

104. Jesus' prayer for Himself

December 17, 2017

I am sure you'd agree with me. In the morning, I might have a long list of things to do. By the grace of God, somehow I manage to get all the things done. At the end of the night, as I fall into bed, though I am exhausted, I have two special feelings – accomplishment and relief.

A little over 33 years after His arrival as a newborn baby in Bethlehem, there He stood in Jerusalem, saying, "It's a wrap." He had done everything the Father sent Him to do. His job was accomplished and He felt relieved.

As we've learned before, the Lord Jesus and His disciples were on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. I believe that Jesus was praying this prayer audibly for His disciples to hear and to be encouraged. You may think, "Wow, Jesus prayed a whole chapter long." Actually, it is not a long prayer at all. If you read this prayer in chapter 17 at normal reading speed, it takes less than 4 minutes. But it's a fault of preachers and Bible teachers to drag this prayer into 3 Sunday teachings.

As we will study this morning, Jesus prayed to the Father in heaven for three things: Himself in v1-5, His disciples in v6-19, and the whole church including all of us in this sanctuary in v20-26.

Let's hear what the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father in heaven.

A. GLORIFY YOUR SON

*John 17:1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said:
"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,*

The Bible is filled with many great prayers. We are impressed with Abraham's prayer in Genesis 18, Moses' prayer in Exodus 32, king David's prayers in 1 Chronicles 17 and 29, his son Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8, and Mary, Jesus' mama's prayer in Luke 1. But this prayer of Jesus is by far the greatest recorded in the Bible in my opinion as well as other Bible students.

Why should this prayer be considered the greatest prayer of Jesus? Don't we have any other prayers by Him in the Gospels? Of course, we do. But this prayer shows us so much more of Jesus. Someone who is very wise said, "A person's innermost being is revealed by genuine prayer." This is a unique opportunity to see the nature and heart of Jesus.

When we hear someone say, "Let's pray," the most of us would bow our head and close our eyes. But we see that Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven. This shows us that we should never confuse the non-essential things of prayer, such as locations or postures of our prayer mode, with the essential aspects of prayer.

The essential aspects of our prayers are the One who hear our prayers – our God, not the people around us, our sincere and humble hearts, and praying according to God's will.

Being a pastor, I am often asked to pray for some people for themselves or their loved ones. I am absolutely honored to do so. But I want all of you to know this one

thing clearly. I do not have any more special connection with the Lord than any of the born-again Christians around the world. God does not have a pet believer whom He favors over others. He hears all of our prayers equally and attentively.

How many times did Jesus already tell His disciples that the hour of glorification has not come? But now, the hour has come. The hour has come in which the Son of God would end humiliation by men. And most of all He would end the sacrificial system that was required for every single sin of every single human being in history once and for all through His own death as the perfect sacrifice.

It was the hour for fulfilling all prophecies regarding the Messiah; It was the hour of triumph over sin, death, and the prince of this world satan; It was the hour of dismissing the old and ushering in the new; It was the hour when the sun refused to shine for three hours; It was the hour when the earth rocked and shook and the graves gave up their dead. It was the hour of glory for Jesus the Son of the Living God.

Someone might object, "Isn't Jesus selfish to pray for Himself?" No, I don't agree with that idea. A prayer for self is not, by any means, necessarily a selfish prayer. Additionally, this particular prayer shows how much our Lord Jesus laid aside His glory to save the wretched sinners like us.

We find the very important words – glorify and glory – five times in these verses. The Greek word for 'glorify' is "doxazo." Of course, it is a verb. Its noun is "doxa" where we get our English word "doxology."

From the human point of view, Calvary where Jesus died was a horrible display of man's sin; but from the divine point of view, the cross revealed and magnified the grace and glory of God. Yes, Jesus glorified the Father through His miracles throughout the Gospels as we see. But He brought the greatest glory to God the Father through His sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, and coronation back in heaven.

Through Jesus' atoning sacrifice, we get to have a glimpse of the love of God, the mercy of God, the power of God, the righteousness of God, the judgment of God, the wisdom of God, the knowledge of God and many more.

B. THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF ETERNAL LIFE

John 17:2-3 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

The Father has given His Son Jesus all the authority over all things according to the Book of Philippians:

Philippians 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth

What is the "eternal life" Jesus was talking about? Is Jesus talking about spending our eternity somewhere in heaven without having anything to do, bored out of our minds, floating endlessly with equally bored angels? To start to answer that question, we find an answer that surpasses our imagination in 1 Corinthians chapter 2:

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: " Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

According to the Book of Revelation chapter 4, the apostle John saw the Throne Room of Heaven that is beyond any human imagination. And the angels and the people who are in heaven worship the Lord forever and ever. I really doubt that we are going to see Saint Peter who is supposed to stand at the outside of the Pearly Gate with a clipboard in his hand.

