

God's Plan for the World

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[0 : 00] Well, please have your Bibles open at John chapter 17. We're going to be studying the first five verses this evening.

Well, we're going to start with a question. What is God's plan for this world? I wonder how you'd answer that question.

And I wonder if I went round the room and asked everyone for their answer. Whether we'd all come up with the same one or whether there would be different ones. You'll be pleased to know that I'm not going to do that.

But it is a crucial question. And to take it a bit further, or to ask it another way, why was it that Jesus came? And what is God's purpose for me and for you?

We need to be sure about the answer to these questions. And John 17 verses 1 to 5 are going to be very helpful for us in reminding us and perhaps showing us for the first time what God's purpose is in this world.

[1 : 07] So to set the scene then, as we come to John chapter 17, we find Jesus face to face with his darkest day. It's Thursday night.

He's eaten the final Passover meal with his disciples. He's told them that he's going away. And in chapters 13 to 16 of John's Gospel, he's been preparing them for what they need after he has gone back to the Father.

And now, they head together towards the garden where he'll be betrayed by one of his closest followers. Where Jesus will be arrested and tied up and taken away.

Pretty soon he's going to be abandoned and denied by his remaining followers. And he'll find himself alone facing trumped up charges before a Jewish court and before the Romans.

He's to be beaten. He's to be mocked. He's to be crucified. And he's to face the agony of the Father's wrath. That's what Jesus is facing tonight, tomorrow.

[2 : 20] And what does he do in the light of this? Well, he prays. And wonderfully and thrillingly for us, he prays in the full hearing of his disciples.

And John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has written down that prayer for us. So that we can learn from it. And what a prayer it is.

We're given here the extraordinary privilege of listening in as the eternal Son of God made man talks to God the Father.

He prays in this prayer firstly for himself. And then he prays for his disciples around him. And then he prays for all believers. And that includes us if we have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's a thrilling thing. Here is Jesus praying for himself, for his disciples. Here he is praying for us. And what is the grand subject of his prayer? Well, fundamentally, it's that the mission of God in this world will be completed.

[3 : 30] That it will be carried out. That God will carry out his great purpose. That he will finish the work that he had planned in eternity past.

And so, as we listen into the first part of this prayer, as Jesus prays for himself, what do we learn about God's plan for the world?

And what do we learn about our part in it? Just what did Jesus come to do? Well, the prayer is very personal. It's very direct. And that's not surprising.

Jesus is facing the great trial, the great day. And he doesn't mince his words. He gets straight to the point, as I guess we all would in similar circumstances.

And as he prays, very quickly we get a clear picture of what he's all about. If you look at the first five verses here of this chapter, you'll see that the word glory, or glorify, or glory, glorified rather, comes in five times.

[4 : 35] And then look particularly at verse one. Father, the hour has come, he prays. Glorify your Son. That the Son may glorify you. That is, the Father.

And look at verse four. Jesus says, I glorified you. So this is where we start. And I'm sorry that you don't have an outline in your notice sheet, but we're going to effectively build up a sentence this evening.

So I'll be repeating it several times. So hopefully you'll keep up with that and it'll be clear. So Jesus, first of all, Jesus prays then that the Father will be glorified.

Jesus prays that the Father will be glorified. What do we mean when we talk about the glory of God? Well, I think this is a helpful way to think about it.

The glory of God is the shining out of everything that God is. This is his name, his reputation, his power, his knowledge, his justice, his mercy, his love, and so on.

[5 : 42] It's all of God on display. His majesty there for all to see. It's all of God and his attributes on show. That's the glory of God. And then what does it mean?

What does it mean to glorify God on earth? After all, he is all glorious, isn't he? And there's nothing we can do and there's nothing anyone can do. There's nothing Jesus' prayer can do to make him more glorious.

Well, to glorify him means this. To proclaim and make known God's glory to the world, to the people who are watching on.

It means to lift up his name and his honour and reputation so that others see it more and more.

Think of the athletes who've just competed in the Winter Olympics.

Here's Lizzie Arnold and she's going down the skeleton course face first, 70 miles an hour. And she's the fastest over the events that they do.

