and she struggles to speak. And this has basically been Jean's life since that accident. But for 26 years at the Elms, Jean has been running a Bible study with the 11 or 12 other residents there.

She's also been helping run the Sunday service on Sunday with the other residents there. And she's been faithfully trying to tell the gospel to them. And when I asked Jean, Jean, what can I be praying for you?

I'm thinking she might say something to do with health or something along those lines. She said, please, can you pray for my friend Anne? I told the gospel to Anne last week. She looked like she was literally on the verge of accepting it.

And then she pulled back. Please pray for my friend Anne. Now, if we were to ask the question, though, who is Jean? And if we asked it, you know, if the world was asking that question, well, they would probably say Jean really is nobody.

[6 : 23] Jean is nobody. She's disabled. She's in her 90s. Financially, she doesn't have much going for her. She hasn't had a visitor, a personal visitor, in almost a year. Well, Jean is nobody, if you were to ask the world.

Who is Jean? Well, arguably, no one. And of course, if you were to ask that question, who is Jean? Well, I wonder, you need to ask the question about yourself, don't you? Who am I?

Now, I was having a conversation with some of the guys and gals at JAM, which is our youth group. And it was very interesting, the ability that they have to use terms such as gender fluid and cisgender, and they're 14, 15, some of these guys, terms that I had no idea about at their age, but they're just so kind of adept at using them.

And it struck me that identity is such a key issue at the moment, isn't it? Who are you? Who are you? Who is Jean? Well, maybe nobody. Who are you?

And if we were going to ask that question of the disciples, who are the disciples in this upper room discourse, which we're at the end of in chapter 17, we probably would have come up with a very similar answer to Jean.

[7 : 29] Well, the disciples, well, they're no one. They're no one. They're a group of 11 illiterate fishermen who are scared, who've been betrayed, and they're tasked with bringing the gospel to the rest of the world, tasked with doing so with a message about a crucified slave.

And they're to do so with the fact that the person that they're talking about, well, he isn't even here anymore. He isn't even here. So who would you say the disciples are? Well, I'm sure in many ways you would say nobody.

Now, we're coming to the end of our upper room discourse, and this is the great high priestly prayer, as it's called. And it feels weird, and it's weird for two reasons. It's weird for two reasons because, number one, there's nothing new in this prayer.

There's nothing new in it. And everything that we've seen in John 17, we've seen already. It makes it difficult for me as a preacher to think, how do I say anything at all new? And number two, it's weird because it's not actually directed to the disciples.

It's a prayer between Jesus and God, but they kind of can listen in to one half of the conversation. So it's quite a weird thing as far as Scripture goes. And basically, I came up with a silly illustration to really try and help us get our head around the fact, like, why is this here?

[8 : 42] Why would you have no new material? Why would we listen in to one side of a prayer? And I want you to imagine your first high school crush. Okay? Can you think back that far, some of you? I want you to imagine your first high school crush, and you think, oh my gosh, I just really want this person to know that I like them.

Okay? I just really want them to know. But I don't want to let them know that I like them without knowing first that they like me. Okay? You know, the classic dilemma. Well, how do you know? And so you think, oh, what can I do?

Well, we have this mutual friend. All right? We have this mutual friend. I'm going to ask my mutual friend to call this person I like. Okay? I'm going to ask them to call it. I'm going to be there when they call this friend, and I'm going to listen in to that conversation.

All right? I'm not going to let them know. You know, I'm just in the background. Okay? So it goes something like this. Your friend calls up. He says, oh, hey, how are you doing? Great. I'm just wondering. Yeah, yeah, Fred, he's a great guy, isn't he?

Oh, you do think Fred is a great guy? Yeah, Fred would love to hear that. I'm sure if he was here, Fred would love to hear that. Oh, you would go on a date with him? That's amazing. Hang up. Think how good Fred is feeling, right?

[9 : 45] Fred is hearing that, and he's got certainty. And it's, in a weird way, sort of the same with this prayer. We're listening in to Jesus, praying to the Father, talking about these wonderful things for our encouragement as we listen in.

