

John 17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 July 2021

Preacher: Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Let's turn back to the chapter that we read, which is the prayer that Jesus prayed just before His arrest and crucifixion.

Just let's read the first couple of words, but I want to just quickly go through the whole of the chapter, not unpacking every verse. Don't worry, we just don't have time to do that.

In fact, this chapter deserves several sermons, but because this is holiday time, it's very often a good opportunity to look at a chapter like this as a whole so that we can take away a broad view, the big picture of what we find in a passage like this.

Let's read from the beginning. After Jesus said this, He looked towards heaven and prayed, Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You.

I don't know where the title, The Lord's Prayer, came from. I don't know who was the first person to coin the title, but we all know what the Lord's prayer is.

[1 : 14] It's the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, and so on and so forth. But in one sense, the Lord's Prayer was never the Lord's Prayer, because Jesus never prayed that actual prayer.

It's the Lord's Prayer in the sense that it's the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, but it's not the prayer that the Lord—and the reason I know that is because—well, you know, don't you—because the Lord's Prayer includes, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Well, Jesus didn't have any debts. He never asked God to forgive his sin because He never had any sin to confess. If you want to find the Lord's Prayer, then you come to John 17, because this is where we get to eavesdrop, and it was deliberate.

Jesus had no intention of keeping His prayer private. We're to keep our prayer private when we come, Jesus said, when you pray, go into your closet, your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret.

That way, you open up everything to God. There's nothing God doesn't know about anyway, and in prayer, you can tell whatever you want to God, and your Heavenly Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

[2 : 50] That's what Jesus promises. So, I hope we're faithful in doing that, and I'm speaking to myself as well. But this, although it is between Jesus, the Son of God, and God the Father, it is not meant—it was never meant to be a secret prayer.

It was not meant to be a private prayer. It was always meant to be written down so that the disciples and the church would know what was on Jesus' heart as He approached His impending arrest and trial and death.

Now, you'll see in the NIV that it quite rightly divides the prayer into three sections. So, I'm not going to be complicated today.

I'm going to simply take these divisions, and I'm going to make some comments on these three sections. You'll notice that the first section is from verse 1 to verse 5, where Jesus prays for Himself.

The opening words are, glorify your Son, glorify me, in other words. He's praying for Himself. He's asking the Father to do something for Him.

[4 : 09] And I'm going to explore what He's asking the Father for. And then, from verse 6 to verse 19, His attention is given to the disciples, the friends that He had made while He was on this earth, who would very soon become the seed, the root of the New Testament church.

Their job was to go after He was ascended into heaven. Their job was to go out into the world and to make Jesus known. So, the second section is that He prays for them.

And we'll explore the two particular things that He prays for. And then, the last section from verse 20 to 26 is where Jesus prays for not just the disciples, but everyone who was going to come under the influence of the gospel, and they were going to be drawn into God's kingdom.

They were going to be converted. They were going to come to faith in Jesus. And down through the ages, the gospel would be spread all over the world, and churches would be established in every country and tribe and nation and culture.

The third section is where Jesus prays for all believers. And that, of course, includes us, where we are today.

[5 : 42] And we have every reason to believe that Jesus continues to pray, even now, for His people.

You and me and our churches and our communities and our countries and where we witness, where we make Him known by our lives and by our conversation.

So, let's just very simply then take the chapter as it's presented to us, these three sections, Himself, the disciples, and the whole church in every age.

Number one is where Jesus prays for Himself. Verse 1, Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You.

What exactly is Jesus asking His Father for? You'll notice that the operative word is glory.

[6 : 47] In fact, all the way through this prayer, the word glory appears again and again and again. I think, I may be wrong, but I think it's eight times throughout this chapter.

So, it's obviously a word that is heavily on Jesus' heart and heavily on His mind. It's a word that features in His consciousness the word glory.

Glory. So, I think it would make sense for us to just spend a few seconds thinking, asking, what does it mean? What does glory mean? Those of you who are familiar with the Bible will know that the word glory is a word that appears often in the Bible.

But it's one of these words, it's almost like we're into a different world, aren't we? We're into the heavenly world and we're into a different vocabulary. That's not surprising because we're listening to a prayer within the Godhead.

So, it's not surprising that there would be some elements of that that would be difficult to understand and some words that are not quite easy. They're not very easy to.

[7 : 52] So, we have to, that doesn't mean we can't understand them. The Bible is accessible to us. We can't understand it in its complete depth, but we can access it enough for us to get the gist of what is happening.

The word glory, isn't it? It's a word we use in many different contexts between ourselves. We talk about the glorious weather that we're having at the moment. What do we mean by that?

You can't really put your finger on it, can you? It's like, it's difficult to define, but we all know what it means. We all say it's glorious weather and you know perfectly well what that means. It means it's weather that makes you feel different.

