

Text: John 17:1-26

Title: "Believe because He prayed His high-priestly prayer for His people"

Time: 3/1/2026 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Have you ever stopped to think about how encouraging it can be to hear someone else lead in prayer? We have some regulars who pray to that end during our prayer of petition together. At some of those times, we hear the audible prayers of one whom we do not regularly hear from that way. When that happens, every heart is encouraged in the Lord.

Last Wednesday evening I had the joy and privilege of hearing some fellow pastors lead audibly in prayer at the ACCC meetings. On Wednesday night, a group of believers gathered at Orwell Bible Church for prayer together, and I experienced the joy of hearing Chris and his son Daniel lead in prayer as we had formed small groups to pray.

I remember especially hearing Chris pray for Daniel's serious relationship with his Christian girlfriend. It was like I was invited to witness the deep love of a father for his son and that father's godly desire that his son have a godly home of his own one day. That was encouraging to hear.

That Wednesday evening made up for my having to miss the Wednesday morning I always look forward to at Mike's home or barn, where I hear brothers, made humble before the throne of grace, offering their prayers. I leave every Wednesday morning very encouraged, not merely because I prayed, but also because I heard these brothers of mine pray. They often pray for the needs that were on my heart, which I was able to share with them.

In John 17 Jesus prays for His disciples. The language of verse 1 indicates that this prayer is similar to His prayer before the tomb of Lazarus in John 11. There John tells us, "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me" (41-42). Jesus prayed audibly then "because of the people which stand by." He does the same here, lifting His eyes to heaven and speaking this prayer audibly because of His disciples standing by (v. 1).

They are in the temple courtyard, likely in front of the east gate, with their hearts still full of the symbolism of the Passover sacrifice that Jesus had just celebrated with His disciples. He has spoken things to encourage them, and now He prays audibly to encourage them.

Because of its setting and content, this prayer has for hundreds of years been referred to as Jesus' high-priestly prayer for His people. To pray intercessory prayer for others is to do the work of a priest, and Jesus does that. Even more, Jesus commits Himself in prayer to the consecration of the priesthood, and not only the priesthood, but also to become the sacrifice offered by the priesthood (v. 17). The phrase *for their sakes* means *on their behalf*. It is the language of substitutionary atonement. Jesus is on His way to Gethsemane and then to the cross, and in this prayer He consecrates Himself to this work of atonement for His people.

Jesus prayed this prayer and John records this prayer so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name (20:31). Specifically, we must believe because Jesus prayed His high-priestly

prayer for His people. He makes four specific requests that will organize our understanding of the prayer.

I. Jesus prays to be glorified (vv. 1-8).

Illustration: In John 10 we found Jesus at the winter feast that came before the Passover of these chapters. It was December, and the feast was the Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah. Hanukkah commemorated the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus three years after Antiochus Epiphanes had defiled it with a pagan altar and sacrifice in 167 B.C..

Filled with the patriotism of that celebration and hopeful that Jesus would be their next Judas Maccabaeus, the Jews surrounded Him in Solomon's portico and demanded He tell them something plainly: "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus's answer was plain, direct, and clear: "I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me" (10:22-25). The Jews thought they had not been told plainly, but they had.

Application: In verse 3, Jesus says it again as He prays. He is Jesus Christ, whom the Father had sent. He had been sent with a specific time in mind, which John calls "the hour" throughout his Gospel. That hour was the time when the Father would glorify the Son, and the Son would glorify the Father (vv. 1, 5). The Apostle Paul explains this glory to the Philippian church. The Son glorified the Father by being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and the Father glorified the Son, further glorifying the Father, by raising Him from the tomb and giving Him the name that is above every name in His ascension into heaven (Phil. 2:5-11).

This glory includes the authority to judge all humanity (v. 2). He spoke before of this authority that would be given to Him in John 5:27-29. With great authority, Jesus will speak with the voice that raised Lazarus – the words, “Come forth!” Then Jesus shall judge the sheep and the goats. To some He will say, “I never knew you.” But here in our chapter, He tells His disciples only about what He shall do for them whom He knew – He gives them eternal life.

In the Bible, the definition of death is separation. Spiritual death is separation from God; physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. Eternal death is separation from the blessings of eternal life in torment. The opposite of death is life. The opposite of separation is relationship. To have eternal life is to enter into a relationship with the true God and Jesus Christ whom God sent, in order that we might get to know Him better for all eternity (v. 3).

As the recipients of eternal life, who know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent, we have a glorious role in this glorification of the Father and the Son. Our role in this begins with God’s enablement through Christ (v. 4). He revealed God’s name to those whom God had given Him (v. 6). Isaiah 52:6-7 prophesied that Jesus would accomplish this mission of the Messiah: “Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” These beautiful feet were Jesus’s feet.

