

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.  
Executive Vice President & Provost  
Criswell College

Resurrection Postlude Part 3  
**Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in Gethsemane**  
John 17:1-26

**Introduction**

Only John's Gospel includes this wonderful prayer. Three of the Gospels, Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46, include the shorter version of the prayer in Gethsemane that records Jesus' agony of facing the cross and His prayer, "O My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will but as You will." There are really three great lessons in this chapter. This is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus, and it contains three sections: (1) Jesus' prayer for Himself, 17:1-5; (2) Jesus' prayer for His disciples, 17:6-19; and (3) Jesus' prayer for all future believers, 17:20-26. The character of this prayer suggests that the struggle over the "cup" in the prayer recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke had been resolved, so this prayer would have followed.

**Jesus' Prayer for Himself, 17:1-5**

This prayer focuses on Jesus' desire to complete His earthly ministry according to the will of the Father. He wanted to accomplish everything that God intended in the incarnation, which includes five things.

1. **Glorify Your Son, 17:1.** Jesus said, "Father the hour is come. . . ." This clearly refers to the offering of Himself on the cross once for all, for all humanity, for all time, for all who would believe on Him as Savior and Lord. Jesus did not ask for an easier assignment or an easy death, but only for the ability to face the hour victoriously as the Son of God. As He lifted up His eyes to heaven, His request was a simple one, "Glorify Your Son!" This was not a selfish request to go out in a sham blaze of glory that would show His enemies and the world what a terrible mistake they had made, nor a glorious exit like that of Elijah's dramatic departure in a blazing chariot of fire, 2 Kgs 2:11. Jesus wanted His death on the cross to be His finest hour, so it would be God's finest hour; therefore He added, ". . . that your Son also may glorify You."
2. **Glorify the Son's Gift, 17:2.** Verse two continues verse one by stating, "just as you have given Him [the Son] power over all flesh. . . ." This refers to Jesus' mission to die on behalf of all people. His death as a human being was to be the means ordained by God for Jesus to bring the gift of eternal life. Jesus prayed that this gift would be given to "as many as You have given Him." Read Paul's wonderful declaration in Romans 3:21-26, which is a wonderful commentary on John 17:2. God's purpose in Christ's death on the cross was to give eternal life to all who believe in Him, see Heb 9:28; 10:10-18.
3. **Jesus' Redemption Gift Defined, 17:3.** Here the gift of "eternal life" is defined by Jesus' death on the cross by which all people, ". . . may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Eternal life then is not a fitting reward given at the end of a meritorious life of good and godly behavior. No! It is a gift from God to undeserving sinners as an act of God's grace, Rom 3:23; 6:23; Eph 2:8-9. This was an

entirely new concept of truth, Jesus Christ died to save sinners. Paul works through this idea in Romans 5:1-21. Especially helpful is **Romans 5:15**, "But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many."

4. **Jesus' Mission Accomplished, 17:4.** On earth Jesus brought glory to the Father. He finished His assignment to pay the debt of sin for all those who believe on Him, see Rom 3:21-22. In His going to the cross, He "finished" the assignment that God gave Him and became the Savior of the world. It is worthy of note that Jesus never tried to glorify Himself, but was a meek and lowly servant who always sought to bring glory to the Father.
5. **Jesus' Earthly Ministry Completed, 17:5.** Jesus' request as He faced the cross was that He would be glorified and God would again restore the glory He had with the Father before the world existed. His earthly ministry completed, Jesus was ready to assume His role as our great High Priest where He would always be available to make intercession for us, Heb 7:25.

#### **Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples, 17:6-19**

This part of Jesus' prayer focused on His desire for the success of the disciples' mission. It is a prayer of both the blessing and commissioning of the disciples to carry forth His work after He was gone.

1. **Jesus Blessed the Disciples as a Love Gift, 17:6.** The disciples were the property of the Father, but He gave them to the Son. Jesus revealed to them the "name" of God, which is synonymous with His character, Exodus 34:5-7. Jesus said, "They have kept Your Word," which means they have kept the faith revealed in the living Word, Rom 10:8, 13, 17. It is encouraging to see that Jesus did not present them based on all their imperfections, but He presents them on the basis of their faith.
2. **Jesus Expressed Thanks that His Disciples Received the Word, 17:7-8.** This is important. If they were to remember with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it was important for them to hear His teaching so they would have something to remember. Because they received God's word, they believed He sent Jesus.
3. **Jesus Prayed His Disciples Would Glorify Him, 17:9-10.** Jesus prayed the disciples would glorify both Him and the Father. The disciples belonged to the Father and He gave them to the Son. This same thought was made by Paul in Romans 8:14-17, namely that the disciples, and all of us, are joint heirs of the things of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus said, "All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine and I am glorified in them.
4. **Jesus Prayed for Divine Protection for His Disciples, 17:11.** Jesus was about to leave the disciples in the world. He makes us one with Him and the Father. But it is more. Jesus prayed that they may be "kept" or protected by the power of God's name, and that they be united as He and the Father are united as One. It is not just a term of agreement but also oneness of Spirit.
5. **Jesus Prayed for Their Security, 17:12.** He makes us secure in His keeping. This is good news! Jesus not only is able to save us, He is able to keep us saved. He protected

all the true disciples. Judas was the exception. The rest Jesus kept by the power of God's name, see 17:6, 26. Our salvation would be poor indeed if it were dependent on our own ability to keep us saved, see John 10:29; Rom 8:35-39; Heb 7:25.

