

High Priestly Prayer

A while back I shared an opening on this idea of considering our Lord Jesus from a verse in Hebrews, and it was an opening that I used to draw us into worship. When we think about considering our Lord Jesus, whether it be for a sharing time or just in an opening, it brings us into worship. When you think about His holiness, His love for the Father, His sacrificial death on the cross or any manner of His character, we are drawn into worship no matter where we are. There can be no other response when we consider our wonderful Lord of worship in our hearts. So worship has flown from our hearts as we have met around this table.

The thing about an opening is that there is a limit to what you can share. You have a time constraint to where you really cannot develop a thought but so far. It can be a precious thought you have, but you need to really focus in pretty quickly on it because of the time limitation. You do not want to let that opening overpower your worship time by being long. So what I am saying is that more can be said for this time that I have now because I do not feel like I am under quite as much of a time constraint. And hopefully I will be able to share this word with you that will be a blessing this morning. So we are really looking to the Lord for that.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, how we thank You that we can be before You this morning. Lord, when we look at Your Word, we have no doubt in our hearts that they are truly life to us. Lord, where would we be without Your Word? It is so precious to us, and we just thank You for the privilege of having this time before You to look into Your Word, knowing that You will open Your heart to us. And Lord, I really do invite You to open Your heart to us this morning, that as we look at John 17, this mighty priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus, that You would show us much in there of what we need to see, and as a result of that, Lord we will have a greater and deeper more abiding love for You. That is our goal this morning; not just to teach or to have information, but we want to see You afresh. For we cannot go on without seeing You afresh each week. So Lord, thank You for this time this morning, and I do ask that You would help me to share these thoughts upon my heart that I would be clear and concise in that You would be understandable and entreatable. We want to see You above all else. So we commit this time to You this morning in Jesus' name. Amen.

A Man of Passionate Prayer

This morning I am going to be reconsidering our Lord Jesus. A few weeks ago we were just considering Him, but this morning we will be reconsidering Him. And it is going to be in light of Him being a Man of passionate prayer. You may have read the email I sent out a couple days ago just giving you a heads-up that we would be looking at John 17. That really is a very precious prayer of the Lord Jesus. It is twenty-six verses, and it is a little lengthy. So I am not going to be reading the whole prayer because it is too much to go through at one time. So as we go along we will be looking at some of the verses because I did not want to overwhelm you with the entire prayer right now.

As I mentioned, this prayer in John 17 is often referred to as Jesus' high priestly prayer. That is not something unexpected because in my Bible it has a title so you know what is coming. But I think that is an appropriate name for this prayer. And some have even called it, "The Lord's Prayer." It is like what is first introduced to us in Matthew 6 when we read of the Lord Jesus teaching His disciples how to pray the Lord's Prayer.

Many of you know I grew up in the Catholic Church, and one of the first things you had to learn in your catechism class was the Lord's Prayer. It was called, "The Our Father;" that was the title of the prayer. So you had to memorize that as one of the first things you did, and boy you better had memorized it.

When you look at what I am going to call, "The Our Father" as in Matthew 6, that truly captures what we ought to pray. It is a comprehensive prayer, and it is especially high-lighting our need for forgiveness. That is a big part of that prayer, and we all need forgiveness.

On the other hand, this prayer of our Lord Jesus found in John 17 is quite different. And the reason I say that is because this prayer can only be prayed and expressed by the Lord Jesus Himself. That prayer is so special, so powerful, so intense that only Jesus can do that. That is His prayer; that is truly the prayer of our Lord Jesus. It is personal, it is passionate, and it is the greatest intercessory prayer that we will ever hear the Lord utter, and I mean that. That is truly an intercessory prayer that only our Lord Jesus can pray for us; it is a wonderful prayer.

So regardless of what you call it, in a few minutes we will begin to take a closer look at this wonderful prayer. Incidentally, just as an aside, it happens to be the longest prayer that Jesus prays in the Bible.

