

The Lord's Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

If you would, turn with me to John chapter 17. The awesome privilege of opening the Word of God.

The only infallible and inerrant Word we will hear this morning. John chapter 17, we're going to study the first five verses, so look there with me. John chapter 17. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. This is the Word of God.

Well, I have officiated a lot of weddings, but there's always one part of every wedding in which I feel I don't belong. After the Father gives the bride away, after vows and rings are exchanged, after all the promises made to God and the, or made before God and the witnesses gather, I have the joy of pronouncing them husband and wife and telling the new husband he may kiss his bride. But then I feel I don't belong.

Now, don't get me wrong. I believe a man should kiss his wife. And after all the buildup of that wonderful moment, it's wonderful to see them share that first kiss. People love that moment. But personally, I have a deep instinct to look away. Standing a few feet away, I want to look up at the ceiling or down at my notes. Immediately, that is what I do. The first kiss is a wonderful moment to enjoy, perhaps at a distance, but not up close and personal. I don't belong there. It's a powerful moment for a new husband and wife, but not for us. We don't belong. There should be a similar instinct as we read this chapter in John 17 as the Lord begins to pray. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus gathered his disciples for one last meal. After supper, he washed their feet. Then he taught them and prepared them for how to live after he had gone back to the Father. But now he turns away from them to the Father. While this prayer is wonderful, it's almost embarrassingly intimate. The Son is speaking personally with God the Father. The Son is face to face as it were with the Father. When he taught his disciples how to pray in Luke 11, we call it the Lord's Prayer, but in a much more significant way, this is the Lord's Prayer. It's the longest prayer recorded in Scripture by our Lord, and it is the prayer where the Lord lays bare his heart. It's the prayer where the Lord turns the vessel of his soul upside down in the presence of God, emptying out all his burdens and desires and longings to the Father.

[4 : 2 9] Now if you think about it, it's actually stunning that Jesus would ever pray at all. He's the second person of the Trinity, fully God, knows all things actual and possible, but he does pray again and again. If you go through Luke's gospel again and again, he pulls away to a desolate place, to a mountain so he can pray through the night. He goes alone to pray.

Though it's stunning that he prays, it's perhaps a more amazing marvel to wonder at all that he prays.

But this prayer of his is preserved for us. Jesus is quite obviously praying to the Father, but he's praying aloud so that at least some of his disciples can hear and so that these words can be passed down to us.

The scope of this prayer, which is captured in all of John 17, is almost endless. Begins with the Lord meditating on eternity past, praying about the ministry he's just completed, the hour that he will soon face, the suffering that is now coming and will arrive before the end of the night.

The kiss that will betray him into the hands of the evil one and his minions. The Lord then prays for his disciples, prays for the ministry that will happen after all of his investment, after he's gone to the Father.

[6 : 07] But then the Lord lifts his gaze and prays for the church. All those who will hear this gospel throughout the world all the way up until today.

The scope is unreal, but these first five verses are perhaps the most personal. They are the most personal. The Lord prays about the purpose behind it all.

Prays about the purpose of salvation, of the plan of God. In so many ways, Jesus is praying about the purpose behind everything that exists and every person that exists.

So in a word where we're going, the whole purpose of your existence is to see the glory of God in saving sinners through Jesus Christ. The whole purpose, if we got to the very bottom of it, the whole purpose of your existence is to see the glory of God in saving sinners through Jesus Christ.

We're going to break this out as we walk through this prayer in three points. The first is the request. After Jesus is done teaching, all the focus turns on him and he prays.

[7 : 20] Look in verse John 17. When Jesus had spoken these words, that's just John's way of saying, after he had completed his teaching from John 14 to 16, preparing the disciples for him departing from the world, then he lifted his eyes to heaven.

Now, in other parts of Scripture, it talks about, I lift up my eyes to the hill. Where does my help come from? We think about the tax collector who would not even lift his eyes. But it's striking here that John preserves this when he does not include many gestures in his gospel.

As if this look left such a deep impression on his disciples that they never forgot it. Suddenly, the Lord turns from his teaching and turns to his Father.

