

PRAY FOR GOD'S GLORY

JOHN 17:1-5

Relationships are hard work. Communication is hard work. Listening carefully, thinking rightly, talking, and talking graciously are all hard work. There are times it seems like it might just be easier or better to be silent. (It's not better.) Unfortunately, we sometimes consider the hard work of spiritual disciplines and come to a similar conclusion — the hard work is not worth the effort. We are wrong when we think that. It *is* hard. But it is worthwhile. And perhaps prayer is the hardest work in our relationship with God. We are too quick to give up with it and too prone to be too short with it.

In Matthew 6 in what is commonly called “The Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus taught His disciples and us how to pray by giving a pattern for prayer. In John 17, Jesus demonstrates how God prays and how He prays for us. Have you ever wondered what conversation between the members of the Triune God is like? We know that Jesus intercedes for His children (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25) — have you ever been curious how Jesus intercedes for you when He talks to God about you? This prayer answers both those questions. It is a revelation of the dynamic of the inner-Trinitarian workings and the desires God has for us.

Because of that unique revelation (it’s the lengthiest recorded conversation between the Son and the Father) John 17 is a particularly rich and stimulating passage of Scripture. Of this passage, Luther said, “This is truly, beyond measure, a warm and hearty prayer. He opens the depths of His heart, both in reference to us and to His Father, and He pours them all out. It sounds so honest, so simple; it is so deep, so rich, so wide, no one can fathom it.” Luther’s co-laborer and close friend Melanchthon wrote, “There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or in earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than the prayer offered up by the Son of God himself.” [Hughes, *John*, 391.]

Believers have long been drawn to this passage: John Knox had it read to him every day during his final illness — and it was read to him as he entered glory upon his earthly death. Boice’s 17 sermons on the passage pale in comparison to Thomas Manton’s (chaplain to Oliver Cromwell) 45! It has been called “The High Priestly Prayer,” “The (True) Lord’s Prayer,” and a “Holy of Holies.”

We come to this prayer this morning because one Sunday at the beginning of every year, we spend a week on Scripture and another week on prayer. This morning we learn from the lips of Jesus how to pray. Specifically, we learn how to pray for God’s glory. The first section (vv. 1-5) focuses on the glory of Christ. Simply stated, the glory of God is the revelation of the character and nature of God. The more that is revealed about Him, the greater His glory. So when Christ prays for God to be glorified through Him and for Him to receive the glory of God, He is merely praying for God to be more greatly revealed. The encouragement to us

is then two-fold: these are the truths about God that should bring us the greatest delights, and these should be truths that we seek to reveal about God.

Remember the context of this prayer: it is given for the disciples in the Upper Room. After these words, He would lead the disciples across the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane, where He also prayed in the Garden for them (cf. Mt. 26:36-46; Mk. 14:32-42; Lk. 22:39-46). This prayer serves as something of a benediction by Christ for the disciples after He has taught them throughout His ministry and on the night of the last supper.

While Jesus will pray for the Twelve (vv. 6-19) and for us (vv. 20-26), He begins by praying for Himself. The intercession He makes for Himself is particularly instructive for us because it demonstrates what is on His mind and heart as He is going to the cross. Judas is “in the shadows” and the trial, beatings, and cross are all looming in the hours ahead. What does He pray for Himself in that context?

CHRIST PRAYS FOR AND TEACHES US TO PRAY FOR GOD'S GLORY.

What is most important for Christ is the exaltation of God. What is most essential to Christ is that the Father is revealed in all His fullness and that Christ would delight in the reality of the Father. Even when He prayed for Himself, He was concerned most of all for the glory of the Father. His prayer in vv. 1-5 is a demonstration of how He taught us to pray — “Our Father who is in Heaven, hallowed be your name...”

