

The Gospel of John

The High Priestly Prayer

John 18:1, 17:1-2

INTRODUCTION:

The scripture text is somewhat unusual this morning because we are going to go through an introduction of the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. This message will be more topical than normal.

The intent of the message this morning is to set up the background for where they are; to examine why the prayer is called a High Priestly Prayer; to learn how Jesus became our High Priest, and how all of that provided eternal life for all who will believe.

So fasten your seatbelts. We have a lot to cover!

Judas has left the upper room to betray Jesus. Jesus and His disciples have also left the upper room and are walking through the city of Jerusalem. And as they are walking, Jesus continues to instruct them. His instruction includes comforting promises and serious warnings of what they will face when He leaves them. He tells them that He will die, He will rise, and He will go back to the Father. He is promising them everything they will ever need. All the resources of heaven will be at their disposal through prayer. They will know the truth because He will send the Holy Spirit who will bring them the truth.

He is promising them peace and love and joy and every virtue. But as He stands on the brink of His own death, the disciples are afraid, worried, full of doubt, and anxiety. They can't even imagine a world without the Lord. They had been with Him for three years. The deeper they go into the night, the greater their fears become. Despite our Lord's reassurances and promises they are having a hard time embracing them because all they can think about is Him leaving and Him dying.

All that instruction, all that promise, and all the warnings has now come to an end and we enter into chapter 17. Chapter 17 is a prayer that He prays to the Father, and what He prays to the Father is that the Father would fulfill all the promises He has made, that the Father would bring to fulfillment all the work that He has done.

This is a prayer that is remarkable because it demonstrates the humiliation of Christ in a unique way. He is, after all, God, who made everything that is made; and without Him was not anything made that was made. He is God who upholds the entire universe by the word of His power, according to Hebrews 1. He is God who will come to reign and establish His rule in the new heaven and the new earth forever. He is the Creator of everything and the sustainer of them.

In this passage He gives us the most magnificent example of the need for prayer. If the Son of God who **controls** all things, and is the **ruler** over all things, and is **sovereign** over

all things, and **knows** all things, and has **all power** is in a position of depending on God to fulfill all His words, how much more are we dependent on God?

This prayer reflects how He now prays in heaven, interceding for us. Here, we see our great High Priest. He is our mediator between God and man. This prayer belongs to us as a gift from heaven.

The prayer is divided into three parts. In the first five verses, Jesus prays for Himself. Then starting in verse 6, He prays for the apostles that are with Him on that very night. And then He closes the chapter by praying for all believers throughout the history of mankind on earth. So He starts by praying for His own glory, and then He prays for the glory of His own people.

Stand and Read Scripture

John 18:1 (NASB)

18 When Jesus had spoken these words, He went away with His disciples across the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden which He entered with His disciples.

John 17:1-2 (NASB)

17 Jesus spoke these things; and raising His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You, ²just as You gave Him authority over all mankind, so that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.

Prayer

BODY:

I. WHERE DID THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER TAKE PLACE?

I suspect that most people would tell you that the High Priestly Prayer occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane. But we learn from the first verse of chapter 18, that Jesus and the disciples had not arrived at the garden yet.

John 18:1 (NASB)

18 When Jesus had spoken these words, He went away with His disciples across the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden which He entered with His disciples.

Although John mentions the garden here in this verse, the account of what happened there before the betrayal of Judas is not given as it is in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. When John says that Jesus "**went away with His disciples across the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden which He entered with His disciples**", He is not referring to the upper room, but instead that they had left Jerusalem. So the last part of Jesus' farewell discourse and His High Priestly Prayer took place as He and the disciples passed through the streets of Jerusalem. That is why John could record what Jesus prayed because he had heard it with his own ears. If you remember, according to Matthew, Jesus prayed alone in the garden.

Matthew 26:36-39 (NASB)

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and told His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ And He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him, and began to be grieved and distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

³⁹ And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed...

