

The Prayer of Jesus for Us

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[0 : 00] Father, thank you for your word. We pray today that you would help us to learn from it. And learning from it, we pray that you would be at work by your spirit to drive us to faith and obedience.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down. Now, friends, I want to begin this Bible talk by saying that it's one that I come to with a little bit of fear and trepidation.

You see, my Lord is the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the focus of my existence. His person and work is the basis on which I'm saved. He is the one before whom all creation will one day bow the knee and confess him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

His life has shaped my life. His sacrifice has shaped my attitudes. His work has shaped my life and ministry. And yet I know that I am a frail man in prayer.

And this week I have come to this passage in John chapter 17. It is the longest and greatest prayer by Jesus recorded in scripture.

[1 : 05] And the great expositor, Matthew Henry, called it the most remarkable prayer, followed by the most full and consoling discourse ever uttered on earth.

The reformer Martin Luther said, This is truly beyond measure, a warm and hearty prayer. He opens the depths of his heart, both in reference to us and to his father, and he pours them all out. It sounds so honest, so simple. It is so deep, so rich, so wide. No one can fathom it. And Melancthon, another of the reformers, when giving his last lecture before his death, said of John chapter 17, There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or on earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime than the prayer offered up by the Son of God himself.

And the Anglican Bishop Ryle said, The chapter we now have begun is the most remarkable in the Bible. It stands alone. There is nothing like it. Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, Thomas Manton, preached 45 sermons on these 26 verses.

The Irish preacher, called Marcus Rainsford, wrote expositions of John 17, amounting to more than 500 pages. Martin Lloyd-Jones says, I have a little book at home with 12 sermons on it.

[2 : 29] He preached extensively from it. And his book is called *Safe in the World, The Secure Basis for Christian Living*. So there is what others greater than I have thought of what is done with this book, this chapter in the pulpit.

And today I'm going to speak on it for 25 minutes or so. So no wonder I'm in fear and trepidation. It is a wonderful piece of scripture. However, let me say that there is probably no better place for us to finish our series on prayer before we begin our series on judges next week.

So it's a great place to finish. But we are only going to get a broad outline of it today. And we're going to find some things to encourage us and to inform our lives of prayer.

So let's turn to it. Let's get a feeling for the setting of this particular prayer. We know from its immediate context that Jesus uttered this prayer after he'd instituted and celebrated the Lord's Supper.

It was also after a long discourse that ran from John 13 to John 16 to his disciples, preparing them for his imminent leaving of them. However, to personalize it a bit, I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 22.

[3 : 46] So if you're in John's gospel, keep your hand there and just flip back to Luke's gospel and go to chapter 22. And when you alight there, Luke 22, we're going to look at verses 31 to 32.

Again, the context is set. Jesus has just celebrated the Lord's Supper and he turns to Peter, otherwise known as Simon, and he warns them that there are tough times of spiritual testing coming.

Look at verse 31. Jesus says to Simon Peter, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. So all of the disciples.

Now look at what he says in verse 32. He encourages Peter with these words. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. You see, because the Lord knows that this coming time for them is going to be tough. He has been praying for them. And he has been praying that when Peter turns back, he will strengthen his brothers.

[4 : 49] And I wonder whether John 17 represents these sorts of prayers that were prayed by Jesus as he headed towards his own death. Prayers for his apostles.

Prayers for those who would come to believe in him after he had left. So let's turn and have a look at what he says to those about what he's praying to those for whom he prays.

It's long been recognized that the prayer of Jesus here in Luke. Sorry, you better go back to John 17. Falls neatly into three sections. In the first section, Jesus prays for himself.

In the second, he prays for his disciples or in fact, his apostles gathered around him. In the third section, he prays for those who will believe in him because of the witness of those believers.

That is of the apostles. In other words, this last part of his prayer is a prayer effectively for us. That is for we who have believed in Jesus because of the witness of the apostles.

[5 : 49] Let's have a look briefly at each section. And I did warn you, it will be just brief. First, the things that Jesus prays for himself. Look at verses one to five. Notice the context. Look at verse one. Jesus says, Father, the hour has come.

Now, for some time now in John's gospel, Jesus has been referring to this thing called the hour. The first time he spoke of it was to his mother at the wedding of Cana in chapter two.

There, Jesus said to his mother, my hour has not yet come. Then in chapter 12, he mentions it again. This time he links it with his death. Listen to this. John 12 verses 23 and 24.