So how did Christ pray for Himself and how did He pray for God’s glory? He **prayed for God’s glory** in five ways:

1. Christ **ASKED** for God to be Glorified (v. 1)
2. Christ **SUBMITTED** to the Glory of God’s Authority (v. 2)
3. Christ **SOUGHT** God’s Glory in Giving Eternal Life (v. 3)
4. Christ **EXHIBITED** God’s Glory in His Work (v. 4)
5. Christ Asked for **RESTORATION** to God’s Glory in Heaven (v. 5)

1. Christ ASKED for God to be Glorified (v. 1)

- As we look at the prayer, notice three contexts of the prayer —
 - ✓ **...lifting up His eyes to Heaven...** —
 - This is a familiar posture of Jesus' prayers (e.g., the raising of Lazarus, 11:41; blessing five loaves and two fish, Mk. 6:41; healing deaf man, Mk. 7:34).
 - It is in contrast to His prayer in the Garden anticipating being the sin-bearer (Mt. 26:39) and in contrast to the tax collector's prayer (Lk. 18:13). It is in contrast to most of our own prayers.
 - To lift His eyes to Heaven is to recognize the authority of God in Heaven (where He looks for help), but also suggests the fellowship He has with God in Heaven (not prostrate in humility).
 - ✓ **"Father"** — this was Jesus' normal way to address God (e.g., Mt. 6:9; Jn. 17:5, 11, 21, 24-25; 20:17). The only time He doesn't address Him as "Father" was when He was the sin-bearer (Mt. 27:46).
 - To address God as Father indicates submission and dependence, but also equality w. God (5:18).
 - He has a unique access that evidences intimacy and fellowship between the Father and the Son.
 - ✓ **the hour has come...** — we've already alluded to it, but now Jesus is specific about the cross.
 - "The hour" in John regularly referred to the time of the cross (2:4; 12:23, 27; 13:1).
 - The eternal plan and promise of redemption (Tt. 1:2) has arrived. "The unfolding drama of redemptive history has reached its apex." [MacArthur]
 - For Jesus to mention the cross in this moment is to recognize that this prayer is being given with the cross in the forefront of His mind — the death of God incarnate and the absorbing of God's infinite wrath as sin-bearer. The prayer is motivated by the quickly arriving cross.
 - What then does Jesus pray for Himself under the shadow of that cross?
- One commentator has said that there is only one request in this part of the prayer: **glorify Your Son...**
 - ✓ The word **glorify** means to honor and praise (and find delight in); it also means to give (reveal) a true estimation of the reality of another, to show the weightiness and importance of another.
 - ✓ For Christ to pray this for Himself means something like, "While I am going to experience the most humbling (despised) kind of death, and absorb Your wrath, will You also demonstrate My true nature in the resurrection and ascension and My return to glory?"
 - ✓ For Christ to pray for His glory is to pray for His resurrection and vindication (Rom. 1:4).
 - ✓ It is "a petition...to reverse the self-emptying entailed in his incarnation and to restore him to the splendour that he shared with the Father before the world began. The cross and Jesus' ascension/exaltation are thus inseparable. The hideous profanity of Golgotha means nothing less than the Son's glorification." [Carson]

- But notice also why Christ prays and asks for Himself to be glorified — ***that the Son may glorify You.***
 - ✓ Since Christ is God (He is the eternal ***Son*** to the eternal ***Father***), when He prays for Himself to be glorified, He is praying for the entire Godhead to be glorified. So it is a right, God-honoring prayer.
 - ✓ But even more than that, the Son is always pointing to the Father. Throughout His ministry, He always wants the Godhead to be glorified and the Father to be glorified (1:14, 18; 7:18; 8:50, 54; **12:28; 13:31-32**).
 - ✓ So, this is no “self-serving” prayer — it is a prayer that terminates where all prayers should terminate — on the glory of God, so that God is honored and revealed in all that is done.
 - ✓ The Son is exemplifying in His own prayer how He has commanded us to pray (Mt. 6:9).

