



Christ's Prayer for Glory

John 17:1-5

February 13, 2022

Main Idea: Jesus has glorified the Father by doing the work he was called to and prays for glory from the Father.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXT: JOHN 17:1-5

Highlight – What stands out?

1. Who is discussed in this passage?
2. What key themes or repeated words do you find in the text?
3. What questions do you have about the text?
4. Is there anything surprising to you in this text?

Explain – What does this mean?

Jesus has just finished teaching the disciples in the Upper Room, having told them that his hour has come and that though they will face hardship, he has “overcome the world” (John 16:33). Now, he turns his attention to the Father in prayer.

In today’s passage, he discusses two ideas: **glory and eternal life**.

1. In verses 1,4, and 5, Jesus discusses glory. How does glory move between Father and Son?
2. Jesus says in verse 4 that he glorified the Father on earth by doing the work the Father gave him. What events remain between this statement and Jesus being glorified in resurrection? (Read John 18-19 as a reminder of these events.)

3. Now, look up Matthew 26:39, Philippians 2:8, and Romans 5:18. How is Jesus able to endure the difficulties discussed in question 2?

Let's turn our attention to eternal life.

4. In verse 2, Jesus states that God the Father has "given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom" the Father had given him. In verse 3, what does he say eternal life is?
5. How do we know God? Read John 1:12, 14:7, and 20:31.

Apply – How does this change me?

1. If eternal life is knowing God, what does that imply about your life? How should it affect how you live?
2. Think back to question 3 in the Explain section. Where in your life are you holding back in obedience? Is there sin in your life you need to repent of?
3. Revelation 3:21 says, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." How do these words bolster your faith and encourage you toward obedience?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. What practices in your life help you know God and to know him more?
2. Pray for our church, that we would collectively and individually grow in obedience and Christlikeness.

Commentary

TAKEN FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN BY D.A. CARSON

THE PRAYER OF JESUS (17:1–26)

This prayer is not free-standing; it is intimately connected by themes and link-words with the discourse that precedes it (chs. 14–16), as even the first words of 17:1 ('After Jesus said this ...') intimate. Indeed, there is ample evidence that prayers of one sort or another were frequently connected with 'farewell discourses' in the ancient world, both in Jewish and in hellenistic literature (e.g. Gn. 49; Dt. 32–33; *Jubilees* 22:7–23). What is unique about this prayer rests neither on form nor on literary associations but on him who offers it, and when. He is the incarnate Son of God, and he is returning to his Father by the route of a desperately shameful and painful death. He prays that the course on which he is embarked will bring glory to his Father, and that his followers, in consequence of his own death and exaltation, will be preserved *from* evil and *for* the priceless privilege of seeing Jesus' glory, all the while imitating in their own relationship the reciprocity of love displayed by the Father and the Son.

In some respects the prayer is a summary of the entire Fourth Gospel to this point. Its principal themes include Jesus' obedience to his Father, the

glorification of his Father through his death/exaltation, the revelation of God in Christ Jesus, the choosing of the disciples out of the world, their mission to the world, their unity modelled on the unity of the Father and the Son, and their final destiny in the presence of the Father and the Son. To cast this summary in the form of a prayer is not only to anticipate Jesus' being 'lifted up' on the cross, but to contribute to the climax of the movement that brings Christ back to God—one of the central themes of the farewell discourse (*cf.* Dodd, *IFG*, pp. 419–420).

This is one of the features of John 17 that makes Käsemann's influential study of it so anomalous. Käsemann not only argues that John's Christology is profoundly docetic—a view adequately criticized elsewhere—but that John has no theology of the death of Jesus. One is reminded of Martin Kähler's famous epigram describing Mark's Gospel: 'a passion story with a detailed introduction'. H. Thyen not only thinks that the same could be said of John, but argues that from the beginning to the end the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus' passion as God's action in him.³ In this light, John 17 is part of the crescendo to which such passages as 1:29, 34; 3:14–15; 6:51–58; 10:11; 11:49–52; 13:8 have been building, a crescendo that is climaxed in chs. 18–20 in the passion and triumph of Jesus the Messiah.

