

A Heart to Pray for Us (John 17:1-26)

Big Idea: What does Jesus talk about when he talks to the Father? He talks about his glory, our good, and the church.

I was on the top floor of Jimmy's Coffee on Gerard one day. I had the floor all to myself. It's one of those big communal tables, and I was glad to be able to spread out and work in privacy.

But then a couple of women came up the stairs. They saw me there. They must have decided it was okay, because they came in, sat down at the table, and proceeded to have the most intimate conversation right in front of me. I guess sometimes it's easier to say private things in front of a stranger rather than someone you know. I got to eavesdrop, with their knowledge, on a very private conversation, which is a very unusual and intimate thing to experience.

In a sense, that's what we get to do tonight. We're in a series looking at what Jesus said to his disciples right before he was killed. Tonight, that changes. In John 17, Jesus stops talking to his disciples, and he starts talking to God instead. And we get to eavesdrop. We get to see what Jesus prays about – including for us!

The Bible teaches that, from all eternity, God existed as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And that relationship is amazing. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

delight in each other. They adore, defer to, and rejoice in each other. At the center of the universe is love: the love between the Triune God. But up until this moment, we never got to eavesdrop on an extended conversation between two members of the Trinity. But here, Jesus lets us eavesdrop as he talks to his Father at this crucial moment.

This is not just a prayer. This is a prayer from God the Son to God the Father. In some ways, this prayer is a summation of Jesus' entire life and ministry. It's been called Jesus' high priestly prayer, because in this prayer Jesus prays us as our high priest.

Martin Luther, a prominent figure in church history, said of this prayer, "This is truly, beyond measure, a warm and hearty prayer. He opens the depths of His heart, both in reference to us and to His Father, and He pours them all out. It sounds so honest, so simple; it is so deep, so rich, so wide, no one can fathom it." The Scottish Reformer, John Knox, had this prayer read to him every day during his final sickness. In the closing moments of his life he said that these verses continued to be a great comfort and a source of strength for his conflict.

What's on Jesus' mind in this amazing prayer? So many things. We could spend months looking at this chapter. One preacher preached 45 sermons on this chapter.

But we can't do that. We only have about 20 minutes. What is important to Jesus? What are the priorities that shape his prayer at this key moment?

Jesus has three main priorities:

Jesus prays that his glory (17:1-8)

Read verses 1 and 2 with me:

Father, the hour has come; 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.

And then verses 5:

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

That's where Jesus begins. He's on the hour, the time when he would complete the mission God sent him to accomplish. His primary concern at this moment is that God would glorify him so that he could glorify the Father. Jesus wants to bring the Father glory, and to return to the Father's right hand to enjoy the communion that he had with the Father and the Spirit from eternity.

Jesus begins with the most important priority: the glory of God. This matters! The whole reason we were put on this earth is to glorify and enjoy God. In one sense, Jesus never gave up his glory. While he was on earth, he still retained all the fullness and attributes of God's character. There was never a moment when he stopped being God. While on earth he continued to hold the universe together. But his glory was hidden. We couldn't see it. Now, Jesus prays that he be restored to God's side, and his glory revealed again.

Why does this matter? Because we need Jesus to be glorified! It is very good news that Jesus has completed his task, and that he is now at God's right hand ruling in power. And it gives us hope too, because Jesus prays in verse 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."

One day we will see that glory, and it will be the most beautiful thing you've ever seen. You know when you see something amazing, and it brings deep satisfaction and joy to your soul? It will be like that, only better. Theologians call this the beatific vision. It's a sight that will make us happy forever. The theologian Jonathan Edwards said, "After they have had the pleasure of beholding the face of God millions of ages, it will not grow a dull story; the relish of this delight will be as exquisite as ever."

And that's where Jesus begins. He begins by praying for his glory and the Father's glory. And that's very good news for us as well, because it means that Jesus has completed the work that he was sent to do, and he's now enthroned right where he should be, and his glory is enough to satisfy our souls for eternity.

