

John 17:1-19

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[0 : 00] Do be seated. And again, if you've got a Black Church Bible, turn to page 903, John chapter 17. John chapter 17. And we're going to spend the next three weeks in this prayer.

I'm preaching from just one chapter. It's in some ways easier to get into a chapter than it is to get into a whole book of the Bible. So three weeks in John 17. It's actually the Lord's Prayer. It's not the Lord's Prayer we often pray. Because the Lord Jesus could never have prayed what we often call the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus did not need to ask for the forgiveness of his sins, did he? But you and I do. That, in many ways, is the disciples' prayer, our Father in heaven. But this is the Lord's Prayer in John 17. And it's really holy ground. It's, in many ways, the kind of inner sanctum. John Knox, the father of Presbyterianism, the Scottish reformer in the 16th century, he said that the Lord used this passage to bring him to faith in the Lord Jesus.

[1 : 10] And apparently, when John Knox was in the last illness, the last few weeks of his life, he kept asking people who were visiting him, can you read to me John 17? He said that to his wife, read me that scripture where I first cast my anchor.

And what I want you to do over these next three weeks, as the church in IPC Ealing, is really to cast your anchor in John 17. If you look at verse 13, Jesus is speaking to his father there, but he's deliberately speaking so as to be overheard.

I'm coming to you, but I say these things while I'm still in the world, so that they may have, so that they may have, my joy fulfilled in themselves.

And so as we get into John 17, it almost feels like we're intruding, listening in on Jesus' prayer, but it's not an intrusion, because Jesus is inviting you and I to overheard, eavesdrop on this conversation, this private conversation between a son and his father.

It's overwhelming, really. We're not spectators. We find ourselves being drawn into it. I was in Paddington Station the other day, and I was standing in the middle of the concourse.

[2 : 35] It was very full. It was about eight o'clock in the morning, and the Bakerloo line was shut. And suddenly, a brass band started playing all around me. I didn't know what was going on. And I found myself, along with a couple of others, right in the middle of this brass band.

And I was drawn into the music. I didn't kind of join in, you know. But I wasn't just listening to it. I was part of it. I was there. And that's what we find with John 17.

As we hear it, suddenly we find ourselves drawn into it, into this most intimate relationship of the father and the son. The father says, I'm coming to you.

Father, he says, I'm coming to you, and I'm saying these things while I'm in the world, so that these people who hear my prayer may have joy. There's a sense in which we're not spectators, we're participating.

So there's three sections, and you can see them. Verses one to five, he prays for himself. And verses six to 19, he prays for his disciples. And in verse 20 to the end, he prays for those who are going to come to believe in him through the witness of the disciples.

[3 : 44] So it's the night before he's about to die. It's the night before the cross, and he is thinking about 21st century healing. Isn't that amazing? They're about to crucify him.

They're about to execute him by the most cruel form of punishment devised by man, and his thoughts are to the ends of the earth. And he is praying for them to believe in him through the testimony of his apostles.

You've got it on your lap. And that's what the Bible is. It is the testimony of the apostles. And there are people from all over the world who are coming to believe in the Lord Jesus today.

According to the stats, 56,000 people will become Christians in China alone today. Through the testimony of the disciples. All because of the prayer of Jesus.

And so this is something actually really profound. And we're going to look this morning at verses 1 to 5 where Jesus prays for himself. Doesn't that strike you a little bit strange, doesn't it?

[4 : 52] Don't you feel a little bit awkward about that? Or even embarrassed about that? We've been schooled, haven't we, not to put ourselves first? But Jesus does.

He prays for himself. I remember hearing about a young lady, I think she was middle-aged. She was in a church. She was desperate to get married. But she didn't want to pray for herself.

So she prayed, please send my mother-in-law a son-in-law. Please send my mother a son-in-law. I've ruined the joke there, haven't I? Please send my mother a son-in-law.

It's a rubbish joke, isn't it? But we can be a little bit embarrassed by that. And we can feel awkward, can't we, about praying for ourselves? But Jesus prays for himself.

What does he pray for? Look, that's even more embarrassing, doesn't it? Look at these verses.

Father, glorify your son. Verse 5. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

[5 : 57] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence there's only one request that Jesus is making for himself. It comes up five times in five verses. He prays for glory. Father, glorify me.

