

# Jesus' Prayer and Priorities

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] for you before we get stuck in. But if you're here this morning as a Christian, we're going to see that one of the priorities that Jesus brings to God in prayer is you. We'll get to that shortly as Jesus prays for his people, that Jesus has you and me in mind as he contemplates the cross.

That's an incredible thing to know. But before that, we'll also see that Jesus prays for God's glory. That the ultimate goal of Jesus's mission of the gospel is that God would get the glory that he and he alone deserves. That his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and all of these things, the glory of God is Jesus's number one goal and ultimate priority. And so there's kind of the two headings. Jesus prays for God's glory. Jesus prays for God's people. And we'll see how those two are intertwined as well. But first, Jesus prays for God's glory. This is just the first five verses of chapter 17. So we're going to spend the bulk of our time in the remaining 21 verses as Jesus prays for God's people. But I think there really is significance to the order here as we look at it. This is the first part of Jesus's prayer, praying for God's glory.

This is a great chance for us to be reminded of the ultimate significance of the glory of God, that we find our place in light of that. We find our place downstream from that, as it were.

God's glory is Jesus's ultimate priority and the goal of the gospel. Have a look there at verse one. When Jesus had spoken these words, really, that's all the words in the preceding chapters we've been making our way through. He lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.

And remember in John's gospel, the hour, as Jesus says here, is always referring to that hour that the whole of Jesus's ministry is moving toward the hour of the cross, the hour of Jesus's death.

[ 2 : 2 1 ] That hour, which will look like complete failure and defeat to the world, but will actually be Jesus's crowning glory as to the cross and the resurrection, the ascension that follows. Jesus's victory over sin and death is confirmed and is demonstrated.

Jesus knows that that moment is here, and so he prays that he will receive that glory that can only come through the cross.

Why is Jesus wanting to be glorified? Well, what is his goal? We see that in the second half of verse one. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, Jesus says. Jesus's number one priority here on the night before his death is not his own preservation or comfort. It is not even his own glory as an end in itself, but it is that God the Father would get the glory that is rightfully his, that the Son would be glorified in order to reflect like a mirror that glory back to the Father. And so Jesus prays for God's glory. The glory of God is the goal of the gospel. And I just wonder as we begin, is that how we tend to think? Why did Jesus come? Why did Jesus die? Why the gospel? Perhaps our answer to that question would often begin with ourselves. He came to save us. He came to rescue us. He came because he loved us.

Please hear me really, really carefully here, because all of those things are completely true. And yet perhaps a thread that we might sometimes miss or be less quick to go to, but which in some ways is even more fundamental to the Bible story is that Jesus came, that God might be glorified.

That doesn't mean that God might become glorious, but it means that the glory of God in all its fullness might be demonstrated, might be seen through the gospel. At the center of the gospel, at the center of that picture is not us, but it's God. The gospel is for the glory of God, and God in his glory then rescues his people. And Jesus goes straight on to make that point, that incredibly in displaying that glory, God also brings his people in to share in that glory. Part of Jesus revealing that glory, verse 2, is that he's able to give eternal life to God's people, and that eternal life then is defined for us. Verse 3, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you've sent. And so according to the Bible, eternal life is not just about going to heaven when we die. It's actually about knowing God. It's about recognizing that glory here and now, and then responding to that, and specifically knowing that Jesus is the one sent from God to reveal his glory in the gospel, to return that glory to the Father, and to grant that ongoing relationship, that knowing God in the closest possible way to his people as we, through the gospel, recognize the glory of God. And so as Jesus prays for God's glory, we see that his people, you and me, if we trust in Jesus, we are able to share in that because of the work Jesus accomplishes. That's an incredible thing. We'll see more of that soon. But just the last, last verse in this first section, verse 5, is Jesus again praying for God's glory, that he, the Son, would return to the Father's presence, that he would return to share in that glory that has been his from before the beginning, before the world existed, as it says. Again, that reminder that the gospel isn't making God glorious, but is revealing that eternal glory to all creation, that as Jesus completes his mission on earth, as the hour of the cross comes, Jesus returns to that glory that has always been his.

