

## JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

John 17:1-26

Key Verse: 17:1

*After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."*

Suppose you expect that something horrible will happen to you in the next few hours. What would be your prayer topics? Today's passage records Jesus' high priestly prayer. Just before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for himself, for his disciples, and for all believers. His prayer reveals what was really on his mind as he braced for his upcoming suffering and death. May the Holy Spirit teach us how much Jesus loves us as we study his prayer!

### I. JESUS PRAYS FOR HIMSELF (1-5)

Look at verse 1. *After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."* In John's gospel, the words "my hour" or "my time" are repeated, indicating Jesus followed God's schedule for him. Now "the hour" had come for him to die on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). Crucifixion was the most inhumane way to execute a person. The state supreme court of Georgia banned the electric chair, citing its cruelty. But crucifixion was much more inhumane, not only physically but also mentally. The victim's naked body was hung publicly for his family and others to see. His hands and feet were nailed to the cross. Death would not come quickly, sometimes not until days later. After death, his body was left to rot or eaten by scavengers. Jesus is the Son of God. He was the only person without sin on earth. But he was about to be crucified for the sins that you and I committed. He prayed, *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."* He prayed that God would glorify him so that he might glorify God. What does this mean? The word "glorify" (doxazo (δοξάζω) in Greek) means "to give honor" or "to reveal." Jesus wanted to reveal God's glory through his death on the cross.

Jesus' prayer revealed the purpose in his life. It was to glorify God by obeying God's will. *"Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."* This prayer teaches us what our purpose or goal in life should be. What is your goal in life? I often ask the question to my students in my classes. Most of them would answer: "It is to make a lot of money and to be happy." They do not know that God created each of us for his glory. The Bible teaches us that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (Ro 11:36). To live to gratify our sinful nature was not what God intended for our life.

Before Jesus saved me, I lived a selfish life following my sinful nature. As a result, I was a burden to myself and to others. I was not a blessing. I did not have a clear purpose in life. I was like a dead fish flowing down the stream. But since Jesus came into my life, my goal in life was changed. I know now and believe that God created me in his own image, not to live a selfish life, but to live a life that glorifies him. Today, I see many

young people also live life without a clear purpose. *Carpe diem* or YOLO seems to be a catch word for them. They live to gratify their sinful desires, not knowing it is a cursed life. They need to find out a true purpose of life by studying the word of God. That's why we must help them spiritually through our Bible studies with them.

Before his conversion, the apostle Paul was an ambitious young man. He lived his life in his own way. But after he met the risen Christ he came to know the truth about life. He said, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1Co 10:31). It is not easy, however, to live for the glory of God. It is especially difficult when we are persecuted because of our faith in God. We also suffer inwardly when our life of mission seems to produce little fruit. But we must remember Jesus' prayer in this passage. Jesus wanted to glorify God even through his suffering and death. He wanted to glorify God by completing his mission as the Lamb of God. May God help us to remember this prayer so that we may live for the glory of God despite difficulties in our life of mission!

Look at verse 2. "*For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.*" The hour had come for him to die on the cross. But Jesus did not despair. He knew that God granted him authority to give the gift of eternal life to all believers. His death would be followed by his glorious resurrection. He would conquer sin and death. He would open the door to the kingdom of heaven so that we may be with him forever.

People pay little attention to eternal life. In the hustle and bustle of the modern day life with smartphones and social media, there is no time for them to stop to think about life. Many young people consider eternal life as something they can worry about later when they get old. In addition, many people have a wrong concept of eternal life. Contrary to their notion, eternal life is not an extension of life in this world. It is not an upgrade of this imperfect world. Jesus says in verse 3: "*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*" What does it mean to know God and Jesus Christ? To know God is much more than to have mere intellectual knowledge of him. It is to have a personal relationship with him. To know Jesus is to love him and to obey his words (Jn 14:23). When we come to know him through a personal relationship, eternal life begins in us even in this world. Of course, we will have eternal life in the kingdom of God that is yet to come.

Some people consider Hawaii as a paradise. Its pristine beaches and beautiful flowers are indeed remarkable to see. But it's no heaven. In fact, a paradise is no paradise if Jesus is not there. Heaven is heaven because we will be with Jesus there. Do you want to live in heaven just because its streets are paved with gold? No. We want to be in heaven, because Jesus, who loves us so much, will be there with us forever.

Jesus rendered glory to God while on earth by completing the work that God gave him to do (4). His mission was to plant in people's hearts the love of God, faith and hope of the kingdom of God. It was not easy. He suffered a lot. Through his suffering, Jesus glorified God. Look at verse 5. "*And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*" The lost paradise and its restoration are

the key points of the Bible. The paradise was lost when the first man sinned before God. But Jesus came to restore the kingdom of God. Through his death, he would restore the broken relationship between God and us sinners. His resurrection would open the door to the kingdom of God. For this he prayed, *“Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.”*

## II. JESUS PRAYS FOR HIS DISCIPLES (6-19)

Look at verses 6-8. *“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.”* The twelve disciples were ordinary men. They were not exceptionally bright. Neither were they exceptionally faithful. Still, Jesus loved them very much because God gave them to him. So what did he do for them during his time on earth? He revealed God to them. How? He taught them the words of God and they accepted them. Through the word of God, the disciples believed that Jesus came from God (16:30). They came to know God personally by accepting the word of Christ. I also came to know God by studying the word of Christ. We all come to know God through studying the word of God. Bible study and prayer are indeed two most important things for us.

