Praying with Jesus — Part 1

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0:00] You would take your Bibles and open them to the Gospel of John, chapter 17, page 903. You might have to share with the person next to you.

John, chapter 17. We come today to the longest prayer recorded in any of the Gospels from the lips of Jesus. It's the whole of chapter 17.
And it is simply stunning. We are at the end of the Last Supper from chapter 13 onwards. We are within hours of Jesus being crucified.
And chapter 17, this long prayer is sandwiched between Judas going out into the night to betray Jesus. And chapter 17 begins with his arrest, trial and execution.
Jesus is sitting there with 11 of his disciples. It's night and he slows down and he prays. And so we're going to slow down and we're going to spend three weeks in John 17 as he prays in this little paragraph, verses 1 to 5, first for himself.
[1:08] Next week in verses 6 to 19 for his disciples. And the week after that, the last few verses, he prays for us, for those of us who come to believe through the disciples' witness.

And a lot of commentators say this is holy ground. We are listening in to the Son of God speaking to God the Father all about his death, which is just about to come.
And it starts with these words in verse 1, if you just look down at it. When Jesus had spoken these words, that is all of the Last Supper, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said.
Now, it is absolutely obvious that I will point it out, and that is that Jesus was a man who prayed. Throughout his life in his ministry, he prayed, and now at the hour of his death, he communicates with God the Father in normal human words as we would use in conversation.
He prays exactly the same way that you and I pray. He speaks to God his Father in heaven. There is no magical incantation, bells and donk, you know, there is no special poetic difficult language in it.
[2:32] This is not a mystical experience. Jesus uses the simplest, deepest, most personal words. And before he goes forward to the cross, he deliberately takes time to speak to his heavenly Father in such a way that his disciples overhear it, and now we can overhear it.

And it's great, because his prayer is not a shopping list. He doesn't say, Father, I want this and this and this and this and this. In fact, there are very few actual requests in his prayer, because prayer is not like going to the wall, to the ATM, and asking, you know, for all sorts of things from God.
Like Jesus, we come before God and we open our hearts to him. And as Jesus does here, we converse with God the Father. We seek his face. We try to lay ourselves open to him.
Because prayer is not trying to get God to do what I want. But it's more about being in his presence and aligning ourselves with what he wants. It's fellowship with God.
But the biggest thing he wants to give us in prayer is himself. So now with his death looming, what is it that dominates his prayer? And I've got two points.
[3:46] We learn two things out of these first five verses. The first is about the glory of Jesus Christ. And the second is about the giving of Jesus Christ. So firstly, the glory of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has glory on his mind. Twice in the first verse, he prays about glory. And then three times in the last two verses. Let me take you down to verse four, just to remind you what he prays.
He says to his father, I 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.
This is a very big scope for a prayer. Jesus goes back into eternity past and forward into eternity future. And he speaks about his whole life and ministry. And he says, everything I have done on earth was for your glory.

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Every word, every miracle, every prayer, every rejection, every piece of suffering, above all the death that I'm about to die, it's all been about glory.
[4:57] And verse five tells us that God the Father and God the Son existed before the creation of the world, before time began, glorifying each other, giving each other praise and adoration and taking joy in each other.

They were doing it with the Holy Spirit mutually and eternally forever before the world was made. And clearly, verse five means that when Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us, he lost something.
He gave away something of that face-to-face glory and adoration and appreciation he had with God the Father. He was still full of glory. He still revealed the glory of God, but his glory was veiled.
It was concealed, which was why when people saw him, they didn't bow down and worship him instantly and why people still don't today. And as he is praying, Jesus says, Jesus is clear that the supreme moment of his glory is about to happen.
And he asks the Father, may I return into your presence and receive that glory again? Only this time, he's going to return into the presence clothed in flesh with humanity, bringing many sons and daughters to glory.
[6:18] Now, the implications of this are vast. And we only have time to look at three implications this morning. And the first implication, which is very simple, is that God did not create the world because he was lonely.

