

## **The High Priestly Prayer of Christ**

**John 17:1-2**

**Part One**

We are now making a major transition in our study of the Gospel of John. We have been examining what is commonly referred to as the “Upper Room Discourse” which is the biblical record of Christ’s interaction with His disciples on the last night of His life. The record of this interaction is recorded for us in **John 13:31-17:26**. But now we are ready to move on in John’s Gospel to our next major area of study, which is commonly referred to as the “The High Priestly Prayer of Christ” in **John 17**.

This prayer is unique. This prayer is so exalted that it cannot be duplicated. Its serenity, its majesty, and its authority befit only the heart and the lips of Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God.

The prayer marks the end of Christ’s public ministry, but it looks forward to the ongoing work of His immediate disciples and then to those who would later believe through them.

Though this prayer is difficult to subdivide, for it is essentially a unity, there is a certain movement within this prayer that I would like to highlight for you over the next several weeks.

My hope and my prayer as we do this is that it might help us to understand that we exist for one primary purpose and that is to glorify God. And I would also hope and pray that as we become more and more convinced of this truth that God will enable us by His grace to fulfill this purpose so that we might experience not only the satisfaction and the fulfillment of it but also the sheer joy of it.

So how are we going to outline this prayer? We will outline this prayer based on the various people Christ prayed for. Therefore over the next several weeks the question that we will be seeking to answer is this: Who did Christ pray for in His high priestly prayer? This morning we will be considering the first person that Christ prayed for. And who was that?

Christ in John 17:1-5 prayed for Himself. Let me read these verses for you. **“These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said,**

**‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, (2) even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. (3) And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. (4) I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. (5) And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.’**” So who did Jesus pray for in these verses? He prayed for Himself. And what did He pray for?

Jesus in John 17:1-5 prayed for His glorification. Isn’t this exactly what He said in **John 17:1, “Glorify Thy Son?”** Now this might on the surface appear to be a rather self-serving prayer but as we break these verses down and look at them more carefully we will see that this request is anything but self-serving.

So let us begin by looking at **verse one**. How does this verse begin? It begins with Christ **“lifting up His eyes to heaven.”** This particular posture might seem a little odd to us since most of us when praying bow our heads and close our eyes. But Christ, typically when He prayed, did not do this. His typical posture was to do exactly what He did here, which was to lift His eyes toward heaven.

Can we do the same? Of course we can do the same. Why? We can do the same because we in Christ have been justified, but though we have been justified and therefore now enjoy a righteous standing before God in Christ we have not yet been fully sanctified. Or in other words, we have not yet been perfected in respect to what we might think, feel, say or do.

Therefore even though I could lift my eyes to heaven when I pray, as Jesus did here in **John 17**, based on my righteous standing in Christ, I have chosen to continue to bow my head and close my eyes when I approach Him in prayer.

Do I see a day when that will change for me? Yes! And when will that day be? It will be on that day when I stand with Christ in glory perfected and complete. On that day with my eyes wide open and while gazing up at the His throne I will offer up praise to Him that I now only offer up to Him with my head bowed and eyes closed.

So what about you? As I shared with you, you are free to do it either way. But whatever posture we assume it is vitally important that we recognize the only reason that we can come into His presence at all using either posture is because of Christ and what was about to transpire in Christ's life, which brings us back to Christ's prayer.

So how does Christ's prayer begin? It begins with these words, "**Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee.**"

So let us first of all look at the phrase, "**Father, the hour has come**" and more precisely let us look at the words "**the hour.**" This is not the first time that we have seen a reference to this particular "hour." In fact, we have already seen it twice in this Gospel, once in **John 17:30** and then again in **John 18:20**.

In both of these cases the writer of this Gospel made the point that the Jewish leaders could not seize Christ because His 'hour' had not yet come; or in other words, Christ could not be arrested, tried and crucified by the Jewish leaders until the specific time that Christ's Father had appointed for Him to be arrested, tried, and crucified had in fact arrived.

But Christ now in His prayer to His Father in **John 17:1** acknowledged that this hour had now come. Or in other words, He knew that His Father's appointed time for His arrest, trial and crucifixion was now upon Him. But these particular events were not the only events that Christ associated with this appointed hour. There were other events as well, events I believe that were not associated with His cross but rather with His crown.

This is something that I believe we will see clearly when we finally get to the "glory" of **verse 5** which was the glory that He enjoyed with His Father before the foundation of the world and see the linkage that Christ makes between His cross and this future glory in the context of this "hour" that had just come upon Him.

Therefore When Jesus, based on the context of John 17, referred to "the hour" as now having come, He was referring not only to the hour of His death but also to His resurrection, ascension and coronation. So how did Christ pray in light of this hour that had now come upon Him and all the events that He associated with this hour?

