



JESUS' DEITY REVEALED • JESUS' HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER •

JOHN 17:6-26 • 04/08/2018

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## MAIN POINT

Jesus prayed to the Father on our behalf so that we can have fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What thoughts come to mind when you hear someone say, “I’m praying for you,” or “I’ll keep you in my prayers”?**

**How does it feel when you realize someone is praying for you? What would you want someone to pray for on your behalf?**

We may be skeptical about others' prayers for us, or we may depend on those prayers often. Wherever we fall on that spectrum, we often forget that Jesus is interceding on our behalf right now. Today we will look at Jesus' prayer for His disciples in John 17. As His disciples, Christ prays for our unity with each other and with God.

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## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 17:6-11.

**Jesus said His disciples knew certain things about God because of Jesus. What are some things you know about God because of Jesus?**

Jesus had revealed the Father to the men the Father had given Him. No one can know God except as the Son reveals Him. Jesus is God in human flesh. Because He is, He reveals God's nature and purpose to redeem people through faith in Jesus.

**Jesus said He was praying for His followers. What would you want Jesus to pray for you? For our church?**

**What two things did Jesus specifically pray for His disciples?**

**What did Jesus mean when He prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one? Why do you think He prayed for unity?**

The world would reject the disciples as it had rejected Jesus. Thus He prayed that the Father would protect them by the power of God's name—His being or nature—and that they might be one as Jesus and the Father are one. Their unity would enhance their witness to the world.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 17:15-19.

**What are some specific things Jesus indicated in His prayer that He wanted for His followers?**

**What are ways you have experienced God's protection against the Evil One?**

**In what ways does Jesus' prayer encourage you as a Christ-follower?**

Jesus specifically prayed that believers would be protected from the Evil One and the influences of a godless world (vv. 15-16); believers would be sanctified by the truth (v. 17); believers would be sent into the world (v. 18).

**Why didn't Jesus pray that they would be taken from the world?**

Jesus did not pray that God would take the disciples out of the world. Jesus had said He soon would depart from the world but that the disciples would remain in it. He knew the same society that would crucify Him would reject and persecute His followers. Yet they could not accomplish His mission if they were removed from the world. Their faithful testimony about Jesus would be the only way lost people could hear about salvation through Him. Jesus' plan was not to take believers out of the world but to reach the world through them.

**How was Jesus' mission for His disciples described in verses 16-18?**

Jesus stressed the nature of the disciples' mission in the world. He was sending them into the world even as the Father had sent the Son into the world. Jesus was sending them as the Father's emissaries into an alien environment to witness about redemption in Christ. The disciples were to continue the same mission on which the Father had sent Jesus: to seek to persuade people to accept God's grace in Jesus.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 17:20-26.

**What is the central theme of Jesus' prayer in these verses?**

Jesus asked the Father that all future believers be one in the same way the Father was in the Son and the Son was in the Father. When Christian fellowships are divided today, people may wonder whether Jesus' prayer was practical or powerful. Can all Christians truly experience a unity that transcends differences? The church's failure to live up to Jesus' intention does not devalue His purpose or His ability to fulfill that purpose.

**What is the result of unity among believers? How can believers apply the truths from these verses as an individual? As a small group? As a church?**

Jesus' high priestly prayer shows His deep concern for unity among His followers. Unity is not sameness. Unity does not mean holding the same opinions, to agree on every matter. Unity among Christians means loving one another with Jesus' love, obeying His commands, and working together in His redemptive mission. Love for Jesus, faithfulness to Him, and a sense of needing one another to do His work will unite His people for maximum effort for Him.

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## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**In what ways does Jesus' prayer in John 17 change your view of prayer? How does it change your hope?**

**In what ways should our confidence be strengthened knowing that Jesus is praying for us?**

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## PRAY

Spend some time thanking God for Jesus' intercessory prayers on our behalf. Thank Him for the hope we have, even when we do not know what to pray. Ask God to align our prayers with those of Jesus, that we might be most concerned about His purposes for His kingdom and our lives.

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## COMMENTARY

### JOHN 17:6-26

17:6-7. Perhaps we can best approach the paragraph by asking two questions: What does Christ do for believers? And what should be our response? We start the answer to the first question with the word proclamation. The disciples heard about God and his plan from the Son. Most sons probably reflect their fathers, perhaps in facial features, height, hair color, personality, and sometimes even world view. Jesus specifically identified his task in the world as one of revelation to a select group of people chosen by the Father. Jesus referred to the incarnation here. God took human form to communicate with the world. The first act of the Son in drawing disciples unto himself in the vibrant relationship of new life was to tell them and show them what the Father is like. Believers are gifts from the Father to the Son. All people belong to the Father by creation, but those who trust in the Son and relate to him by faith become God's children by redemption.

17:8. By this time in the Gospel of John, we know that Jesus spoke only what his Father had told him. He can describe his own teaching ministry by saying, I gave them the words you gave me. Hardly a surprising close to a ministry that had always been described by Jesus as originating with the Father in heaven. In this verse the Lord also talked about edification. When Paul stayed three years with the Ephesians declaring God's truth, he followed the example of Jesus who did the same thing with these disciples (Acts 20:17-21). Here we encounter John's interesting contrast of the Greek terms for word and words. There must have been an obvious intent on John's part to distinguish between word and words with a special focus on the singular to emphasize the unity of the message.

17:9-10. The Lord also spoke of intercession. Verse 9 contains the curious phrase, I am not praying for the world. We should not infer here that the Lord never prayed for the world.

