

When I was asked to teach last spring I was given a few chapters as options, and when I saw this, an entire chapter of Jesus praying to the Father, I wanted this chapter. I wanted to sit and rest in the words of my Savior to my Holy Father. How amazing is that! I had a lot of plans, I was going to read this chapter daily so that the richness and the depth of this prayer could wash over me. But life got in the way. So then I decided I would start on Jan 1, like a new year's resolution, that still gave me more than 50 days to bask in God's glory. And then I got in the way. I had a thousand excuses for why I didn't have time to read or pray or work on this talk. A few weeks ago I showed up at my small group with cupcakes and someone asked me how my talk prep was going. And I said, well, yesterday I made cupcakes instead of working on it, so what does that tell you?

Since the start of the year, maybe longer, I'm sure if you asked my husband he'd be able to tell you for how long, I have been feeling stuck, overwhelmed, apathetic. This week I described it to my jr high girls as being in a funk. Not about this passage, about everything. It has been difficult for me to focus on the Word. I confess that I wish I had spent more time on preparing. The riches of this passage are immeasurable, and are what I desperately need.

Almost every sermon series about this chapter, b/c there are all series, I've yet to find one single sermon that covers the whole chapter, they all start with great bible teachers and scholars talking about how inept they feel to cover this chapter where God speaks to God. Charles Spurgeon said, "It is far beyond our little skill to draw forth all the sweets which lie

within these words like ointment in a box of alabaster. For their full consideration a lifetime would be too brief, and the mind of the most grace-taught believer too feeble.” Martin LLOYD Jones has 48 sermons on this chapter, and they’re all online, he’s enjoyable to listen to. And no, I did not listen to all 48.

But God continues to prove to me over and over that He is faithful, even when I am not. Despite my resisting, God has dragged me through this chapter because He knows what I need. In his loving kindness he gave me an extra week b/c of snow that never really happened, and an extra day because my job that has been extremely busy for 6 months, didn’t need me Monday. And b/c He loves to bless me abundantly, he even had the pastry I’ve been looking for at Paris Baguette for months, both times I went there to work on my talk this week. I am extremely grateful for all the prayers you have prayed for me as well. My prayer today is that God will be glorified and we will be strengthened.

Jesus prays throughout the gospels. There are times when Jesus prays for and with his apostles or for the people he interacts with that are recorded, but most of the time when we hear about Jesus praying to the Father, he goes to be alone to pray. He goes to the mountains, or into the wilderness, or to a quiet place, or away from the crowd, or in the middle of the night, or early in the morning. Even in Gethsemane, when Jesus tells his disciples he needs them there for support, he tells them to stay back while he goes and prays. But this is a different kind of prayer. Jesus wants his apostles to hear, he wants this prayer to be remembered and recorded

for his apostles, for the new church they will build, and for us in 2025 to know his heart and his desire for his people.

Do you know that Jesus prays for you? This chapter is a tangible example of Jesus praying for his people. In Matthew 19, Jesus prays for the little children. In Luke's record of the Last Supper, Jesus tells Peter,

“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.”

And Jesus continues to pray for His church even now, as he sits on His throne. Romans 8:34 says that Jesus “is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” In 1 John 2:1 we read that Jesus is our “advocate with the Father,” and in Hebrews 7:25 it says that Jesus “always lives to make intercessions for us.”

John 17 is a unique chapter in the bible. It is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus and John is the ONLY Gospel that contains it. It is often entitled the Prayer of the Great High Priest because in it we have a portrait of Jesus as priest.

Hebrews 7:25-28 describes this aspect of Jesus' character very well.

25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.**26** Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. **27** Unlike the

other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. **28** For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

I expect this is a very emotional time for Jesus. We just finished chapters 14-16, Jesus' parting instructions for his apostles. Jesus is preparing to leave his closest friends on earth. Friends he has mentored and ministered to for the past 3 years.

Jesus just finished sharing his heart with his apostles, and now he turns to his own Father and he cries out to Him in prayer. I am going to read the prayer as we go along, but I will be cutting out some of the more repetitive verses for time sake.

Let's read the first 5 verses. John 17: 1-5

17 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, **2** since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. **3** And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. **4** I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. **5** And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Jesus looks up to heaven, and for some reason, I can't look up to heaven without reaching my arms up, so I picture Jesus, arms up, eyes heavenward. "The hour has come!" This is the moment Jesus was born for. This is the moment all of human history has been longing for. Finally, the hour has come, and in his last hour, Jesus is locked in and completely focused on giving God glory.

