

A Time for Glory

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. My name's Janet Skora. If you haven't met me before, I have the great privilege of being one of the wardens here at St Paul's as well as a community group leader.

Great to be able to open God's Word with you this morning. First, let me pray for us, and then we're going to explore this wonderful part of John's Gospel. Gracious God, thank you so much that you give us your Word that we might know you, that we might continue to have a relationship with you, and that we might use your Word to spread the good news of Jesus across this world.

I pray, Lord, that as we open your Word this morning, that you would speak to our hearts and help us to understand more of who you are and all you've done for us. Amen. So if you've been with us for the past few weeks, we've been working through this particular section of the Gospel of John. Last week, Nick spoke to us about the deep sense of belonging that Jesus imparted to his disciples, a connection that was derived from God, but that would sustain them when they were scattered, in their doubts, and in the difficult days that lay ahead for them.

The chapters that we've been exploring over these past few weeks all take place in a four- to five-hour conversation between Jesus and his disciples over a meal. It starts at chapter 13, in the passage that you'll be familiar with, where Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

[1 : 25] And so the passage in chapter 17 that Helen just read for us draws this time to a conclusion. Jesus' main concern is that he wants the disciples to understand that God should be glorified, that everything he's done is in fulfilment of God's plan, including the call on the lives of a people to trust in him.

And this is the last chapter before Jesus is arrested, before he's tried and crucified. And so what we have here is an experience of Jesus, a experience of Jesus that the disciples had not had.

Throughout these chapters, we've had a real sense of the emotion that they've experienced, the grief and the fear that they have in thinking about his departure. It feels like quite an intimate moment in Jesus' ministry.

And in this time, Jesus has compressed some of the most confronting and challenging and comforting words that this group of men would hear. They've asked questions, they've listened, and I can imagine them feeling pretty emotionally and physically exhausted.

It feels like a scene to me, like we're standing outside a room, standing at a window, watching quietly, our noses pressed to the glass, straining to hear, realizing that we're witnessing something that is really profound for these men.

[2 : 48] And then along the way, we realize that he's also talking to us. Jesus has spoken to them about where he's going, that he has to go, and that they will remain, and that they will be scattered.

He promises his spirit, the counselor, who will come to continue to reveal the truth to them and to the world, and to bring God glory. Last week, we heard from Nick that Jesus assures his disciples that they will continue to belong to him after he has gone.

And so at the end of this time, Jesus turns to prayer. It's a prayer that gives us some deep insight into the heart of Jesus and his desire for his followers. It's a personal conversation with his father that he opens up for the disciples to hear and experience.

This is the only time in the Bible we get a glimpse of the prayer of one person of the Trinity to another. We're invited into this intimate fellowship between father and son.

So there are three parts to Jesus' prayer. He prays for himself, he prays for the disciples, and he prays for those who would believe the church. Let's start with the first prayer in verse one.

[3 : 56] Father, the hour has come. Glorify your son that your son might glorify you. This request that Jesus has for glorification is not about selfish ambition, but fulfilling his divine purpose.

He lifts his eyes to heaven, the posture of prayer, but it says so much more to the disciples in the room about the relationship Jesus has with his father. Jesus' prayer is conveying to God that he has done what God has asked him.

He has completed the mission, he's brought glory to God, and seeks that God would continue to glorify him as he faces the cross. Jesus understands that the hour has come for him to complete the mission on earth through his death and resurrection.

This is something he's spoken openly about in other accounts in the Gospels, making clear that the timing and purpose on earth for him are God's timing, not for him to choose.

Earlier in his ministry at the wedding of Cana, Jesus responds to his own mother's request for him to intervene, to get more wine, by saying in John chapter two, verse four, my hour has not yet come.

[5 : 10] And then later in chapter seven, his brothers urge him to go to Jerusalem, and he says to them, my hour has not yet come. And yet here he says, my hour has come, because he knew that the timing of the plan for his life was God's to decide, and his purpose on earth was to bring God glory.

In verses two and three, Jesus repeats that his purpose is connected to our eternal life. For you granted him glory, authority over all people, that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

Now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. Jesus makes it pretty simple. Eternal life isn't something that starts when we die.

It isn't something that we search for in a great quest to Mordor, or that we spend our lives trying to be good to achieve. Eternal life is for all who know the one true God and his son Jesus.

What Jesus is telling them is that eternal life starts then. Verse three assures us today that when we come to know God and his son, we start to experience the things of heaven.

[6 : 28] Heaven is, after all, about the presence of our heavenly father. The more we know Jesus, the more we experience what heaven will be like. These verses really are the gospel.