What does Jesus care about? Jesus cares about his glory. And it's not egotistical or narcissistic. It is not right for anyone else to seek his or her own glory, but it is right for God. John Piper [says](#):

God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is not the act of a needy ego, but an act of infinite giving. The reason God seeks our praise is not because he won't be fully God until he *gets* it, but that we won't be happy until we *give* it.

What is Jesus' first priority? It's his glory. His glory is not only right, but it's what we need.

Here's Jesus' second main request.

Jesus prays our good (17:9-19)

What else is on Jesus' mind? Jesus prays for his glory, but he prays for a second priority: our good. Jesus prays for all those who follow him, and he prays for specific things:

- He prays that we'll be **protected** – “keep them in your name” (17:11); “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (17:15). We face enemies. Ephesians 6:12 tells us, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” We need help. We will not be able to stand on our own. But Jesus prays for the Father to protect those who follow him. We are not alone. Jesus continues to intercede for us, that the Father protect all those who follow him against our enemies.
- He prays that we'll be **united** – “Keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one” (17:11). And he repeats this again later in this prayer. One of the reasons is he wants us to be one, Jesus says in verse 20, is “so that the world may believe that you

have sent me.” One thing I’ve seen this year is that it’s hard to stay united. It is so natural for people to find reasons to pull apart. The world will never be attracted to Jesus by Christians who fight each other. But when people who have no reason to get along are united by Jesus, the world just may take notice.

- He prays that we’ll be **joyful** – I love this. Look at verse 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.” In case you think that God’s agenda is to take away your joy, Jesus prays here for your joy – a joy that lasts even when life is hard. God’s agenda is to make you happy in him, to give you a happiness that can never be taken away.
- He prays that we’ll be **holy** – Verse 17 says, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” Sanctify means to be set apart, to be made holy. God intends to change us from the inside out, to transform us so that we become more and more like Jesus.

What’s on Jesus’ mind? What’s on his list of priorities? Number one is his own glory. But number two is you: your protection, your connection with other believers, your joy, your holiness. Jesus cares about all of that. It’s very much on his mind. In fact, right now he is praying for you.

We are very much on Jesus’ mind. We learn that Jesus is at God’s right hand praying for us right now. Hebrews 7:25 says that he always lives to make intercession for us.

Think about this: when your prayers are weak, Jesus is praying for you. He has your good, your joy, your holiness on his mind. He cares for you.

Jesus prays for his glory and our good. But he has one more priority on his mind:

Jesus prays for those who've yet to believe (17:20-26)

Jesus prays: "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word..." (17:20). He continues in verse 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."

You are an answer to this prayer. When Jesus prayed this, he was praying for you. But Jesus goes beyond praying only for us. Jesus' heart is for those who don't yet believe. He prays for all future disciples. He prays for the church as a whole – including the church still to come. John Stott says:

It is first and foremost a prayer that there may be a historical continuity between the church of the first century and the church of subsequent centuries; that the church's faith may not change but remain recognizably the same; that the church of every age may merit the title "apostolic" because it is loyal to the teaching of the apostles.

His desire is that the church be unified, that we see his glory, and that God's love would be in us.

What is important to Jesus? Jesus shows us by what he prays for. These are the things that are closest to Jesus' heart: his glory, our good, and the church.

I told you about that time I got to eavesdrop on a most intimate conversation at Jimmy's, because they let me overhear it. Tonight we've been able to eavesdrop on an even more intimate conversation between the Son and the Father. What does Jesus talk about when he talks to the Father? Amazingly, he talks about his glory, our good, and the church. These are precious to him, and they should be precious to us too.

Through his death, he offers life and forgiveness to anyone who trusts him. But that's not all. He invites us to join that eternal conversation that goes on between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – a conversation that now includes us. See his heart for you. Know that right now he's praying for his glory, for your good, and for his church.

Thank you, Father, that when we are prayerless, Jesus is praying for us. And thank you for showing us what Jesus talks about when he talks to you. May what's important to Jesus become important for us as well, in Jesus' name. Amen.