

Jesus' Abiding Prayer – A Prayer for Glory

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CBC Ilderton

John 17:1-5

January 19, 2020

Have you ever noticed that when people specialize in certain areas, they seem to not give the kind of personal attention that they do to their professional work? It's not uncommon, for example, to see a mechanic driving a beater of a car. The carpenter's home has unfinished renovations. The orthodontist has crooked teeth. There is something in the human condition that can cause us to develop an expertise in the very areas where we are lacking.

So when it comes to prayer, there is a real danger that we talk about it and fail to do it. As we open to John 17, we find Jesus being an expert practitioner of the things he teaches. He doesn't merely teach about prayer, but also models it.

In the final hours of Jesus' earthly ministry, we meet him with his disciples. He has spent the evening teaching them about loving one another, promising them to give his Spirit to them, and reminding them of the hope of salvation. But now, his earthly ministry coming to a close, we find Jesus prays for himself (vv. 1-5), for his messengers (vv. 6-19), and for us (vv. 20-26). As we hear Jesus pray, we hear what some have called a most sacred and holy prayer. Many since the 16th century have called this "Jesus' High Priestly Prayer" – a reference to his praying just before he makes atonement for sin. But this prayer doesn't really spend time talking about his atonement. Rather, in this prayer Jesus sums up all that has been taught in this Gospel and points us heavenward by praying about glory.

What does it mean to pray for God's glory?

Pray to desire what God desires

Notice what Jesus does in v. 1 – he looks heavenward. His posture reflects his heart attitude. Nothing in the Bible demands that we pray with a particular posture, but it can be helpful for us to remember that Jesus modeled how to pray not only by his words but also by his example. As he lifts his eyes heavenward, he prays a personal prayer that is heard by those around him. What does he pray?

"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (v. 1). All throughout John's gospel, Jesus has said that his hour had not yet come. The hour he is referring to is the hour of his death. In 12:23, he knew that the time had come to die like a seed dies when it is planted in the ground so that it might arise with newness of life. Here, in the face of imminent death, Jesus prays.

What does he pray? Notice how often he prays for glory. His prayers are God-centered. He does not start with his needs nor his desires. He begins with a focus on the glory of God. He wants his Father to be honoured, praised, and glorified. And so he begins to pray with a God-centeredness. He begins with the focus on His Father, delighting his soul in the Father, and keeping his heart on the Father.

Here, in the moment when he is pressed and stressed, his eyes look to his Father. How often do our prayers have a Godward focus? We can talk about prayer but be prayerless.

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We can say we are God-centered in our theology but be man-centered in our praying. We can say we trust God but be prayerless and self-reliant.

But not Jesus. Fully dependent upon his Father, fully aligned with his desires, in the hour where he is about to be put to death, Jesus prays. And when he prays, it is not a selfish prayer, a prayer full of personal pursuits. Rather, it is a Godward prayer, a prayer seeking the glory of God. “Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” So praying with a God-centeredness is key to glorifying God. But what does it mean to pray with a God-centeredness? How does this glorify God?

Pray to see God

If we think about what it means to glorify someone, we will be helped in our praying. In John's gospel, this theme of glory appears over and over, especially here. And to glorify someone is not to exalt them and give them a place of honour, but to acknowledge the honour that is due. Consider what this looks like practically.

If a teacher were to take one of the worst behaved and performing students and say, “I want to glorify this student,” it would be utterly ridiculous for the teacher to award this student with a certificate of achievement for excellence. The student has not mastered the material. The student has not demonstrated the character of one who pursues excellence. And so the teacher's glorifying of the student would be utterly nonsensical.

But if the teacher were to take a quiet, unassuming student – one who was excelling in the material, one who was achieving great marks, and one who was quietly working diligently and awarded them with recognition, this would be to glorify them. Unseen, unnoticed, and unappreciated, to glorify this student would give them the recognition deserving of them.

This request is Jesus' desire. Father, I want people to see you as you really are. I want people to recognize the depths of your love in how far you will go to rescue humanity from sin. And how will God be seen, recognized, acknowledged clearly? By the cross. Here is where God's glory is on display. Here is where God's love is seen. The Father and Son, from eternity past, in full agreement, had determined to save a people from sin. In order to rescue them from sin, the Father had planned to send his willing Son to earth. We see this in v. 3 – the Father sent his Son as the One who would reveal the Father's heart.

