

**John:
Inner Sanctum**

John 17:1-26

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

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Turn with me to the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel and we'll read it together. Hear the Word of God.

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My made full in themselves.

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them

into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

So far God's holy and inerrant Word; may He bless the reading of it. Let's pray.

Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

At no time have I felt my inadequacy in preaching Scripture as I do this evening coming to this particular chapter, John 17. Philip Melancthon's friend and disciple, a man by the name of David Hitraus, in the 16th century was the first person to refer to this chapter as Jesus' sacerdotal prayer, or as we sometimes call it, Jesus' *High Priestly Prayer*. Before that, as far back as the fifth century Cyril of Alexandria, theologians and Bible students have perceived in this chapter something of the picture of a high priest going into the most holy place and taking with him the names of the tribes of Israel, the children of God, the people of God, and interceding on their behalf.

This is holy ground. Nowhere are the words of Calvin truer than here about the gospel of John, "Here we see the soul of Jesus." Jesus is finished speaking to His disciples, and now He turns to His Father in heaven. We're eavesdropping a prayer. We're over hearing a prayer of Jesus.

Do you ever wonder what kind of words Jesus employed when He prayed. How did He pray? Well, this is how He prayed; this is Jesus' prayer language. I've been wondering this week. Did John take it down notes as he listened to Jesus praying? Did he recall it, perhaps, the next day and make some notes? Was it just given to him afresh by the Holy Spirit? I don't know the answers to those questions. John Knox had this prayer read to him every day during his last days when he was ill and dying, and just before he died he confessed to drawing from this prayer the greatest source of comfort and strength.

I've been looking for help in how to preach this chapter. I turned to Dr. Martyn

Lloyd-Jones and discovered that he preached 48 sermons on John 17. I turned to James Montgomery Boice and discovered that he'd preached 16 sermons on John 17. I have a book in my library by Thomas Manton, one of the great Puritans and one time chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, and I discovered that he preached 45 sermons on John 17. And I have to do it in one.

You will note in your Bibles, especially if your Bibles are divided into sections with chapter or section headings added to the Scripture, you'll notice that it falls fairly neatly into three sections. In verses one to five, Jesus is praying for Himself; in verse 6-19 Jesus is praying for the disciples; and in verses 20-26 Jesus prays for the people of God everywhere at all times—that's us.

We could take those three segments, but that's not what I'm going to do. That would be a wonderful way of looking at John 17, going through it almost verse by verse. Instead I want you to notice verse 24 because in many ways, verse 24 encapsulates some of the main ideas and petitions of this prayer. In many ways verse 24 provides for us what we sometimes call an epitomizing text: "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory which thou hast given Me. For thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world."

I. The basis on which Christ prays for His people.

I want us to see first of all the basis on which Christ prays for His people. There are two things, two platforms on which Jesus seems to base the petitions of this prayer. First of all, He seems here to be fully conscious of His role as divine mediator. He says, "I desire," or perhaps better, "I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me." This is His certain petition. In a few hours from now, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as He makes His way from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane, the tone of Jesus' prayer will change. Then, He will pray in the darkness of Gethsemane, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done." That was a prayer about Himself, but now, here in the upper room, there is a certainty to this prayer, a certainty that is based upon a consciousness in His role as the divine Mediator.

As you read this prayer, something of the splendor of Jesus' deity seems to shine forth in the words that He uses. He seems fully conscious, "Father, glorify Your Son," He says. Glorify Your Son, that's how He begins this prayer. He's the Son of God, He's the Lord of Glory, He is the Word incarnate, enfleshed to be sure, incognito to many, but He is the eternal Son of God, the one who had been with God from the very beginning. "Thou didst love Me from before the foundation of the world," He's conscious of an existence before the world was created. And on that basis, He seems to bring forth now from within Him petitions on behalf of His disciples based on that consciousness of who He is, the second person of the Trinity, as the divine Lord and divine Messiah. But then again, He prays on the

basis of His Father's eternal love for Him, "Thou didst love Me," Jesus says, "from before the foundation of the world."