Christ prayed that in light of this hour that had now come upon Him and all the events He associated with that hour that His Father would glorify Him. Or in other words, He prayed that His Father would glorify Him in His death, in His resurrection, in His ascension and in His coronation. Or we could say Christ was asking the Father that in this moment of truth in respect to this hour that had come upon Him that His attributes as God's Son might shine forth in all the events that were about to transpire in this hour that had now come upon Him.

So let me ask you this question. Did the attributes of Christ shine forth in His death? Or in other words, was He glorified in His death? And what is the answer? The answer is yes!

Christ's death glorified Him because it manifested His perfect obedience, His infinite love and His complete mastery over all things essential to the perfect culmination of His Father's redemptive plan.

So now let me ask you another question. Did the attributes of Christ as God's Son shine forth in His resurrection, ascension and coronation? And what is the answer? The answer is of course, yes! Those attributes did shine forth and did in fact glorify Him.

Christ's resurrection, ascension and coronation glorified Him because these events displayed His person, power and majesty in a way that had not been seen during the course of His incarnation. So who did Jesus pray for first? He prayed for Himself. And what did He pray? He prayed that in respect to the hour that had now come upon Him that His Father would glorify Him.

So now let me ask you this question: Though Christ did in fact pray for Himself, was His prayer concerning His glorification a selfish prayer? Some might think that it was but based on the context the answer would have to be no, it was not a selfish prayer!

And why is this? Let us once again go back and **John 17:1** and read Christ's request but this time we will read the entire request. What does it say? This is what it says, **"Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee."** When Christ added the phrase, **"that the Son may glorify Thee"** He showed that His prayer was not a selfish prayer. Christ wanted to be glorified in order that through His glorification that He might

glorify His Father. From Christ's perspective His glorification through the events of the hour that had now come upon Him was not an end in itself but rather a means to an end.

So let me ask you this question: When you pray for yourself what are you seeking to accomplish? Are you seeking to advance yourself and your purposes and your ambitions or are you seeking to glorify God? Hopefully your answer is that you are seeking to glorify God.

The desire to glorify God so that He might be displayed in all of His beauty needs to be the driving force of our lives and therefore all our prayers (Colossians 1:16). Why? Because this is why we have been created. What does **Colossians 1:16** tell us? It tells us this: **"We have been created by God and for God."** Will we ever find true fulfillment and satisfaction in this life apart from living our lives for Him and seeking His glory? What is the answer? No! We will not be able to do this for the simple reason this is why we have been created.

And when we finally get this, and when we finally by His grace begin to live this, and see it reflected in our prayers, it will open up to us the door to true happiness and true peace no matter what our circumstances might be, for the simple reason that in any circumstance we can always through prayer find a way to do what? Glorify Him!

Therefore it really should not matter a whole lot to us whether we are rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, strong or weak, known or unknown, rather what should really matter to us is whether or not, we by the grace the God, are able through prayer to glorify Him in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves. This is what was important to Christ and this is what needs to be important to us.

So after praying that His Father would glorify Him so that He might glorify His Father, Christ in **John 17:2** actually helps us, I believe, to see very clearly how His glorification would in fact glorify His Father.

Christ's glorification in the midst of the hour that had come upon Him would glorify His Father because Christ's glorification would allow His Father's redemptive plan to move forward (John 17:2).

Let me read for you once again **John 17:1** but this time I will add **John 17:2**. What does it say? This is what it says. **“These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, (2) even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life.’”** Obviously there is a link between Christ’s prayer that His Father would glorify Him so that He might glorify His Father and what Jesus said to His Father in **verse 2**. So what is Christ’s point?

Christ’s point was this. If Christ were not glorified then His Father would not have been able to be glorified because Christ would not have been able to provide life to those whom His Father had chosen.

Now there is more to be said about this verse and I will seek to do that for you next week but for right now what is important for us to understand is that when Christ prayed for Himself that He might be glorified that His prayer was prayed not in order to advance His purposes and His plans but rather that He prayed the prayer that He prayed in order to advance the redemptive purposes and plans of His Father that were dependent upon His Father glorifying His Son in the midst of this hour that had now come upon Him.

So on the surface it might appear that when Christ asked His Father to glorify Him in the midst of the hour that had now come upon Him that His prayer was selfish or self-centered but this was the furthest thing from His mind. He only prayed that His Father would glorify Him in order that He in this hour might be able to glorify His Father. And how would He be able to do this? He would be able to do this because as the Father is glorifying His Son, in the midst of the hour that had just come upon Him, it would allow His Son to complete the mission of redemption so that He might be able to give life to all those whom His Father had chosen.

And again I would like us to take this to heart in respect to how we approach life and certainly how we approach prayer.

Does it really matter if we are rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, known or unknown in respect to our created purpose? And the answer is no! It really does not matter. And the reason is simple. In whatever circumstance or situation we may find ourselves we will always be able to find a way to

glorify God and we need in those situations to order our prayers accordingly (Philippians 1:19-21).

May God give us the grace to see how we might glorify God in each and every circumstance we find ourselves and may He give us the grace to pray accordingly.