

John 17:1-5 The glory of Jesus Christ

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The Bible often talks about Jesus praying.
When he was doing his ministry,
he would often withdraw from people,
even from his disciples,
and spend time in prayer.
But there are only a few times
where the actual words Jesus prayed are recorded in the gospels.
And John chapter 17
is by far the most lengthy recording of Jesus' words in prayer.
In fact, it wouldn't be remiss to relabel this "The Lord's Prayer".
This is in fact, the prayer of the Lord Jesus.
The prayer that we call the Lord's Prayer
is actually not a prayer that Jesus prayed,
but a prayer that he gave to his disciples to pray,
when they asked him for instruction about how to pray.
So if you are interested in prayer,
there must be lots to learn from John 17.
So we will be spending the next three weeks
looking at this prayer of Jesus.
It's the last thing in John's gospel before Jesus' arrest and his trial.
So it's a fitting lead in to Easter.

17:1 "After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed:"
It's tempting to pass over these introductory words.
But let's stop and ask the question,
"Why did Jesus pray?"
You could say something facile like,
Jesus was a very religious person,
religious people pray,
so it's no surprise that Jesus prayed.
But Jesus was actually more than just a very religious person.
He was God the Son.

When he prays to his Father,
he's praying to one who he shares infinite majesty with.
Jesus is the equal of God the Father in power, in glory, in honour.
The eternal Son of God was there at the creation of the Universe.
It is something different to our prayers.
We come before one
who we aren't worthy to gather up the crumbs under his table,
to use the words of the prayer book.
We can only come before God
because Jesus has opened the way for us by his blood.
But Jesus is speaking with his Dad.

Why did Jesus pray?
You could say something theological like,
God is sovereign.
He is going to achieve all of his plans.
He has a plan to redeem the world
by the sacrifice of his son on the cross.
Jesus doesn't need to pray for that to happen.
It's going to happen anyway.
What is happening to Jesus is prophesied in Scripture.
God always makes the prophesies of Scripture take place.
It will happen whether Jesus prays or not.
Why did Jesus pray?

But you see when Jesus prays,
he's not a powerless human trying to bend the will of the Creator
to fit in with the desires of the human.
We might be like that.
We might treat prayer as an attempt to cajole God
into running the world the way we would like him to.
I'm not saying we should.
Just that sometimes we do.
But that's not Jesus' reason for praying.

Jesus prays to align his will with the will of the Father.
He wants his affections to be in tune with the Father's affections.
Rather than Jesus prayer
revealing a long list of things about his life
that he wishes were different,
instead his prayer is showing
that his heart beats in sync with the Father's heart.

And yet, Jesus does pray to the Father.
When Cherida gets home from work,
we chat about our days.
She tells me about school.
I tell her about whatever I've been doing that day.
There's a mutuality about it.
She wants to hear about my day,
I want to hear about hers.
But prayer, even Jesus' prayer is not like that.
Jesus prays to the Father,
but the Father does not pray to Jesus.
Even though Jesus is one with the Father,
he is the equal of the Father in power and glory,
yet he prays to the Father
and it doesn't happen the other way around.
Jesus' prayer is him getting his affections
in tune with the Father's affections.
It doesn't happen the other way around.
There is equality in the Trinity.
But there is also submission in the Trinity.
Jesus is in perfect submission to the will of his Father.
And his prayer is an expression of his submission
to the will of his Father.
Is it possible to be both equal and in submission at the same time?
Jesus shows that it is.

17:1 "After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed:"

After Jesus said what?

After he gave his disciples the teaching recorded in Ch14-16
some of which we looked at last week in the passage about the vine.

Jesus spoke to people about God.

Then Jesus spoke to God about people.

It gives us the shape of Christian ministry.

It would be no good me getting up to preach the Word to you
if I didn't pray for you as well.

We believe that God will be at work as we teach people about him.

But we also believe that God is at work in answer to our prayers.

So we teach and we pray.

Why did Jesus pray?

He prayed to align his heart with the Father's heart.

He prayed as a sign of his submission to the Father.

He prayed because he wanted the Father to be at work in his disciples.

Next. Jesus prays for himself.

In the passages we will look at next week,

and the one Rod Morris will look at with you the week after,

Jesus prays for his disciples and he prays for Christians generally.

But in today's passage he prays for himself.

What does Jesus pray for himself?

17:1 "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your son."

Jesus prays to be glorified.

Is it appropriate to pray to be glorified?

Well it depends on who you are.

If your name is Vladimir Putin

and you are expecting the Russian people to treat you like a rock star

because you are leading the nation to reclaim its ancient empire,

then the answer would be a resounding 'No'.

It would be highly inappropriate.

But if you are Jesus,

then being glorified,

as actually about removing the veil.

It's about allowing people to see what is true but currently hidden.
In verse 5 Jesus says,
"And now Father, glorify me in your presence
with the glory I had with you before the world began."
The glory that Jesus is praying for is glory that is rightfully his.
His glory was obscured when he came to earth.
And he's praying for what was obscured to be restored.
It's about us seeing Jesus for who he really is.
It's entirely appropriate that we see the truth about Jesus.
And that means Jesus being glorified.

And if you still have any lingering concerns
about Jesus praying for his own glorification,
like it lacks humility or something,
consider how he will be glorified.
"Father, the hour has come."
Which hour is he talking about?
We might think about being glorified
as a ceremony where you get presented with some trophy or award.
But that's not how Jesus will be glorified.
Jesus is talking about the cross.
That's the hour that has come.
It's time for him to go to the cross.
How will the glory that he had before the world began be restored?
It will be restored when he returns to heaven.
How does he return to heaven?
He returns by the way of the cross.
When Jesus prays 'glorify your Son',
he's praying that he might go to the cross.
Yes and then be resurrected and exalted to God's right hand.
But he has to go to the cross first,
and he 100% knows it.
And he's praying for it.

