The Lord's (High Priestly) Prayer – John 17

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I'm going to do something different this morning, two something's, and I hope you're open to it. First, instead of reading the text and *then* talking about it, I'm going to talk about it and then read it. The whole chapter. Because I want you grasp as much as possible, and feel the holiness of it.

The second thing I'm going to do, is start with an overview. Instead of walking through it verse by verse, I'm going to give you some general thoughts and an outline. With the hope that it will increase your understanding, and your awe, and your anticipation to soak it up.

So let's start with this.

John 17 is one of the most <u>significant</u> chapters in all the Bible

Right up there with Romans 8 and Genesis 1. The "beloved chapter" in the "beloved gospel." Where else do you get the *words* of Jesus, from the *heart* of Jesus, to the *Father* of Jesus? Especially this *many*.

It's a glimpse into the heart of our Savior. Words full of truth, passion, yearning, and insight. Which is why one author, over a 100 years ago, said we should prepare ourselves by "kneeling to worship at its threshold." (Moule, *The High Priestly Prayer*, 1908)

And a **commentary** written in the late 1800's said this:

> "No attempt to describe the prayer can give a just idea of its sublimity [its awe-inspiring greatness], its pathos [its passion to stir our emotions], its touching yet exalted character, its tone at once of tenderness and triumphant expectation." (W. Milligan and W. F. Moulton, *Commentary on St. John*, 1898, cited in Burge, *John*, NIVAC, 459)

I agree. And I hope that by the time we're done with it, you do too.

Second . . .

John 17 is the high priestly <u>prayer</u> of <u>Jesus</u> on our behalf

Hence, the title of this sermon. "The Lord's (High Priestly) Prayer." A wordplay on "The Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6. *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

But it would be more accurate to say that John *17* is The Lord's Prayer, and Matthew 6 his *model* for prayer. But that would be a losing battle, fighting centuries of tradition, and there's no need.

It would also be a losing battle to change the "high priestly" part. That John 17 is the high *priestly* prayer of Jesus. Like the editors of the ESV call it. A tradition that's over *four* centuries old.

So I combined the two in order to communicate both. That it's the *primary* prayer of Jesus in the Bible, and it's *priestly*. Priestly in the sense that he's interceding on our behalf, just like a high priest of old interceded for the ancient Israelites.

That's the second thing I want you to know about it.

The third, is that . . .

There are <u>three</u> main <u>sections</u>

Three main parts to his prayer. The first, from v1-5, is his prayer for himself.

1. Jesus prays for <u>himself</u> (v1-5)

Look at v1. And you'll want to keep your finger on the text because we're going to be jumping around a lot.

[1] When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you . . . And then, in v5, he reiterates it. *[5] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

Jesus prays for himself. Plain and simple. And if that seems a bit strange, come back next week.

The second section is from v6-19. Where . . .

2. Jesus prays for his <u>current</u> disciples (v6-19)

Those in front of him at the time, and those of us now. Because everything he says in these verses applies to those who believe now.

Like in v6 – *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.* Your word to believe and keep believing. The Disciples *then* did it, and we're doing it.

Same for v8c – *they have believed that you sent me.* Is that you? Do you believe God the Father sent his Son to die for your sins and rise for your life? Then this applies to you. He's praying for you. His *current* disciples. Not just those at the time, but those today. Because everything he says, fits. All 14 verses.

That leaves the third section from v20-26. Where . . .

3. Jesus prays for his <u>future</u> disciples (v20-26)

[20] "I do not ask for these only [his current disciples]*, but also for those who will believe in me through their word*. Future disciples who will believe as a result of the testimony of current disciples. The proclamation of the Gospel by *current* believers.

Praise God for that. He not only prayed for his current disciples, but looked ahead and prayed for those of you who haven't believed, as well. Haven't, but will.

And still does. The prayer remains. Living and active.

Three main sections to help you grasp it and understand it.

What's more . . .

There are <u>six</u> main <u>petitions</u>

Six main requests that Jesus makes. One for him and five for us.

The first, is a petition for his glory.

– Jesus' glory (v1)

We already saw it in v1 – *"Father . . . <u>glorify</u> your Son.* And v5 – *<u>glorify</u> me in your own presence.* It's a prayer for his glory. A petition for splendor and exaltation.

The second, is a petition for . . .

– Our preservation (v11)
Like in v11b. Where he prays – *Holy Father, keep them in your name.* It's a prayer that the Father would preserve us in our faith. Sustain us in our belief. Keep us connected to him and in fellowship with him. A petition for our preservation.

Third, is a prayer for . . .
– Our protection (v15)
V15 – *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.* Protect them. Shield them from the adverse influences of Satan and his demons. A petition for protection.

Fourth, is a prayer for . . .
– Our sanctification (v17)
Our holiness. Our righteousness. V17 – *Sanctify them in the truth*. About as straightforward as it gets. A prayer that God would set us apart for holiness and righteousness based on the truth of who he is, what he's done, and what he desires. A prayer that God would consecrate us for his exclusive use, more and more.

