

The High Priestly Prayer

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.** To think that we are privileged to listen in as God the Son converses with His Father just as He is about to give His life as a ransom for sinners!

The progression of thought in this prayer is not difficult to discover. Jesus first prayed for Himself and told the Father that His work on earth had been finished (John 17:1–5). Then He prayed for His disciples, that the Father would keep them and sanctify them (John 17:6–19). He closed His prayer by praying for you and me and the whole church, that we might be unified in Him and one day share His glory (John 17:20–26).

Why did Jesus pray this prayer? Certainly He was preparing Himself for the sufferings that lay ahead. As He contemplated the glory that the Father promised Him, He would receive new strength for His sacrifice (Heb. 12:1–3). But He also had His disciples in mind (John 17:13). **What an encouragement this prayer should have been to them!** He prayed about their security, their joy, their unity, and their future glory. He also prayed it for us today, so that we would know all that He has done for us and given to us, and all that He will do for us when we get to heaven.

JESUS' REQUESTS FOR HIMSELF (17:1–5)

1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished 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.

The time has come. The divine plan of redemption was at God’s appointment. Several times before this Jesus’ time had not come (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). But now it had arrived (12:23; 13:1). God was in control.

Glorify Your Son. (cf. 17:5). This request for glorification included sustaining Jesus in suffering, accepting His sacrifice, resurrecting Him, and restoring Him to His pristine glory. The purpose of the request was

that the Father would be glorified by the Son, that God's wisdom, power, and love might be known through Jesus.

You granted Him authority over all people. The Father has ordained the rule of the Son over the earth so the Son has the authority to judge (John 5:27), to take up His life (10:18), and to give eternal life to all those whom the Father gave Him.

And this is eternal life, that they know you. Eternal life as defined here by Jesus, involves the experience of knowing the only true God through His Son. It is a personal relationship of intimacy which is continuous and dynamic. The word know (*ginōskōsin*) here in the present tense, is often used to describe the intimacy of a sexual relationship (e.g., Gen 4:1, "lay"; Matt. 1:25, "had ... union"). Thus a person who knows God has an intimate personal relationship with Him. And that relationship is eternal, not temporal. Eternal life is not simply endless existence. Everyone will exist somewhere forever, but the question is, In what condition or in what relationship will they spend eternity?

Accomplished the work. Jesus' prayer for Himself was based on His completed work—which assumed His obedience to death. Even though the Cross was future, it was a certainty. He repeated His request for a return to His pristine glory with the Father (v1) based on the certainty of the finished work on the cross.

JESUS' INTERCESSION FOR THE APOSTLES (17:6–19)

6 "I have manifested 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 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 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, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 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 has hated 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 keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

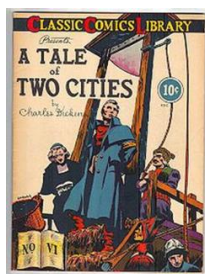
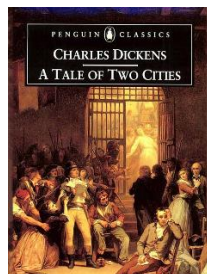
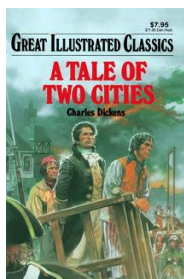
Jesus prayed for His disciples before He chose them (Luke 6:12), during His ministry (John 6:15), at the end of His ministry (Luke 22:32), here (John 17:6–19), and later in heaven (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). This prayer of intercession reveals Jesus' concern and love for His apostles.

Whom you gave me out of the world. The little flock of disciples was given by the Father to the Son. They had been separated out of the world. This separation was by the electing work of the Father, in which the apostles had been given as a gift to Jesus Christ. With the words, **They have kept Your Word**, Jesus praised His disciples for responding to the message of God in Jesus Christ. The disciples were not perfect, but they had the right commitment. Their faith in Jesus was a trust in His union with the Father (17:8). This faith in Jesus was manifested in their obedience to His words because they believed in His divine mission.