It lifts your spirits and it makes everything appear in its splendor. The granite in Aberdeen appears so marvelous on our lovely day, like the kind of weather that we've been having in the last week or so, at least I assume you've been having it as well.

We've certainly had it in Edinburgh, but we talk about the glorious weather. We talk about glory in all kinds of things. We talk about our moment of glory, like the recent Euro tournaments.

[9 : 11] The moment of glory for Italy was when they lifted up the cup. What does that mean? We don't quite know what it means, but we do know what it means. Do you know what I'm saying? There's something splendid about it.

There's something majestic about it, something obvious, something that's displayed. You talk about a glorious singer, the glorious voice of maybe an opera singer or someone else.

The kind of voice that gets to you, that reaches right into your soul and affects you even to tears.

And you say, that was glorious. And you don't quite, well, what does that mean?

You do and you don't know. Something splendid, something sublime. Well, I wonder sometimes if we even should be using the word glory.

Well, I'm not saying we shouldn't, but glory is a word that ultimately belongs to God, isn't it? It's the splendor of God.

[10 : 11] If it was possible for you and I to be transported into heaven right now, then what we would see is God in His glory, in His splendor, in His awesome majesty.

And it would blow us away. It would probably horrify us, to be honest. Remember, Isaiah, the first thing that came to his mind when he saw the glory of God was his own sin. He saw his own utter filthiness. So he had to confess. First of all, the first thing he could do before he could enjoy this great vision that he saw, Isaiah chapter 6, was for his sin to be forgiven. And that's what happened. Because the God of glory is also the God of mercy. So, what then does Jesus mean when He's asking the Father, glorify your Son? Surely, that had happened already. For example, when Jesus changed water into wine, we read there that this was the first of His signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and He manifested His glory.

[11 : 29] In other words, His power, His extraordinary miracle-working power in being able to transform ordinary jars of water into wine.

And we read there that the disciples put their trust in Him. And then in John chapter 11, when Lazarus fell sick, Lazarus, Jesus' friend, and when Jesus was told about it, He said, this sickness is not unto death, but to the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. And then He went and He literally raised a man who had been dead for four days to life again. He came out of the tomb. What is that but Jesus being glorified, where His display, His majesty, His being is made obvious to everyone?

And didn't John himself say at the very beginning of his gospel, we saw His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father? So, there's a sense in which Jesus had already been glorified. But yet, there was another sense in which He was still to be glorified. In fact, John says that the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

[12 : 55] There was another sense, there's something else coming, which would display the splendor of God in another manner that had not yet been displayed.

You would think, wouldn't you, well, is there anything left to wonder at? We've seen so many of the, so much of the power of God, like what I was saying with the children earlier on.

I mean, what's that but the glory of God? Jesus stepping on the water and walking across the Sea of Galilee. I mean, how awesome is that? And yet, there was something left.

There was something else still to happen. And that is what Jesus is referring to when He asks God, the hour has come, glorify your Son.

And I want to suggest to you that there can only be one event that Jesus is talking about, and the context has to determine what that event is.

[14 : 05] The context being, the hour has come. You and I both know what that means. It means that in a few moments' time that Jesus is going to be arrested.

In many ways, this is entirely the opposite of what you would expect. It's the paradox of the glory of God, is that He is glorified, that Jesus is glorified this time in the very opposite way.

To what you would expect. Because in a few moments' time, the religious leaders are going to come, and they are going to arrest Him. They're going to hand Him over to the Romans.

And the Romans are going to persecute Him and torture Him. They are going to place a crown of thorns on His head. They're going to try Him. He's going to go through the indignity of a mock, false trial.

Was there ever such injustice? On the face of the earth where an entirely innocent man is condemned to death and the death of a cross.

[15 : 21] Where He is taken and brutally nailed to a Roman cross. Where He dies. The shameful death.

Three days later, after His body is taken and placed in the tomb, the tomb is found to be empty. His disciples meet Him and they see Him in resurrection, newness of life. That is what God the Son was praying for.

He was not simply praying for resurrection because resurrection can't happen without death. He was praying for what is necessarily about to happen to Him, including the darkness, the pain, the dereliction, the isolation, the agony of the cross.

It is on the cross that the glory of God is displayed as nowhere else. Why do I say that?

[16 : 38] Surely that's the most weird thing that you could possibly say. I mean, this is God. This is the God who created the sun, the moon, the universe, the stars. Surely that's where we go to see the glory of God, the majesty, the splendor, the power of God.

And you go to the work and to the miracles of Jesus, don't you? Surely that Calvary is the last place. No! Calvary is where you see the glory of God as nowhere else. Because it was only through His death that salvation could be brought into a lost and a condemned world.

