

John 17 Jesus' Prayer for Us

If we pray, what do we pray for?

Around the world, poorer people, who make up the majority, pray for food to survive, for freedom from slavery and justice from oppression. Those of us who are better off tend instinctively to pray for good health and safety. We pray when we have a hospital appointment or when our children are in a foreign airport. All of these prayers are fine and good. Jesus prayed much and taught His followers to acknowledge God in everything and trust Him for whatever we need each day. 'Give us today our daily bread.'

When Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, what did He pray? John 17 records what is often called His 'High Priestly' prayer and we can all learn from it, whatever our circumstances.

The Lord knows in a short time He will be arrested and tomorrow crucified. He is not at all surprised, this has been part of the divine plan from all eternity. He is about to lay down His life to atone for the sins of the world, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

So just as a priest in the Temple dedicates himself before offering a sacrifice, Jesus prays, dedicating Himself as Priest to bring the grace of God to people and bring penitent people to God. He also dedicates Himself as the all-sufficient, pure and acceptable sacrifice made on our behalf. Justice is served, our debt paid, the basis for forgiveness and reconciliation provided. The work He came to do is complete. Tomorrow from the cross they'll hear Him say as He dies, 'It is finished!'

Jesus prays, and he prays for glory to God through all of this, His cross, His resurrection and ascension back to the Father's side, the day soon-to-come when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on His followers. God's glory, this is His first concern. For this He will offer up His life.

This is consistent with His previous teaching and example. He taught the disciples to pray, 'Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done,' before they should ask about their daily bread. We are to seek as first priority the Kingdom of God and everything righteous that pleases Him, and our generous Father in heaven Who already knows what we need will gladly supply everything else. Only let us be like our Master, living to glorify God before seeking our own comfort and pleasure.

Next Jesus prays for His disciples and for us, we who trust in Him through their witness recorded in the New Testament. What an amazing thought, that just hours before the most appalling suffering, Jesus was thinking about us! And He knows the trials and temptations we face, the Son of God became flesh and made His home among us for over thirty years. He knows these men, His disciples, knows how vulnerable they are. He knows us too. And with tender concern and deep understanding He prays for us. What does He pray?

Fundamentally Jesus prays that God would keep and protect us from evil while still in this world. We are constantly surrounded by every kind of corruption and sinful compromise. We are enticed and sometimes intimidated to just go along with the world's rebellious flow. Don't make a fuss, be inclusive, tolerate everything. It's easy to be seduced into a lifestyle that sounds positive and easy going, aspects of which are in fact deeply immoral and repulsive to our Maker!

To stand up and declare ourselves followers of Jesus and advocates of Biblical standards will expose us to opposition, ridicule and in many places harsh discrimination, even physical threat. It wouldn't be difficult to lose or abandon faith or give in to one many temptations.

Jesus prays God to keep us. In heaven there's no sin or danger, but for now in this world we need protected. God keep our hearts steadfast in Him. Even as we bear the name of His Christ, may His Spirit seal our souls as His, giving us the courage and wisdom we need!

Note Jesus also prays for our sanctification, that we should become holy like Him. He links this to the truth of God's Word.

We live in an age of information overload in which we are perpetually bombarded with data on every subject under the sun. Much of this is accurate and useful, but much is what we might these days call 'fake news', dangerously misleading. 'How can a young man keep his way pure?' asks the Psalmist, and answers, 'By living according to Your Word.' (Psalm 119 v 9)

The truth of Jesus in the Bible gives us godly insight on all topics and sets us free to live wholesomely, but only if we hold to it and practise it as His disciples. So Jesus prays we will have a love for reading God's Word and submit to be guided by it.

Jesus prays we will persevere in our faith until we see His face in heaven. To that end and in anticipation of that day, He prays that His followers would be united as one. That we might celebrate the fellowship of His Church, many nationalities and backgrounds but trusting in one Saviour, indwelt by the same

Holy Spirit. That we might be enabled and equipped with the fruits and gifts of the Spirit to practise love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control to God's glory. That our communities might be places of grace, forgiveness and encouragement. That our witness would be powerful and persuasive, that people would know we are disciples of Jesus by His quality of love that we share.

Some might think at the Last Supper Jesus has troubles enough of His own, yet we find Him praying for ours. Let us learn from Him and follow His leading, praying these things for ourselves and each other.

Commentator Matthew Henry summarises this chapter nicely when he writes,

'(Christ) pleaded with his holy Father, that he would keep (His disciples) by his power and for his glory, that they might be united in affection and labours, even according to the union of the Father and the Son. He did not pray that his disciples should be removed out of the world, that they might escape the rage of men, for they had a great work to do for the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind. But he prayed that the Father would keep them from the evil, from being corrupted by the world, the remains of sin in their hearts, and from the power and craft of Satan...

Christ does not pray that they might be rich and great in the world, but that they might be kept from sin, strengthened for their duty, and brought safe to heaven.'

Let us give thanks for our Saviour Lord Who ever lives and continues to pray for us at God's right hand!

Let's pray.