

Jesus Prays for Himself

John 17:1-5

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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.

– John 17:1-5, ESV

Introduction: The Holy of Holies of Scripture

This morning, we turn our attention from the Songs of Ascents back to the Gospel of John. In God’s providence, as we do so, we begin John 17, the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in the Bible, a chapter which John Knox reportedly called “the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Scripture.” John Knox was the Scottish founding father of Presbyterianism, and, in 1572, when he knew he was gravely ill and would not last long in this life, he had his wife, Margaret, read John 17 to him repeatedly every day. Thus, this was the last chapter of the Bible that great Reformer heard before he passed into glory.

If this is indeed “the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Scripture,” then it is quite fitting that we should be reading and hearing from this chapter right after finishing the Songs of Ascents. The Songs of Ascents mark the pilgrim’s journey from the hostile world to the city of God to the Temple itself, where the final Song has the pilgrims calling to the priests and Levites in the Temple, “Lift up your hands toward the holy place and bless the Lord.” So, from the priests ministering in the holy place, we progress one step further up and further in.

But why would John Knox call this chapter “the Holy of holies”? Well, because here we have the prayer of the Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed, as He has just served the Last Supper to the disciples in the Upper Room and given them His final teaching. Jesus’ public teaching ministry ended in John 12, and His private teaching ministry to His disciples ended in John 16:33, and He is about to walk out into the night and face the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal of Judas- who, even while Jesus is praying this prayer, is conspiring together with the priests to seize the Lord – and then the horrible death of the cross. At this holy moment, Jesus prays a final prayer before His agonizing prayer in the Garden. He prays aloud, so His disciples will hear Him in the Upper Room. And we get to read His prayer, these words between the members of the Godhead, between the Son and His Father. We see in this chapter the heart of Jesus for His own work, for His disciples who will be left behind after He leaves, and for His church, which will carry His Gospel to the nations.

We’re going to look at this prayer in three parts, as it divides nicely for us: Part 1 this week focuses on Jesus’ prayer for Himself in verses 1-5. Part 2 focuses on Jesus’ prayer for His disciples in verses 6-19. Part 3, then, focuses on Jesus’ prayer for the church, us, in verses 20-26.

A. Glorify Your Son, v. 1-3

It may seem odd to you that Jesus begins this great prayer on this important night by praying for Himself, but that's exactly what He does, and for good reason, as we'll see. As Jesus prepared to pray, we see that He lifted up His eyes toward heaven. Isn't that reminiscent of the Songs of Ascents? –

Psalm 121 – *I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?*

Psalm 123– *To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!*

So Jesus lifts up His eyes and prays: “*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.*”

1. **How Will Jesus Be Glorified?**

So, the first thing Jesus prays for is for His own glory. But how will Jesus be glorified? What is He asking the Father to do?

To get clarification, we need to consider when Jesus first started to say that the hour had come. Repeatedly throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus had said that His hour had not yet come. But in John 12, right at the very end of His public teaching ministry, just a couple of days before this night in the Upper Room, Jesus finally said that His hour had come, the time for Him to be glorified. And what did He mean by that? Well, He told everyone very clearly. Listen to John 12:23-33 –

And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (ESV)

So, when Jesus prays, “*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son,*” He is praying for the Father to bring Him to the cross. The coming of the cross has been weighing heavily on His soul all week during this final week of His earthly life, and now He is asking the Father to bring the cross to Him and bring Him to the cross.

The cross, a cruel instrument of Roman torture, public humiliation and agonizing death, will become, through Jesus, the most glorious symbol of hope and forgiveness the world has ever known. By embracing that cross and by taking the Father's wrath for our sins upon Himself on the cross, Jesus will be glorified. Today, when people around the world think of Jesus and His love, they think of the cross;

when they think of Him as the powerful Savior, they think of His powerful saving work done on the cross.

2. Why Does Jesus Want to Be Glorified?

But what's interesting in this prayer is that Jesus' first thought when He asks His Father to glorify His Son through the cross is not immediately focused on the people who will be saved through His atoning death – though that is coming! No, His first reason given for His prayer is “glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.”

Jesus wants to be glorified through the cross because He knows that, as He is glorified, He will be empowered to glorify His Father. Through the glory of the Son displayed in love and redemption on the cross, the glory of the Father, in giving His one and only Son for us, is also put on glorious display. As John would write himself later in his first epistle, 1 John -

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” – 1 John 3:1

“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” – 1 John 4:10, ESV

3. What Does Jesus' Glory Accomplish?

So, how exactly is it that Jesus is glorified on the cross and the Father is, in turn, glorified through Jesus on the cross? The glory comes through what Jesus will accomplish through the cross. There's nothing particularly glorious about a bloody, shameful, painful death, but that death is the supreme act of love and redemption because of what that death accomplishes, which is the next thing Jesus prays –

glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him

Through the cross, Jesus will be glorified by being victorious over sin and death, in His death and resurrection, and He will be enthroned on high and given full authority to give eternal life to all whom the Father has given to the Son.

Thus, while Jesus is asking for the cross, and embracing its shame and pain, it is the full work of redemption – death, resurrection, ascension to heaven, session at the right hand of God – that Jesus has in view. On the cross, He purchases our pardon. In His resurrection, He overthrows death and secures eternal life. In ascending into heaven, He opens up the path through death to life in the Father's glorious presence, a path he then leads us in as His followers. And in His sitting at the Father's right hand, He receives the highest throne in the universe, the highest authority, which allows Him to save all those whom the Father has given to Him.

Remember the wonderful words of eternal life Jesus spoke in John 6?