It had to be that way. And Jesus was willing because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And so next time you think about the cross, and I hope you think about it regularly, think of the glory of God in the shame that Jesus suffered, in the pain that He suffered on the cross because of what it achieved in our salvation.

[18:06] There was none other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the door of heaven and let us in. That's the glory of God given to the Son.

I'm moving on. I know that there's so much in that first section, but I'm moving on to talk very briefly about the disciples and what Jesus prayed for.

They were the ones who Jesus had called to be His friends, to be His close companions. Their lives had been affected. They would never be the same again. And they were given a particular function to a role to play after Jesus.

Jesus, and Jesus' mind is very much on what's going to happen to them when He leaves them. Because as you know, shortly after He was raised from the dead, He ascended to heaven again. That meant that they were left in the world to witness and to make Jesus known as they represented Him. Of course, they were indwelt with the power of the Holy Spirit.

[19:16] Acts chapter 2, the day of Pentecost, they preached in power, they witnessed in power. So as they took the gospel out to the towns and the villages nearby Jerusalem and so on, that people came to faith.

And yet there's two things that Jesus is conscious of that they need and two things that He prays for. He first of all prays for their protection.

Verse 11. Now, I know I'm being selective, by the way. I know that there's loads and loads of things I could say about other verses. I'm being selective just to give us enough to take away, right?

Verse 11. 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 that you gave me.

So the first thing He prays for is their protection. And then the second thing He prays for is their purification. Verse 17. Sanctify them, or by the truth, your word is truth.

[20:21] As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. I just want to say one or two things about these two things that Jesus prays for. First of all, their protection.

You'll notice, if you're familiar with the New Testament, you'll maybe ask a few questions in your own mind about this. Well, what does He mean by protection?

Because if you read on, especially in Acts chapter 12, and if you know anything of what happened to the disciples ultimately after Jesus had left them, you'll know that they became martyrs.

They laid down their life. It was only one of them that was left, and that was John. He was imprisoned on Patmos. The rest of them were all killed for their faith. So how can it be that Jesus is asking for their protection when in actual fact what happened to them was the very opposite?

They were taken, and they were tried, and they were martyred because of their faith in Jesus. Jesus is not asking for their protection from harm.

[21:25] That's what we naturally think about when we think about protection, isn't it? From harm, the possibilities of something happening to us. He's asking that they may be kept from the evil one.

That's what He says, that you may keep them from the evil one. And that's because Jesus was acutely aware, as nobody else, of the determination of the enemy to bring down the disciples as they preached in Jesus' name.

And that determination worked in many ways. It worked through the authorities. It wasn't long before the disciples met with the persecution of the Jewish ruling leaders and the Romans.

And as the church developed and spread, there were times of the most severe persecution when Christians would be taken and arrested and they would be thrown to the lions or the gladiators or they would be put to death in horrendous ways.

And yet, that didn't stop the spread of the gospel. It had very little effect, if any. The more that Christians were persecuted, the more the gospel spread.

[22 : 50] But there are other ways to bring Christians down, not just persecution. There are more subtle ways that the enemy knows where he can persuade us to drift away from the faith.

And Jesus was acutely conscious of how deceitful and subtle the enemy was. That's why he taught his disciples to say, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

The world has always been hostile towards the Christian faith, but that hostility doesn't always manifest itself in violence. Sometimes does, but it doesn't always.

Like in our culture, I doubt if any one of us this morning faces in-your-face persecution the way that the early church did. None of us is going to be imprisoned for our faith, I hope.

It's not likely, is it? And yet, let me ask you this. How many of us this morning are in danger of drifting from our faith?

[24 : 10] Every one of us should be putting up our hands. We're all in danger. The kind of world we live in is just so, it's just so opposed to everything that we stand for.

Which means that we have to feel that, and we often do feel, that we're plowing a lonely furrow. And that we're listening to only one voice in a fog of darkness and unbelief.

Do you feel that way? I do. I felt it for years. And the easiest thing in the world is to just drift along with the crowd. To do what everybody else does.

Think the way that everybody else thinks. And just, and talk the way everybody else talks. Believe what they believe if believing is the right word. Because, to be honest, if you don't believe in God, you actually end up not believing in nothing, but believing in anything.

Which is the kind of world we live in. So, I would like us this morning, on the strength of Jesus' prayer, to pray for one another. that God will protect the person sitting next to me, the person sitting across from me, the person I know as my brother or my sister in this congregation, that God will protect them from drifting, from succumbing to the snares and the deceit of the world around us.

[25 : 58] And you say, well, the person sitting next to me is a strong Christian. He's been a Christian for 20 years. I don't care. No matter how strong you think that person is, that person, I can tell you, is vulnerable, just as you are.