The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified. The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Can you hear that? Glorified and death. In the context of his upcoming death, therefore, Jesus utters two imperatives.

[6 : 56] Look at them in John 17. Verse one. Jesus says, glorify your son that your son may glorify you. Second imperative.

Look at verse five. Jesus says, and now, father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. You see, the passion of Jesus, the thing that drives Jesus is the glory of his father.

And as he faces his death, he seeks that glory. And he knows that the glory of the father is bound up with the glory of him, the son. So he says, glorify your son so that your son may glorify you.

What Jesus is asking is, father, be at work in me so that you may shine. He knows, you see, that God's glory will shine as he completes the work that the father had given him to do.

That's what he says in verse four. He knows that this work will enable him to give eternal life to those God gives him. That's what he says in verse two.

[8 : 03] Giving eternal life to humans, you see, is the greater, the greatest glory of God. And so Jesus is asking the father to enable him to see things through to the end so that this might be accomplished so that eternal life might be granted.

Implicitly, he's asking for help to remain faithful to the father so that he might be glorified in the presence of the father and thereby the father glorified. Glorified, you see, the passion of Jesus is the glory of his father and God's glory will be accomplished by him.

The son finishing what God sent him into the world to do. This will eventually bring him into the presence of his father and it will mark the finishing of his work.

And now, father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world began. So this is the prayer that Jesus prays for himself.

In the end, of course, it is a prayer that he would bring glory to his father. In the end, you see, this is a prayer totally directed away from himself.

[9 : 13] It is directed toward the eternal life of those whom God has given him. It is directed at accomplishing the father's goal and thereby bringing in the father's bringing the father glory.

Here is Jesus, I think, a model human being. All things for the glory of God. Let's turn to the prayer of Jesus for his disciples, verses 6 through to 19.

Now, what happens is in verses 6 through to 11 and a half, he grounds his prayer. That is, he gives the reasons for the requests that will follow. And the grounds are these.

Look at what Jesus is saying. I'll take you for a quick skim through it. Verse 6. He's saying, look, God has a special people. God has given a special people to him, Jesus. And Jesus has revealed himself to them over these three years.

They have heard and they have obeyed God's word. Verse 7. These ones now know the source of what Jesus has told them. And they know that the source is God himself.

[10:17] That Jesus has spoken God's word to them. And they have accepted the words the father gave the son to impart to them. Verse 8. They have believed that Jesus is sent from the father.

Verse 8. These ones, therefore, belong to the father because they have received the father's word. They are his. Verse 9. Look at verse 11. Jesus knows the reality.

He is coming to the father. Now, if he is to go to the father, where will that leave the disciples? It will leave his disciples in the world without him. So the grounds of the prayer that follows is that this group of disciples are his.

They are, therefore, the father's. And all that Jesus has belongs to the father. And all the father has belongs to the son.

These disciples are, therefore, the children of the father. And this is the ground of the prayer of Jesus for them. With Jesus going off to the father, they will need the father's help.

[11:22] That's the ground of his prayer. Let's turn and see now, therefore, what he's going to ask the father on their behalf. And there are two core requests in these verses.

Take a look at them. See if you can spot them. Look at the first one. It's in verse 11, second half. And the second is in verse 17. Second half of verse 11 contains the first prayer of Jesus about his remaining disciples, the apostles.

He says, Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name which you gave me so that they may be one as we are one.

See the key words? Protect them. You see, Jesus knows that while he was with them, he was able to keep them safe and protect them. Verse 12. He lost none except the one foreordained in scripture.

However, with him now coming to the father, these disciples are now very exposed. So he says to the father, protect them. He doesn't want them to be removed from the world.

[12:26] He does want them, though, to be protected from the evil one. Verse 15. After all, he knows that in this world, the world will hate them even as it has hated him.

And we know where that is going. That is going to the cross. The evil one will also have his eye on them in the world without Jesus. They belong in the presence of God, even as he does.

However, they will not be there. They will be in the world exposed to the same threats as he had been. They will need God's protection. And the second half of his request is given in verse 17.

Can you see it there? First request, protect them. Second request of the father for the remaining disciples is this sanctify them. And the word sanctify is linked to the word holy.

And the word holy has the sense of being set apart. It's being set aside. And Jesus then explains how this being set aside will be accomplished, how this sanctification will be accomplished.

[13:30] It will be accomplished by the disciples being immersed in God's word. After all, you see, God's word is truth. And that truth will protect them and sanctify them.

