

## **Christ's Prayer for Us** - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **John 17:1-26** (#504)

**Introduction:** "I'm praying for you..." Aren't those hopeful words? When somebody you know and trust, when a friendly face, cares for you enough to go to the Lord on your behalf, isn't that encouraging? Praying for one another is likely more important than we will ever realize. And yet, aren't there times when we wonder at whether prayer really matters? Whether it is actually important?

This morning, in **John 17**, we will see two amazing truths: one of the last things Jesus does in this Gospel before His arrest is to pray for not only His disciples, but also for everyone that will come to faith through their witness. That means Jesus prays for you and me! Second – the obvious truth that needs to be stated – the One who prays for you and for me is God Himself. It is Jesus. He prays for us. Could there be a better mediator to call upon the Lord on our behalf? Amazing! Let's dive into **John 17** and see how Christ Himself prays for His followers. In our chapter this morning, I see four distinct parts to Christ's prayer. We'll read of His own work, how He prays for His disciples to be equipped for the mission, how Jesus prays that they would have help in the present, and – lastly – that Jesus prays for coming generations of Christians. Let's take them in order...

**17:1-5** *First: Christ's accomplished work.* Following His teaching to the disciples in **chapters 13-16**, Jesus prays. That, in itself, is instructive: remember, in the very next chapter Jesus will be arrested. I suspect that most of us would be tempted to think that we could use the short time remaining better than with being in prayer. But Jesus disagrees. When you or I think little of prayer, when we see other things as more important, we miss the priority that Christ Himself gives to it. We need to be corrected by Him here. That's not easy in our world that sees "doing something" as what's most important. But our call as Christians is to get our marching orders from Jesus – not from the always-busy culture around us. Prioritize prayer – especially when time is short.

So what does Jesus Himself pray about? Here, He prays to the Father in recognition that the "hour" has come. Said another way, this is the time that

Jesus has been referring to again and again. Make no mistake, He knows what is coming that very evening, and He is ready for it. Make sure that you see this crucial point: what Jesus desires most from this hour is that glory would be manifest – the Son’s glory from the Father and, in turn, that Christ’s works would glorify and bring honor and praise to the Father.

So don’t misunderstand: Christ’s arrest, persecution, death – these are all part of the plan. None of these are a symbol that the world or its ruler have won; no, quite the opposite. Rather, these are signs that God’s plan is being fulfilled. In what way? Jesus answers: the Son has been given authority to give something to those who trust Him: eternal life (**verse 2**).

Of this eternal life, we need to say two quick words. First, note who receives it: those whom the Father has given to the Son. Which is to say, God is the One who grants salvation. You and I don’t earn it – we can’t. In fact, nobody turns to the Lord in faith without God’s work in the first place. I realize some folks balk at that thought, but nobody should: if we are the rebels that the Scriptures say we are, then why would we think that we can somehow muster up the wisdom and effort to turn to the Lord of our own accord? No wonder the Scriptures say otherwise!

Second: what does eternal life look like? Jesus answers in **verse 3**: it is that all who follow Christ would know the Father. This, of course, makes perfect sense. Remember that Jesus has already said that to see Him is to see the Father. And so when we see Jesus, we know the Father. This work of salvation is not just for our benefit here and now, but for God’s glory in eternity. How so? Because the God whom we have offended is the very God who will save us.

Our first application, then, is simple but absolutely foundational: do you have this eternal life that Jesus is praying about? It can be yours if you would call upon Him as your Savior. To use the themes of the prayer: you give God glory by trusting in Jesus Christ – by acknowledging that you are a sinner who needs a Savior and that God has provided that very Savior in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. If you

haven't ever done that, then take a moment even right now, and pray to Jesus, thanking Him for forgiveness and expressing your trust in Him...

**17:6-11** Christ doesn't just call His people to a task, but *He equips them for it as well*. It is because of Jesus' work in teaching and living before the disciples that He can say "they have kept your word."

I want you to not miss something very important: a big part of being equipped to follow Jesus is to know who He is. Did you catch that in **verses 7 and 8**? What does Christ focus on? That He has come from the Father. The Father sent Jesus. Sometimes, I think that this is a fact we might know, but we don't think much about. Especially if you have been a Christian for a long time, you might think "so what? Why is Jesus focusing so much on this?" But remember: John wrote his Gospel so that everyone who reads "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name" (**20:31**). Note the focus on Jesus as God's Son. Jesus is not some other god. Instead, He *is* God. John has gone to great lengths to show that this is the case. We do not worship three Gods, nor do we worship one God who changes forms or identities to suit the situation. Instead, we worship one God who exists in three Persons.

Christ next prays not a general prayer for the whole world, but for the disciples specifically. What about? The fact that they will still be in this world even though Jesus will soon depart from it. Now, He's already spoken about how the disciples won't be left hanging – they will receive the Holy Spirit in a new and powerful way, after all. Yet, in a very real sense, Christ will not be present physically with His disciples until they have died and gone to heaven. In between, they need help. And so our Savior prays for His disciples in two ways: that they would remain in the Father and that they would have unity. The unity in view is perhaps not quite what you'd think: it isn't just unity with one another, between the disciples. Instead, it is unity first with Jesus. He prays that the disciples would have a certain unity with Himself even as Jesus and the Father enjoy a perfect unity. That unity with the Master is what gives the disciples – and Christians today – unity with one another.