So I do not intend to read all twenty-six verses at one time because that is overwhelming, but we will be exploring some of the verses as we go along. We will definitely take a closer look at some of the verses that I think are highlights of this prayer.

So actually this prayer of the Lord Jesus has been on my mind for a long time, and I am talking years, not just months or even weeks. I thought about this, but I never thought I would have an opportunity to speak about it. And like many of you I have read this prayer a number of times, primarily in the New International Version, which I have used over the years.

But there was something a little different this time. Once I read it in the J. N. Darby Version I was struck by one word that was not used in the other versions, especially in the NIV. But J. N. Darby uses one word that really jumped out at me that the other versions did not use, and it totally changed my outlook on this prayer. It was a game-changer for me, and I saw for the first time just how precious and powerful this prayer is that the Lord prayed. So I am excited to have this opportunity to share my thoughts on John 17, but I do not pretend to be an expert or even have the final say so on this word. However, I just want you to leave with a greater appreciation for this prayer just to understand how precious and powerful it is. I feel like I just do not have the words to express just how mighty this prayer is. But the Darby did help me, and we are going to try to explore that here.

First, I would like to lay somewhat of a foundation because it is always good to have a solid foundation. Just think back and reflect upon the time the Lord Jesus spent on His earthly ministry. How did He spend the majority of His time? We would all probably know the answer to that, and I suspect you would say, if I were to ask you, “in prayer.” That is what our Lord Jesus did; He was a Mighty Prayer Warrior. But He was always before the Father seeking His perfect will. For example, Jesus declares in John 8:28: “I do nothing on my own but speak only what the Father has taught me.”

No matter what the situation was before Jesus, He always consulted the Father. He never acted out of His own self. He was always so in tune with the Father before He did anything, and I think we all realize that. There was such a close communion and oneness between them, and we will see this over and over again in John 17. That is just the very nature of our Lord Jesus. But this notion of oneness, (remember this for it is important,) whenever Jesus performed miracles, what often proceeded the healing? It was prayer, and those prayers were mostly uttered audibly, and they were not only for the beneficiary of the miracle but for those who were gathered around the Lord, especially the disciples. It was for their benefit. So that is why He often prayed audibly, and there was a reason for that. They would know that He was the Christ, that He was the Messiah, the One sent from the Father. He was always with purpose when He prayed.

And there were many other instances where the Lord Jesus would disengage from His disciples in the crowds. He would just up and disappear, and they would be looking all around: “Where is the Lord? “Peter, have you seen Him?” “No, I have not seen Him; where is He?” He was nowhere to be found. That is what really confounded the disciples, how He would withdraw like that suddenly from them. But He would find a place of solitude away from the crowds, away from the people where He could spend that intimate quiet time with His Father. That would be just what the Lord would do, and then after He was spiritually recharged, He would reappear, and they would be back with Him.

What I am driving at by saying this is that we need to see that our Lord Jesus was truly a Man of prayer first and foremost. How important it is that we know that and thank God for that! Otherwise, where would we be today if that were not so? So that is kind of my introduction. I just want to emphasize the fact that our Lord Jesus first and foremost was a passionate Man of prayer, and we will see that as we look into John 17.

Before we get started into the text of John 17, I want to share an experience of long ago that will give you an educational aid or tool. Now most of you probably know that I like to share real life experiences to drive home a point. I do not share stories just to entertain; that is not the point. It is to show us a lesson and help us to understand something. So that is why I want to at least let you know that.