God's revelation of himself in his son will set this group of people apart from the rest of the world. It will reserve them for God's service. As they think and they live in line with this truth, they will be protected.

They will be sanctified. By the way, friends, I wonder if I might just push this home a little bit to us. You see, that is why we here at Holy Trinity spend so much time seeking to understand the scriptures.

Why? If we understand them properly, we will understand the son of God. And as we explore them, we grow in the knowledge of the son of God.

And that will protect us. That will sanctify us. That's why as your pastor, I teach you the scriptures because they will make you holy. They will protect you as God works at them by his Holy Spirit to bring you into the knowledge and love of Jesus.

[14:38] So now we've looked briefly at the prayer of Jesus for himself. At the prayer of Jesus for his apostles. Now we turn to the prayer of Jesus to those who will believe in Jesus through the message of the apostles.

In other words, what the people Jesus is praying for is for us. Oh, and also all other Christians who have come after the apostles and who are yet to come. He's praying for them all.

And you can see the change in focus. Look at verse 20. Jesus says, My prayer is not for them, the apostles, alone. I pray for those who will believe in me through their message.

Now, if you look carefully, you'll see that Jesus is asking for two things. First, he actually calls one thing a prayer. And the second thing he does is express a desire, a want.

Look at the prayer in verses 20 to 23. Jesus says, I pray. And then he expresses the content of his prayer. First, he notes that the very, these very people, that is you and me, will come about because the apostles have proclaimed him.

[15:44] The disciples will come about through their message. And then secondly, he asks that they may be one. Now, let me tell you, the oneness here is not structural oneness.

In other words, it's not that every group of Christians will be linked to each other denominational or whatever. Okay. We'll all have the same brand name outside. You know, we'll all be Anglicans or whatever. Okay.

It's not what he means here. No, it's a oneness like the oneness that exists between the father and the son. And verse 21 says that. Jesus asked that they may be one, just as the father is in the son and the son is in the father.

What Jesus is therefore asking for is a unity of believers that demonstrates and reflects the unity of the father and the son. And friends, I know a number of you here travel. And in your travels, you know, when you first, when you come across another Christian, have you felt that sense of they are with you and you are with them?

And they could be, you know, when we were in the Flinders Ranges, we camped and we started chatting to our neighbours in the next door campsite, found out that they were from Holy Trinity Adelaide.

[16:57] But as we chat, we found a unity of faith. Now, the same would happen whether they had been Anglicans or Baptists or whatever, wouldn't it? If they were believers in the Lord Jesus, there is a unity created.

That transcends all structural barriers. You see, this is what has been, Jesus wanting them to be one, just as the father is in the son and the son is in the father.

What Jesus is asking for is a unity of believers that demonstrates and reflects the unity of the father and of the son. An agreement, as it were, in will and in focus and a unity in love.

He talks of love there as well. These things will honour Jesus. By such, the world will know that the father has sent the son and that the son has loved them, even as the father has loved the son.

You see, friends, when you love others, you are expressing what you have seen in the father and in the son. That the father so loved you that he sent his son into the world and that the son so loved you that he was willing to lay down his life for you.

[18:04] And you will see that and everyone that will know that you are Christians because of that. Because of your love that is totally outward looking. You see, that is the prayer of Jesus.

A unity of faith and of love among God's people that will bring many to faith. So there's the prayer of Jesus for us. A prayer for unity of faith and love.

A prayer that has the goal of seeing more people come to know the son and therefore coming to know the father. Now let's turn to the desire of Jesus. Have a look at verse 24. This is what Jesus wants.

And so he says it to the father. He says, father, I want those whom you had those you have given me to be with me where I am. To see my glory.

The glory you've given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. He says, I want them to be there with us and to see the glory you've given me.

[19:08] Because you love me before the beginning of the world. Ultimately, you see, Jesus wants for all believers, whether they be apostles or us, to be with him where he is.

Friends, in this life, as God's people, we see the glory of God the father in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul says that in 2 Corinthians. Father, let me tell you that there is a greater, grander occasion that awaits us all.

That occasion will be when the Lord Jesus appears. And he will take us to be with him so that we might be where he is. Where is he?

With the father. And we'll be like him for we will see him as he is. Friends, as the son returns to the father, so we too will eventually go where we belong.

For we belong not here so much as with the father and with the son. Let's now turn to the last two verses. They operate, I think, as a sort of summary of the whole prayer.

[20 : 20] And Jesus says this. Listen closely to it. Hear all the echoes of the prayer as a whole. Righteous father, though the world does not know you, I know you. And they know that you have sent me.