[6 : 43] And she gets the gold medal. And that's extraordinary, isn't it? She's the fastest of the fast. She's the best of the best of this pretty scary looking sport. And she is a hugely impressive sports person.

She's very talented, very gifted. And there's something of great substance and weight about her. And as she wins, she goes up onto the podium. And she stands there in view of the watching world. And she's given the gold medal. You see, she is a fabulous sports person. She's incredibly talented. And we stand her up there. And she's all over the media.

She's all around the world. Picture of her holding up the medal. She's being glorified in a sense. Her glory, her brilliance, her greatness is being shown to the world around. And in a much grander, a much more wonderful way.

That is what it means to glorify God. To show and honour him. And lift him up so that the world around sees. So that's what Jesus is praying. He prays that the Father will be glorified in the world.

[7 : 48] That his excellencies, his beauty, his attributes will be made known. That his name might be acknowledged and honoured by everyone.

That's Jesus' prayer. And this is the Father's plan for the world. That he will be glorified. And Jesus prays that that plan will be carried out.

So if you're a Christian believer here this evening, what would you say that your Christian faith is about, first of all? Someone perhaps might say it's living a decent life.

Someone might say it's loving others. Someone else says, well for me it's finding peace and fulfilment or satisfaction. Someone else says, well most of all for me it's about community.

And these things are all good and important and they play their part. But at the very heart, at the very fundamental heart of our Christian faith and of God's mission for the world, is the glory of God.

[8 : 49] We are here to bring glory to God the Father. We know, don't we, the first question of the Shorter Catechism. What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Your salvation, my salvation, this church, this earth is not first of all about us. It's all for the glory of God. And to bring glory to God is God's great mission in this world.

And it's worth pausing and just asking again. Is that what my life, my faith, is that what it's about? Or have I made it about something else? But perhaps there's someone here, and for you actually, this talk is quite hard. You aren't so comfortable with all this talk about the glory of God.

Or perhaps you have a friend who finds this difficult. Surely the gospel is all about love for people, isn't it? All of this talk about the glory of God, all of this sort of reformed teaching.

[9 : 55] I find it very difficult. To me it paints the kind of God who seems distant and hard, and is all about just increasing his own reputation. And surely that can't be right.

How is a God whose mission to this world is to bring glory unto himself, good news for me? How does that help me? That's a good question.

Can this be right? And we have to answer that firstly by saying one very simple but important thing. We must remember firstly that we are talking about the eternal, almighty God here.

The great creator. The great sustainer. He is worthy of all worship. He made everything in this universe. And it exists for his praise and glory.

Therefore, we dare not question that in one sense. But actually we can answer that more fully. And we're going to, as we go further into this text, and as we see a little more about the relationship between the Father and the Son.

[10:59] So hold that thought. We'll be coming back to it. You know, why is this good news? How is this good news for me? We will see that. But firstly then we've seen that Jesus prays that the Father will be glorified.

But let's take that a little bit further because our text certainly does. So Jesus prays that God will be glorified. How? Well, firstly, by glorifying the Son. By glorifying the Son.

Verse 1 again. Father, glorify your Son. That your Son may glorify you. Jesus prays that he will be glorified. And actually, if we've read through to verse 5, which we have, and then again later in the prayer, we may be inclined to think that what Jesus is really saying here is, Father, take me back to heaven now.

I want to go back to the glory that I had before the world began. That's what verse 5 says. And he certainly is doing that. Now, now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

God, the eternal Son, became man. He humbled himself. And although he never stopped being God in any way, yet in this world his glory was veiled.

[12:11] He never lost a single attribute or fact of his godness. But he became a man. And people saw him as a man. His glory was, in a sense, veiled.

He often wasn't worshipped. He was greatly humbled. He lived a life of sacrifice. A life of poverty. A life of suffering. And a life of rejection.

This is the eternal God becoming man. And now he desires to return to his rightful glory. He desires to go back to the Father and have, again, the fullness of the glory of the only Son of the Father on display that is his by right.

