

JOHN 17 | *The Greatest Prayer Ever Recorded*

Jesus Prays for Himself

1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said,

Father, the hour¹ has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 because you have given him authority (ἐξουσία) over all flesh (σάρξ), to give eternal life to all whom you have given (δίδωμι, perf. act.) him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know (γινώσκω, pres. act. subj.) you, the only true God, and Jesus Messiah whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having completed (τελειόω, aor.) 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.

Jesus Prays for the Disciples

6 I have made known (φανερώνω, aor.)² 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 (τηρέω, perf.) 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 (ἑρωτάω, pres.) 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,³ keep (τηρέω, aor.) them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one (εἶς), even as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I was keeping (τηρέω, imperf.) them in your name, which you have given me. I guarded (φυλάσσω, aor.) them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction (ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας), that the Scripture might be fulfilled.⁴ 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 hated (μισέω, aor.) 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 may keep (τηρέω, aor.) them from the evil one (ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ). 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify (ἀγιάζω, aor. act. imp.) them in the truth. Your word (ὁ λόγος) is truth. 18 As you sent (ἀποστέλλω, aor.) me into the world, so I have

¹ The hour Jesus keeps talking about is the climax of history—his death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.

² “[T]o cause to become known, disclose, show, make known” (BDAG, 1048).

³ **Le 11:44** 44 For I am Yahweh your God. Set apart yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am holy. **Mt 5:48** 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. **1 Pe 1:16** 16 ...Because it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.

⁴ The only other occurrence of the title “son of perdition” occurs concerning the Antichrist (2 Th 2:3). This fact has led some to conclude the Antichrist will be the resurrected Judas Iscariot (T. Constable, 434).

sent (ἀποστέλλω, aor.) them into the world. 19 And for their sake I sanctify (ἀγιάζω, pres.)⁵ myself, that they also may be sanctified (ἀγιάζω, perf.) in truth.

Jesus Prays for Believers

20 I do not ask for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word (τῶν πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτῶν εἰς ἐμέ),⁶ 21 that they may all be one (εἷς), just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe (πιστεύω, pres. act. subj.) that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, in order that they may become perfectly one (ἵνα ᾧσιν (pres. subj.) τετελειωμένοι (perf. pass) εἰς ἓν), so that the world may know that you sent me and loved (ἀγαπάω, aor.) them even as you loved (ἀγαπάω, aor.) me. 24 Father, I desire (θέλω, pres.) that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to perceive (θεωρέω) my glory that you have given me because you loved (ἀγαπάω, aor.) me before the foundation (καταβολή) of the world. 25 Righteous (δίκαιος) Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known (γνωρίζω, aor.) to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love (ἀγάπη) with which you have loved (ἀγαπάω) me may be in them, and I in them.

⁵ “Set aside someth. or make it suitable for ritual purposes, *consecrate, dedicate* of things... include a pers. in the inner circle of what is holy, in both cultic and moral associations of the word, *consecrate, dedicate, sanctify*...to eliminate that which is incompatible with holiness, *purify*” (BDAG, 9-10).

⁶ “As parents provide for their children’s children yet unborn, so did the Lord Jesus remember future believers, as well as those of the first generation” (A. W. Pink, 3:142).

Biblical Worldview

1. John 17.

- a. The Lord's prayer (Mt 6:9-13) and this prayer (Jn 17) are the two most important prayers in the Bible. This is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the Bible. It is unique because of its length, timing, location, content, and scope.
 - (1) "Whether He prayed it in the Upper Room or en route to the Garden, this much is sure: it is the greatest prayer ever prayed on earth and the greatest prayer recorded anywhere in Scripture. John 17 is certainly the 'holy of holies' of the Gospel record, and we must approach this chapter in a spirit of humility and worship."⁷
- b. Jesus' prayer is based on his perfect knowledge of the Father's desire. Jesus desires exactly what his Father desires. That's what makes this prayer so powerful. It certainly will be answered.
- c. The themes of Jesus' prayer are glory, protection, indwelling, sanctification, mobilisation, and unity.⁸
- d. Jesus may have prayed this prayer slowly or repeated each petition several times to allow it to penetrate the depths of the disciples' hearts. We know John's mind was captured by it, as years later he recalled (with the Spirit's assistance) the exact phrases Jesus used.⁹
- e. The background of Jesus' prayer is his triumph over the world. This prayer is one of victory.
 - (1) **Jn 16:33** 33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart. I have conquered the world.
- f. According to A. W. Pink:
 - (1) Believers are in a sevenfold relation to the world.
 - (2) There are seven gifts referred to in the prayer
- g. This prayer ends the Upper Room discourse (Jn 13-17), which began with present humility (Jn 13:1-12) and ends with future glory (Jn 17:24-27).