So, for John to record Jesus' prayer, he must have heard it with his own ears.

As Jesus and the disciples left the city behind, they crossed a "ravine". It was actually a wadi, through which water flowed during the rainy season. Across the familiar valley was the western slope of the Mount of Olives, where "there was a garden". John does not give the name of the place but Matthew, Mark, and Luke do. They called it Gethsemane. The fact that Jesus "entered" the garden and later left it suggests that it was an identifiable place, perhaps owned by a wealthy family of Jerusalem who allowed Jesus to use it.

II. WHAT IS THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER?

John 17:1 (NASB)

17 Jesus spoke these things; and raising His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You,

This is the beginning of the prayer. John 17 contains the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in any of the Gospels. Jesus prays this after He finishes His final instructions to the disciples and before He is betrayed, arrested, and crucified. First, Jesus prays for Himself, then He prays for His disciples, and He closes the prayer by praying for all believers. This intercessory prayer is commonly called Jesus' **High Priestly Prayer**.

So here we have a model of prayer from one who may seem to us, at first, that He would not even need to pray. After all He was God. But He did pray. In fact, He prayed throughout His entire life on earth. He prayed daily. In fact the Garden of Gethsemane was a place that He went often with His disciples to teach and pray.

John 18:2 (NASB)

² Now Judas, who was betraying Him, also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with His disciples.

If you think about it, Jesus had to constantly be in full communication with God in order to be of one mind with Him. It was likely that there was never a time that He was **not** communicating with the Father.

The gospels tell us quite often that He prayed. What they do not tell us is much of what He actually prayed. There are a few statements mentioned such as at the grave of Lazarus. He prayed to the Father, and then He said, "Lazarus, come out." At Gethsemane, He prayed to the Father and said, "If it be Your will, let this cup pass from Me." At the cross He said, "Into Your hands I commit My spirit." These are all very brief, actual words that Jesus prayed.

Another prayer is given to us in Matthew 11:25.

Matthew 11:25-26 (NASB)

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to infants.

²⁶ Yes, Father, for this way was well pleasing in Your sight.

That is about as extensive of a prayer as we have. It is just a couple of very brief verses, until we get to John 17.

And now we have this lengthy chapter of 26 verses. Every single word comes from the lips of Christ and is part of a prayer to the Father. This chapter has been considered the Holy of Holies of Scripture. It is the most elevated, the most glory-filled chapter in the Bible. It is, of course, the prayer above all prayers. And it is also the chapter above all chapters, because it alone is where we see the communion between the Son of God and the Father.

Here, we are ushered into the throne room of God where we eavesdrop on the communion between the Son and the Father. The veil is drawn back. We are admitted into the Holy of Holies. Here, we need to figuratively remove our shoes and listen, and humble ourselves with reverent hearts because we are on the holiest of all ground.

You may say, "**Wait a minute! What about the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6: 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name,'** and so forth? What about that? Isn't that the Lord's Prayer?" Yes. It is called the Lord's Prayer, but it is not the **Lord's** Prayer. It is a prayer that Jesus used to teach the disciples **how** to pray. **But He did not pray that prayer.** He could not pray that prayer, because that prayer says in part, "**Forgive us our trespasses**" which refers to our sins." Jesus never sinned. So that was a prayer that He did not have to pray for Himself. Instead it is a pattern for how we are to pray.

John 17 is the real Lord's Prayer. It marks the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, and it also looks forward to what follows His earthly ministry. That is His heavenly ministry. His heavenly ministry is a ministry of interceding for His people at the very throne of God. Jesus could have prayed silently as He frequently did. The New Testament could have been written and this prayer left out. But Jesus wasn't silent that night. He prayed openly. It is recorded by the Spirit of God through the apostle John so all of us can hear it as well.

Why?

Because it is a model of what He is now doing, interceding for us. **That is why it is called the High Priestly Prayer.**

III. HOW DID JESUS BECOME OUR HIGH PRIEST?

John 17:1b-2a (NASB)

...glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify You, ² just as You gave Him authority over all mankind,...