Repeatedly, Jesus addresses God as Father. Verse 1, Father, the hour has come. Verse 5, now, Father. Verse 11, Holy Father.

Verse 21, Father, you are in me. Verse 24, Father, I desire. Verse 25, O righteous Father. He's bringing us into this marvelous relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

[8 : 44] In so many ways, it leads us to marvel at the great difference between us calling God Father and Jesus calling God Father.

It's bringing us into a relationship that began before time and continues for all time. My wife is Vietnamese.

That's why when I was over in Korea, I'd tell them, I'm one of you guys. You know, I'm not one of these dumb white Americans. I'm like you. They'd never believe me. They'd just roll their eyes and say, you're an idiot.

But when I married her, her father came to me and said, call me Ba, which is the Vietnamese name for Father. Now, to this day, if we're out in public at a Vietnamese restaurant or in Vietnam together and I call him Ba, all the Vietnamese folks just die laughing.

You know, this white bloke calling him Ba. Even though it is quite humbling to be invited to call him Ba, there will always be a great difference between Kim calling him Ba and me.

[9 : 54] There's a similar difference here. We're brought into this communion between Jesus and his father.

The son's prayer is simple enough. He prays, glorify the son that the son may glorify you. But look in verse 17.

He says he's making this prayer because the hour has come. Father, the hour has come. So glorify your son that the son may glorify you. The hour is a reference to the time of suffering.

Now, if you remember throughout John's gospel, John said several times that even though many people were after him and trying to arrest him, they could not do it. Why? Because the hour had not come.

But now, Jesus says the hour has come. So I have this request because the hour has come. The idea is not that a certain time of day has arrived as it is such and such a time or such and such a day.

[10 : 56] The hour is the decisive moment and the sovereign plan of God has arrived. It is now the time of his suffering. It is now, as John tells us later, the time and the hour of darkness.

But even though his hour has arrived, Jesus doesn't give in to the inevitable. He begins to pray.

He doesn't set out to grin and bear it like we might approach a root canal or a difficult meeting or a dreaded family gathering.

He prays. All throughout Scripture, the sovereignty of God is not something that silences prayer, but calls it forth as we abide in the Lord and cry out to him.

And notice, though, he says he doesn't say, save me from this hour. Later, he will say something similar to that. But he doesn't say that here. Nor does he say, strengthen me for this hour.

[11 : 55] He says, glorify me in this hour. Glorify me as I glorify you. There's never been a prayer like this in the history of the world.

Every Christian can marvel. I was marveling this morning that God is conforming us from one degree of glory to another.

But no man can rightly pray, glorify me. The prophet says, my glory I will not give to another. But here, Jesus prays.

He's no normal man. And he knew it. That's one of the arguments against Christianity, that Jesus didn't know that he was the God-man. You know, he didn't feel it deeply.

He didn't know it in his self-consciousness. That is not true. He prays this bold request because he deserves it as a son of God. And at the end and the completion of his mission, he says, glorify me.

[13 : 02] Now, glory is one of those words I feel like we throw around church so much, all the meaning has fallen out of the bottom of it. Glory is a word in Scripture used to describe the greatness of God going public.

His word used to describe the display of his invisible attributes, his divine power and divine nature, so that human beings get a sense of the greatness of God.

So we say the heavens declare the glory of God. They don't make God glorious. They don't make him glorious or add glory to him. They put on display his invisible attributes, his massive power, his all-sovereignty and goodness and beauty.

They show his glory. So Jesus is saying, when he says, glorify me, he says, show the world how great I am. Jesus became a man as he entered the world.

He veiled his greatness to become a servant. And now he's asking the Father to lift the veil. We saw a glimpse of that in the transfiguration. But he's calling for something more marvelous.

- [14 : 23] Throughout the Gospel of John, there have been these brief shafts of light when the veil has been lifted and the making of water into wine and the feeding of 5,000, the healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus, so on and so on.

But Jesus, all along, has promised a greater display of glory. Look in John 12, he says, And Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. So putting this together, now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified by his death.