Fifth, is a petition for . . .
– Our unity (v21)
Like in v21 where he prays for future followers – *[21] "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you.* One in heart. One in mind. One in purpose and ministry. Direction and hope. It's a prayer for our unity.

And last, is a petition for . . .
– Our presence in heaven (v24)
Our presence with Jesus. V24 – *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me.* Where's Jesus? In heaven. So what's he asking? That the Father would receive *us* just like he received him. Not that it's ever in question, but that Jesus yearns for it. Yearns for us to be with him.

Six main petitions, five for us and one for him, across three main sections.

But that's not it.
There are seven main themes
Main themes. Themes he prays about several times in several ways.

The first is . . .
– Glory – Like he prays for in v1, 4, and 5. But it's also found in v10 – *All mine are yours, and yours are mine* [referring to his disciples]*, and I am glorified in them.* Exalted in them. It's a recurring theme.

Same for v22 – *The glory that you have given me I have given to them.* And v24 – *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me.* It's a petition, and it's a theme.

Second, is . . .
– Election – A theme we've seen before in the John's gospel. Not the *word* election, but the idea. Like in v2 where he prays – *"you have given him* [your Son; referring to himself] *authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."* The elect.

Because *no one can come to me* [he said in chapter 6] *unless it is granted him by the Father.* (65) Unless they're chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1. (4-5)

Same for v6 – *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world."* And v9b – *I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.* It's a main theme. Election.

Third is . . .
– Belief – Sometimes conveyed by the word "know," sometimes "received," and sometimes "believed." He uses them interchangeably.

Like in v7-8 – *[7] Now they know* [or believe] *that everything that you have given me is from you. [8] For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them* [another word for believed] *and have come to know in truth* [believe in truth] *that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.* It's a major theme.

Same for v20-21 that we looked at. *[20] "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one* [last part] *. . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

Then he switches back to "know" in v23b – *that the world may know that you sent me.* And v25b – *these know that you have sent me.* Or believe. It's a main theme.

Fourth, is . . .
– Protection – Like we saw in his petitions. And see in v12 – *I kept them in your name* [a *form* of protection]*, which you have given me. I have guarded them* [protected them]*, and not one of them has been lost* [more protection] *except the son of destruction.*

And v15 again – *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.* Protect them. It's a petition, and it's a theme.

Same for . . .
– Unity – The fifth main theme. Found first in v11 – *Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.* Unified.

Same for v21 as we saw earlier. Jesus prays – *that they may all be one.* And v22-23 – *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.* It's a petition, and it's a theme. Unity.

Sixth, is . . .
– Sanctification – Another overlap with his petition. V17-19 – *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. [18] As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. [19] And for their sake I consecrate myself* [I set myself apart for the Father's exclusive use]*, that they also may be sanctified in truth.* It's a petition, and it's a theme.

And last, is . . .
– Love – From v23b again. Unify them, he prays, *so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.* And v24b as well. Where he prays that his

disciples would *"see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

And finally, in v26 – *"I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

Seven main themes, and six main petitions, in three main sections. All for your understanding. And I would encourage you to read and re-read this prayer every day this week for even more understanding.

But I don't want this to be a purely mental exercise. Where you know a lot *about* the Lord's high priestly prayer, but you don't really hear it. You don't take it to heart.

Because . . .
It was meant to be heard and felt
Just like the Disciples first heard it. And no doubt felt its impact in their heart. How could it be otherwise? It's a prayer from God the Son to God the Father. A divine communiqué between two members of the Trinity. A revealing insight into the Godhead. A heart-felt interaction between God and God. And therefore a peak into the very heart of God.

It doesn't *get* any more significant. It doesn't get any more intimate. It doesn't get any more poignant. And I want you to hear it as such.

But instead of reading it as you follow along, let me encourage you to listen and *pray* along. With a reading from the Symphony of Scripture by Crossway publishers. Maybe even close your eyes, bow your head, and fold your hands. Because when you get right down to it, we're on holy ground with this prayer. About 4 ½ minutes.

Dramatic Reading (https://symphonyofscripture.com/gospel-of-john/ starting at 7:25)

John 17 – *[1] When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, [2] since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. [4] I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. [5] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

[6] "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. [7] Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. [8] For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. [9] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. [10] All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. [11] And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. [12] While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. [13] But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. [14] I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [15] I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. [16] They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [17] Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. [18] As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. [19] And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

[20] "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. [25] O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. [26] I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Summary
Amen. May it always be so.

And may we never read this the same again. May we *hear* it in our heart, and *feel* it in our heart, more and more. As Jesus *continues* to pray, from *his* heart.

Prayer – Father, open our ears more and more, and sensitize our hearts, to hear and feel all that you have for us in Christ. Our one foundation as a church, and our one foundation for oneness, in life. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

You Are Loved