See, not only did he exist before the world began and before he was born in human flesh, but before the creation of the world, the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, constantly poured glory and joy and love into each other's hearts in perfect harmony and grace.
God did not need to make a world. He did not need to have humans to receive love and glory. He lacks nothing. He lacked nothing.
He was infinitely happy and content. Father, Son and Holy Spirit pouring love into each other. He wasn't missing anything. He didn't have any lack or insecurity.
And he did not create the world so that he would begin to receive love and joy, but because he wanted to share love and joy with us.
[7:36] He wanted to bring men and women and boys and girls into the experience of this other person glorifying, joy-giving relationship.

And since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have no beginning, everything that's ever made and everyone that's ever made, we all have our existence depending on him and we all have less value than him.
He is the one who has value above everything else. There's nothing outside of him that gives him or can add to him. He is the Alpha and the Omega.
And recent commentators have pointed out that if God were merely unipersonal without being tripersonal, in other words, if you're just one God instead of three persons in one God, like, say, the God of Islam, he would have a deficit of adoration and glory and love, and he would need to create a world for love and adoration.
But the fact that God is three persons in one, eternally glorifying each other from before time began, means that creation itself is an act of generosity and inclusion, not to get love and adoration, but to give it and to share it.
[8:57] That's the first implication. The second is this. God is eternally and infinitely happy. If you think about God like that, remember when Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan, the heavens part, and God the Father speaks audibly, he says, This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

Literally, I am supremely delighted in him. There's no greater joy than having someone love you, not because they have to or, you know, they're duty-bound or someone else has told them to do so or, you know, any of those kinds of reasons.
You're insecure without it. The best kind of love is when it's freely given. And Jesus has come to bring us into that happiness, into the eternal love and life of God.
And the great power of this is here is Jesus, the Son of God, speaking to the Heavenly Father about his death. And that brings us to the third implication.
And that is that the glory of Jesus Christ, the glory of the eternal God, is a peculiar glory. Notice he does start his prayer with a request in verse 1.

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[10:15] If you look down the second half of verse 1, Father, he says, The hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.

Two weeks ago, I was in Chicago. I'm a member of a thing called the Gospel Coalition. We had a board meeting. And one of the guys on the board is a writer and pastor by the name of John Piper. I'm sure many of you are familiar with his books. The thing about going to these conferences in the States is they're very generous. And they give you books. Every session they give you books. And I took a little overnight bag and I came home with eight books. And some of them were a thousand pages long. So I'm very glad that I packed lightly.
However, Piper's newest book is called A Peculiar Glory. And I think that is very helpful for us in thinking about what Jesus is saying here. We're used to all sorts of glory, aren't we?
[11:14] I mean, yesterday in the newspaper, there was an article titled, Hosting Olympic Games Confers a False Glory. And the basic argument is that the upcoming Olympic Games in the city of Rio are not going to benefit Rio.

It's a sort of an expensive coat of paint over the poverty and the corruption and violence of the city. What Jesus is praying about here is true glory. And true glory, the glory of the only true God, is a peculiar, a unique glory.
See, the first words of his prayer are, Father, the hour has come. And don't we know through all of John's gospel, every time Jesus speaks about his hour, he's talking about the cross, the hour when he dies.
But could there be anything less glorious than a man who's been flogged and beaten, nailed to a piece of wood, slowly dying?
So you see, when Jesus prays, glorify your son, that the son may glorify you, he's not talking about that vast, cosmic, dazzling brilliance of the glory that was there on the Mount of Sinai.
[12:28] He's not talking about that mind-boggling supernatural otherness that came in Ezekiel chapter 1. He's talking about the majesty of God demonstrated in meekness, in humility, in serving, in giving, in dying.

This is the peculiar glory of God in the Bible, the God of the scriptures. Yes, it's seen in triumph. But it is most perfectly seen in weakness, gentleness and steadfast love.
In giving up himself for his people to save us, so that he must bring us back to God. This is the one eternal God who is sovereign over all things, before whose glory we would not even be able to stand.
His highest, clearest, supreme revelation of that glory is in the self-giving of the Son of God over to death for us. I find this remarkable.
It is the humility and weakness of Jesus on the cross that is the supreme revelation of glory in history, where God himself, he tears himself apart from each other, where he gives himself, he need not, he gives himself for us to save us, bearing our sin and rejection.
[13:53] Ultimate sacrifice for God. That is the supreme revelation of its glory. There is no greater glory than giving away your glory.

