

## **The Lord's Greatest Prayer, Part 2**

Scripture: John 17:1–5

Code: 43-94

Let's open our Bibles to John chapter 17. We have the opportunity to go back to this particular chapter. This chapter culminates the evening that our Lord spent with His disciples. Starting in chapter 13, running all the way through chapter 16, He gives instruction, promises, warnings. He sets them up for the future without Him. At the same time as He gives promises and warnings, He also tells them that the Holy Spirit is going to come, and the Holy Spirit will be to them even more than He has been to them. "It will be better for them," He says, "if I go away and the Holy Spirit comes." This is a monumental hour for Him. As it says in verse 1, He acknowledges the hour has come - the hour for which He was born, the hour of His death followed by His resurrection, and then His ascension back to glory.

This chapter is remarkable for many reasons, and we pointed out some of them to you last time when we began to look at it. First of all, it is the real Lord's Prayer. The one in Matthew 6 that we call the Lord's Prayer is really the disciples' prayer. As I told you last time, Jesus couldn't pray that prayer - didn't pray that prayer - because it includes asking for forgiveness of sins. This is the Lord's Prayer. In fact, this is the one extensive prayer from the Lord Jesus Christ to the Father that is contained in Scripture; this is the only one we have. In the four gospels, we have many sermons, we have many parables, we have many conversations, but only this prayer. It is then the model and example of His intercessory work as our great High Priest. As the Mediator between believers and God, this is the kind of prayer He continually prays.

Scripture says "He ever lives to make intercession for us." He left His work on earth, His work at the cross; came through the resurrection; ascended to heaven to be our Mediator, our Intercessor; and He stands at the right hand of God, defending us against all accusations, pleading our case before the Father. No accusation brought against us will stand because all our sins have been paid for in full by His own sacrifice. He was the sacrifice. He is our Defender, our Mediator, the Lawyer for our defense. And what you have in this prayer is an example of that mediatorial work of Christ that's been going on since the ascension - and will go on until all the saints are finally gathered into glory at the end of human history in this world. Before He can enter, however, into heaven to begin the ministry of interceding for us, He prays for Himself. The opening five verses indicate to us that our Lord sought to be restored to the glory He had before He left.

As you remember hearing when I was reading this, He makes several references to the fact that the Father sent Him, the Father sent Him. We understand that. He came from the Father. He came from glory. He came into this world for thirty-three years to live a sinless life, die a substitutionary death, rise from the dead, and go back to mediate for the people for whom He had provided a full salvation.

So this prayer, first of all, opens up with five verses in which He asks for the Father to return Him to glory. And you want to hear those words again: "Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.'"

He said it again in verse 5: “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” This isn’t a selfish request. “Glorify Me, that You may be glorified. Glorify Me with Yourself.” Namely, “Give Me back the glory I had with You before the world was” - the eternal glory that belonged to Him as God, the second person.

Now, this prayer comes at a very critical point in His life. In fact, verse 1 says it: “The hour has come.” This is the prayer that ends His earthly ministry as such. These are the most critical hours. After the Lord’s Supper was instituted in the upper room, after the greatest sermon ever preached to believers that very night, while He was being betrayed. Just before the disciples forsook Him and fled at His arrest, and right before His cross, He prays this prayer, and He begins by asking that the Father would give Him back the glory that He had before the world was.

The long awaited hour has arrived: the crux of redemptive history. Eternity past and eternity future meet at the cross. He is asking the Father for glory because He has a right to that glory. We looked at verses 1 and 5 last week; won’t go back into them. Very simple: “Give Me the glory that belongs to Me.” He is praying for His own honor, His own adoration, His own reward, because He is due all of that, having accomplished what the Father gave Him to do. “Glorify Me with the glory I had with You before the world was.” This is the Son of God looking beyond the incarnation, looking beyond the humiliation, looking beyond the suffering, looking beyond the crucifixion to that glory that was awaiting Him back in heaven.

Deep into the night are we, Thursday night. Now midnight has past. It is in the dark of Friday morning, the day He was crucified. He is outside the wall of Jerusalem. He is on the edge of the Kidron Ravine, through which a brook of water flowed - at this time of year - mingled with the blood of the tens of thousands of animals that were being slaughtered in the temple. It would run down the back slope of the temple and into that Kidron Brook. He would literally be stepping over the symbol of His own blood being offered as the true and only acceptable lamb.