2. Questions of Interpretation.

- a. On what basis does the Father give people to Jesus (v. 2)?
- b. How do we know God and Jesus (v. 3)?
- c. Is there any difference between Jesus' glory in eternity past and his glory now (v. 5)?
- d. Does Jesus at all pray for the world (v. 9)?
- e. How is Jesus glorified in us (v. 10)?
- f. How are we set apart in the truth (v. 17)?
- g. How did Jesus set apart himself (v. 19)?
- h. In what way are we in the Father and the Son (v. 21)?
- i. What is the glory Jesus has given to us (v. 22)?
- j. What does it look like to be perfectly one (v. 23)?

⁷ W. Wiersbe, 1:367.

⁸ L. Walkemeyer, *Together with God*, 20.

⁹ L. Walkemeyer, *Together with God*, 21.

3. About Jesus we learn:

- a. The Father has glorified him (vv. 1, 22, 24).
- b. He glorifies the Father (v. 1).
- c. He has been given authority over all flesh (v. 2).
- d. He gives eternal life to all believers (v. 2).
- e. The Father has given the disciples (and all believers) to him (vv. 2, 6).
- f. Eternal life is to know the Father and him (v. 3).
- g. The Father sent him into the world (vv. 3, 8, 18, 23, 25).
- h. He glorified the Father on earth (v. 4).
- i. He accomplished the work the Father gave him to do (v. 4).
 - (1) According to A. W. Pink, Jesus' finished work includes seven particulars (mark "I have"):
 - (a) He glorified the Father on earth (v. 4).
 - (b) He finished the work given him to do (v. 4).
 - (c) He manifested the Father's name to the disciples (vv. 6, 26).
 - (d) He gave them the Father's words (vv. 8, 14).
 - (e) He kept them as a shepherd keeps his sheep (v. 12).
 - (f) He sent them forth into the world (v. 18).
 - (g) He gave them the glory that the Father had given him (v. 22)
 - (2) "Stay in your lane for the glory of God and you will finish your appointed work."¹⁰
- j. The Father glorifies him in his own presence (v. 5).
- k. He had glory with the Father before the world existed (v. 5).
 - (1) This is a reference to Jesus' eternal glory. V. 22 refers to his acquired glory, and v. 24 to his object-of-the-Father's-love glory.¹¹
- l. He manifested the Father's name to the disciples (v. 6).
 - (1) The name of God summarizes everything about him. Manifesting the name of God means revealing his essential nature.¹² See *God's Name*.
- m. He gave the disciple the words the Father gave him (v. 8, 14).
- n. He is praying for the disciples, not for the world (v. 9).
 - (1) Elsewhere Jesus did pray for the world, but in this instance Jesus prayed specifically for his believing disciples. The basis for Jesus' request was that these disciples belonged to God, so their welfare was His special interest.¹³
 - (2) **Lk 23:34** 34 And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.
- o. All the disciples are his (v. 10).
- p. He is glorified in the disciples (v. 10).
- q. He is no longer in the world (v. 11).
- r. He is coming to the Father (vv. 11, 13).
- s. He is one with the Father (vv. 11, 22).

¹⁰ L. Walkemeyer, *Together with God*, 28.

¹¹ John G. Mitchell, 322.

¹² T. Constable, 431.

¹³ T. Constable, 431.

- t. The Father gave him the Father's own name (v. 11).
- u. He kept the disciples in the Father's name (v. 12).
- v. He guarded the disciples (v. 12).
- w. He speaks that the disciples may have his joy (v. 13).
- x. He is not of the world (vv. 14, 16).
- y. He sent the disciples into the world (v. 18).
- z. He sets apart himself for the sake of the disciples (v. 19).
 - (1) The model of sanctification is Jesus (v. 19).
 - (a) Jesus is the perfect example of a sanctified person. He devoted himself completely and consistently to God's mission for him.
 - (b) Jesus' sanctification makes ours possible.¹⁴
 - (2) The means of sanctification is biblical truth (v. 17).
 - (3) The purpose of sanctification is being sent into the world (v. 20).
 - (a) Sanctification in John's gospel is always for a mission.
 - (b) Jesus set apart himself for mission that we might be set apart for mission.
 - (c) Jesus sends the disciples into the world with a mission (cf. 13:20; 15:26-27; 20:21). Similarly, the Father had sent the Son into the world with a mission (10:36). In both cases, sanctification was essential for the success of the mission.¹⁵
 - (d) We are set apart in the truth in order to be sent on the mission of multiplying disciples of Jesus in our world.
- aa. The Father is in him (vv. 21, 23).
- bb. He is in the Father (v. 21).
- cc. He gave his glory to believers (v. 22).
- dd. He is in believers (vv. 23, 26).
- ee. He was loved by the Father before the foundation of the world (vv. 23-24, 26).
- ff. He desires believers to be with him where he is (v. 24).
- gg. He knows the Father (v. 25).
- hh. He makes known the Father's name (v. 26).