And Jesus' main concern, he's praying here, is that when he goes to the cross, all will see who the Father really is and who he really is and what this glory is about.
He's not praying, Lord, life is really difficult, can I get around this one? Give me different circumstances. He says to the Father, take me to the cross and show the world the beauty of your glory.
And he's not even praying, you know, after the cross and the desperate humiliation of that. Then when I'm raised, give me glory. He's saying, in the cross, at that moment, please reveal your glory.
And that's the first thing that Jesus has on his mind. And the first lesson we learn, it's the glory of Jesus Christ. And the second is the giving of Christ. You see, what does it mean for us now today that the Father glorified his Son and that the Son glorified the Father in the cross?
[15:10] What does it mean for Jesus to die and rise? And the answer that Jesus gives in these little verses, very simply, is he wants to do this, he does this, to give us eternal life.

Look down at verse 2, please. He says, glorify me so I glorify you since, or in exactly the same way or just as you have given the Son authority over all flesh to give, so that you will give eternal life, to whom, to all whom you have given to him.
And I point out again, it's not, Jesus is not telling the Father something he doesn't know. He's laying himself open. Did you notice there are three givings? And one of them is the most important.

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I'll leave that till third. The first giving is that God the Father has given Jesus authority over all flesh. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus Christ.
He has rule, he has reign over every single human being who's ever lived and will ever live, not to use for himself, but to use for our salvation.
[16:29] Which is a bucket of cold water, I think, in our culture, which says there's no authority outside myself. Myself, I am sovereign. I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul, etc., etc.

If Jesus has been given authority over all flesh, the idea that I get life and I live life by being true to myself and following my dream, it's a complete lie.
We do not become ourselves by being true to ourselves or by following our dream. We live by giving ourselves away and by serving others.
So the first giving is that God the Father has given Jesus authority over all flesh. The second giving in verse 2 is that God takes some of those humans over which Jesus has authority and gives them to Jesus.
A subset of all humanity, he gives to Jesus. And I think this is absolutely wonderful. Because what it means is that the bond between you and Jesus or the bond between me and Jesus does not depend on my weak, feeble and hopeless faith that goes up and down day by day, but on the fact that God the Father has given me to Jesus Christ and given you to Jesus Christ.
[17:53] It's not my hold on Jesus that's the basis of me continuing. It's his hold on me because I've been placed in his hands by God the Father. Just keep your finger in John 17 and flip back to John 6 for a moment, please.

John 6, about verse 37. In verse 36, John 6, verse 37, he's just pointed out there are all sorts of people who see Jesus but don't believe in him.
And then he says in verse 37, all the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. Verse 39, and this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise them up on the last day.
This is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I'll raise him up on the last day. And that brings us to the third giving back in chapter 17.
The reason that God has given Jesus authority and given people to Jesus is so that he might give us eternal life. Now, don't you think that giving is a great way to summarise the Gospel?
[19:22] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. And here is Jesus hours before the cross and what is on his mind? What is he praying about?

He's looking forward to the cross. I don't mean pleasurably. He's looking at the cross and he's saying, the reason I'm going there is to give eternal life to all you've given me, Heavenly Father.
Now, you know as well as I do that eternal life has lost its popularity in recent times. There's an essay called The Problem of the Self recently by a philosopher called Bernard Williams.
And he argues, and this has become quite popular, that death would be better than eternal life. Annihilation would be better than living forever because a life of endless duration, he said, would be just boring, which is the worst insult in postmodern Canada.
And he cites the story that's written by Carol Kopetch of Elina Makropoulos, who is offered an elixir.
[20:27] It's the elixir of life that will allow you to live for 300 years at the same age and then you can take the elixir again and live for another 300, etc. And she drinks it at 42 and she lives 300 years as a 42-year-old.

And when it comes to the end of the 300 years, she's so sick and tired of living with all the frustration and just the pleasure. It's meaningless. And she's bored and she decides to die.
And of course, it's been turned into a Czechoslovakian opera. Which I haven't seen. Whenever Jesus speaks about eternal life, the focus is not on the duration, the going on and on and on the same.
The focus is on the quality of life. It's a different quality. The word eternal literally means belonging to the life to come. Our lives here are full of frustration and selfishness and sin.
But eternal life, the life of the age to come is a different life. It's not the life we're born with. It's not just a life that goes on forever and ever and ever. It's a life without frustration, without suffering, without death and selfishness and sin.
[21:44] We have to get away from the Greek thinking about these things. The glory of God and the life of God is not a static thing. It's not a mathematical perfection, a sort of an algorithm,

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emotionless thing.