And that brings me on to my first point, which is just going to be the first four verses. The cross makes God known. The cross makes God known. Have a look with me at verses one to four. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you, since you've given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I've glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Now, we're seeing the words glory and hour all over these verses. And they are just to do with the cross. So throughout John, we've been building up to this point. And the hour and glory is Jesus going to the cross.

[10 : 57] And glory, well, it feels like a weird word, doesn't it? When we think glory, I feel warm, fluffy hug with big yellow lights in the background. But glory in the Old Testament is God's character made known.

It's God's character made known. If you want to know God, well, you need to see his glory. But there's a problem, isn't there? Because verse 3, and this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God.

The only problem with that is, and I hope we've been seeing that as we've kind of had our head in John, no one has seen God. Chapter 1, verse 18, right in the prologue, no man has seen God.

And yet, man needs to see God. Man needs to see God to have eternal life. And yet it is through the Lord Jesus Christ, the rest of verse 3, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

I have glorified you on earth, verse 4. And now, Father, verse 5, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I have with you before the world existed. He's talking about the cross.

[11 : 56] And he's saying that it is the moment upon which Jesus is nailed to that piece of wood. That is the moment that you see God. If you want to know who God is, if you want to know what he's like, you look at Jesus on the cross.

Now, I have the great privilege, and I use that word semi-sarcastically, of getting to go to quite a few Christian conferences. And it's always really great, you get the speaker comes up, and then we get this little intro of the speaker, that this is Dr. Dr. So-and-so, who's written a PhD on this, and is an expert in Puritan literature, has 17 children, all of whom are in the ministry.

And you just think, oh, okay, yeah, great, the classic Christian CV. Well, I want you to think, though, what would God, if God was putting together his CV, if he was wanting to demonstrate to you who he is, what would God put on his CV?

What would he put on? And think of all the things that he could put on, right? He could put on that I am the creator of the universe, I don't need to say any more. He could put on the exodus. He could put on salvation from Assyria.

He could put on the return from exile. Yet God chose one thing and one thing only. He chose the cross. He chose the cross. Moses only saw God's back in glory.

[13 : 12] Isaiah only saw the train of the robe filling the temple. Ezekiel only saw a vision of a vision. And yet we and the disciples saw the cross, and that is God's glory.

That's where God is seen. Now, I really need us to picture this because this is the classic Sunday school answer, isn't it? How do you know God? Jesus. It's just the classic Sunday school answer.

And we might be tempted to switch off, fall asleep, or doze off at this point. This is Christianity 101. But I want us to imagine, I need us to imagine, the person that we love most on this earth, I want whoever that might be, it might be your child, it might be your partner, it might be your friend.

Well, I want you to imagine them up on the cross. I want you to imagine them up on the cross, and that they've gone there willingly. And not only have they gone there willingly, they've gone there willingly for enemies.

Because that is the picture of the unknowable God. That is the way in which God has decided to make himself known. His most beloved, nailed to a piece of wood for the sake of the world.

[14 : 19] God could have chosen any way he wanted to make himself known. God chose the cross. And that leads me on to my second point. The apostles' words make God known.

The apostles' words make God known. Now it begs the question, and I'm sorry we're having to fly through this chapter a little bit, and when I was looking up how other preachers have divided this passage, I found that all of them divided it into three whole sermons.

So there you go, you're getting three for the price of one, but don't worry, we will stick to time. The disciples make God known. Now obviously this begs the question, Benji, we weren't there.

We weren't there. We didn't see the cross. If the cross is what makes God known, well then how can we know God? Surely it was only the people that were there. And how are we supposed to know, especially that Jesus is not here?

We're not like doubting Thomas. I can't put my hands in his wounds. I can't touch his hands. How are we supposed to see the cross? Well basically, John and Jesus paints for us here what is, I suppose, a holy relay race.

[15 : 22] Okay? A holy relay race. But notice that the thing that's being passed on is the word of God. Have a look with me at verse 6. Verse 3. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.

Yours they were. And you gave them to me and they have kept what? Your word. Verse 8. For I have given them the words that you gave me and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you and they have believed that you sent me.