That's what verse 5 is about. But actually, here in verse 1, something else is going on as well. In verse 1, he's praying that the Father will be glorified by bringing glory to God the Son on earth. And this is deep stuff. It's hard stuff. But it's important. He prays that God will be glorified as he, the Son, is glorified on earth.

[13:20] You see, the path to glory for Jesus in heaven, the path to heaven, is that he will display his glory on earth. And that's already been happening.

As you read John's Gospel and study it, you see that he's been bringing glory to his name and bringing glory to the Father's name all the way through. He's been teaching with great authority. He's turned water into wine. And he's turned one meal into thousands of meals. He's healed the sick. He's raised the dead. And in all these things, he's displaying his glory.

And he's pointing to the Father's glory. But there's more. There's more. Because now the great hour is here. Now the time has come.

Here comes the ultimate event. When the Father will glorify Jesus. And the Son, Jesus, will bring glory to the Father.

[14:19] How is the Father going to be given glory in this world? By giving glory to the Son. The Son, Jesus, asked the Father that he, Jesus, might be glorified. And when the Father brings glory to the Son, the Son brings glory to the Father.

There's a mutual thing going on here. Mysterious and wonderful, but true. Just pause on that thought for a moment. We asked that question, didn't we?

Aren't we in danger here of talking about a kind of distant, harsh God who's only interested in bringing glory to himself? Where's love here? Well, we start to answer that question as we see something of the truth of God.

And the fact that God, in his very nature, is a God of love. Because in God there is relationship. There's a mutual love between the Father and the Son that's been there forever.

And they glorify each other. And since all eternity past and into all eternity in the future, they find joy and love in one another.

[15:28] So we can never talk of a cold God. A harsh God. An unfeeling God. Because God, in his very nature, in what he is, is a God who loves.

And a God who finds joy in relationships. Something deep and mysterious here. But it's wonderful and true. We see something similar, of course, in human relationships.

If we're married, and when that works well, when a husband and wife truly love one another, well, they love for their partner to be thought well of, don't they?

And a compliment for one is a compliment for the other. And when you feel married and you, when you talk about your wife or your husband, you don't put them down all the time.

You talk them up. Because you love them and they're wonderful for you. And you find joy in them. And if that's true in a marriage, I can promise you it's even more wonderfully, perfectly true in God. So never doubt that God is a God of love.

[16:32] Never see him as a harsh, distant deity. The very fact that we have here this picture of the Father loving and glorifying the Son, and the Son loving and glorifying the Father, tells us that the God who made this universe, who desires to bring all glory through himself by glorifying the Son, is a God of love.

So we've seen then that Jesus prays that the Father will be glorified. Firstly, by glorifying the Son. And secondly, through the cross.

Through the cross. Because the love that exists in God reaches down to earth. It reaches down to earth.

Father, the hour has come. Jesus prays. This is the hour that everything's been building up to. And this is the cross. The hour is the cross.

How do we know that? Well, if we follow this word, hour, through John's Gospel, we'll see that in the first half of the book, we see the writer saying that the hour has not yet come.

[17:41] For example, back in chapter 5, here's Jesus, and he's in the treasury of the temple, and he's openly criticising the Pharisees, and he's referring to how he knows the Father, and he's referring to God as Father, and he's implying that the Pharisees do not know him, and they're furious with him.

And one would have thought they would want to deal with him right away. But John tells us that they did not arrest him then, because his hour had not yet come.

And we see this several times through the first half of the Gospel. And then when we get to chapter 12, some Greeks come to see Jesus, and they want to talk to him, and Jesus makes this extraordinary statement. The hour has come.

So there, in the middle of the Gospel, everything changes. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. And what is this hour? Truly, truly, I say to you, says Jesus, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. And then he goes on to say this, now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out, and I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.

[18:54] The hour that the whole of this Gospel is looking forward to, and building up to, is Jesus being lifted up, and Jesus dying.

So here we have the cross. Here we have the cross. And the point of all of this build-up, the point of all this anticipation, is to remind us that the hour is the central event.

This is not something, and the crucifixion wasn't an accident, it's not an afterthought, it's the thing that the whole of Jesus' life was building up to. Indeed, it's the whole of the thing, the whole of history was building up to.