The Synoptic Evangelists, especially Luke, mention Jesus' prayers fairly often (Mt. 14:23; 19:13; 26:36–44; 27:46; Mk. 1:35; 6:46; 14:32–39; 15:34; Lk. 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 11:1; 22:41–45; 23:46), but, apart from the so-called 'Lord's Prayer' (Mt. 6:9–13; Lk. 11:2–4—better thought of as the disciples' prayer, taught by the Lord), only rarely is the content of the prayers reported. These have to do with his passion: the prayers of Gethsemane and the cross. In the Fourth Gospel, there are two recorded prayers of Jesus in addition to the one before us. The first is at the tomb of Lazarus (11:41–42). Though a prayer, it was constructed with the needs of the people who heard it in mind ('but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here', 11:42). Something similar can be said about the prayers in John 12:27–28 and John 17: each is rightly labelled a prayer, but is at once petition, proclamation, even revelation.

The relation of John 17 to the Synoptic reports of Jesus' anguished praying in Gethsemane is disputed. Fenton (p. 172) points out that the Synoptic descriptions of Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:36–44; Mk. 14:32–39; Lk. 22:41–45) focus on Jesus' obedience ('Yet not what I will, but what you will'), and especially on the suffering and personal cost to Jesus. His tears, sweat like drops of blood, and prolonged agonizing all contribute to the portrait. By contrast, although John 17 maintains the theme of Jesus' obedience (e.g. v. 4, 'I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do'), it yields no hint of suffering, personal agony or physical pain. Brown (2. 748) so strongly emphasizes these and other differences that any genuine reconciliation between Gethsemane and John 17 at first glance seems exceedingly difficult.

A more sympathetic reading both of the Synoptics and of John suggests several compelling points of connection. If the prayers of John 12:27–28 (*cf.* notes) and John 17 are put together, Jesus' obedience and his suffering coalesce. Psychologically it is altogether convincing that as he approached the cross Jesus should betray both resolution and horror, both filial obedience and personal agony. Both strands are found in John and in the Synoptics. For instance, if Luke records the anguish of Gethsemane (Lk. 22:41–45), he also insists, 'As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem' (Lk. 9:51). The Synoptists, after all, are the ones who report Jesus' determined 'not as I will, but as you will' (Mt. 26:39; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 22:42).

Nor is there good reason to think that John 17 is the Evangelist's theological expansion of the last element of the petition 'Glorify your name!' (12:28), or a creative re-creation of the 'Gethsemane' prayers placed in a different location. However much the different Evangelists chose to emphasize distinct aspects of our Lord's prayers, and reported those prayers in their own idiom, it is surely too much to be asked to believe that Jesus prayed only once on his way to the cross. Did he wait for Gethsemane, as it were, before he got around to the business of prayer, thereby inciting the Evangelists, who were clearly more spiritual than their Master, to manufacture their own prayers and place them on Jesus' lips at discrete intervals in their narratives?

At least from the time of David Chytraeus (1530–1600), John 17 has commonly been referred to as Jesus' 'high priestly prayer'. The designation is not unfitting, inasmuch as Jesus prays for others in a distinctly mediatorial way—a priestly task—while he prays for himself with his self-oblation in view (vv. 5, 19). Even so, sacrificial language is not strong; more importantly, Christians have often thought of Christ's 'high priestly ministry' in terms of his post-ascension intercession (e.g. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1), while this chapter finds Christ praying on the way to the cross. Others have favoured 'Jesus' Prayer of Consecration', the consecration of Jesus to death and glorification, and of the disciples to mission and unity (e.g. Westcott, 2. 238; Hoskyns, p. 494). On the other hand, the theme of consecration by no means exhausts the prayer's themes, some of which are better explored under the (admittedly more generic) title adopted here.⁶

Of the many outlines that have been proposed for this chapter, the most widely adopted one is as follows: Jesus prays for himself (vv. 1–5), for his disciples (vv. 6–19), and for the church (vv. 20–26). Some prefer to link vv. 6–8 with the first section rather than with the second. Others divide the last section into two: vv. 20–23, Jesus prays that all believers may be one; vv. 24–26, Jesus prays that all believers may be perfected so as to see Jesus' glory. Other schemes are still more complicated. The following exposition adapts the outline followed by Schnackenburg (3. 167–169) and Beasley-Murray (pp. 295–296).