He’s headed to the Mount of Olives just across that Kidron Ravine, and the Mount of Olives has a garden in it called the Garden of Gethsemane. Chapter 18, verse 1, sets that scene: “He went forth with His disciples [after He had prayed the prayer] over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden in which He entered with His disciples.”

He goes to the Mount of Olives, goes into the garden, and it is in that garden that that famous time of prayer occurred in which He literally “sweat as it were great drops of blood” in the agony anticipating His bearing sin. It is in that garden that He is arrested, that the disciples flee, and He is taken to a mock trial; and from there, crucified. He anticipates all of that. He looks beyond all of that and beyond the death at the cross itself, and He is now ready to begin to anticipate the glory that is coming His way. “Glorify Me” He prays in verse 1. “Glorify Me,” He prays in verse 5, “in order that You may be glorified as well.”

And then He gives two reasons for His glory, two reasons that He is to be gloried, two reasons that render Him worthy. Number one: because of who He is. Number two: because of what He has done. These are the two things that appear in verses 2, 3, and 4. Because of who He is and because of what He has done He deserves to be given back the glory that rightly belonged to Him through all eternity. Let’s look, first of all, at who He is.

Verse 2: “Even as You,” He says to the Father, “gave Him” – meaning Himself – “authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” “Glorify Me because I am the one who has authority over all flesh. I am the one who gives life, and I am the one who will give life to those You have given Me.” Simply stated, the One who gives life is God. The One who gives life is God. The One who has authority over all flesh, all living beings, is God. “You gave Him authority over the entire human race.”

In Matthew 28, and verse 18, our Lord said, “All authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth.” In Ephesians chapter 1, it’s rolled out in these words: that He is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one to come. And He has put all things in subjection under His feet.” He is the head over all things. The Father literally gave to the Son *all* authority.

John has told us in chapter 5 that He has authority to judge. He has authority to judge, and He has authority to condemn, and He has authority to exalt. He will catapult the ungodly into eternal punishment, and He will exalt those who belong to Him into the heaven of heavens, and He will provide by His power resurrection bodies for both. He is the One who gives life.

Philippians 2, Paul says that after God raised Him from the dead, He “highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name” - the name Lord - and “that at that name...every knee will bow.” Every knee in the universe bows to His authority. He is the ultimate authority.

Now we know that that authority that belonged to Him - that sovereign authority over all things, over the entire universe, and particularly over living things, including even spirit beings – that authority was set aside in His incarnation. And He literally came down; humbled Himself as a man, as a servant; became like a slave. He was basically mistreated by the contemporary Jewish authorities of His time. He was executed by the Roman authorities of His time. And He is the One who has authority over all creation, over all humanity, over all that exists, over all that lives. Authority belongs to Him. Authority belongs to Him for a very important reason, and that reason is stated for us back in John 1. Let’s go back to John 1.

That authority belongs to Him because of a statement in verse 4: “In Him was life.” “In Him was life.” That is *the* foundational identification of God. This is the foundational truth of Christianity. God, the eternal God, is the One who has given life to everything that exists. He didn’t receive life; in Him was life.

Now that is exactly what John wants us to understand as He opens this gospel. Let’s go back to verse 1 for a moment and remember what this says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life” - and we can stop there for our purposes this morning.

“The Word,” meaning Christ, “was with God” in the beginning – “was God,” as evidenced by the fact that He has made everything that exists. Again, I say this is the definitive reality of Christianity.

“The Word” - Why isn’t He called the Lord Jesus Christ? Why does John use “the Word”? Because,

among the Greeks there was this very obvious idea that there was an intelligent designer. There was a power; there was a cosmic force. There was massive energy somewhere in the universe, and it was highly intelligent because of the complexity of what it made. It was highly personal because there is personality among human beings. The Greeks were way ahead of the contemporary movement called “intelligent design,” which is a kind of contemporary answer to the foibles and follies of evolution.

Scientists, since they’ve come to understand the genetic code and the complexity of every cell, no longer can stand up on a tower and proclaim that everything came from nothing. The complexity is so vast that it has to have an intelligent designer. But if you don’t want to say it’s God, you can believe in intelligent design.