And now it's the whole of the thing that history, in a sense, looks back to. This was not an afterthought, but it was God's eternal plan. Jesus prays that God will be glorified by glorifying the Son through the cross.

That is the great hour that's coming. This is what it's all about. Jesus is to be lifted up. And this is the hour when Jesus is glorified.

[19:59] This is the hour when Jesus' glory will be seen. The miracle, the wonder here, for us, is that God's eternal plan centres on the cross.

A dark and terrible, agonising death. Jesus will die in agony and humiliation, bearing our sin. And through this, he is glorified.

Glorified. And the Father is glorified. The event in all of history that brings the most glory to God is when his own Son dies in agony under his judgement.

The darkest day in history, therefore, becomes the brightest day. The greatest suffering the world has ever known brings the greatest glory the world has ever seen.

The day of greatest despair turns out to be the day of greatest hope centred here at the cross. So I asked you a question earlier.

[21 : 09] If you're a believer here, is your faith all about the glory of God? Well, if that's so, then it must also be centred on the cross.

Because the only religion that brings honour to the Father in heaven is one that is, if you like, cross-shaped. When you talk to your friends and family about the fact that you're a Christian and you want to tell them about your faith, what do you talk about?

Do you tell them that Jesus gives you a more fulfilled life? When he said, I've come to give you life and life in its fullness, so that's true. Do you tell them that he gives you peace? He says, peace. I leave with you my peace.

That's true. Do you say that he brings freedom from guilt? He does. He brings that wonderful sense of community. He does. He answers prayers. He says, anything you pray in my name, I will give you.

He does. But unless, at the heart of the message that we share and the hope that we explain to others, unless at the heart of that we put the cross, we've got it wrong.

[22 : 20] We must tell about the cross. Tell them about a saviour who suffered and died. Because it's in that cross that glory is brought to God and God's eternal plan is fulfilled.

Perhaps you find yourself in church sometimes and you wish the preacher could move on from all this talk about Jesus' suffering. It just gets a bit repetitive and gruesome at times for my liking. Just tell me how my life can be better. Tell me some practical things. How can I be a better parent? Or something like that. And we can draw principles from that from the Bible and it's good and important.

But we never, ever move on from the cross. Because in the cross, there is hope. And there is no hope anywhere else. And in the cross, God is glorified.

And in the cross, God's mission is fulfilled. But how is that so? We must ask that question. Perhaps even stronger than that, how can it be that the death and suffering and agony of the cross brings glory to God?

[23 : 30] If we were not so perhaps familiar with that, it would seem to us actually somewhat sadistic and cruel and strange that the eternal God, the Father, punishes his Son, whom he loves and has been in intimate relationship with for all eternity.

How can that be so? How can he do that? How can that make any kind of sense? And of course it is a mystery. But it's all about the reason. I guess we're not totally unfamiliar with the idea of death leading to glory, are we?

The country is quite rightly sort of decorated. The whole of the UK has memorials for the two world wars of the last century, doesn't it?

And we see them quite often and they have lists of names of people who gave their lives fighting. And of course those things are memorials and of course we think with sadness of the families who lost loved ones and the people who never knew parents and grandparents and the like.

But there's something more going on, isn't there? We set up these grand monuments because we believe that there's a certain glory achieved by those who fought. Why? Because they fought protecting, gaining freedom for their country.

[24 : 47] Certainly in the case of the Second World War, they were defeating one of the great evils of the world. So though they died in pain and suffering, and it was sad and it was terrible, there's a glory to what they achieved.

And there's an analogy there, I think, with Christ. His death was terrible, but it was necessary. It was vital because it achieved something extraordinary.

So how is this great glory brought to God through the cross? It's through what it achieves. How can this be the greatest day of history? It's because of what that death buys.

It's what that death wins. What is the real heart of God's purpose in this world? How does he really bring glory to himself? And how does he do it through the cross? Well, let's read again.

Father, he says, glorify your son, that he may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

[25 : 51] That's what it's about. The purpose of all of this, the reason that the eternal God is willing to punish his son is to bring eternal life to sinful human beings like us.