The hour of his suffering is, therefore, the hour of his glory. John is telling us the greatest display of his glory will become and the greatest display of his suffering.

Now, we wear crosses around our neck and paint them under our eyes for baseball games, but that's not the way the cross was thought about then.

- [15 : 32] It's a form of execution. The cross is a symbol of violence, torture, public humiliation. It is the most painful way of execution ever, designed by the mind of sinful man.

And yet Jesus says, It's my time to be glorified. There's a wonderful clash of expectations happening with the disciples when they realize that his glory will mean his suffering.

It won't mean a throne in Rome. It will mean the suffering, his lifting up, his coronation service will be a coronation on a Roman cross.

The greatness of God will be displayed in the shame and torture of the cross because it is the stunning, visible display of God's redeeming love for sinners to the praise of his glory.

The rest of history won't get over this display. And so Jesus says, Father, cast me out. Father, glorify me by handing me over.

- [16 : 37] Glorify me by lifting me up. Glorify me by crushing me. Think about that. So that I might glorify you by bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

Point two, the rationale. Point two, the rationale. Now, Jesus continues and offers a bit of a rationale for his request.

He begins by referencing eternity past. Look in verse two. Glorify your son that the son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

You have given him authority. This reference is not to authority that he would have as the son of God, nor to authority that he would gain by his obedience.

This reference is to authority he was given in order to redeem people. This reference to authority is, behind this reference to authority is an agreement between the father, son, and the spirit before all time.

- [17 : 52] You have given him authority over all flesh. It's a reference to God the father, God the son, and God the spirit deciding an eternity path to save a people and entrusting the redemption to Jesus.

We don't know all of what this means, but theologians have called this the covenant of redemption, that covenant that came before all things. John Flavel, one of my favorite Puritans, says, kind of imagines this covenant as he says, and imagines this conversation between the father and son.

He says, the father says, my son, here is a company of poor, miserable souls that have utterly undone themselves and now lie open to my justice.

Justice does demand satisfaction for them or will satisfy itself in the eternal ruin of them. What shall be done for these souls? The son says, oh, my father, such is my love to and pity for them that rather than they shall perish eternally, I will be responsible to them as their surety.

Bring in all their bills that I may see what they owe. Lord, bring them all in. I would rather choose to suffer thy wrath than they should suffer it.

[19 : 16] Upon me, my father, upon me be all their debt. The father continues, but my son, if you undertake for them, thou must reckon to pay the last night.

Expect no abatements, nothing held back. If I spare them, I will not spare thee. Son says, content father, let it be so.

Charge it all upon me. I am able to discharge it. And though it prove a kind of undoing to me, though it impoverish all my riches, empty all my treasures, yet I am content to undertake it.

It's helping us to see the mystery. Before time, the son was given authority. Redemption was planned by God the Father.

Glorify me, Jesus says, because it's been the plan from the beginning. Jesus continues by referencing redemption accomplished. In the first request, Jesus prays, glorify your son that the son may glorify you.

[20 : 37] In verse four, he reverses the request. Glorify your son that the son may glorify you. In verse four, he says, I glorified you. I did glorify you by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do.

All throughout the John's gospel, we've noticed he's been focused on work, on doing the works. But what is the work he was called to do?

It's not everything he could have done. He didn't preach to as many people as he could have.

If he didn't visit as many people as he could have, he didn't heal as many people as he could have. If you had been friends with Jesus, he would have disappointed you because the work he was called to do might not have lined up with the work you thought he should do, just like Mary and the brothers came and tried to chase him down.

So what was the work that he came to do? There are a number of times in John's gospel where he talks about works plural, but here and in one other place in John 4, 34, he used works singular.

[21 : 47] In an all-encompassing way, he says there, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. That's what I came to do, to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

Now he says here, I have accomplished his work. I believe this singular reference is meant to lead us back to the garden. Adam was placed in the garden to work it and keep it.

