

John 17:1-5 What does Jesus pray for Himself?

Introduction

If any passage in the Gospels deserves to be called 'The Lord's Prayer' then it is this recorded prayer of Jesus in John 17. In it His heart's desires are revealed for Himself, His first disciples, future believers, and indeed for the Christian Church as a whole. We know that Jesus is now praying for us in heaven. It is helpful to have some indication of what things He prays for with great enthusiasm in His intercessions with the Father. It is one of the few glimpses we have of the inner-life and thoughts of Jesus. If we want to be pleasing to Him then it is a good idea to be concerned or passionate about the things that are also priorities on His agenda.

1. The example of Jesus in prayer

There is no doubt that prayer was a priority for Jesus. Luke, in particular, identifies and makes Jesus' prayer life a priority subject in his gospel. He saw prayer as being of particular importance to Jesus, and by implication it must also occupy a central place in the lives of His people as well. This was something that His disciples noticed about His regular lifestyle. In Luke 11:1-4 it states: **One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'**² He said to them, 'When you pray, say: "Father hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come."³ Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'"... We can rightly assume that compared to their own personal prayer life what Jesus was doing was substantially different. Yet He was seeking to model for His followers a pattern of prayer that He desired them to follow in their own lives. The New Testament reveals His approach in practice towards prayer.

(a) **Prayer at the most important times of His life** (i) His baptism as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove... (Luke 3:21-22). Is there a linkage with blessing here –obedience in lifestyle and the prioritising of submission in prayer? (ii) Choosing His disciples one of those days Jesus went out into the hills to pray, and spent **the night praying to God**. When morning came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them...(Luke 6:12-13a); (iii) Prior to Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi Once when **Jesus was praying in private**, and His disciples were with Him...(Luke 9:18); (iv) His transfiguration He...went up onto a mountain to pray. **As He was praying**, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning... (Luke 9:28b-29); (v) In Gethsemane Jesus went out **as usual** to the Mount of Olives, and His disciples followed Him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, He said to them, '**Pray that you will not fall into temptation.**' ⁴¹ **He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,** ⁴² 'Father, if You are willing, take this cup from me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.' ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.⁴⁵ When He rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, He found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ 'Why are you sleeping?' He asked them. '**Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.**' **After Jesus said this, He looked towards heaven and prayed...** (Luke 22:39-46); (vi) On the cross there were several prayers including one seeking forgiveness for those who put Him on the cross, and culminating in Luke 23:46: *Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.'* When He had said this, He breathed His last.

(b) **Prayer in His regular ministry** (i) Before public ministry Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed...(Luke 5:16); (ii) Before instructing His disciples in prayer One day, Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord teach us to

pray... (Luke 11:1); (iii) Before meeting strangers who wanted time with Him (John 12:20-30); (iv) After great occasions like the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:45-46) *Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd.* ⁴⁶ **After leaving them, He went up on a mountainside to pray.** His prayer life provided a structure to His ministry.

(c) **Prayer linked with His miracles** (i) In association with healing many people *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed* (Mark 1:35). The days that followed were packed with ministry opportunities and some healing miracles. (ii) In association with feeding miracles *He gave thanks and broke the loaves...* (Mark 6:41), at the feeding of the 5,000. (iii) In raising the dead *So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that You have heard Me. ⁴² I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me.’ ⁴³ When He had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth round his face.*

Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’ (John 11:41-43);

(d) **Prayer for Others** (i) For the disciples (John 17:6-19); (ii) For the whole Christian Church (John 17:20-26); (iii) For those who nailed Him to the cross *Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing...’* (Luke 23:34a); (iv) For Peter ³¹ *‘Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers’* (Luke 22:31-32). [This is highlighted in J. Thomson, *The Praying Christ*, and p.35].

Yet our primary purpose in this message is to look at what Jesus was praying for Himself here.