Recently, I was looking through some old obituaries of my high school in Williamsburg. My old high school was about a mile down Jamestown Road from Confusion Corner, Walsingham Academy. That was my high school. I came across this recent obituary of my tenth grade English teacher. I was not the least bit fond of English except for one thing; that was the bell that ended the class. I was a whole lot more fond of Math and Science than I was of English, but nevertheless I did like Mrs. Nancy Bounds, who was my old teacher, and I still remember her well after over

fifty years. But as a matter of fact, I would recall her opening the class each day with a prayer, and since we are talking about prayer this morning, I do not think I am straying too far off the ranch to mention this. The prayer went like this: “In the name of the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us, I offer this act which I am about to perform.” That was her prayer at the beginning of English class every day. Isn’t that cool? Of course that was back in the seventies for the sake of you younger brothers and sisters. We were actually allowed to pray whenever we wanted as much as we wanted. But that was a Catholic School, and that was the privilege we had then.

I do not remember much about English except recalling a concept that Mrs. Bounds pounded into our heads over and over. This concept was that when reading or writing anything, she used this idea of utilizing the five W’s, and maybe if there are any former English teachers in here you might know what I am talking about. It consisted of the who, what, when, where, and why of things. That is how she approached everything, whether you were writing or reading. She looked at it from that angle, and as soon as you figured that out, the better off the English went for you. But I never thought I would remember this tool much less be able to apply it fifty years later. And here is the point.

John 17 is actually divided into three distinct parts which we will be reading more closely as we go along, but before we do that, I want to take a high level bird’s eye’s snapshot of this prayer so that we will all be on the same page and set on the same footing as we begin to explore this beautiful prayer. So if you have not read these passages in quite a while I will just call it a refresher.

WHO—WHAT—WHEN—WHERE—WHY

So first comes the ‘who.’ It is the Lord Jesus audibly praying. Second comes the ‘what’. As I mentioned before, this passionate prayer of Jesus is often referred to as “His High Priestly Prayer”; first for Himself, then for His disciples, and finally for future believers who will come into the kingdom.

The third is the ‘when.’ This prayer is offered up to His Father soon after the Passover meal in the upper room.

Fourth comes the ‘where’. Some believe this prayer occurred while Jesus and His disciples were still in the upper room, but most think this prayer was uttered along the road to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The fifth comes the ‘why’. Clearly, this is by far the most important consideration, and we will be looking at this in greater depth, but a brief answer to the ‘why’ of this prayer is that the Lord Jesus is passionate about His relationship with the Father, His disciples, and all who would believe in Him as the Christ. And we fall into that category, praise the Lord. We are included in that.

So as we begin to take a closer look at this high priestly prayer, we find that it is divided into three important parts. Now it is not my intention to analyze this prayer verse by verse. That is more for a Bible study. There are plenty of commentaries out there that are very good that you can look at if you want to take more time to really look into it and meditate upon it because there

is a great deal to consider. But we do need to see the significance of these three parts, and how they build one upon the other.

Another way to describe this prayer is akin to the growth of a thunderstorm. I have always been interested in weather, so when I am on vacation down south on a hot humid day, and I see the billowing tropical clouds that you seldom experience in Virginia, I like to sit back and focus in on one of the little cumulous clouds. As you watch this little cumulous cloud, it begins to expand and grow vertically, and then it becomes what is known as a cumulonimbus cloud. And for all you weather people, you know that is a thunder storm, an expansive anvil head that you see high in the atmosphere. It is like this mighty prayer of the Lord Jesus as it grows in magnitude to a crescendo, just as the thunderstorm would, and it has an absolute precious ending which we will behold.

So it is important to realize this passionate prayer is uttered for the sake of the disciples to hear unlike the Lord's private prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Incidentally, I would like to use the Darby Version as I mentioned, and you will see why in a few minutes why it is so special to me. Remember that I said it really transformed my understanding of this prayer.

John 17:1-5: "These things Jesus spoke, and lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee; as thou hast given him authority over all flesh, that as to all that thou hast given to him, he should give them life eternal. And this is the eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it; and now glorify me, thou Father, along with thyself, with the glory which I had along with thee before the world was."