Jesus has been given full authority over all mankind. "He is the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through the Son" (John 14:6) He holds the keys to heaven, and Jesus says that eternal life is this: knowing God, and knowing Jesus Christ whom he sent.

This word for, "to know" implies that this is an active, ongoing knowing; we know now and we are continuing to know more and more. This specific greek word also means it is an experiential knowledge, not simply an intellectual knowledge. As we walk through our Christian life, and are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we are continuing to experience more and more of who God is."

The idea that it is an ongoing knowledge also means that it is not something that we are looking forward to, it is something that we have now, it isn't just the idea of living eternally, but it is eternally living in Christ, it begins when we first come to know Jesus and continues all through our life as we grow in our knowledge and understanding of who God is, its culmination being in heaven when our knowledge will be complete and we will see Jesus in his full glory, which we'll talk about more in a few verses.

It's important to note that Jesus says eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus.

JC Ryle says “the mere knowledge of God is not sufficient and saves none. We must know the Son as well as the Father. God known without Christ is a being we can only fear and dare not approach. It is “God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” who alone can give the soul life and .peace.”

In v 4, Jesus switches from 3rd person to 1st person, as if he is now making a personal plea to the Father.

Jesus says his work is finished. Even though he is yet to go to the cross, his mind is determined, the plan that was set in motion from the beginning of time, will be accomplished. Jesus is the returning to the Father by way of a desperately shameful and painful death by human standards. But Jesus understands what we do not. Him being lifted up on the cross will forever change it from a symbol of shame to a symbol of glory and redemption. Jesus asks God the Father to reverse the self-emptying that Jesus endured by becoming man and to restore to him the splendor and glory that he shared with the Father before the world began. The cross and the ascension are inseparable, it is through the cross that Jesus will return to the Father and His full glory, therefore, in this prayer we see Jesus resolute to obey the father, even to death on the cross. Jesus’ desire is that he may be used by the Father for the ultimate display of his divine love.

God’s seeming lack of intervention in the most horrible moment of human history led to the Most Glory. How can that realization change the way we look at our suffering, our prayers, and God’s response to them? God is still at work redemptively, regardless of the answer to our prayers.

Now vs 6-19

6 “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. **7** Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. **8** For I have given them the words that you gave 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. **9** I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours...and I am glorified in them. **11** 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. **12** While I was with them, I kept them in your name,,, I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. **13** But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. **14** I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world...**15** I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one...**17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. **18** As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. **19** And for their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Jesus prays for his apostles. Jesus says he has manifested God to them. Manifest means to take something that was hidden and to make it known or obvious by one's actions. Jesus has lived out goodness and mercy and grace and loving kindness, and the apostles have seen that and

have recognized God in Jesus. As Christians we have that same responsibility. We may be the only glimpse of God that an unbelieving world will see. Are we to point people to Jesus, absolutely, we want people looking at Jesus, not us, but the reality is, people ARE looking at us and they are watching us, and they are forming opinions of God on what they see in us. What are we manifesting about God? What characteristics of the one true God are people seeing in us? Are they seeing His grace? His mercy? His sacrificial love? Are we making Jesus beautiful to them, or are they only seeing our filthy rags?

Listen to how Jesus speaks about the apostles. He says, they are gifts, given to Him by the Father. We have read the gospels, and we have seen accounts of the apostles' weak faith and shallow knowledge and faint hearts, but Jesus sees far more in his people than they see in themselves or than others see in them. They are his royal priesthood, his treasured possession. They belong to Jesus, just as we belong to Jesus. And Jesus says that they have received his word and they have believed it. They know the truth. Remember back to John 6 after one of Jesus' teachings many people left and he turned to his apostles and said, "do you also want to go?" Peter answers him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Not only does Jesus say they belong to him, but he says he is GLORIFIED in them. He knows that in less than 24 hours Peter is going to deny him, and all but John are going to abandon him at the cross. He knows all their weaknesses. He knows all their flaws and yet He says that He is glorified in them. He is honored and lifted up by their faith, by their

belief in him and in the truth of God's word. Genuine faith, however dim, truly glorifies God. Every little act of faith the apostles have performed is Jesus' glory shining through them. The same is true of us. Even in all of our weakness, sometimes more so because of our weakness, Jesus is glorified in us. Like our dear sister Sue Lutz said, sometimes all we have to offer is a faceplant of faith, and Jesus GLORIES in that! The kindness of Jesus, the mercy of Jesus, the sacrificial love of Jesus that we reflect to an unbelieving world, that glorifies Jesus.