Verse 14. I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as the eye am not of the world. And finally, verse 17, sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. And remember back to our prologue. Who was Jesus Christ? Well, he was the word, wasn't he? He was the logos. And then he became flesh and died on the cross, which is the supreme act of God speaking.

God spoke in the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. He made himself known through the cross. And then those words that Jesus enacted, he passed on to the disciples.

[16 : 31] So we've gone from the Father, who's given the words to Jesus, who enacted them on the cross. The disciples have seen it and have God's words. They have God's words. And notice what that achieves in verse 10.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. I am glorified in them. We mustn't miss the significance of this because no one has God's glory in the Old Testament.

No one but God alone. In fact, no one could even see God. And now we're seeing that somehow the apostles can glorify God too. Somehow, because the apostles have the words of Jesus, because they've seen God on the cross, dead, crucified, well, they can glorify God.

So the relay race continues. This brings me on to my final and third point, and this is where we're going to be spending the majority of our time together.

We've seen that the cross makes God known. We've seen that the apostles make God known. They glorify him. And now, finally, point three. We see those who believe in the apostles' words make God known.

[17 : 41] Can we just go to the next slide? Those who believe, those with the words of the apostles make God known. Because you see, there's obviously one more step in this relay race that we need to cover.

Not only have we not seen the cross, well, we've also not, we're not an apostle. So how is it that we today can have the glory of God? How is it today that we can have confidence that we know God?

Well, there's one more step in this relay race. Have a look with me at verse 20. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you've sent me.

This is the stunning conclusion of the relay race. The Father has passed the words to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus has made God known on the cross.

The apostles have then passed on those words to those who would believe, which is us, if you're a Christian here in this room. And again, notice what this achieves in verse 24.

[18 : 56] Father, I desire that they, that is the people who believe in the apostles' words, also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world.

That all of those who believe in the words of the apostle will have an eternity spent beholding the glory of the Son. That is the product of believing these words. Now, basically, this sermon only really has one point and I really want to spend some time together thinking about what the application of this would be for us because these are such lofty things that we can know God in the cross.

It's such a Sunday school answer. It's such a kind of, I've heard this before, that my great fear is that we're going to kind of see this prayer and just think, yeah, sure, I've known that since I was about seven or eight years old when my parents taught it to me.

I want to contest, though, that the reality that God is known in one and only one way, dead on a cross, has immense implications for how we relate to him, how we love him, how we know him.

There is only one way to know God. So that must mean that if the Christian is saved, if the Christian is saved for a relationship with God and the best thing that we can do is know him more, it means that Christians never, never move away from contemplating the cross.

[20 : 25] Ever. Now, there's some stats which I don't have with me here, but it was done by a Christian publisher and stated that Jesus Christ, as a topic for reading, that Christians buy books about, is one of the lowest topics that people buy books on.

People just don't want to read about Jesus. And I just think that is shocking and appalling, but it makes sense, doesn't it, because it's just so overly familiar. And yet we see here that the cross, Jesus Christ on the cross, is the only way to know God.

Now, I want to kind of take us through some logical thought processes to see how that actually plays out. Like, what would that actually mean for me as a Christian if I want to know God? How can I look at the cross?

What does that actually mean? Well, two ways. First, I want us to think about trust. Now, all of us, especially in the light of COVID, especially with death being thrust in our face in war and everything else over and over and over again, have been presented with the fact that we're mortal.

And that certainly has been something that we're all painfully aware of now. And if it's not, well, then it's something that is worth thinking on. And I want us to ask the question, none of us know what happens after we die.

[21 : 41] What are we placing our trust in when that happens? What are we placing our trust in? Now, this morning, as I was doing my quiet time, which I often do in a coffee shop, the lady who runs the coffee shop, she asked me, well, how do you know God?

Because I have a spiritual feeling. I feel like there's God and I feel like I can trust that, that when I die, I'm going over to the better place. And I just thought, how on earth can you trust that?

A feeling. Just a feeling. No, but then when we put that into the context of looking at Jesus on the cross, can you imagine anyone else that you would rather trust with what happens to us when we die?

Can you imagine anyone else when you see the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross who's given his life for you, who's risen from the dead, well, there can't be a question about whether or not Jesus is trustworthy.

