



Disciplers Bible Studies

JOHN
LESSON 18

The High Priestly Prayer John 17

A. Introduction

A. Significance of Chapter 17

We come this week to Chapter 17, perhaps the most unique and most remarkable chapter in the Bible. In this chapter, John has recorded the prayer of Jesus as He concludes His close, intimate time with His disciples in the upper room. Many of the historical, spiritual giants throughout the centuries have extolled Christ's high, priestly prayer as incomparable, majestic and overwhelmingly moving.

1. Warren Wiersbe writes, "This 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."

2. Martin Luther said, "This is truly beyond measure a warm and hearty prayer. Jesus opens the depths of His heart, both in reference to us and to His Father. It sounds so honest, so simple, yet it is so deep, so rich, so wide, no one can fathom it."

3. One reformer states, "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."

4. Matthew Henry comments, "It is the most remarkable prayer following the most full and consoling discourse ever uttered on the earth."

5. This is the prayer which was so much a part of John Knox that, when he was dying, his wife asked him where he wanted her to read. He said, "Read where I first put my anchor down, in the 17th chapter of John."

B. What is prayer?

Before we unfold Jesus' high priestly prayer, let's remind ourselves of the importance, meaning, and place of prayer in our Christian faith. Keep in mind that the rate at which we grow, and the extent to which we mature, depends upon our willingness

and choices to order and control our lives Godward.

1. Importance of Prayer

Prayer is the top priority of the believer. It is the chief means of conducting our Christian walk and maintaining our close fellowship with God. It is the measure of the deepness of our knowledge and understanding of God. It gives evidence of the richness of our conversational relationship with Him.

2. Meaning and Basic Purpose of Prayer

Prayer literally means to focus our thoughts, attention and dependence upon our Creator God through the divine indwelling of His Holy Spirit, and in the incomparable name of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Its real basic purpose is to advance God's plans and bring glory to Him. Jesus wants us to undergird our prayers with two primary thoughts: God's will be done, not ours, and God's purposes and glory be achieved, not ours. Prayer lies at the root of all personal godliness.

3. Place of Prayer

The importance and place of prayer cannot be over-emphasized. It is the most heavenly privilege that we have. Scripture tells us to pray consistently, to pray at all times and to pray without ceasing (Acts 6:4; Romans 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Continuous prayer means living our lives with an attitude and practice of humble communion and conversational interaction with God. It means consistent God-consciousness in our thoughts, actions, activities and circumstances. It is not an opportunity to be pious or preachy or display our spirituality. It is a time of heart-to-heart dialogue with your heavenly Father with utter humility and exhilarating joy.

4. Saints of the Past

When we read about saints of the past, one thing stands out: All who have walked with God have viewed prayer as the main business of their lives. Martin Luther spent three hours daily in prayer.

John Wesley devoted two hours daily to prayer. Billy Graham attributes the world-wide response to his ministry to the hundreds and thousands that have prayed for his crusades.

The High Priestly Prayer: John 17:1-26

- I. Christ Prays for Himself (17:1-5)
- II. Christ Prays for His Disciples (17:6-19)
- III. Christ Prays for All Believers (17:20-26)

I. Christ Prays for Himself (17:1-5)

A. Jesus' Anticipation of Victory

In the previous chapter, Jesus had just concluded His private instruction in the upper room with the powerful words, *"I have overcome the world."* These words were stated in anticipation of: 1) His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane; 2) shameful trial by the Jews and 3) unmerciful crucifixion by the Romans. In effect, Jesus had told the disciples that the hour had come for His departure and that they were going to be afraid and run away. But in Him, they were going to have peace, even amidst the great trials and tribulations that they would experience in this world, because He will overcome the world.

B. The Author and Finisher of Our Faith

As Jesus lifted His eyes to his heavenly Father in this magnificent prayer, we see that He was speaking in faith – His personal faith in God's promises – because the cross and His final battle with the *"prince of this world"* were still before Him. It is noteworthy to remember that although Jesus was and is God's unique Son, He overcame the world on a human level by His personal faith in God. This is the faith that we are called on to use in this same world in which we now live (1 John 5:4). The triumph of Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith is brought out beautifully in Hebrews 2:9-14.

C. Glorify Me With Yourself

Jesus began by asking His Father to glorify Him so He could glorify His Father. To glorify in this sense meant to clothe in splendor, or raise to an exalted position of honor and authority. This was an unselfish request for glory because Jesus was committed to carry out the Father's will even to the point of death on the cross. He prayed for God's gracious help in His upcoming sufferings, sacrificial death, resurrection and ascension.

D. Eternity

Before creation, God gave Jesus the authority to judge (John 5:27), to take up His life (John 10:18)

and to give eternal life to all believers whom the Father gave Him. In His prayer, Jesus defined eternal life as knowing the Father as the only true God and knowing Jesus Christ whom the Father sent. It is a personal, intimate, dynamic, continuous relationship with God through His Son. Eternity is not only quantitatively endless, it includes the complete fulfillment of our being by knowing God qualitatively more and more on earth and forever.

E. Glorification

Jesus prayed that He had glorified the Father by all He had done in His works and miracles. Since His death, resurrection and ascension were still ahead as forgone certainties, they were included in His statement. Now He asked the Father to glorify the Son by exalting Him to the place He was before the world began.