Notice the opening of this prayer is confined to the relationship just between the Lord Jesus and His Father. So we are in this little cumulous cloud phase of this prayer at the very beginning. Now Jesus speaks of the hour which is come. Now what does He mean by this? In John 12:23 He says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

And Jesus further states in verse 27: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But on account of this have I come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name."

But the disciples did not understand this; they were confused. When we read those accounts, we see that they are fearful that the Lord will be seized and taken away by the authorities. But now we see the hour has indeed come.

Indeed it is time for him now to be delivered up to sinful man. It is foremost upon his heart. It refers to His going to the cross. And why would He go to that cruel cross? It is because He could give eternal life to all that the Father had given Him including us. The Lord Jesus alone earned that authority, and this act of obedience of dying on the cross glorified God His Father. His Son has accomplished the work of redemption. And Jesus stresses to His Father in verse 4: "I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it."

So His purpose for taking on the form of man has now been fulfilled, and man no longer has to live separated from God because the Lord Jesus has overcome and defeated sin once and for

all. So it is finished! Oh, brothers and sisters, how those words should just explode in our hearts. How glorious those words are: “It is finished!”

So in the beginning of this prayer our Lord passionately desired His Father to glorify Him with the glory He had before the foundation of the world. Do you see the precious relationship that God and the Lord Jesus had in the beginning of this prayer? It is between them. It is so passionate, so intense, yet so precious. So this is part one of John 17.

The second part of this prayer, which is verses 6-19, deals specifically with the Lord’s disciples. Remember my storm analogy. The scope has expanded from only the Father and the Son, and now His prayer has grown into stage two of this thunder storm. It has now risen heavenward, and you begin to see the formation of the storm.

Verse 6: “I have manifested (made known) thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world.”

The disciples’ faith has now been strengthened, and verse 8 declares in part: “They have known truly that I came out from thee, and have believed that thou sentest me.”

They know with certainty that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is the Messiah. There is no question in their hearts; they know. Now they are not perfect, but they have believed in the One who is perfect. That is the essence of this. And that blesses the Lord’s heart more than anything else. Oh, how He treasures their faith. That is what He is looking for. He is looking for faith, and He sees it in His disciples, and He is just blessed by that to such a great extent.

I DEMAND!

Now because of this Jesus makes a startling statement beginning in verse 9: “I demand concerning them; I do not demand concerning the world, but concerning those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine.”

That is a powerful statement! We need to have a closer look at that word “demand” for a minute. This is my moment when we are going to have a little fireside chat before we move on. This is an inflection point in this prayer.

Let’s look at this word “demand” for a moment. If you recall I said that one word in Darby changed my perspective on John 17, and that is the word. Incidentally, I have only seen this word “demand” expressed in the Darby. I did check around in the other versions to find out if maybe that was used elsewhere and I did not know about it, but I could not find any other version that uses the word “demand.” All of the others in verse 9 say, “I pray.” So when I first saw this word “demand” used in the Darby, I cringed. I could not believe what I was seeing. It just seemed like such a strong word, and I thought, “Am I really seeing this right?” My mind went all over the place as I tried to apologize for Darby maybe misinterpreting it or seemingly had a disrespectful translation. I just could not come to terms with that word “demand.” It just did not seem right. How can this be? Who demands anything of God? So maybe it was not Darby’s fault after all; I do not know. Or could Darby’s actual translation be correct? Could it be that the Lord Jesus Himself actually did demand of the Father? I think so. I was struggling with this over and over again. I just could not come to terms with it. Or could it be that perhaps the Lord was so excited and

passionate and pleading that His words became more of a demand than a request. Maybe that was what was going on there. I was trying to rationalize this and come to terms with it.

So what is the answer? What type of question do we have before us here? At any rate I was arrested at this startling verse, and I could not find any other cases in the Bible where somebody demanded anything of God. It just did not seem to exist. Request? Yes, everywhere. Demand? No, I did not see anything. As I have thought about this over time I just came to accept it at face value, and as a matter of fact, it has grown on me to where I actually embrace this word “demand.” I believe it is extremely significant. So before we move on, let’s take a closer look at this word “demand” and the context in which it is used.