If you want more astounding descriptions of heaven, go ahead to read chapter 21 and 22 of Revelation. They will blow your mind. As an artist, I can easily visualize my final pencil drawing before I even start to sketch on paper. Guess what? I cannot even grasp a tiny portion of the beauty of heaven and the New Jerusalem that the apostle John was describing in this Book of Revelation.

Eternal life in heaven is only found in an intimate knowledge of God, and revealed in Jesus Christ. It is not about knowing God in the sense of book knowledge about Jesus, rather knowing Him in the fullest sense, knowing Him as the Savior and Lord personally.

With that in mind, let me tell you a story:

Long ago a great actor in New York City gave a wonderful performance in a large theater, at the close of which there were rounds of applause. He was called back again and again. Finally someone called to him, "Would you recite for us the Twenty-third Psalm?"

"Why, yes. I know the Twenty-third Psalm, but under one condition. Here is my old friend who has been a pastor for a long time," pointing to an old man in the front row. The actor continued, "I would do it only if he also recited the Psalm after I finish." The elderly pastor came to the stage and stood next to the actor.

The actor recited it perfectly, with nothing left to be desired as far as a performance was concerned. When he was finished, again, there was thunderous applause. Then the actor turned to his pastor friend and motioned him to recite the Psalm. The elderly gentleman closed his eyes and started to recite this well-known Psalm:

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

When the old pastor finished, there was no applause, but there was not a dry eye in that theater. The actor came to the front of the stage. He, too, was wiping his eyes. And he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I know the words of the Twenty-third Psalm, but this godly man knows the Shepherd."

The Greek word for 'know' is "ginosko." It is not knowing Jesus haphazardly, rather intimately through believing in Him as our God who came to save unworthy sinners like us. The devil and his demons know Jesus as God without any doubt. Not just knowing about Him, but having a personal relationship with Him through faith in Him gives us eternal life in Jesus Christ.

C. PERFECT OBEDIENCE

John 17:4-5 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

In v4, we find the method of Jesus, how He glorified the Father in heaven – perfect and complete obedience to the Father. Jesus said, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.”

Even though the agony that Jesus is going to go through at the Garden of Gethsemane and the torture and the crucifixion on Golgotha were still in the future from this moment of prayers, in Jesus’ mind, it is already finished – the life of perfect obedience from birth to death and perfect righteousness.

By going to the cross willingly, Jesus showed us that there was nothing the love of God would not do for His own, to redeem them and bring them to glory.

So here in v5 Jesus is longing for the heavenly glory back, longing to go back to where He had come from. Sometimes we get a little glimpse into the glory of Jesus while He was on earth. Think back to the transfiguration of Mathew 17:

Matthew 17:1-3 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

We read that and exclaim, “Wow! That’s a miracle. How cool would that be to be there to see this miracle?” No, I don’t think it was a miracle that Jesus shined His glory then. I think it was a miracle that He didn’t shine all the time. But it just leaked out here.

Please go back to v5 and let’s read it again:

John 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Was Jesus asking for the glory that is something He didn’t possess before? Or Is He asking for more glory than He had before? No, He is not going back to any greater glory because He was full of glory as God before He came to earth. There are no degrees of being God. It is not like the Hindu religion which has many different levels of achievement of divinity in their religion.

To Jesus, the cross was the gateway to glory – glory for the Father who sent Him; glory for Himself; the glory for the sinners He came to redeem.

V5 could not come from Jesus if He were not God Himself, equal with the Father.

Isaiah 42:8 I am the Lord, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images.

Isaiah 48:11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; For how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.

According to these two verses, God DOES NOT share His glory with absolutely anyone. If the Father and the Son share their glory, there is only one answer for this – they must BOTH be GOD.

Question: Did the Father answer Jesus’ prayer? Oh, yes, He did. The first martyr, Stephen from Acts chapter 7 when he was about to be stoned:

Acts 7:54-56 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Stephen saw Jesus in His glorified state.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) The essential aspects of our prayer are the One who hear our prayers – our God, not the people around us, our sincere and humble hearts, and praying according to His will.

2) We need to imitate our Lord Jesus' complete obedience to the Father – without resistance, without complaint.