If you're looking for a simple way to remind yourself, if you're looking for a simple way to explain it to someone, Jesus' prayer for himself tells the disciples and us the good news of eternal life that God has gifted to us by grace and which we receive by faith.

Separation from God is the essence of what we see and continual experience from the consequences of sin in our own lives and in the world. Jesus' prayer for himself makes clear that his purpose was restoring that relationship and at its core is the eternal life that we know now.

He reverses the effects of sin so that we can know God through his son. In this prayer, Jesus shows that eternal life is something given of God along with the knowledge of God.

This is the assurance we have that faith is not a leap into nothing. After all, faith is belief in something and that's what he gives us, assures us in his prayer.

[7 : 44] Next, Jesus shifts his focus to the disciples, praying for their protection, their sanctification and their unity. Jesus' desire is that God would accomplish his plan through the mission and the ministry of these men.

In the context of the room he's in alongside his disciples, he wants them to understand that they are God's people, that they have been called by God, that they are dependent on him and that they belong to God and as we see in verse 6, they were given to Jesus.

Jesus makes clear that God has been made known to them and that they have received the message. In verses 7 and 8, Jesus prays, Now they know that everything you have given them comes from you, for I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them.

They knew with certainty that I came from you and they believed that you sent me. Here we see Jesus interceding for the disciples. He's representing their fledgling belief to God so that he might protect and preserve them.

It's evident that despite still being so frail as humans, the apostles have accepted what Jesus has told them, that they believe, that they have acted on and that they have acted on what they heard.

[9 : 01] They might still have lots of questions, they might not understand it all, but they trust and they believe. In verse 9, Jesus prays, I'm praying for them. I'm not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

Now, why wouldn't Jesus pray for the world? It feels a bit uncomfortable, maybe feels a bit unusual with what we might see the world describe Jesus as. He doesn't pray this blanket love for everyone.

He deliberately prays for those who have been chosen. Jesus does pray for the lost in other gospel records in Luke 23, and later in this chapter, we find Jesus praying for those who will believe in me, for those who are yet Christians.

But here, he's specifically focused on the disciples, his chosen few, in this final time with them.

Those Jesus is praying for have come to know in truth that Jesus came from God and they have believed that the Father sent Jesus.

He prays for their protection, which we see in verse 11, the power of your name, the name you have given me, has covered them. Jesus goes on to acknowledge that his presence with them has provided a level of protection for them, and once he departs, that's going to change.

[10:23] He knows all too well what they're about to face, and so he prays for protection, or for God to keep them. We know this doesn't mean that they're going to have easy lives, far from it.

They will continue to face persecution, and they will ultimately lose their lives on earth. But Jesus prays that they'll be protected or kept. It's more about guarding their hearts, opening them up to a full understanding of God's work for them, and to bring them joy.

It's about perseverance, peace that transcends understanding, a wisdom about what they will face that gives rise to joy. Jesus concludes this prayer to the disciples in verse 17.

Sanctify them by the truth, the truth of your word. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they may too be truly sanctified.

Jesus prays that God will sanctify the disciples, which means set apart, in this case, for God's mission and purpose. Given the opposition that they will go on to face, it's perhaps not surprising, it wouldn't be surprising if Jesus had maybe said to them, go, flee, find a cave, give yourself a safe haven.

[11:41] But that isn't what Jesus asks of them, nor of us. He knows the reality of the spiritual battle that they will face, but he also knows that they are critical to God's plan for them to take the good news to the ends of the earth.

And that's going to mean persevering through hardship. He knows that the world will hate them because they don't belong to the world, just as he did not. Jesus doesn't ask the Father to take them out of the world, but protect them and sanctify them by the truth of his word.

Jesus' prayer for his disciples really highlights the importance of spiritual protection and growth. As believers, we're called to live in the world, but not be of the world, which sounds really tricky.

What it means is that we must rely on God's word and his spirit to keep us holy, to keep us set apart for his purposes. God gives us his word, he gives us his spirit and his body, the church, to guide us, protect us, encourage us, and restore us when we need it.

And in the final part of this prayer, Jesus goes on to pray for the church. He extends his prayer beyond the immediate disciples in the room with him to include all who would believe in him through their message.

[13:03] Now this is where if we're standing at that window, listening intently, we hear our name and our ears prick up because Jesus is talking to us. He prays for unity of all believers that they may be one as he and his father are one.

This isn't about unity for the sake of harmony or peace, but for a purpose, to show the world that Jesus was sent by the father and to reveal God's love.

Unity is a safeguard for believers in facing the challenges and the opposition of this world that would seek to divide, distract from God's purpose and discourage. In verses 20 and 21, Jesus says, My prayer is not for them alone.