The essence of John 17 really hinges on this word “demand,” at least in my mind it does. So the best way to substantiate this is to look directly at the Greek word for “intense prayer.” I think that is the answer to the riddle here. I think that will bring resolution of why that word was used. And that Greek word for intense prayer is “Alteo.” And that is a mouthful as all Greek words are. But this word means number one to ask, request, require, petition, or demand. So there it is. So Darby has chosen to use this word “demand” rightly so because the Lord Jesus is not simply asking something calmly or casually of His Father. No, not at all; the Lord is intensely passionate in this prayer. This is no ordinary prayer. It is presented to God in power that can only reflect the radiance of the Lord Jesus. He alone can only pray this prayer in such power. So maybe you think I am making too big a deal over the word “demand”—and perhaps.

If you do not remember anything else this morning, that is okay, but do not forget this marvelous word and the power that it projects in this prayer. It is absolutely powerful!

What Does Jesus Demand of the Father?

For the rest of our time I am going to frequently use this word “demand.” That is the word that drew me to this prayer. So what is Jesus demanding of His Father? He is demanding what God already wants for His disciples as well as all believers. He is not asking for anything outside of His Father’s perfect will. In fact He is reinforcing and embracing God’s will for the disciples. Let me just simplify that as we go on. I have called these the righteous demands of Jesus.

- 1: That they be kept as one just as Jesus and His Father are One. (v. 11)
- 2: That they would have joy. (v. 13)
- 3: That they would be protected from evil. (v. 15)
- 4: That they would be sanctified, set apart as holy. (v. 18)
- 5: That they would not be of the world but rather sent into the world as Jesus was. (v. 14)

These are the five righteous demands that we see in this second part of the prayer. In other words, the Lord is only petitioning the Father for what we would describe as the ordinary essentials for living a Christian life. He is not demanding extraordinary, lofty or unachievable things that only a select few Christians could ever attain to. He is not saying that at all. He is so down to earth, approachable and entreatable. He is only praying the things that we would be expecting Him to pray for. Even though it is a powerful prayer, yet it is still simple enough that we

see what His heart is. And the things that He prayed for are those things that are essential for us to live, and nothing more. It is just the way it is presented to the Father that makes it so powerful, that He alone needs to be the One praying for us.

Why is He right to make these righteous demands? It is because Jesus is in such perfect harmony with His Father that God absolutely delights in these righteous demands being cast upon Him. God would have it no other way. He wants His Son to be so powerful in His beseeching to Him that it delights His heart. And as we saw in verses 1-5 they are so in tune with each other that they are One, and they glorify one another so that both share identical desires; there is no conflict there. They are so in tune with each other.

There is one last thing I would like to say about the Darby Translation before we move on. This is something for us to think about and ponder. Why do you think it is that only Darby uses the word “demand” rather than just simply the word “prayer” as all the versions seem to? I have been wondering about that quite a long time. And I thought, am I the only curious cat wondering about this? Why is this? In fact, I have never seen anything written or expressed or said about this.

Now I cannot prove this, and it is only my opinion going forward, but I believe Darby wanted us to see just how incredibly God and the Lord Jesus are for us. Let me state it this way that we can all agree on. I am borrowing what Jerry said from his message a few weeks ago. And that is this: Jesus and our Heavenly Father are “all in” for us. I believe we can understand and accept that, and I think that is the core of this, that is the reason. I believe when you realize that there could be no other further question, there cannot be any doubt that the Lord Jesus and the Father are “all in” for us in this prayer.

Romans 8:31 powerfully declares: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” It does not matter, if God is for us. What I am saying is that the word ‘prayer’ which is seen in the other versions, I think is simply wrong to express it that way because it is just too weak. I think it fails to convey the depth of feeling that has to be expressed. It is just too weak. This word “demand” fits the bill for what we are looking at. It should not be any other way.