That's his prayer. That's the longing of his heart as he goes to the cross. Father, glorify me. That is a little bit embarrassing, isn't it? Is that the sort of prayer that anyone should pray?

Lord, puff me up so that everyone will see how important I am. We don't like leaders, do we, who puff themselves up.

Power and glory almost always goes to people's heads. And so what do you make of this prayer?

Father, glorify me. Has Jesus become some kind of megalomaniac?

This carpenter from Nazareth who spent 30 years fixing coffee tables and chairs. Father, glorify me. It sounds, doesn't it, so ego megalomaniac.

[7 : 03] So self-indulgent. What about if I was to pray this morning? What about if I just prayed, Father, glorify me. Glorify Paul Levy. Let's stop meeting in this building on Drayton Green.

We'll knock it down. We'll build a great cathedral and let's call it St. Paul's. And you'd think he's lost it, wouldn't you? That's what Jesus is praying.

He's praying that his name would be known throughout all the world. That the disciples, through their testimony, that their testimony would spread to every generation and every culture and people all around the world would find out about him until the end of time.

Father, glorify me. Glorify your son. Listen to these words from the French philosopher Rousseau. The person whose thinking led to the French Revolution.

Listen to what he said. He said, The person who can love me as I can love is still to be born. No one ever had more talent for loving. I was born to be the best friend that ever existed.

[8 : 12] Posterity will honor me. I rejoice in myself. My consolation lies in my esteem. He believed that every town in France should build a statue in honor to him.

It's obvious, isn't it? His mother never said no to him when he was a little boy. But we recoil, don't we, from such self-glorification. It doesn't seem right to us. Although we indulge in it ourselves from time to time, instinctively we know it's inappropriate for human beings.

And yet Jesus says, I want to be glorified, Father. Glorify me. How can Jesus get away with it, but you can't? Why is it a good thing for Jesus to be glorified and not me?

Well, I've got two points. Firstly, because of who he is. And secondly, because of what he's accomplished. How can Jesus get away with it? How is it good for Jesus to be glorified?

Well, first of all, because of who he is. And look at verse one. When Jesus spoke in these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and he said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your son.

[9 : 23] And then in verse five. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. Can you see what Jesus is saying there?

He's saying, I am no ordinary human being. The person speaking these words is the preexistent son of God. And that puts him into a completely different category, doesn't it?

Let me try and explain this. I was and I am useless at maths. Awful. If you know me, I'm innumerate, pretty much.

Imagine someone like me who is hopeless at maths and science and physics. Imagine at the end of this year, it is announced that Paul Levy will receive the Nobel Prize for physics.

It wouldn't glorify me, would it? It would humiliate me. Because at some point, it wouldn't take long for someone to realize that they've made a huge mistake.

[10:33] And I wouldn't be glorified by that, would I? I'd be mortified. Because you would be doing something to me outwardly that doesn't correspond to what I am like inwardly.

Inwardly, when it comes to physics and maths, I'm no help to the kids in the homework. It would be totally inappropriate for me to receive the Nobel Prize for physics.

But when Albert Einstein was given the Nobel Prize for physics, that's quite different, isn't it? That's totally appropriate. It's a public recognition and outward recognition of what he is inwardly.

He was a brilliant scientist. And so when Jesus prays, Father, glorify your son, he is saying, Lord, Father, show the world who I really am.

So if I pray, Father, glorify me, what I really mean is disguise who I really am.

[11:37] Because if you really knew who I was, if you really knew what I was like and what my heart is like, you wouldn't sit here listening to me this morning. You see, when we say, Father, glorify me, we are really praying, Lord, pull a veil over what I'm really like because I don't want what I'm really like on the inside to be put out there.

Disguise what I'm like. But when Jesus prays, Father, glorify your son, he's saying, Father, I want people to know outwardly and see who I really am.

Take away the veil. And that's what the transfiguration was, wasn't it? Do you remember? Jesus goes up on a mountain with Peter and James and John and God draws aside the curtains and they get a glimpse really of who Jesus is.

This carpenter from Nazareth, just for a moment, suddenly they see his dazzling glory. They see the reality of who he is. And there's a voice that booms from heaven and it says, this is my son with whom I'm well pleased.