2. **The Petition** (John 17:1a) *‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son...’*

(a) **The form of address** (i) For Jesus Father... ‘Abba’ It has been noted by Bible commentators that in the Gospels there are twenty-one recorded prayers of Jesus. On almost every occasion, with one exception, Jesus uses this form of address (Bruce Milne, *John*, p.239). The exception is the cry of dereliction (see Matthew 27:46: *My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?*) in which Jesus is firstly quoting a Scriptural text, Psalm 22:1, the first of two citations from this Psalm on which He is meditating on the cross. Secondly He is on the cross as our substitute and as a result the Father has for those three dark hours stood apart from His beloved Son who is carrying our sin with which He cannot be associated. Jesus, therefore, would not have used this form of address in that context as it was inappropriate. However, at all other times before and after Calvary it was His standard practice. It was a mark of the closeness of His relationship to God the Father. It was also an act of submission to the Father. Jewish people of Jesus’ day would have been shocked to hear such a term of address to God. The reason for that is that following their exile to Babylon six centuries earlier (605, 597 and 587/6BC) and the ending of a physical kingdom in the Promised Land for roughly two generations before it was reconstituted under Zerubbabel (538BC), Ezra (458BC) and Nehemiah (444BC) respectively, there was a determination to honour God and to worship Him only in ways that glorified His name. The idolatry that Jeremiah and Ezekiel preached against would never appear again in Jewish places of worship. This in itself was very good and highly commendable. However, as the centuries passed, the forms of worship and the ways the Bible was being interpreted by the rabbis led to an extreme formalism in worship, and they forgot to acknowledge that at the heart of it all is meant to be a living relationship with God. Jeremiah had prophesied that this would be the case (Jeremiah 31:31-34), and in the life teaching and example of Jesus it would be fulfilled. (ii) For us our Father in heaven... (Matthew 6:9) Jesus’ relationship with God the Father was unique. However, He

wished to teach His followers to pray in a manner closer to His own form of address while recognising the clear distinction between us as creatures and our Creator and Redeemer. Yet prayer at its heart is an expression of a relationship between us and God. Jesus had an automatic right to speak to His Father. We as God's children, redeemed through the shedding of His precious blood, in the name of Jesus, can also have direct access to God in prayer. Hebrews 4:16 states: *Let us then approach God's throne of grace **with confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* Do you need to hear that reassurance today?

(b) **The timing of the address** *the time has come...* (John 17:1) There is a consciousness in the prayers and actions of Jesus of the timescale around which His earthly ministry was being carried out. We have to be careful not to speculate beyond the clear teaching of Scripture, but this is a significant feature of John's account of His life. If you remember at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry there was a real reluctance to perform miracles or engage in any form of service that would draw public attention to Him. At the wedding of Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11), for example, Mary His mother asked Jesus to assist the wedding party in the production of more wine. John 2:4 gives Jesus' clear response: *'Woman, why do you involve me?'* Jesus replied. **'My time has not yet come'**. (The literal translation here is 'my hour') Events in His ministry were understood in the light of God's timing for His life. There were some ugly scenes in which no matter how graciously and carefully He spoke there were hearers who were deliberately misrepresenting His words. John 7:30 records a reflection on the implications of what happened and more importantly did not happen at that time. *At this they tried to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because His time had not yet come.* The same point is made in John 8:20: *He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized Him, **because His time had not yet come.*** The turning point is recorded in John 12 less than two weeks before the Easter events would take place. Jesus was very conscious that this sacred and solemn moment had arrived. In John 12:23 He declared: **'The time [hour] has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'** ²⁴ *Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.* ²⁵ *Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* ²⁶ *Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.* ²⁷ *'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.* ²⁸ *Father, glorify your name!'* Then a voice came from heaven, *'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'* Jesus lived so close to God that both His friends and His enemies could not divert Him from the Father's timetable for His life. His agenda was planned and executed right on schedule. How often the Church of Jesus Christ today is reactive to the agendas of our secular society, rather than seeking to put all our energies into being authentic witnesses of Jesus Christ fulfilling His purposes for our lives. Whose agenda are you following today? It is a crucial question as it will affect your prayer life and mine. When our supreme ambition is to do His will, in His way and in His timescale it enables us to overcome our frustrations, our disappointments and our sadness at things that often ought not to take place in this sin-affected world.

