

John 17: Jesus' Prayer For The Church: Past, Present & Future

When was the last time you overheard a conversation or part of a conversation between other people?

Our Gospel reading for to-day is the longest recorded prayer of the Lord Jesus & it was probably prayed in the 'upper room' before the group moved to the Garden of Gethsemane. It appears that John over-heard Jesus praying and recorded the prayer.

Jesus was having his last significant conversation with His Father prior to being reunited with Him after His ascension to Heaven & he also knew that what he said would be overheard by the Disciples & be instructive & an encouragement to them as he went to the Cross. This prayer falls into three sections:

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

What sort of things do you pray for yourself? Here was the Lord Jesus praying for Himself, but not in a selfish way.

As Jesus addressed His Father, there's a note of intimacy, with God's glory, or reputation & honour being paramount. (verse 1)

In saying that 'he prayed for himself', there's no hint of self-interest. The Father's 'glory' is closely associated with the Son's 'glory', so Jesus prayed that the Father will glorify Him through his death & resurrection.

The authority the Father gave the Son included gifting Eternal Life to all whom God chose. (verse 2) Note the definition of Eternal Life: *Now this is Eternal Life, that they may know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* (verse 3) Eternal Life is knowing God!

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Jesus had brought glory to the Father in everything He did on earth, with His obedient life, teaching and miracles. (Verse 4)

Now the time was approaching for the Father to take His Son back into the radiance of His presence in Heaven, which He had before the world began. (Verse 5)

2. JESUS PRAYS FOR THE DISCIPLES. (6-19, 25-26)

The word "disciple" means 'learner'. It may refer to a much wider group, as in Acts 1:15 where there were 120 and 1 Corinthians 15:6 where there were 500; but at least it referred to the eleven.

The Disciples are described as *the ones you gave me from this world*. (verse 6) They no longer belonged to 'the world'. They'd grasped the truth that God was present in Jesus & had obeyed God's Word. (verses 6-8) They'd brought glory to Jesus (verse 10) despite having been hated by 'the world'. (Verse 14)

Jesus prayed for 5 things for the Disciples:

First, he prayed for protection from disunity, despair & abandonment of the Faith in the face of Jesus' death. (Verse 11)

Secondly, he prayed that they would be filled with joy at knowing God. (Verse 13)

Thirdly, he prayed for protection from the evil one. (Verse 15) Not removal from 'the world' but protection from the temptations the world brings. We see this in the Lord's Prayer: *deliver us from evil*, or the evil one.

Fourthly, he prayed for growth in faith & holiness through knowing & accepting God's truth. (Verses 17 and 19) They would need this as they obeyed Jesus' instruction & began to make Christ known, calling on people to repent & believe God's truth. (Verse 18)

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Fifthly, he prayed for an intimate friendship with God, Father and Son through the Spirit. (Verse 26)

3. JESUS PRAYS FOR THOSE YET TO BECOME CHRISTIANS.

(verses 20-24)

Verse 20 is astonishing. Facing the agony & humiliation of the Cross, Jesus not only prayed for those around Him whom He knew & loved. He also prayed for all who would *believe in me through their message*. (verse 20) That includes us! That includes all who have become Christians as a result of the teaching of the Apostles. For what did he pray for these 'future Christians'?

He prayed for three things:

- Unity. (verses 21-23) Such unity which would reflect the unity of the Godhead & make 'the world' sit up, take notice & believe!
- Abiding. (verse 21b) Such unity is only possible when people are 'in Christ'. Jesus didn't pray for unity at any price. It isn't possible to have unity with those who refuse to submit to the authority of the Bible.
- Heaven-bound. (verse 24) There we'll see & experience the glory of God in such a way that we'll be kept busy for Eternity.

CONCLUSION:

What a privilege for us to have this great prayer, reflecting Jesus' love for His Church & His concern for our perseverance in the true Faith.

May we know something of the unity, abiding, sacrificial love & Heaven focussed life for which He prayed, as we stand firm on the truth God has given us.

Might our personal lives & our Church life be so infectious that others in our community might come to know & love the Lord Jesus.

Here's a great point for prayer as we support one another in our church family this year.