1. Jesus prays for his glorification (17:1–5)

17:1. *After Jesus said this* links John 17 to the farewell discourse of John 14–16. As in the prayer recorded in 11:41, Jesus raises his eyes to heaven. In a book which makes so much of ‘Son’ Christology (cf. especially 5:16–30) it is altogether natural for Jesus to address God as *Father* (cf. 11:41; 12:27), even as he has constantly referred to him in that way. Farther on in the prayer, ‘Father’ gives way to ‘Holy Father’ (v. 11) and ‘Righteous Father’ (v. 25).

Repeatedly throughout the Gospel we are told that the ‘hour’ has not yet come (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). From the time ‘some Greeks’ (12:20) try to see him, the hour is impending, it ‘has come’ (12:23, 27–28, 31–32; 13:1, 31). The *time* (*hōra*, ‘hour’) is the appointed time for Jesus’ death/exaltation, for his glorification. That God’s appointed hour has arrived does not strike Jesus as an excuse for resigned fatalism, but for prayer: precisely *because* the hour has come for the Son to be glorified, he prays that the glorification might take place. This is God’s appointed hour; let God’s will be done—indeed, Jesus prays that his Father will accomplish the purpose of this appointed hour. As so often in Scripture, emphasis on God’s sovereignty functions as an incentive to prayer, not a disincentive.

Although Jesus prays for himself in vv. 1–5, his praying is scarcely analogous to what we do when we pray for ourselves (cf. Carson, *FWD*, p. 182). There is but one petition: *Glorify your Son* (cf. also v. 5). For the general thought, cf. notes on 12:23; on the ‘glory’ of the Son, cf. notes on 1:14. The associations here are complex. The verb ‘to glorify’ can mean ‘to praise, to honour’, and something of that meaning is suggested by the fact that God’s purpose is that all should honour the Son even as they honour the Father (5:23). The very event by which the Son was being ‘lifted up’ in horrible ignominy and shame was that for which he would be praised around the world by men and women whose sins he had borne. But in this context the primary meaning of ‘to glorify’ is ‘to clothe in splendour’, as v. 5 makes clear. The petition asks the Father to reverse the self-emptying entailed in his incarnation and to restore him to the splendour that he shared with the Father before the world began. The cross and Jesus’ ascension/exaltation are thus inseparable. The hideous profanity of Golgotha means nothing less than the Son’s glorification. That Jesus should pray that the Father might glorify the Son is therefore also a moving expression of his own willingness to obey the Father even unto death (cf. notes on v. 19).

From Jesus’ perspective, even the glorification of the Son is not an end in itself. Jesus offers his petition (he says) in order *that your Son may glorify you*. As he seeks not the praise of men but the glory that comes from the only God (5:44), so Jesus seeks by his own glorification nothing less than the glory of his Father (cf. notes on 13:31–32). The distinctions between the Father and the Son that are so carefully maintained in the Fourth Gospel (e.g. 5:19–30; 12:20ff.; cf. 1:1b) happily give way on occasion to frank confessions of Jesus’ deity (1:1c, 18; 8:58; 14:10; 20:28), so it is not entirely surprising that Jesus’ crucifixion and exaltation issue not only in his own glorification but that of his Father as well. God is clothed in splendour as he brings about this death/exaltation of his Son.

