

## 7. Jesus Prays for His Disciples

John 17:1-26

Jesus' Final Days On Earth

### Preparing the Disciples Through Prayer

In chapters 13-17 of the Gospel of John, the apostle recalls the words and actions of Jesus as He prepared His disciples for His crucifixion and what would take place after His ascension to the Father. When they finished eating the last supper, John tells us they departed for the mile walk to the Garden of Gethsemane (14:31). Stopping somewhere near the temple, chapters 15 and 16 continue Jesus' last words of instruction as well as words of comfort. In chapter seventeen, Jesus turned His heart toward the Father in prayer. We are given an insight into this intimate conversation shared in the Scriptures as Christ prays for Himself and His disciples.

Jesus knew He would soon face arrest and crucifixion, yet He was concerned for His disciples and wanted to comfort them in their distress. This shows us the depth of His love. He knew that their faith would take a battering at His death at the hands of the Romans and the apostate Jewish leadership. The Scriptures record that only one of the eleven disciples, the apostle John, was there at the crucifixion, but the others likely stood at a distance so that they would not be recognized as His disciples. Chapter seventeen now takes us up close and personal as Jesus prayed with them before the time of darkness began. There are three parts to His prayer to the Father. In the first part, Jesus prays for Himself, verses 1-5; the second part focuses on prayer for the disciples, verses 6-19; and the last part is the Lord's prayer for all who will believe through many ages, verses 20-24. Let's focus on each piece of this most special prayer of Jesus.

### Jesus Prays for Himself (John 17:1-5)

<sup>1</sup>After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. <sup>2</sup>For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup>Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began (John 17:1-5).

Over three years before, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus spoke of an hour when He would greatly glorify God. At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, He said to His mother, "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). Three times also, in John chapter seven (vs. 6, 8, 30), He again shared that His time or hour had not yet come, but now, just a few hours before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (John 17:1).

What did Jesus mean when speaking of the Cross as His glory and glorification? (v. 1). How does the cross bring glory to the Father?

### Glorifying God

What does the word “glory” mean? In the Old Testament, the most common Hebrew word translated *as glory* is *kabod*, which means "heavy in weight." In the Book of Exodus, Moses said to the Lord, “**I pray you, show me your glory!**” (Exodus 33:18). For what was he asking? Moses longed to see the brilliance, beauty, splendor, and majesty of the Lord on this side of heaven. In the New Testament, the Greek word translated *as glory* is *doxazo*. This word is used to describe “**Solomon in all his glory**” (Matthew 6:29) and also “**all the kingdoms of the world and their glory**” (Matthew 6:8). To glorify someone is to recognize the importance or the weight of some desirable quality that a person possesses. When Jesus talked about His desire to glorify His Father and to be glorified through the cross, it was to show or magnify the uniqueness of the love and mercy of God through Christ crucified for sinners.

Many religions of this world project God as stern and angry, but in this passage, we see that Jesus' obedience to the Father reveals what God the Father is truly like. Yes, He is an awesome God and One who executes justice and judgment, but He is also a God of love, mercy, and kindness revealed through the enormous cost that He was willing to pay to bring us guilty sinners to Himself. If Jesus had stopped short of the cross, it would have proved that there were limits to the degree of love God would go to. Jesus went all the way to the cross to show us that there is no limit to the love and mercy of God. If there could have been another way, don't you think God would have taken it rather than give His Son to die on the cross? The cross reveals the weight or the glory of God and speaks loudly of the Father's character showing us clearly the Father's love for us.

Jesus then prayed about the gift of eternal life that He gives to all the Father gives Him (v. 2). This eternal life is more than having no limit in time or the absence of time; more than that, it is a quality of life. We will all live forever; it is just a matter of where we will live in eternity. Upon our repentance and belief in Christ, the gift of life changes our eternal destiny and begins a transformative process that changes us from the inside out: “**And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit**” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We only see the result of this transformative process when we pass from this life into eternal life. We are immortal souls living in the transitory tent of these physical bodies:

**For while we are in this tent, [our mortal physical body] we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life** (2 Corinthians 5:4).

Jesus then described the essence of this gift of life that He gives His people: it is to know the Father and the Son.

**Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent** (v. 3).

When we receive the gift of life, the Holy Spirit enters our lives and begins His work of opening our minds and hearts to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and, simultaneously, showing us what the Father is like. When we believe, it is more than intellectual knowledge based on an understanding of the character of God; it is the beginning of a love relationship. When we understand the depth of God's love for us, we respond by loving Him in return. When Adam lay with his wife in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 4:1), the English King James Version says, “Adam **knew** his wife.” The Hebrew word *yada* means “to know” in the sense of “to experience.” In this

context, it denotes the most intimate relationships between a man and woman, a heart-to-heart knowledge that inevitably leads to the expression of that love by sexual union. Unfortunately, this type of intimacy is not always given the honor it deserves in the confines of a marriage covenant. In verse three, Jesus says the true believer can know God in a close, covenant relationship. The believer is destined for a heart-to-heart relationship with the Almighty God. This kind of close relationship is our ultimate destiny, which is what God's ultimate sacrifice was for.

How can this love relationship between God and His people be developed? How does the Holy Spirit help us experience the love of Christ?

### **Jesus Prays for His Disciples (John 17:6-19)**

<sup>6</sup>I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. <sup>11</sup>I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>12</sup>While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup>“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup>My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified (John 17:6-19).

Jesus now prayed concerning the importance of the Word of God that He had shared with the disciples (vs. 6-8, 14). The importance of the Word of God must not be underestimated. In the late fourteenth century, as John Wycliffe translated the Old and New Testament into English, all hell broke loose to ban the Bible's publication and keep it chained to pulpits and only spoken in Latin so that people could not understand it. Satan sought to keep the people in bondage to a form of religion apart from the light of God's Word. Today, supernatural evil powers can no longer stop the Word of God from being published in many languages, so the enemy has changed his strategy to keep people so busy that they do not have time to read, meditate, and grow in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus. There is always a strategy of the enemy to blind and distract us away from God's Word. Jesus said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63). No wonder our enemy makes it his job to keep us from the life-giving source of God's Word.

At one time, only one wage was needed to sustain a whole family and provide for their needs. Now, we need everyone, including the dog and cat, to go to work to put food on the table and pay off our mortgages! Although the Word of God is more readily available to people today in most

countries, so much media bombards us that we have little time reserved for its meditation. We need to be aware that the primary objective of Satan is to drown out the Word of God in whatever way he can. How important is it to you to hear God's Word? Jesus said that it was God's channel or agency to transform the believer: **"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth"** (v. 17). The eleven disciples heard, valued, and obeyed the Word of God (John 17:6).

How vital was the ministry of the Word of God in the early days of Christianity? When a dispute arose among the Greek-speaking Hebrews against the Jews living in the land of Israel, i.e., that their widows were being unfairly treated concerning the daily distribution of food, the apostles refused to give more of their time to administrate and oversee such things properly. Instead, they formed a committee to choose seven men to manage such situations, saying, **"We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word"** (Acts 6:4). They saw that the most crucial thing in the life and growth of the church was that its leaders were to be men of prayer and to continue teaching the Scriptures. Many churches in these modern days expect their pastors to be CEOs when the need is for them to teach the Word of God. The blessing and anointing of the Spirit will be on churches that have an emphasis on those two areas of their ministry.

Jesus then prayed about the protection of the disciples. He said, **"Protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one"** (John 17:11). In the days when the Old Testament was written, names were sometimes given to express things happening at the time or aspects of a person's character. For instance, during a battle with the Philistines, when the High priest, Eli, and his sons all died, and the Ark of the Covenant was stolen, Eli's grandson, born at the same time, was named *Ichabod*. Ichabod is a depressing name: it means *the glory has departed* (1 Samuel 4:21). How would you like to grow up with that name? Jacob's name given at birth meant cheater, deceiver, or swindler, and his character turned out just as His name described. No wonder God finally confronted him and changed his heart and character; his name was changed to Israel, Prince with God, or Contender with God (Genesis 32:28).

What does the name of Jesus mean? It reveals something of the nature of God. Jesus said in His prayer to the Father, **"Protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me"** (v. 11). In Hebrew, there is no letter *J*. The name Jesus in Hebrew is *Yeshua* or *Yehoshua*, which means "Yahweh is Salvation" or "Yahweh Rescues." Jesus revealed the character of God and glorified the Father by His obedient act of self-sacrifice, i.e., the giving of His life so His people could be saved.