Jesus specifically says he is not praying for the world, He is praying for his chosen ones, not because he doesn't love the world, we know He loves the world, John 3:16, but he is praying for these chosen apostles b/c they are the ones that will take His message into the world so that others might believe; they need to be strengthened, protected, united.

What Jesus was praying was sort of unheard of in the context of the day. Disciples never continued to follow after a dead Rabbi. Once their teacher died, they would take the lessons they learned and go off on their own. Honestly it would make more sense for the disciples to scatter after the death of Jesus, first so they could spread the message around more and second because they were mem of suspicion and a larger group was a bigger target. But the world, the flesh, and the devil are so pervasive, and so seductive that the disciples would not have been able to remain in Christ on their own efforts. When believers stay in Christ, it is because Jesus prayed, "*Holy Father, keep them in your name.*"

Jesus calls God, "Father" over 100 times in the Gospels, he calls him Holy Father only 1 time, here. He is claiming the promise of a Holy God

who demands a Holy people. Father, you are set apart, now set apart your people. Jesus is very clear, I don't want you to take them out of the world, we need to be in the world. Jesus wants us to be kept in God, to be kept as one, and to be kept from evil.

JC Ryle says, "It is far better for His people to remain in the world and be kept from its evil than to be taken out of the world and removed from the presence of evil altogether...to abide here in this valley of tears; tried, tempted, assaulted, and yet kept from falling into sin, is the surest plan to promote the sanctification of Christians and to Glorify Christ...The easiest course is not always the path of duty. He that would win the crown must carry the cross and show himself light in the midst of darkness and salt in the midst of corruption."

In a recent conversation with my 15 year old, he was pressing back on a decision he disagreed with and said, his whole life he has been told his job is to be a light, but you can't be a light in a room that is already bright, you only see light when it is in the darkness.

Sisters, are we too comfortable in our bright places? Are we willing to step into the darkness? Are we willing to encourage those around us to step into the darkness so that Jesus' light can shine?

Do not be afraid sisters. So often I am afraid of the world, I am afraid of the evil that threatens me and my children, but God says,

"Remember that I commanded you to be strong and brave. So don't be afraid. The Lord your God will be with you everywhere you go."

Joshua 1:9

And we can take hope in perseverance to the end b/c God promises that too. Psalm 121 says

“The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore.”

Don't be fooled into thinking this will be an easy task, remember, Jesus also says the world hates me, and it will hate you too. We have not been called to an easy task, but we have been promised everything we need to accomplish it.

Sisters, pray for protection. Regularly pray for protection from spiritual attacks, for yourself, for your loved ones and for the church, just as Jesus prayed for His disciples. And then step out in boldness, “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Phil 1:6

The keeping work that Jesus prays for is not just that they would be kept “in Him”, but also that they would be kept together. Jesus prayed that they would be **one**, just like the Father and Jesus are one. And we are made in their image, we are not meant to be alone. But even as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, they are not the same. Therefore, we should not expect that genuine Christian unity will mean uniformity. We should expect it to mean unity in truth! Jesus Christ is the Truth. There is only 1 way, and it is narrow. Unity should NEVER come at the cost of the truth or compromising God's word. Unity is not bringing all religions together, unity is believers maintaining the truths of the scripture, loving one

another, being devoted to each other. It is unity of spirit, of heart, of purpose, of mission and ultimately a united destiny.

When we do this, we reflect to the world who Jesus is and why He came. Our unity puts Christ's mission on display and shows the world what kind of Savior and Lord He is. Unity is that we are all 1 in Christ. It breaks down race and sex and station, and denomination and it should eclipse even politics.

Tim Keller said, "the honor of Jesus' name is bound up in the quality of this community. It must be possible or Jesus would not have spoken about it. We need to be so radically united and so radically different that the outside world sees us and knows that we are different."

When the world looks at the church, what do they see? How are we failing to live in unity with our brothers and sisters? Spend some time talking about that in your small groups.

Jesus asks the Father to keep his disciples, but he also asks that they be filled with joy, the same joy that Jesus has. "

Jesus has an existence filled with joy. His joy surpasses the joy of anyone else who ever lived, because

His joy is rooted in unbroken fellowship with the Father, and unwavering faith and confidence in the Father, and it comes from seeing all the great things that God had done

And

His joy was never diminished by His own sin, or corruption, or Satan having power over him.

Jesus prays that his disciples experience joy. . We must know that He is also concerned that WE have joy. God's aim is to multiply joy in our lives, not to subtract it. The world, the flesh, and the devil would tell us something different, the word cosmic killjoy gets used to describe God sometimes, but this couldn't be further from the truth. One theologian puts it like this, "Joy in the heart of the creature corresponds to goodness in the heart of the Creator." John Piper says "God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him."

