

John 17

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to where we read together in John's Gospel and chapter 17. At the beginning we read, After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed.

The material we have in John 17 has often been referred to, traditionally within the church, as Jesus' high priestly prayer.

And there are a few reasons within this passage why that's the case. The one thing we have throughout this chapter, Jesus making an intercessory prayer for his disciples, and indeed for the disciples that will come after them down through the ages of the world.

So, as their high priest, he makes an intercessory prayer to God on their behalf. There's also, in addition, the fact that he uses at certain points within this prayer, cultic language, language that relates to the temple worship.

And I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment when we come to look at the passage. But there's also the fact that this is a prayer that Jesus prayed immediately before he essentially offers himself up for sacrifice.

[1 : 30] In chapter 18 that follows this one, Jesus goes out and is arrested, tried, and of course the next day is crucified. So this prayer essentially immediately precedes the arrest and death of Jesus, which within the schema of John's Gospel as a whole is understood as Jesus' offering of himself, as we saw this morning, as a sacrifice for sin.

So those are some of the reasons why people have often described this passage as Jesus' great high priestly prayer. Now, I'm sure as we read through it a moment ago, you were struck by just how dense it is with ideas and imagery.

It's an incredibly rich part of the New Testament. We could spend months looking at this passage, picking away at it, and I'm sure even at the end of that time, we could still read it again and find something fresh to challenge us or delight us within it.

And that's my way of saying that tonight, we're barely going to scratch the surface of this text. We're not going to be able to see all that this text says or to see even all of the key themes within it.

But what I want to do is to pick at one particular strand within the tapestry of John 17, and that is the strand of glory.

[2 : 56] The word glory recurs throughout this passage, and each time it recurs, it picks up different associations and different meanings.

Now, that's not to say that there are several different meanings to the word glory, but it's to say that the idea of glory is a multifaceted one in John 17.

It's an idea that has different dimensions and different aspects. And when we bring these together and realize that there are different aspects of the same thing, then that becomes a very powerful and very challenging thought.

So what I want to do tonight is to look at that theme of glory and pick at several aspects of it. There are really four aspects that I want to look at.

The first is the idea of glory and splendor. The second is the idea of glory and the cross. The third is the idea of glory and service.

[3 : 58] And the fourth is the idea of glory and unity. So those will be our four points together, and hopefully we will manage to get through all four in the space of the next half hour or so.

Before we come to look at them in detail, though, I just want to make a very general comment about this passage, or, if you prefer, about the obvious relevance that this has to us.

What we have in these verses is Jesus praying, yes, for the twelve disciples who were with him, but also for all disciples down through the ages. We have an insight into the fact that our Lord prays for his people.

This is a prayer that is for you and I. And on that level, it's a window into Jesus' ministry as the high priest in heaven today.

For presumably, or biblically, he continues to make intercession for us. He continues to pray on our behalf. And this is this morning, as we thought about the good shepherd who calls his sheep by name.

[5 : 06] Then, surely, at God's right hand, Jesus makes prayer for each one of us by name. And there's an incredible sense of privilege and honour and wonder at the idea that we might be the recipients, the objects of Jesus' prayer life.

And that's something, I think, that each of us ought to reflect upon and ponder in ourselves. So, let's move on then to our four points. And let's begin by thinking about this idea of glory and splendour.

Jesus begins his prayer by saying, Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people, that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

And then down in verse 5, we find this language, And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Now, this language here, I think, is language of glory in terms of splendour. And in fact, when most of us think of the word glory, it's probably some kind of idea of splendour that we have.

[6 : 25] Some kind of idea of an attribute or a quality possessed by someone that causes others to worship or venerate or respect them.

The kind of thing that maybe some of the folks here might associate with a particular football team or with a particular character, you regard them as worthy of your praise.

Well, the imagery here is of Jesus being worthy of praise, of receiving glory, and of possessing authority. But what's crucial, and where no football team will ever compare, is the point that what lies behind that is a sense of Jesus' eternity.