Isn't that staggering? Isn't that extraordinary? That great love which exists in God reaches down to this earth, to those who have rejected him and holds out and gives eternal life.

And so that moves us on to the rest of our, our sentence here. Jesus prays that God will be glorified, firstly, by glorifying the Son, secondly, through the cross, and thirdly, which brings eternal life.

So that would be better without the numbers. Jesus prayed that God will be glorified by glorifying the Son through the cross, which brings eternal life. It's astonishing, really, when you think about it, isn't it?

God the Father gave God the Son in Jesus authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

[27 : 06] And he does it through the cross. If we're believers today, then there was a time when we weren't.

And maybe you're here today and you're not. And someone who is not in Christ, who's never come to know this eternal life, well, you're living not for the glory of God. You're living for the glory of yourself, other people, other things.

And yet, despite that, God comes to give and offer eternal life through Jesus. So two questions then about eternal life in this passage.

Firstly, who gets it? And secondly, what does it look like? So the first thing, who gets this eternal life? Who's it for? Well, look at verse 2 again. Since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

This eternal life is for those whom the Father gave to the Son before the foundation of the world.

This eternal life, therefore, is for God's chosen people.

[28 : 18] Before the world began, God chose a huge number, a great multitude of people and gave them to his Son. So this is a wonderful thing. If we're a Christian here today, it's not only the case that we were chosen by God before the world began, but we were given as a gift, as a love gift, from the Father to the Son.

These two persons within the Trinity, within God, who have loved each other for all eternity with a love greater than we can imagine. We are a gift from one to the other.

Isn't that a precious thing? And of course, we're not those kind of gifts that you might get at Christmas from an uncle or a cousin or something. You sort of look at it politely and put it in the cupboard and forget about it. No.

We're treasured gifts. We're the kind of gifts that become family heirlooms because we put them up and we display them. When anyone comes round, we show them off. That's the kind of gift we are. We were given, yes, before the foundation of the world. But in time, Jesus came, just the right time, and he died on the cross to purchase us, to redeem us, to give us eternal life.

[29 : 29] That's what we are. Maybe there's someone here this evening and you are struggling, rather. You feel like you're just about holding on to your Christian faith. You feel like, well, I'm not sure I'm going to be able to carry on much longer.

I'm not sure I'm ever going to get to the end. I'm not going to get to the new heavens and the new earth. I just feel like I'm just going to fall and fail any day. Well, this is a glorious truth for you because God has saved you for his glory.

He gave you, before the world began, God the Father gave you to God the Son. And he gave you to God the Son so that the Son could come and die for you and redeem you and give you eternal life to bring glory to God.

And one thing that's absolutely true about God is he will get glory and he will be glorified as you have eternal life. So you aren't going to be lost.

You're never going to be lost because it's in God's business to save you. It's in God's business to keep you because you are there for his glory and he loves you and he's given you eternal life and he won't take it away and he won't let go of you.

[30 : 42] So wherever you feel tonight, hold on to him but really realise that he is holding on to you because you are that precious gift and he will be glorified as you get to the end.

He will. But maybe someone here isn't a believer yet. Maybe you're not saved yet. And you're wondering, well, what if I'm not one of those chosen people?

If it's true that God chose a load of people, yes a lot but not everyone. What if I'm not one of them? What hope is there for me? And what I would say to you is actually that's not the right question for you to ask right now.

You don't need to ask that question. See here's Jesus speaking in John chapter 6 and verse 37. He affirms this truth and then he helps us to see the right response for someone who doesn't know him yet.

He says this, all that the Father gives to me will come to me. It's true. Those gifts that he's been given, they will all come. And whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

[31 : 49] And if you're not saved yet, that's for you. Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out. So this evening, if you're aware that you've not been saved, that you're not living for the glory of God, that you don't have this eternal life, then Jesus says simply to you, come.

Come and put your faith in me. Come and trust in me for forgiveness of sins, for eternal life. And I will never turn you away. And when you come, you will see that in a wonderful way, God has chosen you.

God has given you. God has treasured you. And he will keep you. That's the truth. Isn't that glorious? Won't you come tonight if you haven't before?