Eve was given to him as a helper in the mission of filling the earth with the glory of God, but Adam failed. He let the serpent come into the garden. The serpent deceived Eve, then deceived him.

They both ate fruit and the world has never been the same. So what is the work that Jesus came to do? As the last Adam and the second man, the work Jesus came to do was the work Adam failed to do.

He loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He was made like us in every respect, yet he never sinned in word, thought, or deed.

[22 : 56] He loved his neighbor as himself. He lived unreservedly and without any deviation for the glory of God every day of his life.

So much so that he can say, I have accomplished the work. Who can say that as they come home from work each day? No one. But this statement is so helpful.

It's not merely looking back at all that he did in living unto God all the days of his life. It's also forward looking. The work Jesus came to do was not just not sinning against God, but offering himself as a sinless sacrifice for men.

Anticipating the cross and all that would soon ensue, the betrayal, the arrest, the kangaroo court, the mocking, the torture, the cross. Jesus says, I have accomplished the work.

He's preparing the disciples that that is not a deviation either. He says, I have finished the work. And in less than 24 hours, he will say, it is finished.

[24 : 00] There's meant to be kind of a massive security taken from these words. And several years ago, the hit musical, Hamilton, was released on Disney Plus and our family got to watch some of it.

The end of that hit musical, Hamilton, revolves around Eliza Hamilton. Alexander Hamilton's wife. After her husband, Alexander, was shot in a duel by Jonathan Edwards' grandson, no less, the musical tells her story.

It centers on Eliza for a bit. She gives her life to continuing his legacy. She continues campaigning against slavery, establishes a school, raises money for public works, starts an orphanage.

She does a ton for the good of other people, quite a humanitarian. But twice toward the end of the musical, she says, have I done enough?

Have I done enough? That's the question, isn't it? In so many ways, that's the question that plagues our hearts.

[25 : 23] But because of Jesus, this is a question you never need to ask again. That's what he's saying.

He's done enough. He's finished the work. He's accomplished salvation.

He's done all the work that was necessary to make you right with God forever and ever. You will never be more justified than the moment you place your trust in Jesus Christ because it's based on something that happened, something that he did, something that you did not do and did not contribute to, so you will never start contributing to it.

Wonderfully, has he done enough? Yes. Always.

Tucked into these verses, Jesus references not merely redemption plan and redemption accomplished, but redemption extended, so to speak. Jesus was sent to give eternal life to all who were given to him.

[26 : 36] But what is this eternal life? Look in verse 3. It says, This is eternal life that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

This is one of the most beautiful sentences in all of Holy Scripture. It's the only time Jesus refers to himself as Jesus Christ. Christ is not his last name.

It's a title. Jesus is saying, Jesus, the Messiah, the anointed one, the promised son of David, the one who will rule and reign on the throne of David forever and ever.

But the verse centers around this explanation of eternal life. What is eternal life? It is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ.

For John, eternal life is a way of summarizing all that it means to be in the kingdom of God. Eternal life is therefore not a never-ending life. It's not about not dying.

[27 : 41] Eternal life is not about not decaying, not ceasing to exist. It's not about a life that never stops or never ends. Eternal life is about knowing God and living in fellowship with Him, living in communion with Him in so many ways.

In this little prayer, the whole story of the Bible is brought to the forefront. Why did God create the world? Not because He was unhappy, not because He needed fulfillment, not because He needed help or any of these things.

The deepest reason He wanted to call finite sinful creatures into fellowship, into communion with Him.

The story of the Bible is not about an angry God trying to get right with these people. It's about an angry God, I mean, about a good God moving out everything that stands in the way to be with His people, to commune with them forever and ever.

Fellowship is the whole story. It begins in Genesis 1. The Lord creates a people that they might be known as His people and He might be known as their God taking on those wonderful, possessive pronouns.

[28 : 55] Fellowship is the story. While we must wait to be in His physical presence, fellowship begins now and you shall know the Lord. It's the promise of the new covenant and Jesus Christ and you have sent.

Christianity is not a list of do's and don'ts. It's not about getting you to mind your P's and Q's. It's definitely not about a few hours of your week that the Lord wants you to give. It's not about getting you to heaven.