I have made you known to them. And I will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them. And I myself might be in them.

Friends, this is a grand prayer, isn't it? You could do no better, I think, to set aside it as a project. To meditate upon it for a week or a month.

And just let it soak in. Read it again and again. Dwell on it. Thank God for it. Allow your life to be shaped by it. But also, learn about prayer here.

At the feet of Jesus. Do you remember in these last few weeks as we've spoken about prayer that I've been stressing a number of things? And one thing that I've been saying is that our prayers are so us-focused, aren't they?

[21 : 26] That is not the way of Jesus here. His focus, even when he prays for himself, is God and God's glory, isn't it? His focus is on what others need, this group of disciples and the ones that will come after them, in order to remain in God and for God to remain in them.

His prayer here reflects exactly what we learnt last week as we looked at the Lord's Prayer. Friends, will you let that be the focus of your prayers? Focus on the glory of God the Father and his Son. Focus on the things that will cause you to honour the Father and to honour the Son. Focus on praying that you might be spared from the things that will dishonour the Father and dishonour the Son.

Friends, you are going to be with Jesus the Son and God the Father. In your prayers, focus on the things that will prepare you and others for that time.

Pray that when you get there, there will be nothing to be ashamed of and that God will have given you everything to be able to stand there. Do this when you pray for yourself. Do this when you pray for your family.

[22 : 41] Do this when you pray for your friends. When you pray for the ministry of our missionaries. When you pray for the ministry of your leaders. However, I don't want to stop there.

I want to reflect a little more on what we've found here in this passage. You see, in this passage, we have seen Jesus the intercessor, haven't we? The intercessor for his disciples.

He's interceding. Not only he's interceding for himself. For his apostles. For us. All so that God the Father might be glorified.

Well, friends, I want to tell you some great news at this point. Some absolutely astounding news.

And that is that Jesus has not stopped praying for us who believe in him.

He does it now. If you don't believe me, no, you do it anyway. Pick up your Bibles. Have a look.

Turn with me to the book of Hebrews. And if someone can find the page number for Hebrews 7, yell it out.

[23 : 41] The book of Hebrews is directed toward people who are at risk. And these disciples, just as the disciples were at risk when Jesus turned to the Father.

And the rite of Hebrews tells them of the superlative nature of Jesus. Someone found page number for Hebrews chapter 7? 12.08. Thank you.

Look at verse 24. We're told in verse 24 that Jesus is a priest forever. Now look at verse 25.

God says to us words about Jesus. He says, You see, friends, our Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father.

Not only has he saved us, not only will he be doing everything in order that that salvation is made, you know, is enduring. He lives forever.

[24 : 49] That is, he always lives to intercede for those who come to God the Father through him. What we have seen Jesus doing here in John 17 is what he is still doing.

That's why I guess it's so good that you could keep praying so many prayers about it, preaching so many sermons about it. Telling people that God still, that Jesus is still doing it. He is still praying that

we might be brought home to God the Father.

Still praying that we might be protected. Still praying that we might be sanctified. That we might be forgiven the things that would separate us from the Father. That we might be preserved. Friends, through Jesus we can therefore come to the Father with great boldness.

Because of Jesus we can know that we will receive grace, mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So friends, the last thing I want to say is what I've been saying all along.

I want you to be confident as you pray. God the Father answered the prayers of Jesus in John 17. God the Son lives to intercede for you still.

[26 : 06] For us still. Go to the Father through the Son.

And when you do, you will find God the Father open-handed in giving you what you need in order to come boldly into his presence. You will find him to be full of grace and mercy.

You see friends, God the Father loves God the Son. He loves what he has done. He loves to hear his intercessions for his people.

And he loves those who belong to his Son. And he wants their good. And he wants their good. So ask him for it. You will find him open-handed in giving you what you need to come into his presence. You will find him full of grace and mercy. You see, he loves the Son. And he loves those who belong to his Son. And he wants their good. So ask him for it.

[27 : 18] Ask him for it. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your Son.

Who has given so openly of himself for us and whoever lives to intercede for us. Father, please help us to be like him in prayer.

To be interceding for others. Please help us also to come to you boldly. Knowing that we'll find mercy and grace to help in time of need.

That we will find you to be a father with an open hand full of good things to give his children. Father, please drive us to prayer as individuals and as a congregation.

Across all of our congregations, drive us to prayer, we pray. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing again the song Breathe On Me, Breath of God.

[28 : 54] Amen. Amen.