So that's who is God's treasured, chosen people given as a gift. And that's also anyone who will come to him.

Secondly, and finally, what does this eternal life look like? Because maybe, and it's possible, that eternal life kind of sounds a bit dull to you.

[33 : 02] You know, your life now, it's fine, but it's not particularly exciting. And really, do I want that to go on for all eternity? Do I want millions of years of this? Do I even want millions of years of sort of floating around in some kind of heaven?

Might I get bored? And maybe life for you is a really tough experience. Maybe it's difficult for you and sad for you and hard for you. And that's the case for many people. And really, you don't want too much more.

You know. That's a terrible thing, but it is the case for people. Well, we need to learn and understand what eternal life is at its essence.

It's not life, just life, that goes on forever. It is that. And John's Gospel teaches that. Back in chapter 11, Jesus is talking to Martha after her brother Lazarus has died. And he comes to her and he says, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet he shall live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. So this life, this eternal life, yes, it goes on forever.

[34 : 07] And yes, it goes on forever in a new heavens and a new earth. It starts now, but it goes into this new world. And it is a world that's free from pain and suffering and sickness and death and sin. That's gloriously true and the scripture teaches that.

But actually, what's at the heart of it and what's at the heart of what Jesus is saying here is something else. It's less about the quantity of the life, it's more about the quality of it. It's less about what it's like and more about who it's about.

Because eternal life is knowing God. Look at verse 3. And this is eternal life. That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus, whom you sent.

through the death of Jesus, we may be brought into relationship with the eternal, loving God, Father, Son, Spirit, as the Holy Spirit gives us new, eternal life.

And we come and we know this God. And in Him, we see something of His glory. God calls us to Himself to see Him, to know Him, to come to His Word and to learn and see more and more of His glory.

[35 : 30] We don't come to Him as a distant deity from whom we kind of hide our faces, although He is awesomely glorious. We come as one who calls us close, who calls us to be friends, who calls us into permanent relationship with Him, who unites us with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we come to the Word and we see the more we pray and the more we study this book and the more we read it and the more we hear Him talk and the more we go through life, the more we come

to know Him and the more of His glory we see.

Even though times will be tough, the disciples face tough times, Jesus told them that, even though the world will hate them and will be hated too, even though we struggle and we fall and we fail, the disciples all abandoned Him, remember, they needed to be restored.

Yet, we know God and Jesus whom He sent. That's the wonder of eternal life. And if we had more time, we could look through the rest of this prayer and learn more rich lessons about what this life looks like and what Jesus desires for us, but we don't have that time.

And we're just scratching the surface with eternal life. But it's not, it's less about something that goes on forever, although it is that.

[36 : 51] It's more about knowing God than Jesus. And so we close with questions. Firstly, if you're not yet a believer, will you come and trust Jesus today and know this eternal life, which is knowing the majestic, eternal God as Father and His Son, Jesus Christ?

Will you come and experience and see the beauty and the wonder and joy that there is in Him? And for believers here, where's your focus?

Is your life just kind of plodding along? And of course, in one case, that's right, we do just plod along, we do just keep on going. But as you do so, are you also growing in the knowledge of God, in the love of God, and in the appreciation and understanding of His beauty and His glory as you go through life and you take its knocks, its joys and its sadnesses?

Are you in the Scriptures? Are you hearing God's Word? Are you seeing more of Him? Are you coming to know Him better? That's eternal life. It goes on forever.

You'll keep doing that for all eternity and there'll always be more and it's glorious. But that is eternal life. And this is what brings glory to God. That you should have life seeing and knowing Him and glorifying Him as you see more and more of His glory.

[38 : 20] So what's God's mission in this world? Well, Jesus prays that God will be glorified by glorifying the Son through the cross which brings eternal life.

And what is eternal life? It's knowing the Father and the Son and seeing their glory. Are you part of that?

And if you are, are you taking it seriously? Are you growing in it? And are you rejoicing in it? Amen. We're going to close with singing and we're going to sing Psalm 23 which is on page 28 in the book. We'll sing the whole psalm. The Lord is my shepherd, no want shall I know. He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow. He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow. Amen.