6. **Jesus Prayed for Their Joy, 17:13-14.** Having received the elements of unity and security, the disciples should count it all joy to be endowed with the assignment to spread the Gospel to a waiting world. This is a daunting task because the world does not want to hear the Gospel, but rather wants to create its own god and its own terms for appeasing that god.
7. **Jesus Prayed for Their Protection from Satan's Devices, 17:15-16.** Jesus prayed for their spiritual protection from the evil one. This is a reference to the adversary of all the human family, Satan. This verse is similar to 1 John 5:18, which also says that those born of God are kept by the power of God. Satan was the adversary of God in the Garden of Eden, Gen 3:1-5, he was the adversary of mankind in Job 1:8-12; 22-10.
8. **Jesus Prayed for Their Sanctification, 17:17, 19.** The sanctification of the disciples, as all believers, comes from the Word of God. The Word of truth builds up, protects us from error, and washes us, Eph 5:26. It is living, powerful, and a discerner of our needs and desires, see Heb 4:12.
9. **Jesus Prayed for God to Bless Their Mission, 17:18.** Jesus is both the sender and the One who was sent. This means that Jesus had set the example, and He prayed that the disciples would follow it. This also means that both the Father and the Son doubly commissioned the disciples to go into the world with the truth.

#### **Jesus' Prayer for All Believers, 17:20-26**

While Jesus' prayer for the disciples presents challenges and blessings that apply to all who would believe, in this third section of the prayer, Jesus prays for everyone who would believe. In this sense Jesus prayed for you and me.

1. **Jesus Prayed for the Unity of All Future Believers, 17:20-21.** It is remarkable that Jesus turns His attention to pray for all future believers. He prayed for those who would have faith in Him and that God would use "their word," which is a reference to the Gospels. Jesus also prays for unity among all future believers. It is a spiritual oneness that is an extension of what He prayed for the disciples in 17:11. Jesus was not praying for a single denomination to emerge or that multiple denominations that might develop should merge into one. He was praying for a spiritual unity among believers in 17:21 in order "that the world may believe that You sent me." We can fellowship with those who hold the basic tenets of faith and the Gospel, even when we may disagree on some issues. Hershel Hobbs said, "Admitting our diversity we can express a unity in diversity" that will let all people know we are Jesus' disciples, see Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of John*, pp. 243-244. We tend to try to arrange unity and often forget that we have unity, and we are to "keep" it, see Eph 4:1-6.
2. **Jesus Prayed that Believers Share His Glory, 17:22.** It was God's choice to share His glory with us by sending His Son that we may be one with Him and share His glory. God's glory like His name, is His character, honor, majesty, power,

praiseworthiness, and appearance. Jesus shared His glory by His resurrection and guaranteed our resurrection and glory, 1 Cor 15:43. Even now He works in believers, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," Col 1:27. In the Old Testament Daniel refers to a manifestation of glory for believers in 12:3-4. Ultimately we will bear the image and glory of the Father and Son, Col 3:4; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Cor 15:35-49.

- 3. Jesus Prayed Believers Would Be One with the Father and Him, 17:22-23.** Jesus prayed that every believer would be one with Him and the Father. We share oneness with the divine nature of God and Jesus when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives, see 1 Cor 6:19-20; 2 Cor 6:14-18. This only is possible if we put on the mind of Christ, which also is the mind and will of the Father, Rom 12:2; Phil 2:5; Col 3:2; Heb 8:10. It is oneness that is celebrated in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:4-6).
- 4. Jesus Prayed for the Maturity of Believers, 17:23.** Jesus prayed that future believers be perfected, Greek τελειόω (*teleioo*), which means "mature" or "complete." *Teleioo* does not refer to sinless perfection. It describes something broken or incomplete that becomes what it was made to be. The growth process is sanctification; the goal is maturity, *teleioo*. It refers to the life transforming power of God at work in the life of a believer. This transforming power is seen by the world and demonstrates two things. First, it provides evidence "that they may know that You have sent Me." Second, it provides evidence that God loved them as He loved Jesus, 17:23b.
- 5. Jesus Prayed We Would Be With Him and the Father, 17:24.** Jesus prayed that all believers be with Him in heaven and see Him in His glory. The disciples only saw Him in His human form, except for the glimpse of glory given to Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration, Matt 17:1-13. This is an extension of the promise of Jesus in John 14:1-6; 1 John 3:2-3 and a wonderful guarantee that every believer will enter heaven.
- 6. Jesus Prayed We Would Know God through Him, 17:25.** Every believer is able to know that God sent faith in Jesus as his or her Savior. We see in this the justice of God by which the world is judged, because they do not know God, John 3:18. They lack faith in God and His Son, Jesus. Believers know God sent Jesus, who declared the Father's name, as an act of God's grace. By this grace we all are able to know God. The justice of God convicts the world of sin, but the grace of God provides forgiveness through our Lord Jesus Christ. As the gospel song puts it, "justice called and mercy answered."
- 7. Jesus Prayed We Would Be Loved by the Father Just as He Is, 17:26.** This is the third time Jesus refers to the name of God, see 17:6, 12. He revealed to us the name of the Father, and He brought the love of the Father to every believer. God's name is synonymous with His character. He is a God of love, justice, judgment, mercy, grace, holiness, sovereignty, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, righteousness, faithfulness, goodness, immutability, transcendence, and immanence, to name a few of His attributes revealed to us in His Son, our Lord Jesus, see the crucifixion Psalm, 22:22. Jesus said, "He who has seen me, has seen the Father," John 14:9. Just as God loved Jesus and was in Him, He loves all believers and is in them through Christ. This is the simple Gospel of God in Jesus expressed perfectly in John 3:16.