

High Priestly Prayer – part 1

John 17:1-17

Mark Vroegop

¹ 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, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. ⁶ “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:1–17).

What we pray about reveals what we value.

For example, what runs through your mind when you hear the following prayer requests?

- Lord, I could use \$10,000 right now.
- Father, would you make me more attractive and more popular?
- God, please let this police officer give me a warning!
- God, please help me to be more patient with my annoying roommate.

The content of our prayers shows us the desires of our hearts. In other words, you and I pray about the things that matter to us. I’m sure you’d agree with that.

But this connection between praying and heart condition becomes even more revealing when suffering or hardship enter the picture. The depth of emotions when life becomes difficult creates a revealing intensity in our prayer lives. This is part of the trauma of hardship.

Praying through suffering reveals what you really value. If you think back to a time where pain entered your life, I'm sure you'd agree that it created lots of challenges. But it especially creates challenges with what to pray for.

Jesus Knows What's Coming

In John 17, we have the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the entire Bible. And it comes at a very important time in Jesus's life. He's concluded his teaching ministry. He's given final instructions to his disciples. If you flip over to John 18, you'd find that the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus are right around the corner.

Jesus knows what is coming. Everything in his ministry has been leading to this moment. It is his mission. But the path in front of him is going to involve immense suffering as he absorbs the wrath of God on behalf of those who put their trust in him.

We don't have the kind of knowledge that Jesus possesses here. Sometimes we think that knowing the future would make things easier. However, Jesus knows the suffering he is about to endure. He knows the trauma of what that will mean for the disciples. This prayer reflects how Jesus thinks and how he prays as he approaches suffering.

As we study it, we not only get a sense of what is important to Jesus as he approaches the darkest hour and the most intense suffering experience of anyone. The followers of Jesus are instructed as to how we should pray when we are suffering. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, this passage will help you see how Christians think about suffering and the way a relationship with Jesus changes you.

What Does Jesus Ask For?

There's a lot in verses 1-17, and we'll pick up the second half of the prayer the week following THINK. In this prayer, we find that Jesus prays for one thing for himself and two things for his disciples. For himself, he prays for glorification. For his disciples, he prays for protection and sanctification. Allow me to unpack each of those words and help you know what they mean and how they apply to your life.

1. Glorification

The first thing that Jesus prays for is his own glorification. It dominates the first five verses of this chapter, and it is a theme that we've heard throughout John's gospel. In fact, you could consider this

prayer to be a summary of the entire gospel up to this point. In some respects, the prayer is a summary of the entire fourth gospel to this point.¹

John makes it clear that Jesus is praying. Jesus “lifted up his eyes to heaven and said...” (v. 1). And then Jesus says two very important things that would seem contradictory but are essential to Christianity. First, he says “the hour has come...” Throughout the gospel, we are told that Jesus’s hour had not yet come (see 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). But now it is here, and it refers to the fulfillment of his mission on earth—to die and be raised again from the dead. The “hour” is the impending suffering of the cross.

The second thing that Jesus says is the singular prayer request that he offers for himself: “glorify your Son and the Son may glorify you.” This prayer for glorification requires some explanation.

Let’s start with a definition. The verb “to glorify” means to praise or to honor. But this word has a far deeper significance than just flattery, affirmation, and recognition. “Glory” is a word that is directly connected to the essence of who God is as God and what makes him unique from the rest of the creation. In this respect, glory is the most cherished and valuable characteristic because it’s what God is like. A few verses that help us see this.

John began his gospel with the concept of glory: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).*

In his first miracle of turning the water to wine, Jesus revealed his glory to his disciples which resulted in them believing in him: *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him (John 2:11).*

In the Old Testament, God’s glory is what Moses longed to see after the disastrous idolatry of the golden calf (Ex. 33:18). When the tabernacle was completed, the glory of God filled the new worship facility such that no one could enter it (Ex. 40:34-35). When Solomon completed the temple, the glory of God filled it and the priests could not stand to minister (2 Chron. 5:14). And the prophet Habakkuk looks for a day when the knowledge of God’s glory will be known over the whole earth:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14)

“Glory” is linked to what defines and characterizes God in his holiness, beauty, and power. It summarizes him and everything connected to him. Maybe a way to think about it is considering the word “beauty” in the context of a bride walking down the aisle. A wedding service is designed to highlight many things. But a wedding just isn’t a wedding without a beautiful bride.

¹ D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 551.

Glory is like that. In fact, the apostle Paul summarizes the essence of the sinfulness of mankind in this way: “for all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory” (Rom. 3:23) and “...exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals...” (Rom. 1:23).

You might think of how you would feel if a bridesmaid refused to wear her assigned dress and instead wanted to wear a wedding gown just like the bride.

“Glory” is the summarization of divine beauty, power, and authority. Glory and God are deeply connected. The entire creation exists in order to reflect the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). And Jesus prays for his own glorification so that he can glorify the Father.

This was the plan from the very beginning of time. In verses 2-3, Jesus reaffirms his God-given authority (“given him authority over all flesh”), mission (“to give eternal life...”), sovereignty (“...to all whom you have given me”), and message (“this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”). In verse 4, Jesus verbalizes that he has accomplished the work God sent him to do.

Finally, Jesus prays for the kind of glory that was his prior to his entrance in the world (v. 5). He prays for the restoration of his close and intimate connection with the Father. Why is this important to note here?