[ 6 : 50 ] Jesus. And so that's the first five verses, the first section, Jesus prays for God's glory. There's a lot of stuff in there. There's a lot more that we could talk about, but what are we kind of supposed to take away from that, I suppose, before we move on to Jesus's prayer for God's people?

Well, I think probably more than anything else from these verses, we want to see that understanding that the gospel is for the glory of God. That is Jesus's primary concern, even the night before his death, and that that will be our primary concern at every stage of our life, the glory of God.

So often our natural tendency is to kind of move ourselves into the middle of the picture, isn't it? That things would revolve around us, even God himself, our desires, our comforts, our aspirations. And yet the truth is that God in his perfection, his glory is the ultimate thing.

And we find ourselves in him, it is his glory that is our hope. And it says we see that, as we grasp that in the gospel, that our first thought is no longer, well, what will God do for me today? Even though God does incredible things for us each and every day, but rather that our first thought, our attitude to life would be, how might God's glory be displayed in my life today? Even in the hard times, even in the sufferings, even in the struggles, that we would have a God-centered gospel, that we would seek his glory first in all things, just as Jesus did, as Jesus prays for God's glory.

So that's the first five verses. Then having that foundation in place, then let's move on to the second section here, which is the rest of chapter 17. If you think that Jesus being concerned above all for God's glory makes us kind of worry, well, does he really care about us at all? We now get an answer to that question. That answer is a resounding yes. As we see now, Jesus prays for God's people.

[ 9 : 03 ] And actually, as Jesus prays for God's people, we get to see what it is in our lives that brings glory to God. It's worth noting here that Jesus actually prays for God's people in two distinct groups.

In these verses, he prays from verse 6 onwards for the original disciples who are right with him in the upper room. But then if you look down to verse 20, you'll see Jesus say this. He says, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

And so Jesus is praying here for the church throughout history as it holds on to the teaching of those first apostles. And again, is that not just incredible to think that Jesus on the night before the cross, that he was thinking about us, that he was praying for us, that he was bringing us before his perfect heavenly father, that we might glorify him. It's incredible, isn't it, that Jesus prays for us. And so what is Jesus praying for God's people, both for the first disciples, for us this morning? I'm going to deal with those kind of all together as I think it's a common themes that run right through. And I think we could summarize it by saying this, Jesus prays for God's people that the father would keep them united on mission until they finally share fully in his glory.

Really four major emphases that we'll just quickly look through, that the father would keep them united, united, are on mission until they finally share fully in his glory. Let's have a look at those.

First, Jesus prays that the father would keep his people. At verse 11, Jesus says, 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. At verse 15, I ask not that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. As Jesus prepares for the cross, and following that, his resurrection and his return to heaven, he's in no doubt, is he, about the seriousness of the situation in which he's leaving his followers. Think of it this way, you know, the gospel, which is the hope for the world, this message of salvation, God's rescue plan for humanity. As Jesus leaves, he's going to leave that in the hands of a fairly unremarkable group of people who he's speaking with here. A group of people who, as we've seen in earlier chapters, will be opposed by the world as they live to different standards from the world. A group of people who will face constant pressure to let go of that message, and instead be kind of squashed and formed into the mold of the world.

[ 11 : 56 ] And what was true for those first disciples is true for us today, and we need to not be naive to that, to the pressures that we face. Jesus took this seriously, and so we should take this seriously.

That our relationship with God is a battleground. The call to be in the world, but not of the world, is a fight that we daily have to take up. It's not something that we just naturally drift into.

And so in praying to the Father that he would keep us, Jesus is kind of waving a flag, isn't he? He's warning us, helping us to see the seriousness of the situation that we're in, but also giving us the incredible comfort that this is a challenge that we don't face alone. But rather, as Jesus kept his disciples while he walked on the earth with them, so God will keep us as his people today, will keep us in his name, as it says. Really, that means living according to his word, living in dependence on him, living as his people. And so you might be here this morning and feeling that the Christian life is just incredibly hard, that at school or at work or in our families or just the realities of day-to-day life or just the constant direction of things from the media, that everything seems to be pushing against what we believe. And just that feeling that, well, maybe it would just be easier just to let go or just to go with the flow. And we see in this passage that Jesus knows that struggle.