2. Christ SUBMITTED to the Glory of God’s Authority (v. 2)

- Think for a moment about the character of Jesus Christ:
 - ✓ He is the eternally existent God, *self-existent*, uncreated, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He has revealed all truth and He knows all things; He is present in Heaven, co-regent with the Father, and also present everywhere at all times. He can do all things that are consistent with His nature. There is nothing that exists that doesn’t belong to Him and nothing that can act against His will.
 - ✓ And this one “who is before all things and in Him all things hold together...[who] is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything” (Col. 1:17-18), *submits Himself to the Father and the Father’s authority*.
- He prays what He prays (submissively, v. 1) because the Father ***gave Him authority***.
 - ✓ This does not diminish Christ’s deity, but it gives a glimpse into the inner workings of the Godhead.
 - ✓ While there is co-equality in nature between the three Persons of God, they are distinct as Persons and in function. (Father, Son, and Spirit are different people and they function differently.)
 - ✓ While the Son has authority as the eternal Son of God, He also has authority because it has been granted to Him ***over all flesh*** (there is no person anywhere not under Christ’s authority) by the Father. The Father gives the Son right to rule the earth (**Ps. 2:7-9**), right to judge (**Jn. 5:27**) and right to resurrect Himself (**8:28-29**). And He joyfully submits to that authority.
 - ✓ “Jesus’ prayer highlights His absolute confidence in and submission to the perfect will of God, even though He knew perfectly what it would cost Him.” [MacArthur]
- The authority Jesus is particularly thinking about here is particularly the authority to give spiritual ***life***.
 - ✓ The Father has given (“promised” Tt. 1) particular people to Jesus (**6:37-39**).
 - ✓ And the Father has given the Son the power to grant ***eternal life*** — that life comes through faith (“belief” **3:15-16, 35-36; 5:24**) and He preserves those who believe (**10:28**).
 - ✓ This prayer, then, also affirms that God is also glorified through the granting of eternal life.

3. Christ SOUGHT God's Glory in Giving Eternal Life (v. 3)

- What is eternal life? Obviously it is a long period of time — unending time. But it is more...
- **Eternal life** is to know the Father and the Son in their unity. It is to be unified / joined with Him.
 - ✓ The essence of eternal life is knowledge — ***to know You...and Jesus Christ***
 - ✓ To know God is more than just know about Him or the way to Him; it is life itself (15:9-11).
 - ✓ Notice also the verb — “This *is...*” Eternal life is not just having something in the future. It is a present (and ongoing) possession to all who believe in Jesus Christ. Which means, that while we will one day see Him face-to-face, intimacy, fellowship, and relationship has begun and is growing.
 - ✓ The goal of salvation is not just to give us something in the future; it is to give us something now.
 - ✓ We don't get married so that after 60 years of marriage there will be someone to take care of us; we get married so that we can express love and enjoy fellowship now and then mutually care for one another. There *is* a final good gift in salvation, but don't overlook the gift that it is today.
 - ✓ God's gift of eternal life is that you would enjoy Him today (Col. 3:3; Phil. 1:21).
 - ✓ Since knowledge of God is experiential and dynamic, a legitimate question to ask is, “Is there that longing to know Him deeper and more personally?” [Laney]
- Since eternal life is to know the Father and the Son in their unity, then His prayer for us is even more significant —
 - ✓ v. 21 — Christ wants us united to them so the world will also believe (and have eternal life, v. 23)
 - ✓ v. 22 — Christ wants us to enjoy the glory and unity that is enjoyed by Father and Son
 - ✓ v. 24 — Christ wants us to be with Him, to see Him (and thus to know Him and His glory)
 - ✓ vv. 25-26 — Christ knows the Father and wants us to know the purpose of the Father sending the Son (for the “hour” of redemption and to grant eternal life) and to know their unifying love.
 - ✓ Christ came with authority to give us eternal life — a freedom from the prison of sin that takes us to the fellowship of the King (think *The Prince and the Pauper*).
 - ✓ Too often we think of Christ's work as only cleaning up our sinful mess, but He gives Himself to us.
 - ✓ He not only gives Himself to us, but He prays that God would be glorified through that gift.
 - ✓ God's glory is on display when sinners are redeemed and enjoy His fellowship. (Do I act that way?)