There's nothing wrong with praying to be glorified

if the glory is just revealing what is already there.

Here's a surprising consequence of that.

We can pray to be glorified.

I bet you never thought it was OK to pray to be glorified.

But we can pray,

"Father, you have made me a child of God.

Please glorify me, by making it evident to those around me,
that I am indeed a child of God."

We're not praying to be glorified

by boasting in the things people usually might boast in.

"Lord please let people recognise my sparkling wit
or my stunning good looks or something like that."

And neither do we pray,

"Lord please help people to see how hard I work for your kingdom
and honour me for serving you."

That's would be seeking glory for ourselves not the Lord Jesus.

But we can pray,

"Lord, unveil peoples' eyes,

that they might see that you have made me your child.

Let them see how gracious you have been to me,

not counting my faults against me

but accepting me as your child,

and working in me through your Spirit."

But be warned, that's a dangerous prayer to pray.

God may well choose to answer it

by making you follow the way of the cross.

People may recognise you as a child of God

because of the Christ like way you endure adversity.

So just as Jesus was glorified on the other side of the cross,

if you pray to be glorified,

you too may find glory in your suffering.

This is how the apostle Paul found himself glorified

when writing to the Corinthians.

1 Cor 12:9 "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly
about my weaknesses,

so that Christ's power may rest on me.
That is why for Christ's sake,
I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardship, in persecutions,
in difficulties.
For when I am weak,
then I am strong."

Jesus prayed to be glorified.
And he was by the way of the cross.
We too can pray to be glorified.
If we dare.

Jesus prayed to be glorified.
But he didn't stop there.
Jesus' glorification was not an end in itself.
Jesus prayed to be glorified so that the Father would be glorified.
17:1 "Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."

I said earlier
that Jesus prayed to align himself with the Father's affections.
He also worked to bring the Father glory.
His own glory was in order to bring the Father glory.

God the Father is invisible.
That makes it hard to see his glory.
We can see his glory reflected in what he has done.
The glory of creation points us to the Father's glory.
But we can't actually see the Father's glory itself.
At least not until we get to heaven.
Moses did catch a glimpse of God's glory.
God hid Moses in a cleft in a rock.
And Moses was able to peek out and catch a glimpse.
But that's the closest anyone has come to seeing God's glory.
I guess the other time is when Peter, James and John
saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain.

But here, Jesus is telling us
that he works to bring glory to the Father.
It's part of Jesus' willing submission to the Father.
The goal of his work was to bring the Father glory.

How did that happen?

In short, through the gospel.

The Father's glory is revealed in the gospel.

We see his love, his mercy and his kindness
when we see the people he has saved.

It's not unlike Dr Catherine Hamlin.

How do you see the glory of Dr Hamlin?

When you meet one of the women
whose lives she transformed with a fistula operation.

You meet one of those women,
and you say, "What a fantastic doctor!"

The results of her work reveals her glory.

That's a picture of the Father's glory.

His glory is revealed

when we see those people he has given the gift of eternal life to.

That's what Jesus says.

²For you granted him authority over all people
that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

³Now this is eternal life:

that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

⁴I have brought you glory on earth
by finishing the work you gave me to do."

Whenever you see the word 'for' in the Bible,
you should ask, "What's it there for?"

Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.

For you granted him authority ...

How does the Son glorify the Father?

By completing his saving work.

God the Father is glorified when people see his saved people.
People saved not from the debilitating effects of fistula,
but from the damning effects of sin.
People given not just a transformed earthly life
but eternal life.

God the Father is still invisible.
That much hasn't changed from Old Testament to New.
But we see his glory in the people he has given eternal life to.
The people who know him, the only true God
and Jesus Christ whom he sent.

People sometimes say to me,
I don't need to come to church,
I experience God in nature.
It's true we do hear the echoes of God's glory in his creation.
But you actually hear them more clearly
when you see his redeemed people.
Here's someone he gave eternal life to.
Here's someone else he gave eternal life to.
Look around.
This place is reverberating with God's glory.
The evidence of his love and mercy is all around you.
The gift of eternal life is here to be seen.

And if you look at me
and you think to yourself,
"That's not a particularly impressive specimen of eternal life.
Surely God could have done a better job than that."
No. No. No.
That's the point.
This poor specimen of eternal life
is evidence of boundless reach of God's mercy and love.
Why, his gospel is so glorious,
it could even save such a one as me.

OK it's time to summarise.

Three points.

1. Jesus prayed.

He prayed to align his heart with the Father's heart.

He prayed as a sign of his submission to the Father.

He prayed because he wanted the Father to be at work in his disciples.

2. Jesus prayed that he might be glorified.

And that's entirely appropriate because when Jesus is glorified, that's just revealing what is true about him that has been hidden.

And he is glorified by going the way of the cross.

We too can pray that we might be glorified.

But remember when you do that,

that God may well glorify you

in a similar way to how he glorified Jesus.

3. Jesus prayed that he might be glorified in order to glorify the Father.

We can't see God the Father,

But we do see the glory of his mercy and love

when we see the results of Jesus work.

The Father gave Jesus work to do,

to give eternal life to his people.

Jesus completed that work on the cross.

And now we see the Father's glory as we look around us.

1. Jesus prayed.

2. Jesus prayed that he might be glorified.

3. Jesus prayed that he might be glorified in order to glorify the Father.