(c) **The aim of the address** *glorify Your Son...* (John 17:1, 5) On what basis could Jesus make this request? It was because of His conscious obedience to the Father's will for His life. His prayer life was a recognition that he wanted to happen what the Father wished to take place. Therefore, it was not a selfish request, but a God-honouring one. How many times have you and me wondered how we ought to pray in certain situations? We know we ought to pray, but what words should we use? What requests ought we to make? What might God want to happen in this situation anyway? Would it not be true that the closer we get to the Lord the more we will be aware of what He desires to happen? In a lesser sense and with a significant degree of humility we can also ask God to honour us as we seek to fulfil the calling He has

entrusted to us. John 17:5 states: *And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.* We hesitate, and rightly so, to glibly repeat words our Lord used. Yet as far back as I Samuel 2:30 God declared of His human followers: *Those who honour Me I will honour, but those who despise Me will be disdained.* Do we need to ask the Lord if the choices we are making are the ones most honouring to His name?

3. **The Purpose** (John 17:1b, 4)... *that Your Son may glorify You*

This was a time of crisis. The word ‘crisis’ is not too strong because to face physical death by crucifixion when it was within His power to avoid it must have occasioned serious emotional distress. Jesus in His incarnate state as a human being experienced all the emotional struggles we face. The writer to the Hebrews placed an emphasis on this important point. Hebrews 2:10-11 states: *In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation **perfect through what He suffered.*** ¹¹ *Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.* Likewise, on the same theme in Hebrews 4:14-16 this truth is explained as a means of encouragement for us in our journey of faith today. *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.* ¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, **but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet He did not sin.*** ¹⁶ *Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us **in our time of need.*** We will never face the intensity of loneliness Jesus experienced on the cross because we have never shared the level of intimacy that the Father Son and Holy Spirit possess in their communion within the Trinity, but to a lesser degree we might experience it at some level.

Jesus confirms in the words recorded in John 17:4: *I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do,* that the exchange in John 12:28 was something central to His convictions and the motivation undergirding all that He did in ministry, prior to His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus’ calling on earth was to the Jewish people. He had faithfully discharged this responsibility. His work was completed. The apostle Paul with a different calling to the Gentiles also at the end of His earthly life came to a similar conclusion. *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.* ⁷ ***I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*** ⁸ *Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and **not only to me,** but also to all who have longed for His appearing* (II Timothy 4:6-8). The challenge comes to us in our missional context. In my priorities personally, in the priorities of this congregation more generally, could an impartial informed Christian observer report that the priorities of Jesus to glorify God and the passion of Paul for mission to extend God’s kingdom amongst those who currently don’t have opportunities to hear or experience contact with the Good News, are reflected in our top priorities. The criticism of the Church in the majority world against Western Christianity is all too often that we are too comfortable planning Church life around what we like or are comfortable with rather than that which is most effective in reaching the unchurched for God. When many thousands of people in Broughty Ferry have no meaningful experience of the Gospel we can not be satisfied in suggesting we have done our bit because this sanctuary is pretty full almost every Sunday morning; Whether we build a larger church on another site or church-plant in other locations or ? Doing nothing is not an option. One day we will stand before the Lord Jesus and He will ask each one of us –how did you glorify Me and My Father through the missional choices you made in the mission-field where I placed you in Broughty Ferry? How did you work with the other brothers and sisters in Christ in your community and city to advance my kingdom? Do not be satisfied on earth with an answer that will not be acceptable when He looks you in

the eyes on that day? He will not find acceptable any claims that we are happy to have fellowship in heaven with brothers and sisters whom we wouldn't talk to or work with on earth. How will God be most glorified as we model His love for fellow-believers both within and beyond our own congregation (see John 13:34-35: *A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* ³⁵ *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*.) This ought to be a key concern for us.