How did Jesus glorify His Father? Jesus glorified the Father and became our high priest when He died on the cross. He lived a perfect life on earth and flawlessly accomplished the work of the Father that He was sent to earth to do. When He died on the cross, He became the perfect sacrifice for us.

1 Peter 3:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins **once for all time**, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

The office of high priest was instituted at Mount Sinai when God gave the Law to the Israelites through Moses. Aaron and, subsequently, his descendants were chosen to be priests who were responsible for interceding for Israel before God. One priest was selected as the high priest who would enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer the sacrifice that would **temporarily** cover the sins of the people.

When Jesus came, He offered His life as the ultimate sacrifice that would not only cover the sins of the people but completely cleanse His people and save them. Jesus is the ultimate High Priest, and His intercession for us is found here in this High Priestly Prayer in John 17.

As our Great High Priest, Jesus continues to intercede for us.

Hebrews 7:25 (NASB)

²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save forever those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Perhaps the most crucial thing for believers to understand today is that it is because Jesus is our High Priest that we can approach God with confidence. This was one of the promises that Jesus had just made to the disciples: direct access to Him.

Hebrews 4:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ Therefore let's approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of *our* need.

We no longer need to go through earthly mediators. Jesus has broken the barrier, made the perfect sacrifice for all time, established a new covenant, and reestablished our relationship with God. Because of our High Priest, we are free to come to God.

IV. HOW DOES OUR HIGH PRIEST PROVIDE ETERNAL LIFE?

John 17:1-2b (NASB)

...so that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.

When Jesus was crucified on the cross, He became the perfect the Lamb of God that John the Baptist referred to in John 1:29 and 36.

John 1:29, 36 (NASB)

²⁹ The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him, and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!...****

³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!**"**

This was referring to Jesus as the perfect and ultimate sacrifice for sin.

The whole sacrificial system established by God in the Old Testament set the stage for the coming of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect sacrifice God would provide as atonement for the sins of His people.

When John the Baptist referred to Jesus as “**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**” ,the Jews who heard him might have immediately thought of any **one of several important sacrifices**.

With the time of the Passover feast being very near, the first thought might be the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. The Passover feast was one of the main Jewish holidays and a celebration in remembrance of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. In fact, the slaying of the Passover lamb and the applying of the blood to doorposts of the houses is a beautiful picture of Christ’s atoning work on the cross. This protected the Israelites from the angel of death just as Christ's blood protects us from spiritual death.

Another important sacrifice involving lambs was the daily sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people. These daily sacrifices, like all others, were simply to point people towards the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In fact, the time of Jesus’ death on the cross corresponds to the time the evening sacrifice was being made in the temple. The Jews at that time would have also been familiar with the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, who foretold the coming of One who would be brought “**like a lamb led to the slaughter**” and whose sufferings and sacrifice would provide redemption for Israel. Of course, that person was none other than Jesus Christ, “the Lamb of God.”

CONCLUSION:

The idea of a sacrificial system may seem strange to us today. But the concept of payment for our sins is one we can easily understand. We know that the wages of sin is death and that our sin separates us from God. We also know the Bible teaches we are all sinners and none of us is righteous before God. Because of our sin, we are separated from God, and we stand guilty before Him. Therefore, the only hope we can have is if He provides a way for us to be reconciled to Himself, and that is what He did in sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross. Christ died to make atonement for sin and to pay the penalty of the sins of all who believe in Him.

It is through His death on the cross as God’s perfect sacrifice for sin and His resurrection three days later that we can now have eternal life if we believe in Him. The fact that God Himself has provided the offering that atones for our sin is part of the good news of the gospel that is so clearly declared in 1 Peter 1:18-21:

1 Peter 1:18-21 (NASB)

¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. ²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Go Tell it on the Mountain.