I am not praying for the world. At this point He was not praying for the world in its hostility and unbelief. This prayer is for two things: (a) the disciples' **preservation** and (b) their **sanctification**. The world is not to be preserved in its rebellion or sanctified in its unbelief. Since the disciples would be in the world, Jesus prayed for their protection. The hostility against God which fell on Jesus would now fall on the tiny band of apostles, and subsequently on many of Jesus' followers. He would protect them from the sin and enmity of the world by the power of His name. In Bible times a person's name stood for the person. (In John 17:6, 26 the NIV translates the Gr. "Your name" by the word "You.")

I am glorified in them. In the old economy, God dwelt among people and showed His glory. In Jesus, God's glory was displayed. Then Christ's disciples glorified Him: Glory has come to Me through them. And now in the Church Age the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son and believers are also to glorify the Son.

I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world. Jesus would soon depart to the Father and leave His disciples in the world. They had to stay in the world to carry out God's plan in spreading the good news of redemption and in planting the church. With the formation of the church, the history of the world has become, in a sense, "a tale of two cities": the city of God and the city of man.



It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world. God's plan was not to remove the disciples from danger and opposition (take them out of the world) but to preserve them in the midst of conflict. Though Jesus would soon be taken out of the world, His followers are to remain in it. God intends for His followers to be witnesses to truth in the midst of the world they live in. 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.

They are not of the world. Just as Jesus did not belong to the world, so believers do not. They belong to the heavenly kingdom because of their new births.

Sanctify them. Now His second petition for them was for their sanctification. Sanctify means "set apart for special use." A believer is to be distinct from the world's sin, its values, and its goals. The means of this sanctifying work is God's truth. The truth is communicated in the Word, which is both personal and propositional. As the message about Jesus was heard, believed, and understood, the disciples' hearts and minds were captured. This change in their thinking resulted in changes in their living. The same is true of believers today. As they appropriate God's Word to their lives, they are sanctified—set apart for God and changed in their living in order to honor God.

Sent them into the world. Jesus is the model for every believer. He was in the world but He was not of the world. He was sent ... into the world on a mission by His Father. So believers are sent ... into the world on a mission by the Son, to make the Father known. This passage is similar to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Each Christian should view himself as a missionary whose task is to communicate God's truth to others.

I consecrate myself... that they may be sanctified. For the benefit of the disciples, Jesus sanctified Himself. This sanctification refers to His being separated and dedicated to His death. The purpose of the death of Christ is to dedicate or separate believers to God and His program.

JESUS' INTERCESSION FOR FUTURE BELIEVERS (17:20–26)

20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe 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, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 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. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

those who will believe. The final portion of Jesus' prayer (vv. 20–26) was for future believers who would come to Him through the message of the apostles.

they may all be one. Jesus requested unity for future believers. The divided church is in many ways a scandal. The cure, however, is not institutional union. Jesus was not praying for the unity of a single,

worldwide, ecumenical church in which doctrinal heresy would be maintained along with orthodoxy. Instead, He was praying for a unity of love, a unity of obedience to God and His Word, and a united commitment to His will. There are great differences between uniformity, union, and unity.

All believers belong to the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and their spiritual unity is to be manifest in the way they live. The unity Christ desires for His church is the same kind of unity the Son has with the Father: **just as You are in Me and I am in You.**

The glory that you have given me. The glory which Christ gave the church may refer to the glory of the Cross. As the church received and pondered the significance of Jesus' atoning work, it would be united in God's purposes and redemptive plan.

The goal of the unity of believers with each other and with God is twofold: (a) that the world will believe in the Son's divine mission (know that You sent Me), and (b) that the world will sense that God's love for believers is deep, intimate, and lasting as is His love for His Son.

Jesus' petitions for all believers are four: preservation (John 17:11), sanctification (v. 17), unity (vv. 11, 21–22), and participation in Jesus' glory (v. 24).

As you review this prayer, you see the spiritual priorities that were in the Saviour's heart: the glory of God; the sanctity of God's people; the unity of the church; the ministry of sharing the Gospel with a lost world. We today would be wise to focus on these same priorities.