Jesus knows the reality of that. And so Jesus has asked the Father to keep us, and we can be certain that the Father will give to the Son whatever he requests. This is not a request from Jesus to the Father that the Father is going to turn down, but he will keep all those who are his.

And so there's realism, but also encouragement there. We're called not to compromise with the world, neither to disengage fully from the world, but instead to walk that line in the world, but not of the world. That's a hard place to be. Jesus knows that. But as he has prayed for us, we do that kept by the Father. So Jesus prays that the Father would keep his people. And then that second emphasis is that he would keep them united. And again, this is a theme that we have heard a lot about in these chapters of John's Gospel. Jesus, again, emphasizing it here, verse 11, and keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they might be one, even as we are one.

[ 14 : 42 ] Verse 20, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you. Verse 22, the glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. God is not just keeping a number of individuals, each going their own way through the world. The Bible is clear that God is keeping a people. That as we are united to him through the Gospel, so we are united to one another in a supernatural way. And in fact, you'll have heard the closeness of that link repeated by Jesus in those verses, that God's people would be one, even as the Father and the Son are one.

That is the level of closeness that Jesus is speaking about. And so what does a church where God's work is really having a deep impact look like? It's not first and foremost all the stuff that church might be doing. It's actually far more the quality of that church's relationships.

Is there a supernatural unity there where people are brought together by something far more than shared interests or just kind of local geography or similar music tastes or just the same age and stage of life, but actually a unity which is God at work in his people.

It's kind of like any kind of friction, you know, the closer things get, the more heat there is, the more things blow up against each other, the more challenging that is. And so it is a deeply spiritual thing to have genuine closeness and community and sacrificial relationships uniting a group of people who are found in a church, a group of people with different histories, a group of people with different backgrounds, a group of people, many of whom will be very different from us. And our prayer is that more and more very different people would be joining the church. But that we would all pray continually that God would be protecting unity in the church.

That comes, as Jesus says, as we're kept in his name, as it's only by grace that we're here. And so even if, even when we are wronged by others, there is still able to be that unity within the church because we can share that grace with others too, because that is the grace that we have first received. That is the grace that has brought us to God. That is the grace that has brought us together.

[ 17 : 26 ] That is the grace that makes this unity as God's people continue. And of course, as the church grows, not everyone will know everything about everybody. That's not what's been spoken about here. But it is meaning that a growing church wouldn't be used to kind of hide or dilute division. Instead, all of us would take our role in ensuring unity, that we would be, as we sang earlier, this redeemed people doing that because we have first received grace. And doing that with confidence, as again, Jesus has prayed that God would protect that unity as we live as his people. So that God would keep his people, that God would unite his people. And that emphasis on unity then leads on to the third emphasis here, which is mission. That God's people are kept in his name. They are united through that.

But we see here that's not specifically an end in itself. They're given a purpose. Verse 17, sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. That word sanctify here really means to kind of set them apart. And we see in verse 18 that God's people are set apart for this particular mission.

As you sent me into the world, Jesus says, so I have sent them into the world. Then actually, that incredible news that God's people continue that mission that Jesus began.

It doesn't mean that we die for anyone's sins. You know, that's Jesus' specific work that has been finished or accomplished on the cross. That is done. That is finished, that he might be glorified.

But we continue that work in that we continue testifying to God, testifying to his glory, sharing God's word as given through the apostles. That was the task the original disciples were set apart for. That's who Jesus is speaking directly to in verse 18. But we see it continues to be a big part of what Jesus prays after verse 20. For those like us, if we're Christians this morning, who believe due to the apostles' teaching, that again, our being kept, our unity, has this missional effect. I'm going to use that word.

[ 19 : 44 ] Verse 21, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.

Verse 23, I in them and you in me, that the world, sorry, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them, even as we are one.