The reason Jesus’s disciples found themselves with the Father through the work of Christ was because they had kept Jesus’s word (v. 7). They had believed His claim to have come from God as the Christ, the Messiah, for their

salvation (v. 8). The rest of that humanity over which the Father had given Christ authority did not keep Jesus's word in faith, but these disciples did so.

And so Jesus prays to be glorified, and God has answered that prayer and is still answering that prayer in the lives of those to whom He has given eternal life, as they grow more and more to know Him and keep His word by faith. Are you a part of this answer to prayer? Does your life glorify Christ because you have kept His Word by believing that God sent Him? If not, today can be the day that changes.

II. Jesus prays that His people would be unified (vv. 9-15 [the 11 apostles], 20-23 [believers through their word]).

Illustration: On the trip home from Cleveland on Thursday, I was on a plane from Charlotte to Manchester in an aisle seat on row 10. I had a book with me that one of the ACCC brothers had given me, which is a commentary on Exodus. It was visible to the lady sitting next to me. Her name is Nancy Hellmann, and I knew she was a sister in the Lord as soon as she told me, "That looks like a good book." It turns out she is involved in worldwide child evangelism. She attends a Bible-believing, gospel-preaching church in Rochester, NH. We had a nice conversation about our respective ministries and some about the Book of Exodus.

Application: It was like Nancy and I had known each other our whole lives, whereas everyone else around was still a complete stranger to me. That I could have that conversation with Nancy in a way that we could not do so with anyone else sitting around us is a consequence of the wonderful truth contained in this prayer request of Jesus for His disciples. God has answered the prayer request of His high-priestly prayer that His people be one. It is so.

Notice that Jesus prays for His disciples to be one, but not for the world to be one (v. 9). Making the world one is the agenda of the evil one, whom Jesus cites as He asks for the oneness of believers (v. 15). His concern is that He is leaving this hostile world, but His disciples are remaining (vv. 10-13). To the degree the world becomes one, it rebels against God and persecutes His people. To the degree we believers experience the benefit of the unity we possess, we are better defended against a world that hates us because it hated our Lord (v. 14).

Although Jesus does not pray for the world, this praying is a work that He has left us to do for Him (1 Tim. 2:1-6). We are called to pray for the world that they might be saved. In addition, we are called to give them Jesus's word, the gospel, so that they might believe. The eleven apostles were the first in the church age called to do so, and they left us the New Testament including this Gospel of John (vv. 18-23).

But every believer is to walk in the steps of the beautiful feet of our Savior and bring good news to a lost and hateful world. He died for us so that we could complete this mission (v. 19). We do so best, when we love one another in unity (John 13:34-35). Are we doing our part, loving one another, praying for the world, and giving them the gospel?

III. Jesus prays that His people would be sanctified (vv. 16-17).

Illustration: There were scores of people on the plane from Charlotte to Manchester, but two were especially set apart as pilots of the plane with the mission to get us off the ground and back down again. What set them apart from the rest of us during the flight was the cockpit door, which no others were allowed to trespass.

Application: This illustrates what Jesus means by *sanctified* in His prayer request. He prays that His people would be set apart for the work that they are to undertake, bringing the gospel to the world and making disciples of the nations. What sets us apart for this task is truth, God's truth. God's truth is His Word.

With the airline pilots, their training sets them apart from the rest of us even more than the cockpit doors. Were they more like the rest of us who are not trained at all, they would be incapable of flying the plane. The same is true of the believer. God's Word empowers us to be witnesses and disciple makers. When we neglect God's truth in His Word, we become too much like the rest of the world around us, who are untrained in His truth, to do them much good.

IV. Jesus prays that His people would be glorified (vv. 24-26).

Illustration: Verse 23 ended with the amazing truth that the Father has loved us, His people, just like He has loved His Son, Jesus Christ. One commentator fittingly called that "breathtakingly extravagant." Have you ever entered a building, maybe the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Buckingham Palace, or even a grand log lodge out west, with your breath taken away at the extravagance of the place? It left you speechless. That is the proper response to the truth of Jesus's prayer, "You loved them just as you loved Me."

Application: "Beloved," says John in his first epistle, "when we see Him we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). That is what Jesus prays for here, and for some of our precious brothers and sisters, that prayer has already been answered. They are with Him. They see His glory. They find themselves loved before the founda-

tion of the world. And for all eternity, it is Jesus's plan to continue to help these glorified people of His to know better God's name and God's love for and in them.

Conclusion: Jesus has prayed out loud so that we might be encouraged in Him this morning. The prayer admits that there is an evil one. The prayer admits that there is a hostile world of hatred, out of which we have not yet been taken. But the prayer also guarantees that Jesus has been glorified, given the name above every name, that His people are one, that they are set apart by His truth, trained by His Word for their mission, and that their glorification is guaranteed.

For the disciples, Gethsemane and Calvary were next that evening. But years later John could look back, remember this prayer, and know that it was answered in full. May we be faithful with the same confidence in the prayer of our Lord for us as well.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*