In verses 9-19, we learn Jesus’ prayer topics for his disciples:

**First, “they may be one as we are one”** (9-12). From the gospels, we get the impression that Jesus’ disciples were not lovable people. They were slow to learn from Jesus, but quick to compete with one another for human recognition. They ate and slept a lot and did not pray much. They were mostly burdensome to Jesus. But Jesus did not consider them useless. Jesus says, *“And glory has come to me through them”* (10). This reveals Jesus’ heart. Jesus trained them in many ways to be future spiritual leaders. Still they were too young. Soon they would abandon him upon his arrest. But Jesus prayed for them. He saw them in God’s eyes. He had a hope that they would change the world through their faith in God.

Look at verse 11b. *“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.”* Jesus prayed that God would protect them so that they would be united in him. Satan’s work is to destroy and tear down relationships. God’s work is to build up and to unite. Jesus prayed that his disciples might be united in him by obeying his words, as he was united with God by obeying God’s command. We are, like the disciples, selfish and individualistic. So it is not easy for us to be united. Only when we come to know the love of God we can be united into one. Jesus is our common denominator. Jesus also prayed for the disciples that they might conquer the world by being one in the love of God. We can be united in Jesus when we pray for his world mission command with one accord. Yes, we are all different in terms of our background, character, tastes, and so on. But just as many different instruments in orchestra can make beautiful music, we can be united in Jesus’ name and serve him together humbly.

**Second, “sanctify them by the truth”** (13-19). Jesus was going back to God soon, leaving his disciples in the world. The world would hate them, simply because they followed the way of God instead of the sinful way of this world. Jesus did not want his disciples to escape from the world. Rather he wanted them to challenge and conquer the world with the word of God. He prayed that God might protect them from the evil one, as he taught in the Lord’s Prayer, “Deliver us from evil.”

Look at verse 17. *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”* Jesus prayed that God would sanctify them by the truth. The word “sanctify” is from the Greek word “hagiozo” (αγιαζω) which means “to set apart for sacred use or to make holy.” Jesus prayed that God would set them apart from the world and make them a holy people. We learn that we should not be of the world, even though we are in the world. We should not conform to this unbelieving world. As disciples of Jesus, we should have a different value system, a different purpose in life.

God who is holy wants us to live a holy life. How can we be sanctified and live a holy life in this unholy generation? Jesus prayed: *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”* We must hold on to God’s word, because God’s word is truth. Without God’s word, we have no absolute standard. Without God’s word, we cannot but live according to our sinful desires and social consensus which changes over time. Many people just follow the trend of the world without questioning it. Today’s young people live in a moral wilderness. Without the absolute word of God to guide them, they blindly follow the trend of this world. Everything becomes relative. For example, statistics show that a majority of young people now support gay marriage, even though the Bible teaches us that homosexuality is a sin (Ro 1:26-27). Worse yet, many of them see no problem with having sex outside marriage. But sin under any other name is still sin. Sin brings condemnation and death to people, even when they commit it not recognizing as sin. Again we learn how important it is for us to study the word of God faithfully so that we may be sanctified by the truth.

We must be sanctified with the word of truth. This means that our inner persons are transformed in Christ. Our hearts can be made pure and we can live a holy life only when our sinful nature is changed in Christ. This can happen through the word of God. To be sanctified, that is, to be set apart does not mean we should separate ourselves from our society to live in a remote island or in a monastery. Rather, we should be in the world among people to have a good spiritual influence on them. Jesus said, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it” (15-16). How can we have good spiritual influence on others? We can’t do this when we conform to the world. This is possible only when we follow Christ by obeying the word of God.

Look at verse 19. *“For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”* Jesus sanctified himself by obeying God’s will to die on the cross. In this way Jesus taught us how we may be truly sanctified.

### III. JESUS PRAYS FOR ALL BELIEVERS (20-26)

Jesus prayed also for all future believers who would come to him through his disciples' preaching. Let us think about two particular prayer topics of Jesus.

**First, “all of them may be one.”** Look at verse 21. *“...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* This was the second time Jesus prayed for unity among believers. This time he prayed for all future believers to be one. Again how can we be united? We can do this when we have a right relationship with God through his Son Jesus. When we have a personal relationship with God, we can also have a love relationship with one another in him. When we love one another, the world may believe in Jesus as the Son of God (22). Jesus prays in verse 23: *“... so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”* Jesus teaches us that we can be most effective evangelists to the world if we are united in him and be a spiritual orchestra that plays the beautiful music of love.

**Second, “to be with me where I am.”** Look at verse 24. *“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”* Jesus prayed for all of us to be with him in heaven after our pilgrimage on earth. Jesus loves each of us so much. What does he want for us because he loves us? Jesus did not pray for the improvement of our human conditions. He prayed for our names to be in the book of life and for us to be the members of God's family. Jesus said, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory.” Jesus wants us to enjoy the glory of the kingdom of God with him forever. He concludes his prayer in verse 26: *“I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”*

From the high priestly prayer of Jesus, we learn that Jesus wants us to glorify God through our lives. He wants all of us to be with him forever in his glorious kingdom. May God help us to live for the glory of God! May God sanctify us with his word of truth and help us to be united in his love!