4. **The Plan** (John 17:2-3)

For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those you have given Him. ³*Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.* ⁴*I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave Me to do.* ⁵*And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.*

Even in the section of the Lord's Prayer for Himself there are the inevitable intrusions of concerns for God the Father and for His Church- us in other words. In essence, what is it that will bring the most glory to God? This was the overarching question for His life? What question would articulate the strongest desires of your heart and mine? What concern predominates your private prayer life and mine? What do our priorities reveal in practice about what is most important to us? If you don't find this deeply challenging then you are either perfect or not grasping what I am trying to communicate! For us as God's people it is a constant struggle to balance the most important in the face of a whole host of other (usually perfectly legitimate) things that plead for our time and resources. How did Jesus win this battle? It has to be concerning the clarity of His vision about what really mattered and where He could most effectively invest His time and energies. Here in these four verses there are three gifts from the Father to the Son to accomplish that which He had been sent to do.

(a) **Authority** (John 17:2a) *For You granted Him **authority over all people**...* Jesus prayed in this way on other occasions as Matthew 11:27 indicates: **All things have been committed to Me by My Father.** *No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.* This is pointed statement in our pluralistic world. There is no other name through whom we can come with confidence to the Father. There is no other name by which we can be saved and be placed in right standing with God the Father. There is no other name under which we can live a Spirit empowered life in His service than in the name of Jesus. In the words of an early Christian hymn that Paul quoted with approval in Philippians 2:9-11, we note: *Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name,* ¹⁰ *that **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow**, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Jesus was encouraged in earthly ministry because of the authority given to Him by the Father to fulfil that calling. In a delegated way He sends us out in His name with authority to fulfil the callings entrusted to us. In John 20:21-23 we read these extraordinary words: *Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! **As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.**'* ²² *And with that He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.* ²³ *If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'* These words are not to give inflated views of self but a sense of privilege in relation to the Lord who entrusts to us His gospel and the right to declare to the one who trust puts their faith and trust in Jesus that their sins are forgiven and that they have received the gift of eternal life. Are you exercising the delegated authority of Jesus in your evangelistic work?

(b) **A People** (John 17:2b) *...that He might give eternal life **to all those you have given Him.*** In John 6:37-40 there are similar words spoken by Jesus. **All those the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.** ³⁸ *For I have come down from heaven not*

to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰For My Father's will is that **everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life**, and I will raise them up at the last day.' Jesus knew the Father had entrusted to Him the gift of a people, the Christian Church that would comprise an incredible multitude of Jewish and Gentile believers from every generation; every ethnic group from every era, who one day would be gathered with the Lord Jesus giving Him all the glory and praise. Jesus on the cross cried out *Finished* (John 19:30) not because a people might be saved or could be saved, but because they had been saved. In time through the gracious efficacious prompting of the Holy Spirit they would willingly by faith reach out and receive the gift of salvation as a result of His amazing grace. We go out in our evangelistic work with that same confidence that our labours are not potentially in vain, but that God will grant the harvest He has promised as His Church worldwide continues to grow year on year. This gift from the Father in its fullness entrusted to Jesus, but in delegated fashion as His ambassadors we too receive this amazing assurance. Our calling is to be faithful in prayer claiming people as yet unsaved for God, for One who hears the heart cries of His children, especially those that will bring most honour and glory to His name. Are you exercising that authority in prayer? are you seeking to be part of the answer to those prayers by asking the Lord to use your words and actions to be a means of pointing others to Jesus? Paul believed this as well. No wonder He could write these powerful words in I Corinthians 15:58: *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, **because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*** Are you believing this promise of God?

(c) **Fellowship** (John 17:3) ³Now this is eternal life: that they **know You**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. Do you need to see the bigger picture? In Romans 8:29-30 Paul declared: *For those God foreknew He also predestined **to be conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, **He also glorified.*** Paul is writing using a specific tense which is normally restricted to completed acts in the past, but is so certain of the future work of God in salvation for His people that the future is as certain as the past in the light of the promises of God. Have you grasped that? This knowledge in its fullness culminates eternally in worship – as Revelation 7:9-12 reveals: *After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' ¹¹All the angels were standing round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹²saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'* may this be each of our future experience, for Jesus sake, Amen