So to pray for God's glory is to pray that the veil of blindness would be lifted so we can see God for who He is – a loving Father and a sacrificial Son who shows us the Father's heart. And specifically, John says three things that reveal the Father's love.

First, he has given the Son authority over all flesh. In sending his Son, God had purposed that the Son be seen as the ruler, authority, and head over all. For this reason, Paul can say in Ephesians 1:22-3 that Christ is the head of all things and he has been given the church. By going to the cross, Christ demonstrates that he has all authority to bring

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salvation by conquering the last enemy – death. And by conquering death, he destroys the power of this enemy in keeping a people from being brought to God.

Second, the Son shows the glory of God by giving eternal life. Eternal life is his to give. By going to the cross, Christ has secured the victory of life over death. He will taste death so that we can enjoy life. He will endure the cross so we can enjoy the Father. He will die a sinner's death so we can know a righteous and pure life of forgiveness, purity, and love.

Third, the Son shows the glory of God by receiving a people for himself. His death secures for himself that none given to him by the Father will be lost. Those whom the Father gives the Son saves. In God's plan, his chosen people will never be lost. He will not have one snatched from his hands, as Jesus said in John 6. And now, Jesus glorifies the Father by receiving his own people. His chosen children will be saved because Christ will receive them as a gift from his Father.

Here is how God is seen to be glorious – he will display the depth of his love by his Son's death to conquer death and save a people for himself. So Jesus' prayer that the Father be glorified in the Son so that the Son might glorify the Father, this is not an egotistical prayer asking for recognition when it isn't deserved. It's a prayer saying – show the world how high, how wide, how deep is your love by my death to rescue your people from sin.

Pray to know God

In seeing glory, Jesus' prayer is for us to respond to that glory. We are not shown how great God is so that we might become bitter, angry, or upset that we aren't recognized for our greatness. We are shown God's greatness and excellence and love in the cross so that we might know the One true God and his Son.

So Jesus' prayer for eternal life has more than an other-worldly sense. Eternal life is not just a ticket to heaven that lets us live as we want now. Eternal life is knowing the Father and the Son. What does it mean to know God?

When we think of knowing, we often reduce it down to a knowledge of facts. I know details about God – I know about his love, I know about his attributes, I know about his character. But the idea of knowing in the Bible has this sense of intimacy, of personal connection, of a depth of relationship. For this reason, the OT would talk about a man "knowing" his wife to refer to sexual intimacy. Here, the idea of knowing the Father and the Son has the idea of intimate, personal depth of relationship. Jesus prays that we would have a deep, personal relationship with the Godhead now! He does not pray that we will some day get to heaven, but that we might taste the joys and delights of heaven now!

The reason we can know God and love him and glorify him is due to the Son's finished work. All that the Father gave him to do, he perfectly obeyed and completed. The plan of the Father has been carried out. The Son prays that he might go to the cross so that the world would see how great and loving and kind and beautiful and excellent his Father

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truly is. And as Christ goes to the cross, he prays that the glory that he had before the world was created, the glory he shared with the Father would be realized. He prays that the cross would accomplish the work of the Father so that he might be with the Father again and display the victory of life over death, salvation over sin, and mercy over judgment.

And so we hear the prayer of Jesus: “Father, glorify me, take me to the cross. May it be seen there that I am your sent and obedient Son who has completed the work you sent me to do.”

Christians are people of the cross. As we pray, sing, delight in the cross, the glory of the cross is seen. We grow in love, wonder, and delight of the cross; and we experience the reality of Jesus' prayer – that the Father would be glorified in the death of his Son at the cross and the Son is glorified in bringing many sons and daughters to glory. The longing that drives us is that the longing that the invisible God should be made visible and known. And this is the great desire that should fuel us in prayer. Make yourself known. Show us your glory.

And like a compass is aligned with due North, so prayer aligns our hearts and lives so that we do not merely talk about prayer but we become people who pray, “Lord, show us your glory!”