

*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes toward heaven and said,
"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him
authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.
And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
I glorified you on earth, having accomplished all the work you gave me to do.
And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed.
I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.*

Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

Now they know that everything you have given me is from you.

*For I have given them the words that you gave to me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth
that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them.*

I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one."

John 17:1-11

This Is Eternal Life

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The Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus' preparation for the cross in intense and personal detail. He began in the Upper Room by washing the disciples' feet, demonstrating to them the kind of servant ministry that he expected of them. He gave them his new commandment of love. He promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit. In chapters 15 and 16, Jesus led his disciples on a long walk out the holy city and through the orchards and vineyards toward the Garden where he will be taken from them. Now, in chapter 17, having encouraged, and warned, and prepared the disciples for what was to come, Jesus prays for them.

In this prayer, which is often called the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus will "*consecrate*" himself for the men who are around him. He also intercedes for his disciples in the same way that the high priest interceded for the people of Israel in the Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. In the years that followed, the Apostle Paul would write in Romans 8 that Jesus continues to pray for all of us at his Father's side in heaven. The faith and confidence of Jesus' prayer here also reminds me of Moses' farewell address which concluded with Moses' final blessing on Israel in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy.

Jesus is preparing to die, but he prays, "*Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you.*" Jesus' prayer at this time is parallel in many aspects to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's gospel. "*Our Father in heaven*" expresses the same reverence that Jesus expresses here mentioning heaven and his addressing God as his Father. Teaching us to pray that the Father's name be "*hallowed*" is paralleled here by the concern Jesus expresses in this prayer for the Father's holiness and his name. "*Your kingdom come, your will be done*" is paralleled here when Jesus prays that he has finished the work that the Father sent him to do.

Keep in mind, however, that Jesus' prayer here just before he enters the Garden is much more formal and composed than what he will pray in the Garden. There, Jesus sweats drops of blood and prays, "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me.*" There is a hint of Jesus' anxiety here, just as there was in a similar prayer Jesus offered on Palm Sunday. But the anxiety Jesus feels is outweighed by the faith and confidence he continues to have in his Father. So in this prayer, Christ thanks God with a full heart for enabling him to carry through the task with which he had been entrusted.

This prayer is positive, but Jesus prays full of urgency and concern for his disciples. He knows he's leaving the disciples in a troubled world, and that they have a critical mission. He asks God to "*keep them through your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are.*" He further prays that they be allowed to remain on earth, and that they be kept safe.

But most importantly, he will go on to pray that his disciples will be "*sanctified*" in God's truth and that they know His word "*is truth.*" Sanctification is a process, where the deepest part of a person's body, soul and spirit is made spotless. Sanctification is not optional. And it's an on-going process. It interests me that, although the disciples may hear Jesus' prayer to the Father, Jesus is not addressing them. He is also establishing his unique relationship with God as "*my Father.*"

Jesus is moving toward death. He knows this. He must be frightened. I would be. Yet at this time, it's important to him that he establish his relationship with God; that he convince God (who, by the way, already knows) that Jesus has done all he was able to do during his short time on earth. He also knows that His works will continue on for many years through the disciples. Yes, it continues today, through our worship, our learning, our caring, and our love for each other. It is the disciples' faithfulness to Christ himself to which Jesus refers when he says, "*...they have kept your word.*"

And Jesus makes clear that he is praying for his disciples and not for the world because those that don't believe are not in the Word, and the Word is not within them. Because they do not believe, they are not sanctified. This last prayer Jesus offers with and for his men before they enter the Garden is anchored on a single gospel fact: "...this is eternal life," Jesus prayed, "*that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*" It is only as we open our hearts to God in prayer that his Word gets written in our hearts. So the words of Jesus' prayer here show us how important prayer is.

We say the Lord's Prayer at each service, by rote, and I can guarantee that, when we do, all too often we don't really think about what we're praying. We should, and we must, because Jesus has taught that this prayer encompasses all we should ask of our Father. Likewise, we read and speak our Opening Prayer here at service, and when we sit down, most of us won't even remember what we prayed. It's human nature. Let's say the words, and God will take care of the rest. But that's not so!

God wants us to "know" him. He wants us to feel our prayers, for us to talk to him and he will expect something from us in return. So the next time we pray, we should pray like we mean it, pray from our hearts, from the very depth of our souls. Talk to God. Let him hear you. Let him feel you. And remember, prayer is for everyone, young, old, rich, poor. And we must remember to listen. Sometimes when we hear God, he tells us things we really don't want to hear. Prayer isn't always rewarding.

The best time for us to pray is when it feels like God isn't listening. We need to persevere at it. And remember, prayer is not restricted to church and other holy places. Remember Jonah? He prayed from the belly of a fish. We need to stop what we're doing. Think about it, and pray to God. We need to thank him for all he has blessed us with. And we need to believe that God will show us the way, just as Jesus believed and prayed on the worst night of his life.