I pray for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. These aren't verses about denominations or churches.

They're about a different kind of unity. Twice Jesus speaks of belief in these verses. It's the foundation of unity, grounded in Christ and his mission. It's a unity that we see between father and son and a unity of purpose and intention.

[14:15] At its heart for us is unity for those who will believe in me through the message. The unity of believers is such a powerful testimony to the world. Our love and our unity reflect the love of God and the truth of the gospel.

Unity is not uniformity, but oneness in purpose, in mission and in love. And so we should seek actively to promote unity within the body of Christ, working together despite our differences to fulfil the mission in spreading the gospel.

This prayer challenges us to live in such a way that our unity becomes a witness to the world. Jesus concludes this prayer in verses 25 and 26 saying, Jesus' final prayer is that the world would know God through him and those who believe, the spirit continuing to make Jesus known.

we get that strong sense of connection, the connection and the belonging that Nick spoke to us about last week that is deeply anchored in God's love for his son and he for us.

And so as we take a step back from that window and wonder, what does it all mean? What's our next step? Well, there's three things. Firstly, Jesus' prayer is a powerful model.

[15 : 50] It's a model for prayer, for how we pray, when we pray and what we might pray. He prays for God's purpose, he prays for God's plan and his glory. His prayer for the disciples show how we might pray for ourselves, for each other, for where our identity is anchored, for protection by his name from the opposition of the world.

It gives us the assurance that we can pray in confidence as we have a sure hope in belonging to Jesus and remaining in him. It's a model for how we pray through our lives, lives together as believers and how we pray for mission.

We don't know, as Jesus did, who his believers will be. And so our prayer is that as much of the world as possible will be reached for the gospel before Jesus returns and that we pray for ourselves that we would be faithful witnesses of Jesus in this world.

Secondly, Jesus' prayer reminds us of the assurance, the joy and the purpose that we find in the gospel. Jesus' desire is for his followers to know they are connected to the Father, they are loved, they're protected, they're set apart.

In him we have eternal life, not by anything that we have done, but because of God's purpose he has fulfilled. In the familiar verses from earlier in John, in chapter 3, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

[17 : 21] For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world. As someone who has been following Jesus for most of my life, the simplicity of the gospel has spoken to my heart more times than I could remember.

The simplicity of what we read in verse 3, now this is eternal life, that they know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. That's all we have to believe.

Knowing God, believing in him is enough and in hard days that's sometimes all we have. Perhaps today the world feels like it's weighing heavy on you. Let me encourage you to turn to Jesus, open your Bible, read this prayer again for yourself and ask the Spirit to speak quietly to you to comfort and assure you.

And if you're someone who doesn't know Jesus yet, if you're not sure that he's talking to you, the eternal life that Jesus gave the disciples and the believers to come is open to you today. The only step you need to take is to believe.

So talk to someone today and ask about how you can believe. Finally, Jesus' prayer is that the world might believe because of the unity and testimony of those who would come to believe through the disciples.

[18 : 35] This is about unity of purpose and intention, that glory will be brought to God, pointing people to him. This basis for the unity and the gospel bringing together cultures, ages, perspectives, background, is a unity to be celebrated, to be worked on and to be nurtured.

It's active. It's hard work because we're different. It means we need to pray together. We need to meet together around the Bible to share our life with people who will encourage you.

And if you aren't in a community group, let me encourage you to take that step today and get into one because they're awesome. This is why our vision here at St Paul's is that we would treasure Jesus together for God's glory and the joy of all people.

It's important that we have the gospel at the centre, that we're founded in truth. It's important that we acknowledge we're different, but it's also our responsibility to share the message, even though it is God who is sovereign over salvation.

Our job is to tell the gospel, speak it, live it, and God will take care of the rest. Theologian and writer Martin Lloyd-Jones says, to us is given the privilege and responsibility of being the representatives of God, of the Son of God in this world.

[19 : 48] We stand for him. People judge him by what they see in us and they do so because we are the ones through whom and in whom he is glorified. Jesus' prayer tells us that if you want to know God, get to know Jesus.

He shows the Father to us and by his Spirit he continues to make God known through the world. The love that God has for his Son is the love that we have through faith in Christ, connected, protected and invested in.

What love and what a great glory. Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, thank you that you gave your Son that we might know eternal life.

For all of us here today, may the message of your Gospel, may his love and protection and grace continue to spur us on and preserve us in the hard days and in the joyful days.

I pray, Lord, for anyone who is still trying to work out whether they believe in you that they would take their first step today and seek you for the first time. Amen.