There can't be a question about whether or not it is worth putting our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us are going to die. Where is our trust placed? Well, I want it only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[22 : 50] Two. Now again, it's almost a trope, isn't it, to think of all of us just want to be loved and there's so many songs about love. It's the most popular word in pop music, so I'm told.

We all just want to be loved. Well again though, it's true, but again, where do you have certainty that you're loved? Sure, it might be from friends and family. Sure, you might think you're valuable in kind of their esteem and their opinion, but what about whether or not God loves you?

And what about whether or not their love is unconditional? Is it unconditional? Is it entirely for me? But when we look at the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, is there anything more certain than his love for us?

And I've only chosen two here, trust, love. I haven't spoken about justice, I haven't spoken about holiness, I haven't spoken about judgment, all of those things we can see through the lens of the cross.

Now I started this sermon by asking who are the disciples? Who are the disciples? And the question was, well the answer was probably actually they're not anyone particularly, they're not very impressive.

[23 : 57] All they have is words, all they have is words about a crucified slave, that's all they have. Well can I suggest that if you look around the room today, a group of people who are following the Lord Jesus Christ in a language that didn't exist, in a country that didn't exist at the time, that we are all living proof of the power of their words.

How many followers do you think there have been over the centuries in the words of the apostles? Billions probably, almost definitely. Yes they're just words, but these eleven men and their words given to them by the Lord Jesus Christ, well they've brought billions into eternity.

Who are the disciples? Well they're the greatest missionaries to ever live. Now I also began this talk by asking to conclude, who is Gene?

I wonder if you remember Gene. Now I want us to imagine, and this might be slightly heretical to put it this way, so just have your ears twiggled to see if I'm about to preach heresy or not, but I want us to imagine that the Godhead, they got together Father, Son and Holy Spirit before time itself, and they were thinking, man, okay, we want to let the world know that we love them.

We want to let the world know that planning in advance, which I know outside of time doesn't actually make sense, but this is an illustration. So they're thinking to one another, how do I make the world know that they are loved?

[25 : 19] Because they are loved. How do I let them know? And they say, well maybe a love letter. Love letter, you know, classic, it will be handwritten, it won't be by WhatsApp, it will feel really, really intimate and lovely.

And you can imagine them kind of gathering around the table, the Godhead together, I know this is heretical, but anyway, they're gathering around the desk and they're pulling out a nice quill with some ink and they've got some really nice parchment, and they're thinking together, what is it that we're going to write on this piece of paper to let the world know that we love them, that I love them?

Well, they write Jean. They write Jean. Specifically, they write Jean talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jean shared the gospel with her friend Anne, she was doing the great work of making God known to the rest of the world.

She was displaying the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. They wrote Jean. Who is Jean? Well, she's not nobody. She's the love letter of God to a dying world.

That is who Jean is. And so if you are a Christian here today, you might think that all you have is words, weak words that don't do very much.

[26 : 29] You might feel like it's weak and ineffectual, but every single time you talk about the Lord Jesus Christ with your family in family Bible time, with your colleagues, with your friends, you are making the one God known.

You are making him known and showing his glory through the Lord Jesus Christ. You, the church, are God's love letter to a dying world. And friends, I hope, my great hope from this sermon is that that will make you fall so radically in love with Jesus and be so encouraged to just speak of him.

That is all we have to do. We have the apostles' words. We know the Lord Jesus Christ. We know the unknowable God. And all we have to do is speak of him.

That's all we have to do. I'm going to close us now in prayer. We're going to go into discussion groups. There's going to be two questions that are going to come up on the slides.

I would love us to be thinking through those questions together. Please, let's not let this be an intellectual exercise. Let's let this be something that actually goes to our heart.

[27 : 40] Why don't I lead us in prayer as we close. Jesus, I thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ that on the cross he made you known and that Father, because of that, because we have your precious words, we can know you.

Lord, please give us a great boldness to share those words with others, but also an adoration of the Lord Jesus Christ that the God who was high and lifted up would make himself known at the death of a slave on a cross.

What a God we serve. Amen.