17:2. The first word of v. 2 in the Greek text is *kathōs*, better rendered ‘just as’ than ‘for’. In other words, v. 2 establishes the ground for the petition of v. 1b, and does so by establishing an analogical pattern. This can be schematized as follows:

All of v. 2 is the ground for v. 1b, but there are important horizontal parallels that can be observed in this schematization. The first part of v. 2 is best understood as referring to God’s pre-temporal decision to give his Son authority (*exousia*; cf. notes on 1:12) over all people (*pasēs sarkōs*, lit. ‘all flesh’, a common Jewish way of referring to all of humanity). This is not the authority Jesus enjoys inherent in his being the Son, making the Father’s gift of authority equivalent to the fact that the Father is the *fons divinitatis*, the source of deity, of the Son; for if that were in view, it is hard to see how it could serve as the basis for the prayer of v. 1b. Nor does v. 2a proleptically refer to the gift of authority the Father grants the Son consequent upon the Son’s obedience unto death: again, it is hard to see how that still future grant could serve as the *ground* for the petition of v. 1. Rather, v. 2b refers to the Father’s gift, *in eternity past*, of authority over all humanity, on the basis of the Son’s *prospective* obedient humiliation, death, resurrection and exaltation. It is nothing less than the redemptive plan of God, for the second part of the verse makes the purpose of this grant clear: it is that the Son might give eternal life to those the Father has given him.

Thus, when Jesus petitions his Father to glorify the Son (v. 1b), he does so on the basis of the Father’s pre-temporal plan to give all authority to the Son as a function of the Son’s triumphant cross-work and exaltation. Jesus asks that he might be glorified in order that he might in turn glorify the Father (v. 1b)—which is congruent with the purpose clause in v. 2. As the Father is glorified before human beings, so they are brought to faith in the Son and in the one who sent him, and gain the eternal life that was the purpose of the grant of authority given to the Son. Cf. the numerous points of contact with Romans 1:1–5.

Although the grant of authority is ‘over all people’, the *purpose* of the grant is that those whom the Father has given to the Son might have eternal life. As in 6:37 and elsewhere, they are collectively grouped into a neuter plural (*pan ho*, lit. ‘all which’), even while their individuality is preserved by the pronoun *autois* (lit. ‘that he might give eternal life to them’). There is no embarrassment whatsoever between the assertion that God’s sovereign purposes extend to the election of those who will be redeemed, and the twin assumptions that God’s love extends to the ‘world’ (cf. notes on 1:9; 3:16), and that those who reject God’s mercy stand under his wrath (3:36; cf. Carson, especially pp. 163–198). In Synoptic categories, this grant of universal authority to the Son is nothing less than the universal sovereignty of God, the universal kingdom of God, which is mediated exclusively through Christ once the cross, the resurrection and the exaltation have occurred (Mt. 28:18; cf. 1 Cor. 15:27–28). Everything and everyone

in the universe is subject to this kingdom, whether the point is acknowledged or not. The saving subset of this universal reign, the 'kingdom' which one 'enters' only by the new birth (3:3, 5; cf. Mt. 7:21–23; 13:24–30), is the dynamic equivalent of that peculiar exercise of the Son's authority that issues in eternal life for all those the Father has given to the Son (cf. also 5:21–27). On 'eternal life', cf. notes on 1:4; 3:15.

17:3. Many commentators treat v. 3 as a parenthesis to the argument, a tangential explanation of 'eternal life' introduced in v. 2. Barrett (p. 503) says it is the sort of material that would have been included in a footnote, had that orthographical device been available to the Evangelist. But if the links between v. 1 and v. 2, suggested above, fairly represent the flow of thought, then v. 3 constitutes a natural progression (cf. Ritt, pp. 345–353). The gift of authority to the Son, consequent upon his death and exaltation, has as its end that all those whom the Father has given to the Son should be given eternal life (v. 2). Otherwise put, the glorification of the Son entails the glorification of God (v. 1)—*i.e.* God is clothed in splendour in the eyes of those who perceive what has been achieved by God himself in the cross, resurrection and exaltation of his Son. To see God's glory, to be given eternal life—these are parallel, and, lest the reader miss the point, the two themes are drawn together in v. 3. Eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God. Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One.