Jesus is praying for glorification. He longs for it and cherishes it. He desires it and pleads for it. But he prays for this as he anticipates the suffering of the cross. He doesn’t pray for glorification in spite of the cross. He prays for glorification as a result of the cross.

The writer of Hebrews captures this and then provides the application that we need to consider:

...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted (Heb. 12:1–3).

What is the joy set before Jesus? What is one thing he longs for? And what then becomes our consideration? Glorification.

2. Protection

Next, Jesus’s prayer turns away from his own needs to his concern for the disciples. In verses 6-16, the primary thrust of his prayer is for spiritual protection from disunity and from the evil one. It seems that Jesus is concerned about both an internal and external threat.

However, before asking for these things directly, Jesus prayerfully rehearses the basis for his prayer over the disciples.

In verses 6-10, Jesus articulates that his prayer is directly connected to the way that the disciples belong to him. Notice the possessive-oriented language:

- “I have manifested your name to the people you gave me out of the world” (v. 6a)
- “Yours they were, and you gave them to me...” (v. 6b)
- “I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours” (v. 9)
- “All mine are yours and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them” (v. 10)

Jesus makes a clear distinction between his disciples and the rest of the world. And the most important point here is the nature of the relationship between the disciples and Jesus. They belong to him. And this belonging becomes the basis for their perseverance. In other words, hope in suffering does not come from how you are going to make it but to whom you belong. Perseverance is linked to assurance.

There were a few times in my life when the hardship was so intense or so long that my only comfort was the belief that “I belong to Jesus.” Peter encourages believers with the same principle:

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3–7).

Jesus prays for these disciples’ protection because they belong to him.

In verses 11-12, we see this prayer with greater specificity. Jesus is leaving. They are staying in the world. And Jesus prays “keep them in your name, which you have given me.” By using “in your name,” Jesus is appealing to the faithfulness of the disciples. He’s praying by God’s power through the revelation that Jesus had given them that these disciples would remain spiritually loyal in the absence of Jesus.

One of the key expressions of their spiritual maturity would be their unity or their oneness – the kind of unity that expresses the very nature of the triune Godhead with Father, Son, and Spirit. But the key to this unity is the receiving of the revelation about Jesus. What they believed about him served as their unification. But it also served, according to verse 13, as the basis of their joy.

This joyful reception of the Word puts them at odds with the world (v. 14). We saw this last week with the different emotions of the disciples and the world (John 16:20). Here it is again.

Then Jesus makes a very important statement in verse 15: I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (John 17:15–16).

Notice that Jesus is not praying that they would be isolated from trouble. Rather he’s praying that they would be protected or kept from the evil one. “The Christians’ task, then, is not to be withdrawn from

the world, nor to be confused with the world but to remain in the world, maintaining witness to the truth by the help of the Holy Spirit, and absorbing all the malice that the world can muster, finally protected by the Father himself, in response to the prayer of Jesus.”²

We see here so clearly how the followers of Jesus are to think and live. When suffering and hardship come our way, we should not be overly surprised. What’s more, we should resist the temptation to either lose the battle or leave the battle. There’s a temptation to just “give in” by becoming like the world—what it values, what it loves, and what it does. But there’s also a temptation to leave—to run away and cocoon ourselves off from the world or from each other. Both are tragic mistakes.

Jesus’s mission for his disciples is to glorify the Father by living through difficulties, trials, and temptations. And the way forward is to live in the battle with the assurance that Jesus will protect you. If you belong to him, as we sang last week, he will hold you fast!

This prayer begins with glorification and continues with protection. There’s one more thing that Jesus prayed for this week.

3. Sanctification

Jesus prayed, in verse 17, that the Father “would sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” The word “sanctified” means set apart. And it has the sense of being set apart to be holy—to have our character reflect the character of God.

Next weekend, our entire THINK conference is dedicated to this important concept. The idea in Scripture is simply that Jesus not only saves people from their sins and forgives them, but he also makes them progressively more and more righteous in their practical lives. In other words, a relationship with Jesus not only changes your eternal destiny, but it also changes you right now!

Jesus asks that the Father, through the truth, would make the disciples more and more holy. Jesus prays that his followers will be changed more and more to resemble him.

One of my favorite texts about this progressive change in holiness is 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:1.

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. ¹ Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart (2 Cor. 3:18–4:1).

You see, when the goal is being formed into the image of Jesus—one degree of glory to another—there is hope! Because nothing can thwart God’s plan.

² D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 565.

Jesus came into the world in order to grant forgiveness and to make people righteous. That mission is so important to him that he talks to the Father about it. Jesus prayed this way for his disciples. And he prays that way for us.

Modeling the Prayer of Jesus

Friends, this is recorded in the Bible for a reason. John wanted us to not only know what Jesus prayed about so that we could be more informed. He highlights this prayer so that we can be inspired to pray the same way.

If you are not yet a Christian, your first step is belonging to Jesus. Did you hear the contrast between those who his and those who are in the world? Can I ask you: Where are you today? Do you see the way that you try to find “glory” in all the wrong things? Do you feel the weight of your sin and conviction? Why not receive Jesus—right now.

If you are a Christian, I want to remind you of three things to pray about as you walk through a broken world. You should pray these things for every Christian and for yourself:

- Jesus, make me holy—just like you
- Jesus, keep me faithful and protect me from the devil
- Jesus, be glorified in every part of my life

Jesus helps us see how prayer reveals what is really important.

John 17 shows how to pray like Jesus as we wait for Jesus.

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com