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on

the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” – vv. 38-40

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. – v. 44

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. – v. 51

Well, these glorious promises Jesus made in John 6 are exactly what He is going to accomplish and fulfill in His death, resurrection, ascension to heaven, and seating at the right hand of God the Father, far above all power and authority.

So, while Jesus begins His prayer by praying for Himself, His glorification is our salvation. If Jesus is not glorified first, we cannot be saved by Him!

B. How Jesus' Glory Benefits Us, v. 3-4

And how are we saved by Him? How do we receive the eternal life Jesus won for us in His glorification? Jesus prays next: *“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*

1. What is eternal life?

I wonder how you would answer the question if someone asked you, “What is the essence of eternal life?” You might say flippantly, “Duh! It means living forever and never dying.” But would you know that that’s not true? All life comes from God. True eternal life is the life of God alone, and He gives us eternal life out of His life, as He invites us to share in His life. Remember, it was when the Lord breathed upon Adam that he became a living soul, and in a few chapters, after the resurrection, Jesus will breathe on His disciples and say, *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”* True eternal life is to be bought into the life of God by the Holy Spirit.

That’s what Jesus means by knowing God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. He doesn’t mean knowing there is a God or knowing about God. He means knowing God, entering into a living, loving, eternal relationship with God by knowing Christ. We know from how later Scripture unpacks this theology that the Spirit unites us to Christ by faith and brings us into fellowship with the Triune God.

In Matthew 11:27, Jesus said something that captures much of the same truth as verses 2-3 here in John 17 – *“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

2. Why is Jesus authorized to give it?

Why have all things been handed over to Jesus? Why is Jesus given “*authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom [the Father has] given him*”? Or some might ask it this way: Wasn’t Jesus already enthroned in the highest glory before His incarnation? Didn’t He already have all power and authority as God the Son? So, why does He have to go through all of this in order to be “*given authority over all flesh*”?

Well, perhaps the best answer to that question was given by Trufflehunter the Badger in *Prince Caspian*, when he said, “Some of you may have forgotten, but we Badgers remember well, that Narnia was never right except when a Son of Adam was king.” C.S. Lewis wrote this concept into Narnia for a reason: Adam was created to the head of humanity, and when Adam fell, humanity and the world was plunged into ruin. What the first Adam broke by his rebellion, the second Adam had to fix by His obedience. Jesus had to become truly human, a real man, so He would be qualified to be the new head of a new humanity.

When Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father, satisfied God’s justice against sin on the cross, rose again from the dead in victory over death and hell, ascended to the right hand of the Father, He passed the test Adam failed and He undid the curse Adam brought on all creation. He is the redeemer-king, the second Adam, the new and better Image of God. This is what gives Him authority and the highest throne and the right to give eternal life to all of God’s chosen ones. King Jesus has that right.

3. What did Jesus accomplish in His mission?

This is what Jesus meant in verse 4 when He prayed, “*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.*” Phase I of that work was what theologians call Jesus’ active obedience, His fulfillment of the moral law in Himself, His passing the tests Adam failed. By the time Jesus prays in the Upper Room here in John 17, He has done that. He has exercised the dominion Adam was supposed to exercise over creation – over storms and food, over disease and the devil, over death itself – and He has kept His Father’s commands perfectly.

Now that Jesus has accomplished His active obedience and demonstrated His dominion over creation as the second Adam, He goes to the cross to begin the road back to glory.

C. How Glorious Jesus Is, v. 5

But where is Jesus going? What kind of glory is He entering? He has made repeated references to “going away” and “going to the Father” throughout the night in the Upper Room. Here He prays it.

1. What kind of glory does Jesus have?

And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Can you imagine such glory - in the very presence of God the Father, sharing in His glory.? This is the glory Jesus had with the Father before the world existed. From eternity, the eternal God – Father, Son & Holy Spirit – had enjoyed splendid glory in their fellowship with one another in heaven. Jesus had left behind that glory when he came to earth to save us. He laid aside the glory he shared with the Father, the worship of the angelic host, to take on human flesh.

In that human flesh, He is about to be stripped, whipped, and nailed to a cross, but in that human flesh, he will rise again and ascend back to the Father and re-enter that glory. That's the key difference: When Jesus re-enters the presence of God to resume sharing in His glory, He does so as the glorified second Adam, as the God-man, as the head of the new humanity.

2. **What does that say about our salvation?**

Think about what that says about our salvation! Our salvation is anchored in the person of Jesus Christ Himself. He has now the glorifies humanity we will share in when we are with Him face-to-face. Our salvation, our security, our righteousness, our peace with God, our forgiveness, our eternal life, our redemption, is in glory in heaven sharing in the glory of the Father, seated on His eternal, heavenly throne.

People feel good about the security of their investments if they are kept in stable and secure bonds. In this life, the most secure investment is a government bond, backed up by the full faith and credit of the United States government. Other people prefer to keep their wealth in gold and silver, which they consider to be “real wealth” and more secure than government bonds. But our treasure is in heaven. Our salvation is secure at the right hand of the Father, backed by the guarantee of the Triune God.

This is the strength of the security Hebrews 6 communicates –

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. – Hebrews 6:17-20, ESV

Our sure and steadfast anchor is the fact that a man sits at God's right hand. As 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.”

And this is the glorious and secure hope 1 John 3:1-3 gives us:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (ESV)

Our hope is not that we will become God, but that we will be transformed into the full likeness of Jesus' perfect and glorified humanity. “We shall be like him” means we shall be like the glorified Lord Jesus, the man who is our mediator and our Redeemer.

Is this your hope? Is Jesus your anchor? Is seeing Him face-to-face your heart's longing? If so, then you have a sure and steadfast anchor for your soul and a glorious hope at His appearing. Jesus prayed for it in the Upper Room, and we can know God the Father has answered the prayer of His Son.