Many religions tie eternal life to the knowledge of God or of gods. Long lists of partial parallels to various sources are cited in the larger commentaries. But the closest parallels are found in the Old Testament. We have already observed that an integral element of the promised new covenant is that all of God's new covenant people, from the least to the greatest, would know him personally, and without an intermediary so typical of the old covenant relationships (Je. 31:34; Heb. 8:11; cf. notes on Jn. 3:5). God's people are destroyed from lack of knowledge (Ho. 4:6); conversely, Habakkuk foresees a time when 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' (Hab. 2:14). We are to 'acknowledge him' (lit. 'know him'), and 'he will direct [our] paths' (Pr. 3:6); 'the LORD is your life' (Dt. 30:20). To know God is to be transformed, and thus to be introduced to a life that could not otherwise be experienced.

This is not knowledge of 'the divine' in some pantheistic or merely utilitarian sense. This is knowledge of *the only true God* (cf. 5:44; 1 Thes. 1:9; 1 Jn. 5:20). But because this one true God has supremely revealed himself in the person of his Son (1:18), knowledge of God cannot be divorced from knowledge of Jesus Christ. Indeed, knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom God has sent, is the ultimate access to knowledge of God (cf. 14:7; 20:31; especially Mt. 11:27). Nor is this knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ merely intellectual, mere information (though it invariably includes information). In a Gospel that ranks belief no less central than knowledge to the acquisition of eternal life (3:16; 20:31), it is clear

that the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ entails fellowship, trust, personal relationship, faith. There is no more powerful evangelistic theme.

17:4–5. Throughout his ministry Jesus has brought glory to God *on earth*—*i.e.* Jesus has so clothed the Father with splendour that many human beings (creatures of the earth, not of heaven) have come to praise him. After all, the incarnation itself was a display of glory (*cf.* notes on 1:14). The difficult point of this verse is the uncertainty as to whether the work that Jesus has completed refers to everything he has done *up to this point*, or proleptically includes his obedience unto death, the death that lies immediately ahead (*cf.* Riedl, pp. 69–186). Either interpretation can be made to ‘fit’ the passage. Some have argued for the former by appealing to the contrast implicit in the words *And now* (v. 5), which introduce the glorification of Jesus (= his death/exaltation). This misses the mark. There is certainly a contrast between v. 4 and v. 5, but it is not between previous work that Jesus has completed and his cross-work that lies immediately ahead. Rather, a contrast is drawn between the glory that Jesus by his work has brought to the Father on earth, and the glory he asks the Father to give him (*cf.* 13:31–32) in heaven. Once that is seen, it makes best sense if v. 4 includes *all* the work by which Jesus brings glory to his Father, and that includes his own death, resurrection and exaltation (*cf.* 4:34; 5:36; 19:30). So he is speaking proleptically (as in v. 12, ‘While I was with them ...’), oscillating with a more prosaic description of his place at this moment in the flow of redemptive history (e.g. v. 11, ‘I am coming to you ...’).

What is clear is that Jesus is asking to be returned to the glory that he shared with the Father before the world began, *i.e.* before creation (*cf.* notes on 1:1; 8:58). Haenchen (2. 502) rightly observes that this means the incarnation entailed a forfeiture of glory, and this ill accords with Käsemann’s thesis (especially pp. 8–26) that the Fourth Gospel portrays no genuine incarnation at all, but thinks of Jesus in docetic terms as a ‘god walking about the earth’. This does not mean that Jesus is asking for what might be called a ‘de-incarnation’ in order to be returned to the glory he once enjoyed. When the Word became flesh (1:14), this new condition was not designed to be temporary. When Jesus is glorified, he does not leave his body behind in a grave, but rises with a transformed, glorified body (to use a Pauline category; *cf.* notes on ch. 20) which returns to the Father (*cf.* 20:17) and thus to the glory the Son had with the Father ‘before the world began’.