How reassuring it must have been, for Jesus on those two occasions when His Father spoke to Him directly. You remember, once in the waters of the Jordan River, when Jesus was baptized, set apart, commissioned for the task that lay before Him, a voice came from heaven, "This is My beloved Son, and I love Him, listen to Him, because I love Him." And then on the Mount of Transfiguration, when John was there and Peter also, and again that voice came from heaven, "This is My Son, and I love Him." How reassuring it must have been for Jesus at those two epochal moments, in the fulfillment of His redemptive ministry, to be reminded that His Father in heaven loves Him. "I love You," His Father had said to Him. And now, on the very verge of Gethsemane and Calvary, within hours of His crucifixion, within hours of the darkness and dereliction that will descend upon Him as the darkness begins to envelope Him, as those mists seem to come from beneath the door of the upper room to remind Him that He must now walk through the land of the valley of the shadow, He's reminded of His Father's love. When Jesus feel abandoned and forsaken and derelict, tomorrow on Friday, now, this evening, in the upper room, He bases this prayer on the assurance, on the platform, that His Father in heaven loves Him.

II. The subject of Christ's prayer.

It's interesting what Jesus says here. He prays, in verse 24, for those whom Thou has given Me. It's a phrase that repeats itself in this prayer, in verse 2 and again in verse 6 and 9. Four times in the course of this prayer, Jesus makes a prayer on behalf of those whom the Father has given to Him, donated to Him, before the foundation of the world, in election, in sovereign choice. He's not praying for the world. He's not praying for the mass of humanity, whatever love there is in God for the mass of humanity, and I think it's perfectly biblical to use that expression, that God loves this mass of humanity in some form.

Whatever and however you define that love, that's not what Jesus is praying here. This is a prayer on behalf of His elect. This is a prayer on behalf of the chosen ones. This is a prayer on behalf of those whom the Father had gifted to the Son in the covenant of redemption. It's a phrase you've seen before. In chapter 6 verses 37-39, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me. And whoever comes to Me I will never cast out." You've heard it again in chapter 10 when Jesus speaks of His sheep, saying, "No one is able to snatch them from out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand." Who are they? Who are they, exactly? Two groups of people. One group, in verses 6-19, the disciples, the eleven disciples, now that Judas Iscariot has left. Jesus has been praying for them. They have been given to Him, gifted to Him, but now, in this section He's praying for another group, a wider group, the circle is now growing. He's praying

not just for them, "I do not ask in behalf of these alone," verse 20, "but for those who believe in Me through their words."

Dear folk here. You listen to this. Because this applies to you. You think you're not going to find something about missions in here? Well, it's here. I'm not making it up. It's right here in the text. Jesus is praying for those who will come to faith through the instrumentality of the disciples. The disciples will go out into the world. They'll preach the gospel, they'll teach the gospel, they'll witness to Jesus Christ, and through them, by the power of the Holy Spirit, others will come to know Jesus Christ. They'll come to know God from every tribe and every tongue and every people and every nation. And you are going, you are going to various parts of the world, various continents of the world, and do you understand how significant a thing you are doing? You are fulfilling the last words, the final prayer and petition of Jesus. That's what you're doing. That through you, through what you do on behalf of Jesus, God will bless that, God will use that testimony, God will use that gift that He's given to you, and He'll bless it, and cause that seed to grow in the hearts and lives of others. Through you, God is accomplishing His great task of gathering His peoples from the four corners of the world.

Let me pause for a second and ask, "What effect should Jesus' prayer on behalf of His elect have on us this evening?" Three things come to mind. It should promote humility. Those of us who believe are the Father's gift of love to His Son. Did you give your mother a gift? I hope you did. You are the Father's gift to His Son. He's saying to His Son, "I love You, and I'm going to give You these people, I'm going to donate them to You, that through You and through Your ministry and through the accomplishment of redemption that You will provide on behalf of these people, You will bring them to Me." It should provoke humility. It should promote dignity.