This particular prayer focuses on those believers you have given me and emphasizes again the reality of the Bible's teaching on election. The switch to the present tense is an important notification of the Lord's on-going ministry. One paraphrase of this verse says, "And all of them, since they are mine, belong to you; and you have given them back to me with everything else of yours, and so they are my glory!" What a stunning reality! Faltering, failing, sinning human beings represent the glory of the holy Son of God!

17:11. Jesus brought before the Father the fact that his people would be staying in the world after he left. The word world occurs eighteen times in this prayer. This is a strong testimony to the importance of the context of our lives and ministry. The address Holy Father is unique here in the New Testament. The NIV Study Bible says, "The name suggests both remoteness and nearness; God is both awe-inspiring and loving."

17:15-17. How is it possible to be "in the world" and yet not of the world? These verses answer that question. Whatever the biblical doctrine of separation might mean, it certainly does not mean isolation. In the early Middle Ages when the world began to corrupt the purity of the church, some saw monasticism as the only solution. It was apparent to them that one could maintain purity of life and a clear relationship to God only by hiding from the world behind ten-foot walls. Some believers even became lone hermits living in the hills until communal monasticism became more popular. One could never derive such a view from John 17. Jesus prayed not for removal from the world but for an awareness of its evils so they could be avoided. The danger is not the general presence of evil but the evil one. The New Testament indicates that the world is in the ultimate control of the prince of the power of the air who does battle against the living God by affecting the lives of his people. The antidote is sanctification.

17:18-19. From the very first days of Christianity, true believers have practiced separation by infiltration. The Father sent the Son into the world and now the Son was sending the believers into the world. Here the Lord introduced the word sanctify in different verb forms. In effect, he said, "Lead these disciples to an act of dedication as I have dedicated myself to your work. Then as they live their lives for you, Father, they will ultimately enjoy the fixed and final dedication you bestow upon them." In the midst of modern conveniences and sophisticated technology, the church finds it more and more difficult to live in the world without being of the world. We find it increasingly tricky to escape the snares of the evil one and the enchanting attractions of our own flesh and the world around us. Calvin once put it this way: "As the wantonness of our flesh ever itches to dare more than God commands, let us learn that our zeal will turn out badly whenever we dare to undertake anything beyond God's Word."

17:20-21. If we had any doubt that this prayer applies to believers today, it is erased by verse 20. The heart of this final paragraph of the chapter focuses on unity—the ultimate demonstration of God’s work through his people in the world. We learn here that body unity is patterned after divine unity. The absolute oneness of the Father and the Son will now be spiritually transferred to believers for a specific purpose—spiritual unity. The union of the church is not patterned after some earthly organization or any well-meaning intentions of humanity. God joins our spirits through the Holy Spirit because Jesus’ blood is “thicker than water” and thicker than human bonds. Perhaps there is no verse in all of Scripture which has been more frequently quoted to support ecclesiastical church union than John 17:21. However, the emphasis of the prayer centers in spiritual unity, not organizational unity. It must be understood in the light of John 10:30, “I and my Father are one.” If we are to understand the unity of the church, we must first understand unity between the Son and the Father.

17:22. Christian unity is facilitated by glory, first given to Christ and then in turn to the disciples. Glory in this context is not an absolute attribute of God but a relative possession that can be reassigned to believers. Some interpreters see heaven here, but there would be no point in such a futuristic view with respect to the mission statement of verse 23: “to let the world know that you sent me.” Peter wrote that the divine nature was already in us as a result of regeneration, so we already have a measure of the glory of Jesus himself.

17:23. We also learn in this passage that body unity is a witness to the world. Like a set of matched mixing bowls, we are the smaller one that fits into Christ who fits into the Father. Purpose? To let the world know that you sent me. Mixing bowls may provide too mundane a metaphor here, but Jesus’ teaching about the vine and the branches in chapter 15 is affirmed by this prayer of chapter 17. The unity of believers calls forth a recognition of God’s hand by observers in the world even while the church is on earth. Just a few hours before this prayer, Jesus told the disciples, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love fore one another” (13:35).

17:24. Furthermore, body unity will be complete only in heaven. If the disciples listened to this prayer (which I believe they did), they may have remembered Jesus’ teaching from chapter 14 as he promised them they would eventually arrive at the place where he was going. He wanted them to see him there. They had seen him scorned and hated on earth. Soon they would see him killed and buried. But they had never seen the splendor of heaven and his role as the Son of the Father. We see just a touch of humanity in this verse. Just as we invite our friends home to show them how hard we have worked to make it

attractive and comfortable, so Jesus looked forward to the time when all his people would be in his Father's house. What a reminder that our Lord was always a pilgrim and stranger on earth. Now he prayed for guests to visit his eternal home. Notice also that heaven is heaven because of the presence of the Savior, not because of any other physical or material accoutrements.

17:25-26. Again we find the contrast between the world and disciples we saw in verses 9,14,16. The words Righteous Father in reference to God appear only here in the New Testament. They appeal to the justice of God. The world will be excluded from final glory because it has rejected the only means of grace. But the disciples, and all believers, live life with a divine viewpoint because they have known the incarnate God. The exegesis of the Father that occupied Christ's ministry is both complete and continuous. Complete in the sense that the incarnation demonstrated what God was like to those who would listen. Continuous in that it will go on as long as the world lasts. The impact of the latter part of the verse suggests that the very person of Christ lives in us. Through that inseparable union, we are recipients of divine love. The church of Jesus Christ dare not let the pagan society preempt its keynote theme of love. The love of God in the Son and consequently in the church marks Christians and enables them to reflect and communicate God's love.

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## READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

John 18:19-40; John 19:1-16