Of the fact that before he was a man, before he was a child, before he was even conceived, Jesus existed. And Jesus existed as God himself.

Now that's an idea that's there in verse 5. Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. Jesus is saying here, long before I was a human being, I existed and I was glorious.

[7 : 44] We go back to the beginning of John's gospel in John chapter 1, first one, and we read, in the beginning was the word. John's way of speaking of Jesus. And the word was, was with God, and the word was God.

And as John continues in chapter 1, he goes on to say that the word became flesh. The word, God himself, became something that he wasn't.

He changed. He became human. He took flesh to himself. And prior to that, Jesus was a glorious, splendid figure.

Now, there's little within John's gospel, I think, that precisely explains the character and nature of that glory. But there are some interesting associations that are made.

Particularly in John chapter 8, verse 58, where Jesus says to the Pharisees, before Abraham was, I am. Now, that's an amazing moment.

[8 : 50] I mean, to our ears, if we're not familiar with the biblical story, and not familiar with John's gospel, it sounds like dramatical nonsense. Before Abraham was, I am.

And of course, it's a deliberately strange thing to say. But the point is that it alludes back to the story of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush, where God appeared to him in an incandescent, burning, glorious bush.

And when Moses said to him, who should I say you are? He said, I am. When people ask you, who sent you? You say, I am has sent you to you.

Jesus, in alluding to that, in saying, before Abraham was, I am, is connecting himself with that appearance of God, with that theophany of God, the appearance of God's glory.

And of course, by doing that, he's also connecting himself with all the other theophanies of God's glory that we have within the Old Testament. And that's part of the reason for reading, part of the reason for reading Isaiah chapter 6.

[10 : 03] Isaiah's encounter with the splendour and glory of God. It's the fact that as we read passages like that, we have to recognise the fact that we are seeing not simply the glory of God the Father, but the glory of Jesus Christ, the glory of the same one who entered this world.

Now, what relevance does that have for each of us? I want to suggest two points of relevance, two points of application. There may be more that you can think of, but I'll suggest two.

First of all, there's a relevance of acknowledging that as we read the story of the earthly life of Jesus, which of course is one in which God's glory is veiled and hidden, that we must continually remind ourselves that we are nevertheless reading the story of God.

that as we read about Jesus' earthly life, we are still reading a narrative about God, about God's character. And that's hugely important in terms of how we think about God and construe God.

That when we are thinking about what God is like, what God's character is like, we cannot fail to take into account the stories of his character that we find in the stories of the earthly life of Jesus.

[11 : 31] Even though the glory is veiled, he is still the glorious God. Even though the glory has been set aside, he is still Jehovah.

And that's hugely important in terms of our perception of what God is like. The second thing though is that I think we have to remind ourselves that it's this same Jesus who is glorious, who has now returned to the glory he had before the world began.

It's this same Jesus that we come to in prayer. This same Jesus who is at God's right hand interceding for us. And that ought to affect our attitude in prayer.

It ought to affect the way that we address him in prayer, the way that we communicate to him in prayer. Perhaps it ought to affect our body language, our postures, but it certainly ought to affect the way that we think as we enter his presence.

It's a reminder to us that when we come in prayer, we are not coming into the presence of any old friend for all the intimacy that is there, and we'll see more of that in a moment, but we are coming into the presence of the incandescent glory of God.

[12 : 50] we should feel the sense of honour of that, the sense of privilege, the sense of astonishment, but also the sense of respect. We should feel an awareness of the fact that there is nothing routine about any quiet time or prayer time.

There is no such thing as routine in the life of believers, because every moment is an encounter with the glory of God himself, in Jesus.

presence. So that's the first thing then, glory and splendour. Secondly, I want to think about glory and the cross.

Jesus says there, again to go back to the opening words of this prayer, Father, the time has come, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

If we stop and think about that language, it is actually quite surprising language to use. He is saying the time has come, this is the time when I will be glorified.

