

# Jesus: His Greatest Longing

*Wednesday @ First*

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**Bible Text:** John 17:1-15

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Our reading is from John 17 and the passage that's printed there is, in fact, from John 17, not from John 7 and we're going to read the first five verses. We are in the course of a series of talks these Wednesdays on what we usually call the Farewell Discourse or the Upper Room Discourse of Jesus. It's the night of his betrayal. He is certainly within 24 hours or so of his crucifixion and he really is, as we've seen those of us who are able to be here regularly, he's been pouring himself, really, into his disciples and now he has come to an end of his teaching and he begins to pray, and we are reading the first part of that prayer in John 17 today.

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."

I wonder if you have canceled that catalog that sells you things that you think nobody in the world needs these things? I rather love those catalogs. There are one or two of them and I think one of the companies has stopped sending it to me because they discovered I made so much fun of it. The initials are WD and it's full of those things that you think surely nobody, surely nobody needs this. You know, a kind of huge sombrero hat with a hole there so that you can cut your child's hair without the hair getting in the eyes. Then of course, in order to use that, you've got to buy the hair clippers that they sell that no ordinary mortal could ever possibly use. And they sell all kinds of neat things, enormous scissors so that people who can't bend can cut their nails. And my suspicion is that my family wrote in and said, "Please stop sending this catalog to this house because we have a neurotic person in the house who insists on going through every single item and making fun of it."

That being said, there is one item that almost always appears in these catalogs but I thought I'd love to have that but I'm not sure, 1, that I should get it; and 2, I'm not sure if

it really works. So if you've got it, perhaps you can tell me very quietly sometime later on. It's those listening devices, you know, that enables you to hear a conversation at another table that's 30 feet away perfectly clearly. And I sometimes think, you know, that could come in very useful sometimes. But, you know, we are all decent citizens here, most of us, I think aren't we, and we think that would be breaking basic rules of etiquette. You don't try deliberately to listen into a conversation that somebody you don't know very well is having with perhaps somebody who is really quite intimate to them, having a very intimate conversation, and sometimes I feel the same way about John 17. It is, in fact, one of the two most intimate conversations that are recorded anywhere in the Scriptures. It's the conversation that Jesus has with his heavenly Father and although there are many times in the New Testament where we are told that Jesus prayed, I think perhaps there are 20 different occasions in the Gospels when we are told that Jesus prayed, there is no occasion in the Gospel where we've got such a detailed account of the praying of our Lord Jesus, more than two dozen verses in John 17. And as we begin, we are going to be talking about this prayer for three weeks as we begin to think about that there is something about me that says, you know, are we really clean enough to listen to this? Is it appropriate that I should hear this conversation? And of course, the answer to that is a resounding yes. The Lord Jesus means us to overhear this conversation.

The disciples in the Upper Room, they overheard the conversation. Jesus, we are told, lifted up his eyes to heaven and he began to pray out loud. Now, it was somewhat more characteristic in those ancient days for people to do things out loud like this, perhaps more characteristic than is true today, but there is no doubt there is a very special reason that Jesus allows his disciples and now allows us, to listen in to this most intimate conversation. And it is intimate, isn't it? I mean, you get the sense that this prayer is really way beyond any prayer you or I have ever heard. It's actually unlike any prayer that any of us could pray. None of us in our right mind could pray, "Father, glorify me with the glory that I had with you before the world was made." And you catch a sense that now almost at last in John's Gospel, Jesus is helping us to understand what John himself meant right at the beginning of the Gospel, in the first words of the Gospel when he said, "In the beginning was the Word," describing Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Now there are various ways in the Greek language you can say "with," but the way John says it in the opening verse of his Gospel is not that Jesus is, as it were, alongside the heavenly Father, but that Jesus is towards the heavenly Father. He is with the heavenly Father in the sense that the Father and the Lord Jesus are face-to-face with one another. Nothing hidden. Absolutely and fully open to one another.

And here we are given this amazing privilege of overhearing the kind of conversation that takes place between the heavenly Father and his Son who is ministering here upon the earth and it's a most exquisitely beautiful and also wonderfully instructive prayer, and the point of it all, of course, is this: that Jesus is wanting to draw his disciples in to fellowship with the heavenly Father and with himself. Indeed, one of the things that he prays in these verses is that we might "know God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent," and it's almost as though he is saying, because you remember how he has been giving his disciples a lot of teaching about how the Holy Spirit brings us into fellowship with the Lord Jesus, and how the Holy Spirit shows us the Father and the Father's love and care for us, and now

it's almost as though he is wanting them to overhear as though they were his children, he wants them to overhear what that fellowship is really like so that when they are drawn in, they can feel that they belong here.