4. Phase One and Phase Two.

- a. As believers we are:
 - (1) Given from the Father to Jesus (vv. 2, 6, 24).
 - (2) Given eternal life from Jesus (v. 2).
 - (3) Belong to the Father (v. 6, 10).
 - (4) Prayed for by Jesus (vv. 9, 20).
 - (5) Belong to Jesus (v. 10).
 - (6) In the world (v. 11).
 - (7) Kept in Jesus' name (v. 11).
 - (8) Guarded by Jesus (v. 12).
 - (9) Hated by the world (v. 14).
 - (10) Not of the world (vv. 14, 16).
 - (11) Given Jesus' glory (v. 22).

¹⁴ T. Constable, 438.

¹⁵ T. Constable, 437.

- (12) Loved by the Father (v. 23).
- b. Jesus asked seven particulars for believers:
- (1) Preservation: that they would be kept in the Father's name (v. 11).
 - (2) Jubilation: that they would have his joy fulfilled in themselves (v. 13).
 - (3) Emancipation: that they would be kept from the evil one (v. 15).
 - (4) Sanctification: that they would be set apart by the truth (v. 17).
 - (5) Unification: that they all would be one (v. 21).
 - (6) Association: that they would be with him where he is (v. 24).
 - (7) Gratification: that they would behold his glory (v. 24).
- c. In phase two, we are to:
- (1) Know the Father and Jesus (v. 3, 25).
 - (2) Keep the Father's word (v. 6).
 - (a) The disciples had kept the Father's word by believing in and following Jesus, even though they were not consistently obedient.¹⁶
 - (3) Receive God's words (v. 8).
 - (4) Be perfectly one (vv. 11, 21-23).
 - (5) Have Jesus' joy fulfilled in ourselves (v. 13).
 - (a) "A miserable Christian is therefore a self-contradiction. A joyless Christian is one who is out of communion with the Father: other objects have engaged his heart, and in consequence he walks not in the light of His countenance."¹⁷
 - (6) Be set apart in truth (v. 19).
 - (7) Be in the Father and Jesus (v. 21).
 - (8) Allow Jesus to dwell in us (v. 23, 26).
 - (9) Allow God's love to dwell in us (v. 26).

5. Eternal Life:

- a. Is to know God personally and experientially through faith in the Lord Jesus Messiah.
- b. Is the divine life that gushes forth from the Trinity into us.
- c. Includes quantity and quality of life.
- d. Is already the present personal possession of every believer.
 - (1) **1 Jn 5:13** 13 I [John] write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life [both quantity and quality].
- e. Is an ongoing never ending deep relationship with God.
- f. Is quality time with God that never ends.
- g. Changes us and introduces us into a different quality of living.¹⁸

6. Eight verbs are prominent in Jesus' prayer.

- a. To Glorify.
 - (1) **Jn 12:23** 23 ...Jesus answered them, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

¹⁶ T. Constable, 431.

¹⁷ A. W. Pink, 3:128.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, 637.

- (2) **Jn 12:28** 28 Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven: I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.
 - (3) The Father is to glory the Son (v. 1).
 - (4) The Son is to glorify the Father (v. 1).
 - (5) Jesus glorified the Father on earth (v. 4).
 - (6) Now the Father is to glorify Jesus in his own presence (v. 5).
 - (7) The Son had glory with the Father before the world existed (v. 5).
 - (8) Jesus is glorified in the disciples (v. 10).
 - (9) The Father gave Jesus glory (v. 22).
 - (10) Jesus gave that glory to us (v. 22).
 - (11) We are to see Jesus' glory that the Father has given him (v. 24).
- b. To Give.
 - c. To Know.
 - d. To Send.
 - e. To Keep.
 - f. To Manifest.
 - g. To Set Apart.
 - h. To Love.

7. Unity.

- a. Add the Great Collaboration to the Great Confession, Great Commandment, and Great Commission!
- b. The model of our unity is the unity of the Father and the Son. (vv. 21-22).
 - (1) The Trinity is totally unified (vv. 21-22). So must we be, both with the Trinity and with each other (vv. 22-23). Our unity reflects the unity that exists between the Father and Son
 - (2) **1 Co 12:13** 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
- c. The basis of our unity is adherence to Scripture (vv. 17-19).
- d. The result of our unity is more effective evangelism (vv. 21, 23).
 - (1) Togetherness is not just a nice idea. It has eternal implications for reaching unbelievers. We are to be one in order that unbelievers in the world may believe the good news of Jesus (v. 21). Jesus wanted the unity among believers to be so great and so clear that the world would believe Jesus' message about himself.
- e. Quotes:
 - (1) "The ultimate purpose of God in keeping these disciples loyal to the revelation that Jesus had given them was that they might experience unity."¹⁹
 - (2) "Jesus was not speaking about institutional unity but personal unity among genuine believers (cf. Eph. 2:15). He was praying that 'all' true believers would 'be one' in their love for one another, their submission to the authority of Scripture, and their commitment to their mission. Disunity among professing Christians has frustrated Jesus' purpose that the world might believe on Him. Nevertheless, the solution to this problem is not to impose an artificial institutional unity that ignores the bases of true unity—and presents a