So let's talk for a moment about application: you have been equipped and prayed for by the Lord. You have been called to unity with Christ – in fact, this is exactly what He has already been praying for. What does that unity look like? How should it look? I think we can answer in two ways, briefly: it should look like obeying, enjoying, and being formed by Christ's words foremost. That means that what Jesus says about life matters more than what our culture says, our traditions say, our news says. You want to know how to respond when you have been wronged? Go to the Word, rather than asking for opinions online. Not sure how to discern what is wise? Don't get something off the NYT bestseller list, instead open up your Bible. Unsure of how to respond to current cultural issues like abortion, caring for the poor, homosexuality, or immigration? Open the Scriptures before you start listening to what other people say.

Second: if you and I are looking to the Word – to Christ's teachings (and remember that He has upheld all of the Scriptures [**Luke 24:27**]) – then we should enjoy a certain level of unity that is greater than any two random people in the world might. What are you doing to build unity with other Christians? How are you praying for those you disagree with – and for your heart about it? How are you asking the Lord to change you? To form your attitudes and beliefs? How are you going out of your way to act in Christ-like ways to other Christians?

Christ's accomplished work, how He equips for the task; now: *His prayer for help in the present...*

**17:12-19** Note the first part of these verses: the disciples were specially and specifically guarded by Jesus. This tells us that they needed to be guarded – from error, from danger, no doubt from heresy as well. But there is more work that needs to be done, and this is what Jesus prays about. The disciples need to have joy. Said another way: part of what they need to be guarded from is cynicism, despair, and discouragement. No doubt a part of the reason for these words is the extreme stress that will come upon their faith at Christ's crucifixion. But I think it extends to their entire calling also: in hardship, during persecution, when life isn't

going well, the disciples will need to look to Christ if they are to have joy, and this is what He prays for. All the more so because of the hatred and oppression which the world will soon bring to them.

So how does Jesus pray that they would have this joy? He prays for their protection. He doesn't pray – note – that God would simply take believers out of this world. No, they have a God-given mission. Taking them out of the world would be contrary to the Lord's will. Instead, Jesus prays for protection from the evil one. He declares that they need to remember who they are: no longer of this world, because they are united with Jesus, not a culture or a nation. What is necessary, in short, is that the disciples be made holy and be set apart. And that's no less needed by you and I. In fact, I would argue it might be one of the most crucial – yet difficult – things that we are called to: being different from the culture around us. And to have that difference not be a matter of opinion or background, but instead that it would be our identity in Christ which marks us.

How does being called and protected by Jesus change you? We aren't the disciples, to be sure, though we'll see in a moment how Christ's prayer here applies even to you and I. How should it change you that your Lord and Savior prays for you to be set apart for what is true? In what ways are you trying to do that? In what ways are you going with the flow of the world around you, that you should be crying out for forgiveness on and for the backbone to stand against?

Of course, not only did Jesus pray for the disciples and the aid they needed right then; *He prayed for us as well*. That's right: for you and me specifically...

**17:20-26** Jesus here prays for everyone who will come to faith because of the work of the disciples. And He prays for the same kind of things as before: that we, too, would have unity with our Lord. Just as before, so it is here: Christ's point in praying for this unity isn't just for your and my own benefit; no, instead it is to be a display of God's glory: that the world would see people who, though imperfect, are striving in the Spirit to live genuinely holy, otherworldly lives. That is part of our witness, it's the part of the mission that we ourselves take up. Because just as

the disciples were called to preach and teach this Good News and – down through the ages – it has been transmitted in a way that God used to bring you to salvation; so that is our task also. The mission does not stop, must not stop, with you and I. Until Christ returns, each generation is to continue spreading and living this news. Talking about our Savior... “gossiping the Gospel,” as I have heard it put.

But that’s not all! No, in addition to God’s glory, we also benefit in a very specific way: just as the Father loves the Son, our unity with Jesus means that the Father loves us as well. And that love will be made clear for all to see not only in our witness in this life, but ultimately on the day when either Christ calls us home or when He Himself comes for us. On that day, we will be with Him.

So let us close with one further application: how have you shown your thankfulness to Jesus lately? How have you praised Him in your prayers? When you do your daily Bible reading? After a hard day? When your requests are answered? When they aren’t? And how have you passed on this Good News of God’s love to somebody else lately? If you haven’t, how are you praying for courage and an opportunity to do so?

But most importantly: even though there are real applications here that we dare not ignore, we also cannot miss the crucial part – rest in Jesus. You are loved. You are cared for. You are enabled. You are equipped. You are helped. You are prayed for. Our Lord provides everything we could possibly need to have joy in Him. That’s a truth worth holding fast to! Let’s pray...