I met a number of Christians over the years who have told me how deeply moved and impressed they were as youngsters when they just happened in perhaps to their parents' bedroom or to the lounge or to the den, and to their surprise and shock, their father and mother were sitting there praying for them, and they have never forgotten it. They didn't know. They knew that dad in their mum in a kind of general way were there to care for them and most of the time seemed to love them, but they never knew what went on behind closed doors and they get a glimpse into the care and the intimacy that has been expressed to them in the love that their father and mother have shown to them. I think it's a little like this. It's almost as though these children, and in so many ways they have behaved like children, they have squabbled with one another about who is getting the best place, we've all come into this room and you remember how this whole narrative began, none of them would wash any of the others' feet and Jesus got up to wash the feet and then he brings them into this amazing intimacy.

And essentially you'll notice that he says that two things are on his mind. That is how he begins, "Father," he says, "the hour has come," and if we had read through John's Gospel from the beginning, some of us have been doing that on Sunday mornings, we notice that right from the very beginning of the Gospel from chapter 2, there is a phrase that keeps on reappearing. Jesus says, "my hour has not yet come. The hour has not yet come. The hour has not yet come." But just recently, just in this week, he has begun to say, "the hour has now come. The hour has now come." And now he says to the heavenly Father, "the hour has come." This is the hour, this is the time for which he has come into the world, and in this prayer he is going to unburden his heart to the Father about what it is that he has come into the world to do, what this hour is all about.

And as I say, you'll notice he really prays about two very simple things. Number 1 is this: he prays that his heavenly Father will glorify his Son on earth. Look at verse 1, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son." Glorify your Son. And then look down at verse 5, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." So what he's praying for is that from this moment onwards until after his resurrection, he ascends to the right hand of the Father and, as it were, reenters the manifest glory of his heavenly Father's presence, that between this time and that time, he is praying, "Father, glorify your Son."

Now what does it mean to glorify? We sometimes use that in a wrong and a false sense, but glory in the Bible, as many of you will know, is a word that basically means weight. The word for glory and the word for weight, w-e-i-g-h-t, weight, heavy weight, that's exactly the same language in the Old Testament Scriptures because, of course, somebody's glory, somebody's eminence, somebody's worth in that ancient world tended to be measured by the weight of their possessions or metaphorically by the weight of their personality. You know, sometimes you can say about somebody, "He's a very substantial person," and you don't mean that he's obese, you mean that he could actually

be quite a small man or quite a small woman, but you mean there's a strength, there's a quality, there's a character there. When you say somebody's speech is weighty, you don't mean that they shout at you when they speak but there is a kind of weight in their words, there is a significance in your words. When they speak, remember the ad on television when who is it that whenever he speaks, everybody listens? Because there is a wisdom there, there is a weight there.

And this is the language that the Bible uses, the worthiness, the expression of the worthiness. Remember how the psalmist says that the heavens declare the glory of God. You look at the heavens, the stars, the moon, the sun, and you think, "My!" And the one who made these things is infinitely greater than these things. How marvelous and glorious must he be? Actually, the same language is used in the New Testament about marriage when we are told that the woman is the glory of the man in marriage. Now, what's that supposed to mean? That's supposed to mean something like this: when you see a woman, when you see a woman of character and quality and beauty and you notice that she is wearing a ring on her wedding finger, one of the things that you are supposed to think, the man who has won this maiden's hand must be something. She is his glory. That's why if you meet a beautiful woman with a great spirit of grace and you discover that her husband is dirty and scruffy and can't speak the Queen's English or anybody's English very well, and you think there is something strange here. This shouldn't be. And this is what Jesus is praying, he's saying, "Father, I'm asking you that you will show my glory. I'm asking you that by the working of your Spirit in people's minds and hearts, that they will be able to see my significance in my weight, they will be able to understand what I've come here to do because," he says, "you gave me authority to give them eternal life."

Now, that's something, isn't it? There is someone the Gospel tells us who has the authority to give you eternal life which means what? That when you see Jesus' glory, and this is how it always happens, it can differ from one individual to another as to what it is that they latch onto in Jesus, but if he's going to give you eternal life, somewhere or another you've got to see his glory; that is to say you've got to understand that Jesus is so great that Jesus has done something that enables him to offer to you eternal life. It's amazing and he's asking that the Father will glorify him in order that he may do exactly that and, indeed, that prayer was answered, wasn't it? That prayer was answered as his Father laid upon him, as Isaiah prophesied, laid upon him the iniquities of us all so that he would die our death that we might share his life. And Jesus' prayer to his Father, "glorify me," was actually answered even in the moments of shame when he was dying on the cross and then, of course, marvelously answered when the Father raised him up again and demonstrated his glory in him.