II. Christ Prays for His Disciples (17:6-19)

A. Reason for the Prayer

After praying for Himself, Jesus began His prayer for His eleven disciples. He expressed why He prayed for them and why He wanted the Father to grant His requests. God had given them to Him and He wanted God to protect them because they believed Jesus came from God and revealed God's ways and will to them. They had followed Jesus even though they were not consistently obedient. They had kept God's word and trusted in Christ's union with His Father. There was much that they still did not understand, but they had made the right commitment.

B. Concern for Their Welfare

At this time, Jesus did not pray for the world in its hostility and unbelief, but for believers whom God had called out of the world. He made this request because: 1) the disciples belonged to God and He was especially interested in their well being and 2) after His departure, they would miss Jesus' encouraging presence and need God's merciful grace.

C. Jesus Glorified in the Disciples

The disciples heard Jesus pray to the Father that He had given them and all believers many things the Father had given Him: *"eternal life"* (vs. 2); *"Your name"* (vs. 6); *"Your words"* (vs. 8, 14); *"My joy"* (vs. 13); separation from the world (vs. 6); commission to the world (vs. 18); sanctification by truth (vs. 19); *"My glory"* (vs. 22, 24) and *"Your love"* (vs. 26.) Jesus' work on earth was fulfilled and glorified by the disciples. They were the first fruit of His mission

and labor. Because of their testimony, a great harvest has continued in all ages of men and women whom God has drawn to Jesus to receive eternal life and be conformed to His image.

D. Petition for Protection

Jesus asked the *“Holy Father”* to keep the disciples by the power of His name that they may be one as He and the Father are one. A paraphrase of Jesus’ words might be, *“Holy Father, protect them in the knowledge and love of Your name; in the enjoyment of all that You are and in the experience of the power of Your name. Keep them in Your name”* (1 Peter 1:5). He provided further background for His request to protect the disciples. He wanted them to have His joy arising from His finished work and His victory on the cross (John 16:21-22) as well as the joy of having started a world-wide enterprise which is God’s work that will endure for eternity. He had not lost any of them except Judas (the son of perdition) who was the traitor whom the Old Testament predicted would betray the Messiah (Psalm 41:9; 109:6-8; John 13:18). Judas’ defection did not show Jesus as a failure, but Scripture as totally trustworthy.

E. Sanctification by God’s Truth

Jesus prayed to the Father, *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”* Sanctify means to separate them from the world of sin, hostility and unbelief to God’s kingdom for His purposes and service (Exodus 28:41; Jeremiah 1:5.) Jesus wanted the disciples to be sanctified and empowered for God’s particular use in God’s appointed place. Sanctification emanates from God’s word as His entire and eternal purpose (Isaiah 55:8-11.) Jesus Himself was truth (John 14:6.) He sanctified Himself for their sakes, setting Himself apart for the great task of giving God’s truth to those God gave Him. In view of the historical record of mankind, can there be any logical conclusion other than God’s Word as objective, ultimate, complete and irrefutable truth?

III. Christ Prays for All Believers (17:20-26)

A. Pathway for All Believers

Jesus then prayed for all believers who would believe in Him through the message of the original disciples and apostles. Their witness and writings, enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, have been directly or indirectly the way of every believer coming to Christ. It is impossible for Christians to be united in the absence of: 1) brotherly love; 2) a unity of allegiance to God’s truth and 3) a commitment of obedience to Christ.

B. Unity of Love and Obedience

Jesus’ main intercession for all believers was *“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us.”* He was praying for a unity of love, a unity of obedience to God and His Word and a unity of togetherness in submission to God’s will. This is the evidence and reflection of the union that exists between the Father and the Son. Christ prayed for all believers of all time that they might be one even as the Father and the Son are one.

C. Purpose of Unity

The purpose of Jesus’ prayer about unity was that the world might believe that the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, with the divine plan of redemption. Hebrews 1:2-3 states, *“God. . . has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”*

D. Impact of Unity

There is a miraculous oneness of all believing souls who are united to Christ in God and are bound by strong eternal cords to one another. God answered this prayer in an amazingly wonderful way. You and I today are one in heart and faith with John and Peter, the Apostle Paul, Billy Graham, all of the spiritual giants of Christian history, the newly converted Rwanda native, the believing illiterate of the Amazon jungle and all of the ordinary followers of Christ around the world.

E. That the World May Know

The world would see the unity and love among true believers and this would cause the world to know that Jesus was God’s sent One and that He loved men even as He loved Jesus.

F. The Request for Glorification

Lastly, Jesus prayed that the Father would bring believers safely to heaven where they would participate in His glorification. He wanted all believers to observe His glory after His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension (Hebrews 2:10). The goal of every believer’s salvation is future glorification, which begins initially at death or Christ’s return. Glorification includes being with Jesus forever (John 14:3; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:17.)

Application:

In this great intercessory prayer, Jesus prayed for Himself *glorification*; for His disciples (including all believers) *faithfulness, protection* and *sanctification* (vs.11,17;) and for all future believers *unity* and *heaven* (vs. 21-24.) This was the Son of God praying from His heart that you would someday see His glory and fully experience God's love. If you are so inclined, bow now on your knees and praise God for the greatness of His love, mercy and plan of salvation. In light of the upcoming suffering and passion Jesus was about to undergo for you, reflect deeply on the fact that this was the last time He was able to pray with his disciples.