And just for a moment, the father pulls aside the veil and glorifies his son. And what he saw was that glory that he had with the father before the world began and it just radiated out of him.

[13:06] Just for a moment, the glory shone through. And so what I'm saying is what is totally inappropriate for you and me is entirely appropriate for him because he is the pre-existent son of God.

And that means this, he is altogether different from us. You and I were created. The son of God is uncreated.

There was a program, I can't remember what the question was, but you had to kind of identify something. And the contestants on this show, they had to identify either an object or a person or a place, I think it was.

And the first question was, are you animal, vegetable, or mineral? Do you remember that? And so in asking that question, are you animal, vegetable, or mineral?

You're acknowledging there are different modes of existence. There are different levels of existence, different orders of being. And so if this afternoon I go and pick a bunch of flowers from our garden and I offer them to you, you wouldn't take that in the wrong way, would you?

[14:21] You wouldn't phone the police and accuse me of murder just because I picked up a bunch of flowers. Because picking flowers from a garden is perfectly acceptable, isn't it?

It's perfectly acceptable to pick flowers from a garden and decorate a room. You wouldn't say, how inappropriate is that? Of course not. It's what flowers are for.

It's why God created flowers for you to enjoy, to create joy and colour and life into our existence. So it's quite appropriate for you to decorate your home with flowers.

Or you've got a pet and you're training it to behave or you should be training it to behave. Let's say it's a sheep dog, isn't it? And the farmer trains the sheep dog.

Or a... It's not a blind dog, is it? A guide dog. And the dog has to be trained and go through kind of rigorous training.

[15:21] And so they're training for the sheep dog farmer, they're training for the guide dog and nobody goes to the trainer and says, that is so egotistical of you. How dare you do that?

You expect your dog to perform tricks? You expect your dog to work for you? To be a guard dog? To be a sheep dog? You're a megalomaniac, you are.

No one's going to say that. Why? Because, believe it or not, you are on a different level to your dog. And you and I are on a different level from flowers in the garden and pets in our home or the lunch on your table.

The distance, metaphysically speaking, between you and your dog or the flowers in your garden and you, it is measurable. It is appreciable.

There is an appreciable difference because we are all part of creation. But the difference between you and Jesus is off the scale. Altogether, he is the uncreated one.

[16:30] He is the pre-existence one. And so when he says, Father, glorify me with the glory I had before the world existed, remember who he is. Remember that in Hebrews it says about him, the sun is the radiance of God's glory, the exact expression of his nature.

And God's angels all worship him. Do you see? And if the angels worship him, so much do because there is nothing inappropriate about worshipping Jesus.

He is the pre-existent one and because he is the pre-existent one, Jesus does not exist for you. You exist for him. You and I, we long to be glorified.

We've got a craving for the limelight. We've got a need for recognition and admiration. That's part of what it is being a human being. But Jesus has no such need.

Jesus does not need you to worship him. When he prays this prayer, Father, glorify your son, it's not because he's kind of got something psychologically wrong with him.

[17:40] He's got some need in him. He's got a craving for recognition that needs to be met. No, this is not what it's about. A.W. Tozer wrote a little book.

And he said this in this little book. He said, the reason that God made man in his image was that he might appreciate God and admire and adore and worship him.

So that God may not be a picture, so to speak, hanging in a gallery with no one to admire him. I think that's a brilliant way of putting it. So that he may not be a picture in a gallery with no one to admire him.

Do you see what he's saying? So think of those great pieces of art that are not on display. They're hidden away in some vault. They're no lesser works of art, are they? For not being displayed. But it's such a shame. It's a shame for a glorious work of art to be hidden from the public. Gathering dust in the vaults. Why shouldn't it be on display?

[18:45] Such a work of art ought to be on display. I've told you about it before. We've got this thing in our house. There's Aunt Layla's china. One of Claire's aunts.

And it comes out once a year on Christmas Day. What's the point in having a dinner service taking up room in the house that never sees the light of day apart from once on a Christmas Day?

I said to me, well, if you had kids like ours, you wouldn't use it every day. It's too precious, isn't it, to get broken. I want to say, well, better to break the thing and use it than sit in the cupboard.

Beautiful things are meant to be used. And so this is the point that A.W. Chose is making. He's saying, God doesn't need us. He doesn't need you to come here on a Sunday and worship him. Don't think that. He wants you to. He calls you to, but he doesn't need you to. There's nothing psychologically wrong with God. He's not got a craving for recognition.