Jesus, the Father & the Holy Spirit had perfect love, perfect unity, and perfect joy before the foundation of the world. They did not need to make man, they made man so that we could know joy and love and unity as they do. Our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him! So, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice! And let your joy be evident to those around you.

And how does God accomplish all these things? Keeping us in the world but protecting us from the evil one while still filling us with joy? Sanctification.

Sanctification is a 2 sided coin, we are called to be separate, and as such there are things in this world that we should not do, things we avoid as we strive for holiness. Sanctification also means being set apart, but it's more than this, it is being set apart for a purpose, God's purpose. Jesus isn't merely *leaving* them in the world, but He is *sending* them into it, to be witnesses of the one true God.

Jesus came to teach, to live among us, to love, to suffer for truth and righteousness, and ultimately to rescue man. He has trained his apostles to do the same and is now sending them out to continue his mission by sharing Jesus with the world. We are called to this same work. Jesus asks the Father to sanctify them, keep them from evil, yes; but also make them good! Change their hearts, and make them new, so that more and more they can be used by You to complete the mission here on earth.

There is a missional purpose in sanctification: not only should sanctification result in us being on mission, but also, God's mission must be carried out by sanctified people - people who are filled with the Spirit and obedient to God's Word; people who love one another and are unified in their common allegiance to Christ.

Sanctification happens through learning God's truth and Jesus says God's word is truth. Reading and studying God's word helps us to know God better, it is essential to growing in faith and understanding. If we look back at the very beginning of our study in John, we are reminded that:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John 1:1-5

Jesus is the Word incarnate, and he says, Father I am consecrating myself, dedicating myself to Your will, specifically offering myself as the sacrifice, so that they may know what is true. Jesus consecrated himself for us so that we are cleansed, through his blood, and able to live holy lives and testify to who God is and what Christ Jesus has done. Through his

death and resurrection Jesus also returned to the father and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in them and in us to continue the work of Sanctification.

Jesus closes his prayer praying for us, for all believers.

20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word... 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. **24** Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. **25** O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. **26** I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Again Jesus talks about the oneness that should be a hallmark of Christianity.

“walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body...one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”. Ephesians 4:1-3

Jesus says, I gave them my glory, that which makes me beautiful, that light that shines in me, I gave it to them as well; so that when the world sees their otherworldly unity and care for one another, they will have no choice but to believe that this is only possible through Christ. This is only possible when the love of God is being poured out in the life of His people. And the world will say, I want what they have.

Then Jesus says, “Father, I want them to be with me, so they can see me in my full glory.” Jesus longs for us to be with him just as much as we long to be with him. And when our work on earth is done, we will get to see him in full splendor. “clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash, his hair as white as snow, his eyes like a flame of fire, his feet as burnished bronze, his voice like the roar of many waters. And when we fall at his feet he will say, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, **18** and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore...”

In Jesus’ final statement he calls God Righteous Father. This is the only place in the bible where the term righteous father is used. Charles Spurgeon says, God is “righteous,” having the attributes of a Judge and Ruler: just, impartial, by no means sparing the guilty; and He is “Father,” loving, tender, forgiving. How can the judge and the father be found in one? There is but one answer, and that is found in the sacrifice of Jesus which has joined the two in one. In the atonement of our Lord Jesus “mercy and truth are met together”

Jesus says, Righteous Father, I know who you are. I have experienced for all eternity your love that offers truth and mercy, and I want these people to experience this same love. This is unfathomable to me, overwhelming, to

think that we could be loved by God, the creator of the universe, the author and perfecter of life, the alpha and the omega as much as the Father loves Jesus, his only begotten son, who has been in perfect union with him for all eternity. Take a minute to sit in that.

Christian, do you know how much you are loved?

38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[b] neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. NLT Romans 8:38-39

Pray with me

O Holy and Righteous Father, I cannot grasp how deep your love is for us, how vast beyond measure, that your plan from the foundations of the world would have been that your only beloved Son would take my place on that cross. That only hours before his horrific death, his thoughts would be for me. To God be the glory! Lord, we lay claim to your promises in this prayer, to keep us, to unite us, to protect us from evil. Lord embolden us to carry out your mission, to be light in a dark world. Sustain us until we can be with you in full glory. Until that day, may we pour out the same measure of love that you have poured into us.

I pray all these things in the the name of our loving Savior, Jesus, Amen