Well, you would be one of the Greeks who would say there’s a cosmic force, and energy, and power, and intellect out there that is massive and way beyond us; and they actually called it *logos*, *logos*. And to the Jews, *logos* was the Word of God, the Old Testament; and God revealed Himself through His Word. So John just borrows that term from the Greeks and the Jews and said that “the cosmic force that you talk about, the intelligent designer that you recognize out there, that is the Word, the Word.”

And the Old Testament was God speaking, and now God has spoken through the Word. And then in verse 14, he pulls that together by saying, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” The abstract, intelligent mind, power, force that created the entire universe became a man - the Word of God, the Word of God spoken in the Old Testament. Hebrews 1, “God spoke in the past, but has in these last days spoken through His Son.” “The Word became flesh.” That’s Christianity.

Now, the word “became” is very important in verse 14: “The Word became flesh,” *ginomai*. What does that mean? It means that the Word was now something that it never was before - it “became.” God is immutable. God is pure, eternal being. God is not becoming anything. God does not change. He does not develop. He does not progress. He is eternal, pure being.

But all creatures are becoming. They’re in the process of becoming, changing. Even the incarnate Christ was in the womb, and then out of the womb an infant, and then a toddler, and then a child, and then a young adult, and then a full adult – “maturing in wisdom, and stature, and favor with God and man.” At that point, the second member of the Trinity, the Son of God, became something He never had been. He became something He never had been - He took on the fullness of humanity. He was always God, but He became man. We sang it this morning, Charles Wesley’s wonderful words: “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity, pleased as man with man to dwell; Jesus, our Immanuel [God with us].”

Eternally, God the Son - always God – became something He was not. He became a man “and dwelt among us.” He dwelt among us - not a vision; not an apparition; not some kind of esoteric, dream-like experience. He became a man. “He was made in the likeness of man” (Philippians 2). He partook of flesh and blood. He lived here for thirty-three years on earth, fully man. That Word, pure being, became a man. The rest of the gospel of John is to tell the story of His life through the lens particularly of His divinity.

Now, I want you to stay in those opening few verses of John for a minute, because I want to show

you who Jesus is, who Jesus is. This is why He says, "Glorify Me with the glory I had with You before the world began. Because of who I am, I am worthy to be restored to that glory."

First of all, He speaks of His preexistence. Verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word." Verse 2 says the same thing: "He was in the beginning with God." What is "the beginning"? "The beginning" is "the beginning." "The beginning" is Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

When "the beginning" began, He already was. Do you see it? "In the beginning was the Word." Was already existing, "the Word" - not became the Word. He wasn't part of the creation. He already existed when the creation was made - already in existence. He's not a created being; He existed from all eternity.

Let me make it simple for you. Something must be eternal - something; and not something, but someone. Someone with *massive* power, someone with *massive* complex intelligence must be eternal. I know it's hard to think about things that are eternal. That's really an impossibility for our feeble minds to grasp. But reason would tell you, to say nothing of divine revelation. Something has to always be there, because whatever wasn't always there was made by something that was always there, and that something is none other than God. If you want to literally chop the bottom out of Christianity, just deny Genesis, just deny creation, just deny God as the Creator. That is not a small issue.

Since time began at creation, you go before creation. You're beyond time. You're into eternity where only God exists. So "in the beginning [time] the Word already was" - *eimi*, the verb *eimi*, "being." Had John used *ginomai*, then we would have to struggle with the fact that he seemed to be saying Jesus came into existence, which would make Him a created being. But John doesn't tamper with his verbs.

And, of course, Jesus said things like this: "Before Abraham was, I Am." And He refers to Himself as the "I Am," over and over in the gospel of John. The apostle Paul in Colossians says that "He is before all things. He was in the beginning with God." When "the beginning" began, He was already there. This emphasizes preexistence. He didn't become God in time. He's not some emanation from God, some creation by God. He preexisted everything that exists. That puts Him into eternity. That puts Him into the Godhead. Only God is eternal.

Not only was He preexistent, but coexistent. Go back to verse 1. He was not only "with God," but He "was God" - not only was "with God" at the creation, but He "was God." He is preexistent; that is before anything else existed. When nothing existed, He existed. And He not only was there "with God," He "was God." This is a powerful, powerful statement.