### **Prayer of Protection for the Disciples from the Evil One**

Jesus then prayed in verse fifteen that the Father would protect us, not by taking us out of the world, but by protecting us from the evil one while we are living in the world. **"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one"** (John 17:15).

The Lord knew that His disciples would need protection from the evil one at work in this present evil world. It is beautiful to consider that Jesus was praying not only for their protection but also for all who would one day come to know Him. Remember that God lives outside of time. He knows all those who are His own! Jesus was praying not only for His disciples at that time, but for

all who would come to believe in Him. In this prayer on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, He was praying for you if you are one of His disciples (v. 20). You were the object of His concern and prayer during that night. How awesome! I want to share a personal story of God's protection, which I will never forget:

I grew up with my father and grandfather being commercial fishermen, and in my teen years, my dad had a shipwright (A boat builder) build a new commercial fishing boat for us. It took more than three years to complete. As the forty-five-foot vessel was nearing completion, the winter sprat season (a small fish similar to anchovies) began with vast schools of fish caught in the North Sea outside our home port of Harwich on the East coast of England. We hastily got the new boat in the water and hit a big school of fish. We caught around thirty-four tons of fish that day and began filling both boats we owned. The large net was towed between two vessels, the *Why Worry* and my father's new boat, the *Jane Marie*. As we began putting the fish into the hold, the *Jane Marie* got lower and lower in the water with the sprats piled up on the deck. As the day wore on, the weather became windy with a Force Eight gale. As we headed for our homeport, the waves started coming over the boat's rails due to how low she was in the water. We then realized we had made a terrible mistake: we had cut no scuppers (holes in the hull at deck level) to let the water run off the deck.

As the waves came over the rail, the water had nowhere to go, so the boat began to sink. The *Jane Marie* (named after my sister) had two forward compartments with watertight bulkheads. The back half of the vessel was completely underwater, with the rail and the rollers on the stern rail entirely underwater. It is weird to be on the deck of a boat with half of it underwater. The net on the deck was floating away, as were the hatches from the hold. I kicked off my thigh boots so that I would not be dragged under if the *Jane Marie* sunk and my boots filled with water. The engine room and the cabin were keeping us afloat, but we couldn't move due to the angle of the boat now no longer being able to power us forward. Our other boat, the *Why Worry*, had to tow us safely into the harbor. It was then I decided that I needed to learn how to swim! I have always looked back at such incidents and realized that God had angels watching over me to protect me. I have a few of these stories from incidents at sea. I realize now that even when I did not know Him, He was watching over me and protecting me from harm. He will fulfill His purposes for us. His arm is not short that He cannot save us (Isaiah 59:1).

**Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?  
(Hebrews 1:14).**

The above passage talks about angels as serving spirits sent to help those who will be heirs of salvation, i.e., future tense. Even before we came to Christ, the Father was at work to protect us, even though we had not yet committed our lives to Jesus. The Father, who lives outside of time and knows all things, knows all who will respond to the call of the Gospel and protects them from the evil one. Jesus prayed for us that God would protect us. All of us believers can look back over our lives and possibly see the Lord at work in our lives even before we were believers.

**Share the different ways the Lord has protected you from evil. Does He only use angels to protect us? Share your stories where you think the Lord has intervened to protect you.**



Jesus said that we are to be in the world and yet not of the world (John 17:15-17). A Christian is to be like my father's fishing boat. As long as the water was on the outside, all was good, but things began to go very badly when the water started to seep into the boat. The world is to be on the outside of our lives. Once we start allowing the corrupting stuff of this world to settle into the inner part of our lives, we lose our joy and peace, and what's on the inside will flow to the outside: "What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them" (Matthew 15:11).

Jesus' prayer at that time was not that the Father would take the disciples out of the world but that they would be protected. They still had a job to do. That is why they could not go with Him. The Spirit was to come and empower them to spread His life-giving word, even to the Gentiles. The same is true for you. If you know Christ, you have a mission to share His word and be salt and light while there is still time for people to hear and believe the Word of God. You do not need to be in full-time ministry to impact people for the Lord. You already have this calling.