[13 : 58] But when does he say this? It is not after he has risen from the grave and as he is preparing to ascend to the throne room in heaven. He says it on the cusp of his arrest.

He says it on the cusp of his scourging. he says it on the eve of his crucifixion. He says it just as he is about to die.

Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. And the point is that I think in the way in which glory is construed here in John chapter 17, it's not purely the glory of Jesus ascending back to heaven again, but the cross, the place where Jesus dies, where he is most brutalized by humanity, becomes part of his glory.

Because it becomes something that Jesus regards as a revelation of glory and that the evangelist regards as something to be viewed as glorious.

Now that's a very strange thought indeed for us. but I want to just expand on it to try and prove really that this is indeed what's going on here.

[15 : 22] In John chapter 3, we have the language of the Son of Man being lifted up. That's in the context of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

It's in the context of the same passage where we read the famous words of John 3.16 that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life.

In the context of that passage, Jesus speaks about, or the evangelist speaks about, a story that happened in the Old Testament, where God's people rebelled against God, they were hard-hearted, and as a result, as a result of their complaining, God sent a plague of snakes in among their camp.

And that was a punishment for their hardness. But he also made a provision, a way by which they could be delivered from that punishment. And that was that they look at a particular symbol, a bronze snake, that was lifted up on a pole.

It sounds like a very strange story to our modern sensibilities, place. But the idea is that if the people looked at that bronze snake on a pole, they would be delivered from the venom of the snakes.

[16 : 48] They would be healed and protected and saved. And essentially, it was symbolic. It was symbolic of God being their saviour and their deliverer.

And what was being asked of them was essentially a recommitment of their faith, to place their faith in God's promise that they would be healed by looking upon the snake.

So the snake was lifted up upon a pole. And the language that's used in John chapter 3 is that just as the bronze snake was lifted up in the desert, so Jesus must be lifted up.

But the point is that that language of lifted up is the kind of language that's often used particularly in the Old Testament of exaltation.

But we read in Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah saw the glory of God. The idea, the actual language, is I saw the Lord high and lifted up.

[17 : 55] And there seems to be a deliberate point being made there by the evangelist John, a similar point that arises from this passage here, that as Jesus is raised up on the cross, there is something glorious happening.

He is being exalted even at the very same time that he is being put to death. Now as I say, that's a very strange idea and a difficult one to get our minds around.

But it's an idea that runs through the New Testament. The language that Paul uses, I will boast in nothing except in the cross of Christ.

In other words, I will exalt nothing apart from the cross of Christ. And perhaps most radically in the book of Revelation where in Revelation chapter 4 we have a description of the glory of God seated upon the throne.

throne. And then in Revelation chapter 5, the scene is repeated. But the one who sits upon the throne, the one who is glorious, the one who is worshipped by the elders and by the living creatures, is the Lamb of God.

[19 : 10] And not just the Lamb, but the slain Lamb. The Lamb that looks as though it has been slaughtered. And the point of all of this is that the early Christians were forced to utterly reconceive their notion of what God was like because of his death, because of the death of Jesus.

They were forced to rethink how they understood God. Because now the glory of God has to accommodate a particular reality. And that particular reality is his death on the cross.

Now what's the relevance of that for us? I think the relevance of that for us is that we have to acknowledge that the glory of God lies not simply in his own inherent, intrinsic, splendor.

glory of God but the glory of God lies also in his character, in his love, in his self-giving. God's glory can be described, yes, as an incandescent fire.

He is glorious because of his creative might. But he is glorious also because of his redemptive love. He is glorious also because of the marks that to this day he bears in his hands, because of the scar that to this day remains in his side.

[20 : 42] He is glorious also because of his love. And that's a vitally important thing to feed into our concept, that the glory of God is not simply the glory of splendor, it is the glory of self-giving, it is the glory of love.

And that's also something that within the New Testament becomes a paradigm for our lives. If you think of the letter to the Philippians, one of the things that seems to have been going on in church in Philippi is that people were vying for status.