The Greek expression means "face-to-face with God on an equal basis," "face-to-face with God on an equal basis." Literally, the Greek says *Thes n ho Lgos*, "God was the Word," "God was the Word," full deity, verse 14. His glory was the glory as of the *prttokos* from the Father, "full of grace and truth." He had all the attributes of God because He "was God."

So who is Jesus? He is God, preexisting all that exists, coexisting eternally with God as God. And then this remarkable third element of His nature: He is not only preexistent and coexistent with God,

but He is self-existent, self-existent. Verse 3: “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life.” Really a defining, defining statement.

“All things that came into being, all things,” positive. Negative: “Nothing came into being that hasn’t come into being through Him.” Why? He was the possessor of life. Life came from Him. It wasn’t given to Him, it came from Him. He is the Creator. He is the Creator. Genesis, God is the Creator. Genesis, the Spirit is the Creator.

In John, the Son of God is equally the Creator. The triune God is the Creator, and nothing exists in the entire universe that God did not make: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Creator of everything that exists must necessarily be uncreated. Right? The Creator of everything that exists must necessarily be uncreated, and only the eternal God is uncreated, so Jesus is the eternal God. He is preexistent, He is coexistent, and He is self-existent.

Theologians call this the aseity of God, a-s-e-i-t-y, the aseity of God. Nothing gives Him life; nothing takes life from Him. He is life itself. That’s why when God gave His name, He said, “I Am that I Am.” No past, no present - “I Am that I Am.”

Now you know who Christ is. The proof is that in Him is life - a massive statement. Not *bíos* life, not biological life; z, spiritual life. He has the life in Himself.

So all that is created can be said to be becoming. All that is created is in some kind of process. That process, affected by the Fall, is now a process of decay. But everything that was created is becoming. Everything changes. Everything changes. Every ounce of dirt changes; every star changes; everything changes. Every cell changes. Everything is becoming, becoming, becoming, becoming.

God is not becoming; God is eternal, pure, immutable being. That distinguishes the Creator from the creation. And this, by the way, is why we say that the Genesis account of creation is the most important truth, because that’s the basis of everything we believe about God and Christ; and that is also why it is most assaulted by the world.

Now go back to John, chapter 17. “Father, glorify Me with the glory that I had with You before the world began because I am worthy. I am the One who has authority over *all* humanity, and I am the one who gives eternal life.” All life comes from Christ - all life, including eternal life. He is the giver of eternal life. All life comes from Him. Biological life comes from Him. Spiritual life comes from Him. Eternal life comes from Him. And He says, “I give that eternal life, that is what I do, to all whom You have given Me. All that You have given Me, I give eternal life.”

I just need to stop there for a minute and say that phrase “all whom You have given Me” appears seven times in this prayer. That is a defining statement regarding believers, you and me, and all believers since the work of Christ was applied. All believers – listen – have been given to Christ from the Father.

We’ve said things about that through the years. It’s a stunning, stunning reality. What is the Father doing? The Father is gathering a bride for His Son. Through all of redemptive history, all of human

history, the Father is gathering people who will make up the one bride for His Son. That's why when you get to the end of the book of Revelation, you go to heaven. It's a bridal city, and there's a great bridal festival, and the whole city is adorned for a wedding. When all the saints of all the ages are gathered together in heaven, it is a marriage.

All of redemptive history is the Father gathering a bride for His Son because He loves His Son, and He wants His Son to have a bride who will serve Him forever, love Him forever, honor Him forever, glorify Him forever, and even reflect His character, so that – listen – salvation is not a whimsical thing that is designed by people, or that is even determined by individuals. If you are a believer, it is because God gave you to Christ, and He gave you because He chose you, and He chose you before the foundation of the world, the Bible says, and He wrote your name down. Seven times it refers to believers as those whom the Father gives the Son. It is completely wrong to think that that decision is left to us.

Back in John 6, the Lord introduced this truth, verse 37, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me.” “All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” That's in the realm of salvation. Whoever the Father gives to the Son will come. Whoever is given to the Son, the Son will receive. He will not turn that person away. Why? “Because I've come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.” The Father chooses, the Father gives, the Son receives, the Son holds, and the Son raises to glory.

Verse 44 adds, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.” If you're a believer it's because the Father chose you, the Father drew you. He gave you to the Son. The Son receives you, the Son keeps you, and one day, the Son raises you, and nobody gets lost.