When I was involved in church planting in Kent, England, I regularly taught Alpha courses to build the church and reach people for Christ (The Alpha Course is a new beginner's course to Christianity). I also made a living doing sub-contracting work as a part-time painter and decorator work. Once, while I was working with a group of men on a project, I began to get to know these men, and I could tell that they could sense I was different. The language on a building site is somewhat "colorful" at times. They were aware I would not join in certain conversations, and they wondered what my other job was when I was not with them. (I only worked part-time with them). When they asked where I was, I would not say what I did. I did not want to tell them I was a minister of the Gospel, for I knew it would create a division among us, and I wanted to befriend them. It was not long before all kinds of stories began to circulate about what I could be doing on my side job. They knew something was up! I grew close to one of the men, whose name was Kip. He came to me and told me that the men were all guessing what my side job was. They were joking around and suggesting all kinds of things. I told them that if they could give me half an hour over the lunch break, I would tell them what my part-time job was and why I did what I did.

When we gathered with our lunch and cups of tea, I told them my story of near-death experiences and meeting the Lord Jesus. They were all hooked, I could tell. My friend Kip gave his life to the Lord as I shared with them about the Lord Jesus, how He had changed my life, and how He could change theirs too. I don't remember their reactions; I am sure they were mixed. But Kip's life was significantly impacted, and he became a believer in the following weeks. The lives of believers in Christ can be so taken up with only being around other Christians, but the Lord prayed that we might be effective in reaching those in the world. I would never have influenced them for Christ if I had never been in that world with other painters.

I say that to encourage you that wherever you are, someone in your circle needs to hear the words of life. We are in the world but not of the world. Others will know that there is something different about you.

### **Jesus Prays for Unity Among All Who Believe (John 17:20-26)**

<sup>20</sup>My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their

message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. <sup>24</sup>“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. <sup>25</sup>“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup>I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:20-26).

Jesus prayed in verse 21 that those who believe in Him would be one. Do you think this prayer will be answered before Jesus returns? If so, what must occur among believers for unity to become a reality? Why is unity among believers so critical?

Unity among believers will be something that the Lord will accomplish in the Body of Christ in the last days. The spirit of the world is rapidly turning very anti-Christian. I believe we will see a time when it does not matter if you are a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Vineyard, etc. What will matter is that you are standing for Jesus Christ at the center of your life and that you love the family of believers. It will be a time similar to when the early church believers experienced unity of heart: “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14, ESV). Due to this unity, the Holy Spirit came in great power on the Day of Pentecost. The English NIV translates the Greek word *homothumadon* as “They all joined together constantly in prayer.” *Homothumadon* is a compound of two words meaning "rush along" and "in unison." The image is almost musical; many notes are sounded, which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. Being in one accord or being together in unity of Spirit is similar to the instruments of a great concert blending under the direction of the Concertmaster, the Holy Spirit, where the members of Christ’s church are devoted to Christ and one another. When there is unity in the church, there is a unique presence of God in the midst:

<sup>1</sup>How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! <sup>2</sup>It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe. <sup>3</sup>It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore (Psalm 133:1-3).

Unity of heart, I believe, is where the Holy Spirit will lead the church of the Lord Jesus. The Lord will allow troublesome times to come so we learn to lean on one another and the Lord amid our needs. Unity of heart and mind for the kingdom of God will be like the anointing that came down upon the High Priest Aaron when he was ordained. The anointing oil indicated the presence of the Spirit upon his life, and it was there that the Lord commanded a blessing, even life forever.

When we look back at the history of the Church of Jesus Christ over the last two thousand years, we see a shameful record of Satan's work of division among us. I know that every prayer that Jesus prayed will be answered, for every prayer came from the Father’s heart. Jesus said, “For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken” (John

12:49). We live in the days when God will fulfill the prayer of Christ and bring unity to His Church. Maybe, you would like to pray for the Spirit to bring that unity, i.e., the one credential to the world of the divinity of Christ's mission on earth: "I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. **Then the world will know** that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23).

Father, would You equip, train, and empower Your people to be all that we can be in the days we live? Use each of us to manifest the unity of the Spirit and prove to the world that You have sent Your Son into the world to reconcile men and women to Yourself. Amen!

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