People were vying to be leaders, people were vying to be respected and honoured. And how does Paul respond to that? He responds by saying, let this mind be in you, the mind that was also in Jesus Christ.

And it goes on to speak of Jesus self-giving. And ultimately, of course, that self-giving that ends in his exaltation. Because the concept of what glory is now involves an awareness of the cross, involves an awareness of the cross as part of the glory of Jesus.

And that becomes a paradigm for all of our lives. But instead of chasing splendour and glory as humans define it, according to the standards of this world, where splendour and glory is all about status, all about being respected and cherished by other people, all about being raised up on a pedestal, the glory of the believer lies in emulating the glory of Jesus.

[22 : 23] Jesus and the glory of Jesus involved a cross. And Jesus, of course, himself says to each one of his believers, you must take up your cross if you are to follow me.

So that's the second thing then, glory on the cross. The third thing is glory and service. If you look at the language that Jesus uses in verse 4, he says, I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

So Jesus says, I have served you and in doing so I have brought you glory. I have brought you praise. That's in itself a wonderful thought.

But the incredible thing is the fact that Jesus goes on to use similar language about us. In verse 10, all I have is yours, all you have is mine, and glory has come to me through them.

Jesus here says that just as he brought God the Father glory by serving him on earth, so his disciples have brought him glory as they have obeyed his word.

[23 : 40] God. So that's actually an amazing thing to ponder, particularly if we're familiar with the gospel narratives. Because the one thing that we cannot say about the disciples in the gospels is that they were perfect.

The testimony regarding the disciples in Matthew, Mark and Luke in particular is that they were imperfect, that they failed, that they let Jesus down frequently.

And yet this ragtag bunch who were so fallible, who were so imperfect, are nevertheless cherished by Jesus.

And here on the eve of his death, he says, they have brought me glory. And for each one of us tonight as God's people, it's an astonishing reminder of the fact that our obedience, however imperfect it might be, however flawed it might be, is nevertheless meaningful to Jesus.

Because we can often look at our lives, and particularly given the numerous flaws that fill those lives, and we can feel as though we are rather extraneous to the church and to Jesus.

[25 : 01] we can feel as though, well, I'm glad to be a Christian, I'm glad to know I'm going to heaven, but at the end of the day, there's not much that I do that really brings Jesus glory, and I can't imagine that I'm someone who is really glad about and joyful about.

And yet the reminder here is that our service of God is meaningful. And that's a challenge to us, to acknowledge that every moment of our lives is something that potentially can bring precious glory to God's name.

Precious glory in terms of bringing others to see the glory of God. Precious glory in terms of our own private, personal walk with God. Now I want to develop this idea of glory and service a little further.

Because the idea of service in this passage is very much tied in with the idea of ministry to the world and engagement with the world.

You see this particularly in the language that Jesus uses in verse 11. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world. And we see them also in this language also in verse 14.

[26 : 20] 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. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

And then in verse 18, as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. The language of world throughout John's gospel is interesting.

It appears again right back in the beginning of the gospel in the prologue, where we read of how the world was made through Jesus. And yet there is also an emphasis within that passage that the world has rejected Jesus and turned its back upon him.

So that as John uses the language of world throughout the gospel, he is not speaking about something that is intrinsically and inherently evil. But he is speaking about something that has turned away from God, that is cut off from God, and as such knows nothing of the life and hope that God brings.

Those who are saved and rescued are those who are brought out of this world that has turned its back upon its maker and brought into the kingdom. of life.

[27 : 45] Now Jesus here, as he prays for his disciples, is saying, these disciples of mine, they no longer belong in a world that has turned its back upon God.

They now belong in the new world, in the kingdom of heaven. They are qualitatively different. They are not of that world anymore. They are of the heavenly world.

They are of the spiritual world. They are of God's world. They are no longer dead in John 5. They are alive. But for all that they are not of the world, they are still in the world.

They may not be qualitatively the same as the rest of humanity, but they are still shoulder to shoulder with the rest of humanity. And indeed, the language that Jesus uses is that they are to go into that humanity.