I hope I have convinced you now why I have embraced that word “demand” that is used in John 17. I think it is totally appropriate, and when we can accept that, we see just how much power that projects.

Now lets have a closer look at the five demands. The Lord states that He will no longer remain in the world after His resurrection, but His disciples will remain. So Jesus demands of the Father that He would strengthen and keep them in the days ahead that they would endure and persevere together and grow into one just as He and His Father are one.

Verse 13 says, “And now I come to Thee. And these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in them.”

This word “joy” is mentioned here. The Lord Jesus is the very essence of joy. Hebrews 12:2 says in part, “Who in view of the joy lying before Him endured the cross.” Even in the face of death upon the cross, our Lord Jesus was full of joy because He saw the outcome that many sons

would be brought to glory. So it is the joy of the Lord which sustains us. Some day in heaven I have no doubt that we will hear the testimony of many saints that made it through because of the joy of the Lord that they held in their hearts. I think we can look forward to that.

Verse 15 says, "I do not demand that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them out of evil."

Now here the Lord makes another demand. The disciples remain in the world, and they will be needing God's protection from the evil one, having needed such covering. And the disciples in their infancy did not yet know the power of the cross, but in time they would. The victory of the cross over sin and death would soon be their actual experience.

Verse 17 says, "Sanctify them by the truth; thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

Sanctify simply means "set apart" or "made holy by truth." And as His disciples are sanctified they become more like the Master. The disciples are now ready to go forth into the world and spread the gospel.

The Zenith of this Mighty Prayer

It is time to pause and take a deep breath; we are coming upon the ending. Brothers and sisters, we have now arrived at what I call the zenith of this mighty prayer. What is His greatest desire that surpasses all other desires?

Verse 20: "And I do not demand for these only, but also for those who believe on me through their word."

Verse 24: "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

This final declaration of the Lord's high priestly prayer is the mature stage of that thunderstorm. That little cumulous cloud has now reached to the heavens displayed in mighty power indeed. The storm is now mature. The Lord has fully expressed His burden to the Father at this point. More cannot be said than what the Lord has already expressed. The Lord's burden has been discharged, and He need not make any further demands. Like I said, they have all been made. They are so inclusive, so comprehensive; He has covered it all. He has not missed a thing.

Now this is where we are included in Jesus' demand. And this is our ultimate position in Christ. It is the climax of our Lord's exhortation to His Father. How glorious it is that we be with Him. That is the desire of His heart.

What is His desire? That we would be one together with Himself and the Father for evermore beholding His glory. This speaks of what I believe is the consummation of the age, the very marriage feast of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:2-3: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the

heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God.”

Brothers and sisters, our dwelling place is to be with God and His Son. Can there be a higher more glorious calling? I think not.

I would like to conclude this morning with the very words of Martin Luther that penned so long ago. This is what he said speaking of John 17 prayer. “This is truly beyond measure a warm and hardy prayer. He opens the depths of his heart both in reference to us and to His Father, and He pours them all out. It sounds so honest, so simple. It is so deep, so rich, so wide no one can fathom it.”

Brothers and sisters, this is the Gospel of John chapter 17. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Let’s pray:

Our heavenly Father, we just want to come to You again this morning and thank You for opening Your word to us. Lord, these words are precious to us, and I pray that this morning we will just find a greater, deeper and more abiding love for You as we look at this mighty prayer that our Lord uttered for us to the very throne. Lord, how thankful we are that even today I believe You are still praying this prayer for us. Oh Lord, You are the great Intercessor, and how we thank You that in Your precious word that You have left this prayer for us to see, just to know how truly You love us, how passionate You are for us, and how You demanded the glorious desires of Your Father on our behalf. And we know that our Father is indeed delighted when You pray, when You express Your heart to Him. So Lord, bless the rest of our day this morning as we look to You. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.