Jesus prays that God would keep us, unite us, in order that the world might truly know Jesus is who he says he is.

And the incredible love God has for humanity, even humanity who so often turns its back on God and fails to recognize his glory. Jesus' prayer, and our prayer as a church, is that there would be something about our lives lived together for God's glory that would point other people toward the truth of the gospel for them, that would encourage others to respond to Jesus as the one sent from God, that we might know God and be reconciled and redeemed to him.

I think if there is one thing that I'd like us to go away from this kind of bigger section of John, really kind of infused about and fired up for as a church, it's that as God's people, in God's strength, together, we have this mission while we await Jesus' return.

[ 21 : 17 ] We have this purpose to be engaged in, that we are to bear fruit, as Jesus said back in chapter 15, being part of God's church, made possible through the gospel.

It's not just about kind of turning up to a meeting a couple of times a week, but it's about being a people kept and united with the goal of pointing others to Jesus.

And we want to be really deliberate in taking steps in that direction, whether that is just a few examples, maybe just taking one of those bookmarks that are at the back on the table there and committing to fill in those gaps and pray for five people that we might have the opportunity to share our faith.

Whether it is inviting friends or friends' kids along to the Easter holiday club next Saturday and praying that that would be a first step for them to be connected into the church, to see that the church fellowship united in action.

Whether it is committing that at some point tomorrow when someone asks us how our weekend was, what we got up to, that at some point our answer would include being at church, being together with God's people and the joy of that.

[ 22 : 30 ] And that in some way praying that God might use that to open the door to further conversations. We have given this mission, this purpose by God to carry out in his strength.

We don't do that alone. We do that united as God's people. We do that praying for one another. And again, we do that here with God's help as Jesus prays for us.

And again, as always, if you're here and you're not a Christian, I'm really keen to say this is not a secret thing. This is not anything we're trying to hide away. We want you to know that we are so pleased that you're here with us this morning.

You're so welcome. But the thing that we would want most of all for you is that you would know and respond to Jesus's incredible love. Because we think that is the best news in the world.

We think that is what life is all about. And that is what we long to share with those around us. Okay, so Jesus prays for God's people that the Father would keep them, that he would keep them united.

[ 23 : 31 ] And that through that unity, they would continue fruitfully on the mission that God has set his people apart for. And lastly, Jesus prays this for God's people until they finally share fully in his glory.

As we come to the end of this prayer, Jesus reminds us of our final destination and prays that the Father would ensure that we reach that. Verse 24, Jesus says this, Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Remember all the way through this section, Jesus is preparing his people for his going away. That they, that we can face life on earth with real confidence because we know that actually we are not alone.

The Father is looking out for us. The Holy Spirit has been promised. That God is watching over us in these various different ways that we've just been speaking about, being kept, being united on mission.

But finally, there's this reminder that we will one day, each one of us who trust in Jesus, be where he is.

[ 24 : 52 ] And this passage begins with that emphasis, as we said, on God's glory, that this is Jesus' priority, that it might be our priority. And it ends with God's glory. And that incredible promise that we will share in that for all eternity, that we will be with Jesus where he is to see and to enjoy his eternal glory.

In the meantime, there's this challenge which we need to be realistic about, living as God's people in a world that doesn't recognize him, seeking to maintain the unity of the gospel with one another, carrying out that purpose of living to point people to Jesus.

That's hard. And yet we can do that in God's strength, that Jesus has been praying for us. But we also do that with the finish line in view.

As Jesus said back in chapter 14, that he has gone to prepare a place for us. And for all those, whatever your background, whatever your history, whatever your struggles, for all those who turn to Jesus in faith, that they will be brought to that place that Jesus has prepared.

That through Jesus we can know God. Through Jesus we can trust in him as our promised rescuer. That we are promised to share in God's glory, to know God's love, revealed to us in the gospel of his son, Jesus Christ.

[ 26 : 17 ] That we might take great joy in that, that we might find great comfort in that, that we might live together as God's people in light of that, and that we might be eager to share that with the world around us.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.