[19:45] He is just simply the glorious one who ought to be worshipped and ought to be enjoyed. And that's the reason why you were made. The reason why you are, you exist, is because God created you to glorify and enjoy him.

And so this prayer of Jesus is not out of place at all. It's not egotistical. Jesus is the pre-existent son of God and he deserves our worship. I wrote a chapter in a book once about Jeff Thomas, Barbara's husband who was a minister for 50 years in Aberystwyth.

I was reading it again this week. Something like reading your own articles, is there? And one of the students that I interviewed in that article said that Jeff Thomas in his ministry, in the way that he spoke Sunday by Sunday, he always preached the Lord Jesus.

And he said he could remember a particular sermon one week when Jeff said, on one occasion, I remember him saying, I was talking on the door to a Jehovah Witness this week and at one point the JW said something about Jesus.

Caused the man on my door to reply, oh but we mustn't put him on a pedestal, must we? Oh but we must. We must. We must put Jesus on a pedestal.

[21:03] He's different. Father, glorify your son. So first of all, as Jesus prays this prayer, it is because of who he is. But you notice secondly, and the thing that really comes out strongly, is because of what he's accomplished.

Look at verses 4 and 5. Verse 4 says, I glorified you on earth, that's what I've done, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. So Jesus was a man who lived according to God's

will.

And now Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you. Before the world existed. He speaks about completing the work that the Father had given him to do. Look at verse 1. He says, Father, the hour has come. Literally, the hour has arrived. The time is now. It's one of the big themes of John's Gospel. It's something that runs right the way through. So in John 2, Jesus goes to a wedding where the wine has run out.

And what does Jesus say to his mother when his mother comes and says, can you sort this out? Jesus says, my hour has not yet come. I'm at a wedding, but it's not my wedding.

[22 : 08] The time has not yet come for him to go to the cross and shed his blood for his bride. In chapter 2 and verse 4, he says, my time has not yet come. Chapter 7, verse 30. When the temple police come to arrest him and they can't and they have to go back with their tail between their legs and confess that they weren't able to arrest him.

And Jesus says, the reason why they weren't able to arrest me is because my time has not yet come. Or chapter 8, in verse 20, when he's teaching in the temple and no one has seized him because his hour has not yet come.

And then in 1223, the Greeks come looking for him and we're told, Jesus eventually says, the hour has now come. It's time. The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified and he leaves us in no doubt what he's talking about.

He says, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, the seed produces a huge crop.

And he says, now is the time for that to happen. My soul is exceedingly troubled. Father, save me from this hour. It's for this reason I've come into this world. So Father, glorify your Son.

[23 : 20] And then a voice comes from heaven, I've glorified it and I will glorify it again. Why? Because Jesus is glorified the hour that the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies.

The hour, the moment when Jesus is glorified is that hour that fills him with dread. And so he cries out in the Garden of Gethsemane, Father, save me from this hour.

The hour is the time when he is going to be lifted up for the sins of his people. And so in our culture today, we're trying to edit Jesus Christ out of history, aren't we?

We no longer call it B.C., before Christ, and A.D., in the year of our Lord. We call it the year of the common era. They won't say before Christ and A.D.

because they don't want to mention his name. The hour, which is the hour that is at the center of human history, the world wants to deny it. And so for the Christian church, it is this hour, it is his death that we should celebrate.

[24 : 28] It's the most important hour. It is the hour that has come, and Jesus says, for the Son to be glorified. Father, the hour has come. You see what's happening?

He is embracing the cross. He's saying, Father, take me to the cross even though everything in me shrinks from it. And do you see how committed he is to it?

Look at verse 4. He speaks of it as if it's already happened, even though it's 24 hours off into the future. He says, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do, it's a done deal as far as Jesus is concerned.

There's no going back. I read somewhere about a Scripture Union camp. It's called Camp Bevington. And it's named after a Royal Naval Chaplaincy, Chaplain, the name of the guy was called Ronald Bevington.

He was a chaplain in World War II on HMS Perth. It went down in the Battle of the Java Sea in 1942. And Ronald Bevington was on an overcrowded life raft.