Christianity is about getting you to God. Delivering you to God. Amen. Yes. What does it mean to fellowship? I was meeting with a guy yesterday and just said, this is the engine room of the Christian life.

There's nothing like it. Now if you're anything like me, you had a different engine room. Serving the flesh.

Put so many substances in my body that gave me a high. I can't even count them. I had to relearn where the high is. Right here. The light of the word and the power of the spirit.

[30 : 01] It's the engine room. You want to know how to fellowship with God? You don't need to hike Mount Leconte and pray to the mountain. You need to open your word. This is where he speaks. This morning, I heard the voice of God.

I hope you did too because he's speaking there. He wants to talk to you. He wants to commune with you. That's what all the Bible is about. Wonderfully, your devotion should not be about how can I get more into my head?

Wonderfully, just try to connect with this God who's speaking to you. He has 66 books in which he said what is on his heart so go to him. Point three, the reason.

the reason. In verse five, Jesus returns to his original request and he unpacks the reason for it.

Original request, glorify your son that your son may glorify you. Verse four, I did glorify you and now verse five, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed.

[31 : 08] Jesus is in many ways asking the Father to accept his sacrifice. Now even though this covenant was decided in eternity past in the eternal counsels of God, Jesus in real time is saying, Father, accept my sacrifice.

lift me up that all men might be given to me. Restore me to your right hand far above all the rule and authority and power and dominion.

Jesus is saying, Father, finish the work. I have emptied myself. I have been born into the likeness of men. I have taken up human flesh.

I have taken the form of the servant. I have humbled myself to the point of death, even death on a Roman cross. Now, Father, exalt me as you promised.

Bestow on me the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[32 : 14] I can only imagine in the Father's heart. I have watched you, my son. I know it's been unbearable, but you've been faithful.

Come, enter into my joy. Let all of heaven welcome home the son. Can you imagine the day when this king came back? If the heavens rejoiced with great joy over one sinner who repents, how much more with the return of the king who's paved the way for the rescue of many sinners?

The father runs to the younger son who wants to be clean of his filth and sin, calls for the fattened calf to be slaughtered. How much more for the return of the son who died to bring many sons to glory?

In all I've read and all I've listened to, I don't think there's any art that captures the emotion of this scene more wonderfully than the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah. I listen to very little of music like this, but I still listen to this.

The words say, the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever.

[33 : 32] King of kings forever and ever. Lord of lords forever and ever. Musically, it keeps building and building, repeating each of those lines again and again.

King of kings forever and ever. Lord of lords forever and ever. King of kings forever and ever. Lord of lords forever and ever. In England, whenever anyone is in the presence of the king, they're required to stand.

And the story goes, the first time this was performed in public in 1743, King George II was there as the refrains kept declaring Christ to be the King of kings and Lord of lords, saying he will reign forever and ever.

King George II stood up because he himself was in the presence of the king. That's what the son is asking the father. I've accomplished the work and now return me to your right hand as King of kings and Lord of lords to reign on the throne of David forever.

forever. But there's another thing. I think the son is asking the father to bring him home.

[35 : 02] Glorify me with the glory I had with you before the world existed. another unflinching statement of his equality with God.

He's not earning glory, he's returning to glory. But beneath this prayer is a longing for home.

There's an old Welsh word that captures this longing called herith. It means a deep longing for a person or a thing which is absent or lost.

Far too often life in this fallen world is like taking in poisonous gas. We live so long here we fail to taste and smell the world's pollution.

It becomes too familiar with sin that we're not grieved by its heinousness. Too acquainted with this world's crookedness that we cannot imagine anything different. We begin to believe that all this is normal.

[36 : 05] It was never that way for the father and never that way for the son. Our Lord was not like that. Numerous times he says he was troubled in spirit. He wept, he grieved when the boy with the demon that the disciples could not cast out.

He said how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? And now he says father I want to come home. Perhaps the true test of whether you're a Christian is not whether you have joy.