I remember receiving a letter, a handwritten letter, from Alec Motyer. That may not mean much to you, but Alec Motyer is one of the world's finest Old Testament scholars and commentators. I would go a million miles to hear him. He's a one wonderful and extraordinary preacher. I had this handwritten letter from him a few years ago, and in the letter he said, "I've been praying for you." I had no idea he even knew I existed. And the very thought that Alec Motyer would pray for me, but that pales into insignificance in comparison, that Jesus prays for me. Jesus prays for me. He prays for me continually at the right hand of God. He ever lives, the Bible says. He ever lives to intercede for me. Have you ever said, "I'll pray for you," and you've forgotten all about it. I've done that. I'm sorry, I've done that. "I'll remember you in prayer," and you forget. That's why I write things down now. And I still forget. Jesus never forgets. He never forgets your name. He knows you intimately, He knows you better than you know yourself, He knows what it is that you need prayer, and that should promote dignity and stability. Do you notice what He says in verse 12? When Jesus prays, He loses none. Of all the millions that His Father in heaven had gifted to His Son, He has lost none of them. Not a single one.

III. What is the focus, then, of Jesus' prayer?

Notice the words of the text, He prays, "That we may be with Him where He is." With Him where He is. It's reminiscent, isn't it, of the opening words in the upper room, "In My Father's house are many rooms or mansions, and I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am there you will be also." Where I am, there you will be also. The answer to the question, "Where is heaven?" The answer is, "It is where Jesus is." To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Now, what does He mean when He prays, "That they may be with Me where I am?" Let me suggest a few lines of thought. Let me suggest, first of all, that He's praying for their sanctification. It's not there specifically in verse 24, but follow the logic with me, because it's in the rest of the prayer. The logic is that if we are going to be Jesus, we can't be there with our sins. Sin cannot be in heaven. And that's why Jesus prays, "Sanctify them," in verse 17. Jesus is praying for you, and what does He want? Look what He says: "Sanctify them in the truth. Thy word is truth." His prayer is that tonight, yes, tonight, through the Scriptures, through the word of God, through the exposition of the Scriptures, through reading the word, which He caused by His Spirit to be written down and kept pure through the ages, that through that word you might be sanctified, that you might be made more and more holy, that you might be kept from the evil influences of the world.

Part of the prayer had been, that He is leaving the world but His disciples are still in the world, and He's not praying that God would somehow take them out of the world, but that His Father in heaven would keep them from the evil one. Remember Peter, "Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you." Jesus, what is it that You pray for? Answer: I pray for your sanctification. I pray that you might be made more and more holy. Jesus, what do you want from me tonight? Jesus, as I go to the mission field, what do you want from me tonight? Answer: I want you to be holy. I want you to be like Me. I want you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. I want you to be different from the world.

What else does Jesus mean by this? I want them to be with Me. He's praying for their perseverance. I'm going to go away, Jesus is saying. "I'm coming to You, My Father, but I'm leaving those whom You've given Me in the world, and I want them to be with Me, I want every single one of them to be with Me." Trouble lies ahead. Difficulty lies ahead. It is through many tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God, but Jesus is saying, "I want You to keep each one of them. I want you to lay Your hand on each one of them and bring every single one to Me in glory." So that you can say with Paul, I'm not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed to

Him against that day.” You can say that because of the certainty of the prayer of Jesus on your behalf. And He's praying for unity. I want them, I want all of them, I want every single one of them, and in the course of the prayer, that's the basis of what He's been praying for. I want every single one of them. Those who will come to faith.

Do you see what Jesus is saying in this high priestly prayer? There is neither Jew nor Greek nor slave nor free nor male nor female, for you are all in Jesus Christ. And whatever divisions may exist in the world amongst the Church of Jesus Christ, for whatever reasons, and many of those reasons are sinful reasons, whatever reasons may exist on earth, Jesus' prayer is that in heaven they may be one with no divisions whatsoever. That is what Jesus prays, that we might be with Him where He is, and that means holiness and that means perseverance and that means unity.