Throughout the scriptures, perfection and glory are growing and increasing and personal. So the idea, I think, is that in the next life, we continue to increase in our capacity for joy.
We grow in our relationship with him. That is the nature of glory. And I think Jesus, it's almost as though Jesus anticipates this objection in verse 3 because he offers us a definition of eternal life.
He says, this is eternal life, verse 3, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. He doesn't say, knowing God leads to eternal life.
He says, knowing God is eternal life. Now, we have lots of people in our lives. It's such a blessing to know, don't we?
[22:57] Family, friends, fellowship, friendship. Others, not so much. But John, Jesus is not saying here, this is just knowing the most glorious person.

He's saying, it's knowing you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. It means knowing something of this self-giving glory.
And as we gaze on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, we are changed. We are transformed from one degree of glory to another. We looked at that in 2 Corinthians, remember.
It's what we were made for. It's what our friends long for. It's what creation itself longs for. God commands all of us to know his glory.
And he promises there's a day that's going to come when the earth will be filled with not the glory of God, but the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.
[23:55] And this is eternal life, that we know God. And I know we've grown suspicion of this word know and knowledge as though we can separate the head from the heart. But the Bible uses the word know and knowledge to speak of the deepest intimacy between two human people.

Jesus is speaking about the experience of communion with the only living God and with him, which is a different kind of life. life. And that's the point of the cross.
Because through the cross, Jesus brings this life into our world now. And he makes it available to us through the cross. And by going through his death and that great act of self-giving, the door is open for us not just to see the glory but to participate in it.
Now we're going to look at more of this in the next couple of weeks and I just want to give you a trailer for a couple of weeks away. Forgive me for doing this. But just look down in chapter 17 to verse 22, please.
Jesus prays, he's continuing to pray, the glory, Father, that you have given me, I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one.
[25:14] I in them, you in me, that they may be perfectly one so that the world may know you've sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 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.

That is just fantastic. I want to whet your appetite to keep coming. Well, this means all sorts of things but let me just finish with this.
One of the things it means absolutely is that in the words of C.S. Lewis, self-giving is absolute reality.
Behind our world is not just the cold calculus of fate. It's not a spirit trying to evolve into a higher form.
It's not gods vying with each other for mastery. It's not just brute facts. It's the one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit without beginning and without end, pouring his love, his glory, his joy, his happiness to each other.
[26:34] And I think this is just very good news for us at a time like this, when there's so much loneliness and disconnection and lack of community, that self-giving is absolute reality.

glory and giving, the two headings I've chosen, are eternally fused together through the cross of Jesus Christ. And this is not just about eternity past and eternity to come, it's about the now.
Because eternal life does not start when you die. It starts when we first begin to believe that Jesus Christ was sent by God the Father. And the way it grows is as we begin to give ourselves away to each other, and we do that precisely because we have come to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.
We have begun to grasp something of the security of that love poured out on the cross for us in the past, in our hearts by the Spirit in the present. Eternal life grows in us as we give ourselves away.

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And I know it's very hard, it's difficult. In fact, I think it's impossible until we begin to draw on that life of Jesus Christ. You know, when you give yourself away sacrificially, when you've got a choice to do it, you think, ah, I'm going to die, it feels like I'm going to die.
[28:03] But Jesus says it's in dying that we live. And you think to yourself, I haven't got capacity or room or energy, I need to receive what you do from the Father, but it's in giving that you receive.

And it's when we try and grasp hold of our life and hold it to ourselves that we lose life. Lewis says self exists to be abdicated.
God this is eternal life. That they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent. And Jesus tells us that God the Father he wants to pour his self-giving love into our hearts.
That's who God is. That's who Jesus is. That's why he came. That's why he died. So what we do now when we pray is that we join Jesus Christ in entering into that life more deeply.
So I invite you to kneel and we're going to do like Jesus does and pray.

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