It's not simply that we passively exist alongside other people, but that we are actually missionaries sent into the rest of humanity with a purpose.

[28 : 54] That language of being sent into is purposeful language. And that purpose is that we might bring blessing to the world.

blessing, of course, in terms of people coming to know the life and salvation that is in God. Now, I say that because of the language that Jesus uses, that we be sanctified.

In verse 17, sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth. And in verse 19, for them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

The word sanctified is a word that essentially, and it's there in the footnotes of the Bible, essentially means to be set apart for sacred use or to be holy.

It's the word that was used of animals that had been set apart for sacrifice. It was a word that was used of items in the temple that had been set apart for use in the cultic practice.

[30 : 00] And it was a word that was used of the Levitical priesthood, that they were set apart from the rest of Israel for a priestly function. Now, Jesus uses the language in verse 19, for them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Now, I can't help feeling that what's being spoken of here, on the eve of his death, on the eve of the day when he offers himself as a sacrifice for sin.

That Jesus is essentially saying, I sanctify myself. I am setting myself apart for a holy purpose. And that holy purpose is that I die in order that they might live.

But Jesus' death, that we may be sanctified, also means that we are set apart for the holy purpose. sanctified.

And I think the language in terms of ourselves being sanctified is the language of priesthood. Think of the language that is used by Peter, that you are a chosen people, a holy priesthood.

[31 : 13] And our mission to engage with the world, to interact with the world, is a mission to do what priests do, which is to be between God and the world, to bring the blessing of God to the world, to bring the mercy of God to the world, and to bring the world to the mercy of God.

And so as Jesus says, I am sending them into the world, he is speaking of our mission, our mission of evangelism and outreach. And so service, serving Jesus, is something that brings him glory.

But it must also involve an awareness that part of our great purpose here is the salvation of the world. Well, let me finally move on to the closing point, which is glory and unity.

Now, the time is more or less gone, so I want to say just a very little about this. But in verses 22 and onwards, Jesus prays, I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me.

May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. The language that Jesus uses here is again amazing language because he takes the image of his unity with the Father.

[32 : 49] That Jesus, the Son, and God, the Father, are one God. They share in one glory. But he now extends that unity and says, my people, they are part of that.

They are part of our family now. They are part of our fellowship. So that the fellowship of God within himself, the unity of God within himself, is extended to include us.

We are part of the divine fellowship. That language that he uses, I am in men and you are in me. And again, the point is that this is the basis for Jesus' language of unity.

unity. That the church needs to express the peace and the unity of the gospel within itself. Because it is of the very essence of the gospel.

Of the very essence of salvation. Because the very essence of salvation is to be brought from death to life. To be brought from being apart from God. To be brought to being with God.

[33 : 58] And to be with God means to be in the fellowship of others who are with God. To be indwelt by the same spirit that indwells them. And that places upon us a burden of respecting other believers.

Of cherishing other believers. Of doing all we can to maintain the unity of other believers. The unity of the church. Now we've seen tonight then some different aspects of this language of glory.

We've seen something of the kind of glory language that we're used to. Glory is about splendor. Glory is about honour. Glory is about worship.

Glory is about authority. There is also a surprising sign to glory. Glory is about the character of God. About the love of God.

The self-giving of God. We've also seen glory in terms of our service of God. And glory in terms of our unity with one another.

[35 : 07] There's more I'm sure that we could say about glory within John's gospel. And there's more that could be said of the idea of glory throughout the Bible. But I think it's important, and I'll just close with this thought.

I think it's important that as believers we reflect upon glory. that we have an image of God in our minds that is glorious.

That we have a perception of ourselves as a church that is glorious. And that that motivates us to live with a legitimate fear and a legitimate concern that we do not mar that glory with our own sin, with our own squabbles, with division, with anger and hatred.

But that in our unity with one another, in our fellowship with one another, and in our adoration for God, we bring praise that is appropriate to his glory.

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