So although this prayer takes me at least far beyond where I feel I can stand on solid ground and say, "I know exactly what you're talking about here, Jesus," it does at the same time help me to understand the very basics of the Christian Gospel, and it helps me to understand the kind of experience that is involved in being a Christian. It involves, first of all, seeing that Jesus is great and glorious, and seeing that Jesus has done everything that needs to be done for me to have eternal life, and then for Jesus to give that eternal

life to me. And of course, throughout John's Gospel, as you know, eternal life is never pie in the sky when you die. In John's Gospel, eternal life begins here and now and Jesus is always saying to people, "You need to come to me to receive eternal life." I think one could put it this way, "If I don't begin to enjoy eternal life in this world, I'm not going to enjoy eternal life in that world either."

So Jesus is saying, "O Father, glorify your Son," but he's saying, "glorify your Son in order that I may give my dear children eternal life." But then he says something as he turns this around, he says, "and Father, glorify your Son in order that your Son will glorify you." That's in the very opening words, "Father, the hour is come," verse 1, "glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you." Now, how does the Son show the glory, the weightiness, the worthiness of his heavenly Father? Well, how would a son show the worthiness of his earthly father? What would make an earthly father, some of us were thinking about this on Sunday morning, what would make an earthly father say, "Oh, my son. I'm so proud of you." Would it be that the son had done something really easy like get up at 9 o'clock in the morning? "I'm so proud of you, son, that while everybody else was getting up at 6 o'clock, I'm thrilled that you got up at 9 o'clock." Now, there might be circumstances in which a father would be thrilled with that but they wouldn't be ordinary circumstances. No, we are most proud of our sons, we feel that they reflect glory on us when they do something that's outstanding and difficult, and that's what Jesus was praying by saying, "Father, glorify me in order that I may bring glory to you."

Now how does he do that? Well, he does that by the resolute way he goes to the cross in order to die for those whom the Father has given to him. Did you notice he uses that language? He says, "Father," verse 2, "I want to give eternal life to all whom you have given to me," and he is going to the cross, he is actually going to in a way that we can't begin to understand, on the cross he's going to experience a kind of godforsakenness that will make the words of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm come fully true in him. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Now you see what's happening in that moment on the cross when you understand that 24 hours before or less Jesus had prayed, "Father, glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you." They are completely different prayers. This is a prayer here of intimacy, "Father, glorify me," and that prayer is a prayer of Jesus when he is covered in the shame of our sin, when he is dying on the cross for our salvation, when he feels the godforsakenness that is really our just dessert, and he is doing it because he loves his Father and he wants to be able to say to his Father, "Father, for the sake of those that you have given to me, I am prepared to bear your wrath and judgment against their sin." And the Father, remember what he says in John 10, "At that moment, the Father loves his Son."

It's almost unimaginable, isn't it? We get, I think, some fathers and mothers get little tastes of this when their children go through deeply excruciating experiences or make great sacrifices, that the father or the mother feels that his or her heart is just being broken up watching what their child is going through, and yet at the same time they are just filled with a marvel of love and devotion to their child because the child is going through it with such perseverance and even with grace. And that's just a miniature. It's almost as

though God sometimes says to us in these difficult experiences, "I can sustain you because I've been through that myself and even more."

So on the cross, the Son glorifies the Father even when he feels that the face of God has been turned away from him, and in that moment, do you notice what he says in verse 4, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." Remember how he adds another word on the cross when he says, "The work you gave me to do, it is finished." It is finished. It's almost as though in the pain of the cross he is like some great athlete who has won the prize or a sportsman who has won the prize and his arms go up, "I've done it! I've done it! I've done it!" Because he had done everything that was necessary for his Father to forgive my sins. And I think in these moments when speaking for myself, I think I can hardly believe I'm hearing this; that this is what the Father and his Son in a way you think shouldn't the Son be saying to the Father, "O comfort me, Father, this is so hard for me." But what both the Father and the Son are thinking about in this moment is, if I can put it extremely personally, they are thinking about you and they are thinking about me, and the Son is saying to the Father, "Help me, Father, because I love them so much," and the Father is saying to the Son, "I will help you because we both love them so much."

And it's so marvelous, here is something to take us into the rest of the day, indeed, to take us into the rest of our lives, that those who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, we can go out this afternoon and think this: the Lord Jesus' prayer has been answered in me, my fellowship, says John in his first letter. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son.

So we've overheard something today, it's a conversation never to be forgotten.

*Heavenly Father, how we thank you for the way in which you have opened your own heart in this way to your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, and he has opened his heart to us. Lord, we know that sometimes you seem so distant from us, sometimes we wonder if you really care for us, and in those moments we pray that you will help us to remember that this conversation that took place just before the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ is a conversation that takes place daily in heaven for us. "Father, glorify me in his life or her life, that they may enjoy eternal life. O, my Son, I will glorify it." Help us to live in this, we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.*