But there's something more. Because Jesus' prayer is, in verse 24, “That they may be with Me where I am in order that they might behold My glory.” Every now and then in the ministry of Jesus, the incarnate Jesus, His glory had shone through a little. In the miracles, John records it in chapter two, in Cana of Galilee, “He manifested forth His glory.” In a few hours they would not see His glory. They would see a disheveled human being. They would see One upon whom the world would spit at and mock and scourge and nail to a cross and crucify. And any glory that was His by right was entirely hidden from view, and Jesus is saying, “I want them to see Me as I really am. I want them to see Me in My glory and in My splendor.” Just as some of you who have just been to see your children walk across a stage and receive their certificate of graduation and awards, and did your children not spy you out to see where you were sitting in order that they might have some consciousness that you were looking at them? And Jesus is saying, “I want them to see Me as I really am. I in you, and you in Me, in the resplendent effulgence of whom and what God is as He exists in Trinity, the Son in the Father, the Father in the Son, and the Spirit in the Son and the Father, and all of that glory, in all of that splendor.” And that's what Jesus wants for you and me. To catch a little glimpse of His glory.

And you know, my friends, whatever else is on your agenda, and however relatively important that may be to you, it pales into sheer insignificance with this petition of Jesus, that He wants you to see His glory. Do you see what that's saying to us? That if that is our destiny, if that is what God is preparing for us, that we might behold that vision of Jesus in all His glory, if that is what God is preparing for us, shouldn't we, right now, be preparing ourselves for that? “Finish then Thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be, let us see Thy great salvation, perfectly restored in Thee. Changed from glory into glory, til in heaven we take our place, til we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.” Glory, that's what Jesus prays for, glory. May God bless His word to us for His namesake.

Father, we thank You for this extraordinary prayer. We truly are not worthy even of the least of its petitions, and we pray that You would fill our vision with the glory and splendor of Christ, we pray for Jesus' sake, Amen.

A Guide to the Evening Service

The Summer Missions Commissioning

Tonight, we publicly pray over and set apart our various short-term summer missions teams. This special service gives us an opportunity, mid-way through the year, to reconsider our own personal commitment to the work of missions, as well as to be encouraged by the dozens and dozens of members of our church who are taking their precious time and energy to do the Lord's work in foreign lands. Pray for your hearing of the Word (that your heart would be open and teachable under the proclamation of God's word). Pray for our congregation members who are going abroad as short-term missionaries (that they would be useful in kingdom service and would be transformed by their experience). Pray about your missions giving (that the Lord would enable you by grace to give more willingly, cheerfully, and sacrificially than ever before). Pray for the various summer projects (that the Lord would use these outreaches and perhaps even call you to such service!).

The Psalm, Hymns and Spiritual Songs

Jesus Shall Reign (based on Psalm 72)

This is Isaac Watts' famous New Testament paraphrase of Psalm 72. This hymn is a bold declaration that one day "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord." It speaks of the sovereign reign of Christ the Mediator.

We Have Heard the Joyful Sound

Owens was a teacher in Baltimore, Maryland, for almost half a century. She also taught Sunday school at her church, and most of her hymns were written for her Sunday school students – as was this one.

I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art

This glorious hymn of praise to Christ comes to us right out the great Protestant Reformation and the *Strasbourg Psalter*. The words evidence a deep experiential knowledge of God and piety.

Blest Be the Tie That Binds

A great old Christian hymn, whose composer was converted at age 16 under the ministry of George Whitefield.

The Sermon

John 17 must surely be the most profound chapter in the Bible! And we will deal with it in half an hour! Thomas Manton, a seventeenth century Puritan minister and one time chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, preached forty-five sermons on this chapter alone!

Traditionally, this chapter has been called "The High Priestly Prayer." It was called such by David Chytraeus, a disciple of Melancthon in the sixteenth century. As early as the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria speaks of Jesus here as a high priest making intercession for His people. Despite some criticisms of this description, it seems suitable enough for what Jesus does in this chapter.

The focus of the prayer is that we (the people of God) might behold His glory! At this moment they were seeing Him in all His human weakness, and in a few hours they could have seen Him at his weakest of all as He hung upon the cross. They did not, of course, (apart from John) because they all fled. But one day, they would see Him in all His native glory: as the Son of God. Think of it! Thomas Binney, in his hymn, *Eternal Light! Eternal Light!* put it this way:

O how shall I, whose native sphere
Is Dark, whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable Appear
And on my naked spirit bear
The uncreated beam?
There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode,
An offering and a sacrifice
A Holy Spirit's energies,
An Advocate with God

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