4. Christ EXHIBITED God's Glory in His Work (v. 4)

- Christ's primary prayer for Himself is the restoration of His heavenly glory (v. 1), so that His Father would be glorified. God is glorified when Christ is resurrected and ascended.
- But the Father has been glorified in other ways throughout Christ's life and ministry — ***I glorified You on the earth.*** That is, Christ's glorification of the Father on earth began before the cross (1:14, 18)!
- Specifically, Christ glorified the Father by ***accomplishing*** (completing) what He was sent to do.

- ✓ What was He sent to do? He was sent to testify of the Father (5:36). Done.
- ✓ He was sent to fulfill the Law (Mt. 5:17). Done.
- ✓ He was sent to save sinners (3:17). Remarkably — He also considers that done (16:33).
- ✓ His already completed work was a comfort that the Father would finish the work.
- ✓ And when the work is finished? God is glorified (which is Jesus' goal with His prayer).

5. Christ Asks for RESTORATION to God's Glory in Heaven (v. 5)

- In verse five, Jesus reiterates the request He made in v. 1 — ***glorify Me together with Yourself***
 - ✓ He wants restoration after the wrath. He wants to be vindicated as the eternal God-Man.
 - ✓ And specifically, He wants to be restored to the Father.
 - ✓ While Christ did not give up His deity when He was incarnated, He did give things up when He came to earth as the God-Man. He gave up all the privileges of Heaven (Phil. 2:5-8).
 - ✓ This request is Jesus' desire for the restoration of His previous glory — not only for the resurrection from the dead, but for the ascension to Heaven and the place at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1).
 - ✓ He asks to be restored to Heaven with all the glory He set aside so that He can sit alongside the Father as the eternal co-regents of all things. And He is already there (Heb. 1:3). God answered.
- I hope you hear with this prayer the God-centeredness of Christ. He is saturated with the pursuit of God's glory — even when that glory meant the cross and bearing sin, death, and wrath.
 - ✓ Even though He had to suffer in order to accomplish the greatest demonstration of God's glory, because He wanted the Father to be glorified, He joyfully endured it all.
 - ✓ (Here is a lesson for us: too often we attempt to find ways out of our problems when we should be trying to figure out what will reveal God's character most when we are suffering. Our pain is redeemed when we pursue honoring and obeying Him in the pain.)
 - ✓ This One who went to the cross, not only prays for the glory of God; He *is* the glory of God.

CONCLUSION: The title of this sermon is "Pray for God's Glory." I had two ideas in mind with that title:

- ✓ Pray in such a way that God's glory is demonstrated and revealed through your prayers — "Pray for the exhibition of God's glory," so that His nature and character are revealed (even as Christ revealed His authority, eternality, and salvation in this prayer). God wants prayers with a high view of God.
- ✓ Pray with delight in God. To "glorify" God means we reveal His nature, *and* it means that we delight in what is revealed about Him. We want to pray with adoration for God and delight in Him. We go to Him because we love Him. God wants prayers with a great delight in God.
- ✓ It's appropriate (commanded!) to ask God for help. But are we also delighting in the One we are asking for help? In prayer, let's worship, adore, and delight in God — for His glory.

To that end, let us pray to conclude this message:

- ✓ The glory of God and Christ in their nature...
- ✓ The glory of God in His authority...
- ✓ The glory of God in salvation and eternal life...
- ✓ The glory of God in the work of Christ...
- ✓ The glory of God in the exaltation of Christ...

NEW MEMBER TESTIMONIES

BENEDICTION: Prayer