So, let this be an occasion when we start praying for one another. Not just the people that we know who are sick or in hospital. Yes, by all means, of course, pray for them.

But let's pray for one another. Let's pray for the people who you think there's nothing going on with. Because I can tell you there is. We're all under pressure.

Anyway, protection. So, that's what Jesus prays for. He prays for protection. And he also prays for their purification at the end of that section here. Sanctify them by the truth.

In one way, the two things go together because God protects his people by working in them through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. If you're a believer this morning, it means that you are indwelt by God, the Holy Spirit himself.

[27 : 04] He's there for a reason. He's there to change us. He's there to mold us and fashion us into the image of Jesus Christ. And that's what Jesus prays for.

That God will work in his disciples and in the whole of the church to bring them to maturity in the faith. Let's be conscious as never before this morning of the presence and the power and the reality of the Holy Spirit working in us.

and let's give thanks to God for him, for his presence and for his power. Now the very last thing and I know the time has gone, the church at large.

Jesus goes on the last part of the prayer to pray for the church that is going to be established through the witness of the disciples. And I want you to, again, I'm being selective, I want you to notice two things that Jesus wants the world to know through the church.

Two things that Jesus wants the world to know through the church. first of all, he wants the world to know through the church that God sent him into the world.

[28 : 28] That God sent him into the world. And then the second thing he wants them to know, the world to know, is that God loved them with the same love as he loved Jesus.

That's extraordinary. Just let me say one or two things about both of these things. First of all, that God sent him into the world. Well, that simply means that the function of the church is to make Jesus known, make the person of Jesus known.

And when Jesus talks, when he uses that descriptor that God sent him into the world, that encompasses everything. It encompasses who Jesus is.

He's the son of God. What do we stand for as Bon Accord this morning? We stand for the certainty that Jesus is the son of God, the second person of the Trinity, who God the Father sent into the world for a reason.

We believe the gospels. We believe the truth of the gospels. We believe everything in God's word. We believe everything that the gospels tell us about Jesus. and we believe that he is the only way in which we can be made right with God.

[29 : 49] We believe that only through his death and through his resurrection can we be forgiven and can we be reconciled. And there's no greater message to bring to an unbelieving and a lost community.

There's no more fitting reminder on the brink of a new ministry than to be reminded of what the gospel is. It's Jesus-centered.

It's cross-centered. It's forgiveness-centered. We have a message that can transform the most broken lives in Aberdeen and wherever you come from.

So he wants the world to know that God sent him into the world and it's through the church that that message needs to be spread.

The second thing and with this I close that God loved them. Verse 23 and 20. Let me just read verse 23 and 26. He wants the world to know the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

[31 : 05] Now let me read that again. Have you noticed that? I want the world to know that the Father sent me and that the Father has loved them as me and you even as he has loved his own son.

That can't be, can it? Can it? Can I really be? I mean, the Father and the Son, there's a perfect love between the Father and the Son.

There always has been. God's love for me can't be perfect. Can it? Well, I don't know how God can do anything that isn't perfect.

this is the most extraordinary statement. And I would love for us to just absorb it right now.

Absorb it. That the love that God the Father has for you as a believer, as someone who trusts in Jesus, does, is the same love that he has for his own son.

[32 : 35] That is extraordinary. I don't understand it. I certainly don't deserve it. Spurgeon said once that the greatest mystery in all the world was why God should love him.

Absolutely. I can echo that. I'm sure you can too. I don't understand why God loves me. And yet he does. And I need to live in the confidence and in the security of that love.

I don't need to tell you how important it is for a child to grow up in an atmosphere of love. I don't need to tell you how important it is for that child's ongoing character and the growth of that person's personality and so on and so off, their confidence.

Now, when we come to discover the love of God, in Jesus Christ, then that's what's transformative. It's the greatest power in the world to change an individual. And it affects everything. It affects the way we live.

[33 : 44] We live and we breathe that assurance that we have, that confidence that we have in the love of God in Jesus Christ. And it doesn't lead to complacency.

It shouldn't lead to sinfulness. It shouldn't lead to carelessness. In fact, it should be the very opposite. When we truly absorb the love of God, it should lead to a life of devotion and obedience to the God who loved us.

and it also affects the way in which we worship. It affects the way in which we gather. It affects the way in which we respond to the word of God.

It affects everything about us when we live in the consciousness of the immensity of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Christ. So as you look to the future as a congregation, I hope you do so in that confidence and in that security.

[34 : 52] In the great statement that we love him because he first loved us. Our Father in heaven, we pray that the word of God will be embedded in our hearts now.

We pray that you will continue with us throughout the rest of this day and that you will feed us by your grace and take away of sin. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.