So our Lord says, “I am worthy to come back to the glory that I had before the world began because that glory belongs to Me as the life-source. I have given the world physical life, spiritual life. And I give to those whom the Father gives Me, eternal life.”

Now when I say eternal life, I know you kind of have categories in your mind that you've sort of assigned to that. But let me maybe explode your definition a little bit. Can I do that - with a verse?

What is eternal life? Look at verse 3; maybe you've never thought of this. Here's the question: “What is eternal life?” Here's the answer: “This is eternal life,” okay? “This is eternal life” - What? – “that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” What? Would that have been your definition of eternal life? Your definition of eternal life would be just heaven, and heaven, and heaven, and heaven forever - and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever.

That's not Christ's definition. The reason you think like that is because you think about time. There's no time in heaven. There's no past in heaven; there's no future in heaven. There's no passing of moments or passing of time. It is an everlasting present.

So what is eternal life? Here's the answer: “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Are you ready for this? Eternal life is the perfect knowledge of God and Christ; that's eternal life. That's what it is. That is the definition of eternal life.

It is not a quantity of time; there is no time. It is a quality of existence.

If you can understand it this way, understand it as *one moment* - one moment in which you have *perfect* knowledge of God, *perfect* knowledge of Christ; at the same time, *perfect* love. To know God, to know Christ, is to love them. The word "know" in the New Testament with regard to salvation carries the connotation of "intimate love." Not to have eternal life means to not know God, not know Christ, not know divine love. It means to be ignorant, cut off from the life of God - blind, dead.

To have eternal life is to know God and to know Christ. And some day, some day, to know God and to know Christ *perfectly*; and then to love them with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, even in its glorified capacities. So when we get to heaven, it's just going to be one moment in which we are consumed with a perfect knowledge and a perfect love of God and Christ. That's eternal life.

Right now "we know in part," right (1 Corinthians 13)? "We know in part." We know God. To some degree, we know Christ. We love God, we love Christ. But when eternal life reaches its perfection, we will both know God and Christ, and love God and Christ perfectly, comprehensively, completely. And we will be consumed in such exhilarated joy that we can't comprehend even the most meager part of that.

So the Son says, "Glorify Me, because I'm the One, who being glorified, will give eternal life to the ones You gave Me. This is Your plan, Father. And in order to fulfill it, glorify Me because of who I am, the life-giver." And then, secondly, He says, "Glorify Me because of what I've done." Verse 4: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You've given Me to do."

That second phrase means He's looking at the cross. He sees beyond it now, hours away - it'll be over - and He sees beyond it. "I have glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You've given Me to do." What was the work He gave Him to do? Sure, live a sinless life, absolutely. But "the Son of Man has come not to be served, but to give His life a ransom for many."

He was born for the cross, He was born to die, and now He sees it, He understands it. He came to destroy the works of the devil. He could only do that through death. "He is appointed," 1 John 3:5, "to appear in order to take away sins."

The work that He was given to do was the work of substitutionary atonement on the cross. And when the crucifixion at the hand of God brought on Him divine wrath in full, He suffered for the very purposes of God which were behind His incarnation. And at the cross (John 19:30) He says, "It is finished!"

With these words, in verse 4, He's looking past the cross: "I have done the work. I have given My life a ransom for many. So, Father, because of who I am, because of what I've done, give Me the glory I had with You before the world was." The Father answered that prayer. He died later that day, rose on Sunday, forty days later ascended into glory - took His place at the throne - and He ever lives to make intercession for us.

Father, we come now to the time around Your Table, and we do so with grateful hearts. We understand that what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross is the singular means by which our sins could be satisfied with a just punishment. We couldn't have survived that punishment; no person



can. That's what eternal hell is. But Christ survived. As an infinite person, He bore the infinite punishment, and we understand that.

The cross is so marvelous to us. It is where eternity past and eternity future meet. It is where we are reconciled to You. It is the necessary payment for the bride of Your Son. And He paid it, the Bridegroom Himself. So we come to the cross and we ask, Lord, that You would open our hearts to understand afresh the sacrifice of Christ for us - the incarnation, the offering of Himself as a ransom.

And, Lord, may we not hold hypocritically to any sins in our lives – sins of word, or thought, or deed – while we partake in this Table. Seal these things in our hearts, and may they show up in the way that we live and proclaim the gospel. For the sake of Christ we pray, amen.

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