¹⁹ T. Constable, 433.

hypocritical facade of oneness. It is to promote love for one another among genuine believers.”²⁰

(3) “Focusing on God’s glory brings us together with God and others.”²¹

8. The Father and the Son were active together before the foundation of the world.

- a. **Jn 17:5** 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.
- b. **Jn 17:24** 24 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.
- c. **Mt 13:35** 35 This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.
- d. **Mt 25:34** 34 ...The King will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
- e. **Eph 1:4** 4 ...Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
- f. **1 Pe 1:20** 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you....

9. About truth we learn:

- a. The God of the Bible is the only true God.
 - (1) **Jn 17:3** 3 ...This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God....
- b. We are to come to know in truth the Jesus came from the Father.
 - (1) **Jn 17:8** 8 ...I [Jesus] have given [the disciples] the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you.
- c. The Father’s word is truth.
 - (1) **Jn 17:17** 17 Your word is truth.
 - (2) The word of God is not only true, but truth.
- d. We are to be set apart in the Father’s truth.
 - (1) **Jn 17:17** 17 Set them apart in the truth.
 - (2) **Jn 17:19** 19 ...For their sake I [Jesus] set apart myself, that they also may be set apart in truth.
 - (3) “With the mind, we learn God’s truth through the Word. With the heart, we love God’s truth, His Son [cf. 14:6]. With the will, we yield to the Spirit [of truth, cf. 14:17; 16:13] and live God’s truth day by day. It takes all three for a balanced experience of sanctification.”²²
- e. See *Truth*.

10. About the world we learn:

- a. Jesus glorified the Father in the world by accomplishing his work (v. 4).
- b. Jesus possessed glory with the Father before the world existed (v. 5).
- c. The Father gave us to Jesus from out of the world (v. 6).

²⁰ T. Constable, 440.

²¹ L. Walkemeyer, *Together with God*, 26.

²² W. Wiersbe, 1:370.

- d. In Jn 17, Jesus is not praying for the world (v. 9).
- e. Jesus is no longer in the world (v. 11).
- f. We are in the world (v. 11).
- g. Jesus spoke things in the world that we would have joy (v. 13).
- h. The world hates us (v. 14).
- i. We are not of the world (vv. 14, 16).
 - (1) We are to keep loyal to Jesus while we continue to live in the world.²³
- j. Jesus is not of the world (v. 14).
- k. Jesus does not ask the Father to take us out of the world (v. 15).
- l. The Father sent Jesus into the world (v. 18).
- m. Jesus sent us into the world (v. 18).
 - (1) “It was Jesus’ insistence that it was in the hurly-burly and the rough and tumble of life that a man must live out his Christianity.”²⁴
 - (2) “Christianity was never meant to withdraw a man from life; it was meant to equip him better for life. Christianity does not offer us release from problems; it offers us a way to solve our problems. Christianity does not offer us an easy peace; it offers us a triumphant warfare. Christianity does not offer us a life in which troubles are escaped and evaded; it offers us a life in which troubles are faced and conquered. ... The Christian must never desire to abandon the world; he must always desire to win the world.”²⁵
 - (3) “Christians must not take themselves out of the world but remain in meaningful contact with it, trusting in God’s protection while they witness for Jesus.”²⁶
 - (4) “Throughout church history, Christians have sought relief from the world’s hatred by withdrawing from it socially...or by compromising with it. Some individuals tend to withdraw from a disagreeable and dangerous environment, while others prefer to blend into it. Jesus’ will, however, was that His disciples should do neither of these things. He wanted them to remain loyal to God, while actively serving as His ambassadors to the unsaved living in a fallen world. Our sense of mission and our sense of identity should control our desire for comfort.”²⁷
- n. We are to become perfectly one in order that the world may know the Father sent Jesus (v. 23).
- o. The Father loved Jesus before the foundation of the world (v. 24).
- p. The world does not know the Father (v. 25).
- q. J. Vernon McGee summarised what this prayer says about believers and the world: (1) they are given to Christ out of the world (v. 6), (2) left in the world (v. 11), (3) not of

²³ T. Constable, 435.

²⁴ William Barclay, 2:252.

²⁵ William Barclay, 2:252.

²⁶ Edwin A. Blum, 332-33.

²⁷ T. Constable, 436.