[25 : 35] There were others clamoring to get on board and Ronald said, apparently, according to the article, I'll get out. and you get in because I know where I'm going.

Ronald Bevington was listed as lost at sea, never seen again. He drowned. If he hadn't done that, we would never have heard of him. I wouldn't be mentioning his name.

There would be no Scripture Union camp called the Bevington Camp. In laying down his life, he glorified himself. and he brought glory to God.

And so how much more does Jesus bring glory to himself and glory to God by laying down his life for the sins of the world? Do you remember what the writer of the Hebrews says?

The writer of the Hebrews says, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. What made Jesus go through with his death on the cross?

[26 : 35] It was the joy of bringing glory to the Father. It was the joy of seeing people believe in him. It was the joy of seeing people in every culture throughout time being saved, being rescued as a result of what he's done.

Father, the hour has come. If it were possible, save me from this hour, but I'm going to go through that. Not my will, but your will be done. I don't know the date, but pretty soon, isn't it, sometime next year, they will take Prince Charles to Westminster Abbey and they will crown him king.

And they won't take him to Pentonville Prison and chop off his head. But that is what they did to Jesus. His crucifixion is in fact his coronation.

The moment of his humiliation is the moment of his glory. Jesus and his finished work, it's the best news in the world. Father, I've completed the work.

And unless you have trusted in the finished, completed work of Jesus, you can never have assurance. You can never have confidence about this life and the world to come.

[27 : 53] You can never know you've done enough. There's always something more to do, something else. But the good news of the Bible is Jesus says, Father, I've done it.

I've completed the work that you gave me to do. It is finished. And so that is why the church should be obsessed with worshipping Jesus.

Because of who he is. Who is he? He is the pre-existent son of God who made us. But also because of what he's done. And he's done I remember seeing a church I grew up in and there was another church over the road that had a poster on it and wayside pulpits and kind of cheesy posters that people would drive past.

And one of them was, read the Bible free gift inside. Read the Bible free gift inside. Can you see verse 2? Since you've given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you've given him.

Romans 6.23 tells us that the wages of sin if I keep living the way that I live the wages that I get at the end is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[29 : 16] Eternal life is not like chewing gum is it? where you kind of chew it and you chew it and you chew it and in the end it loses its flavour but you keep on chewing. No, look at verse 3.

This is eternal life. It is to know him. Remember what Jesus said. Jesus said in John 10, I have come to give you life and to give it to you in abundance.

And so eternal life is not kind of enduring forever. But knowledge of the one who is everlasting. It's not so much the quantity but the quality.

You know what it's like when you're at the dentist. Time drags. When you go to the child's Christmas concert and you go to watch your kid's performance and you say to the person how long is this going to go on for?

And they say oh forever. Forever. So what heaven will be like? When he died on the cross the Lord Jesus died to bring us into a relationship with the one who is everlasting and that is why you've been made.

[30 : 29] Back in the garden right at the start of the Bible in Genesis 2 and 3 in the cool of the day right in the garden Adam walked with God. He knew God. It's a beautiful picture of what you were made for of a relationship with God.

And Adam when he sins and when he falls that relationship is broken and death comes and sin is the wages of death is the wages of our sin.

And the man and the woman they hide from God because the relationship is broken and there's biological life but the spiritual life is gone. There's no eternal life because sin has broken that relationship but Jesus has come and he's come to restore that relationship.

He died just for the unjust to bring you to church. No. He died just for the unjust to bring you to God. To restore a living relationship with the God who made you.

And so Jesus says to me Father I brought you glory on earth by completing the work that you gave me to do. It's accomplished. It's finished. Let me finish with a description of a funeral.

[31 : 41] It's a humanist funeral. The author says this one of the five speakers summed up my brother-in-law Mark's brief 40 years with his favorite line from his favorite song from his favorite band Radiohead.

If I could be what you wanted all the time. If I could be what you wanted all the time.

The sad fact is and all of us at the funeral knew it Mark didn't come anywhere near achieving that and nor did the rest of us. As the songwriter acknowledges with the line if I could be if only it's a

desperate line.

If only I could be what you wanted all the time. It's such a contrast to the message of the Bible. If only I could be all that God wanted me to be but I can't and neither can you.

But the message of the Bible is thank God Jesus was all that the Father wanted him to be. Let's pray.