

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

John 17:1-26

If John's Gospel may be likened to a mountain range, the seventeenth chapter represents one of its highest peaks. It seems to be the holy of holies of the Bible. Christ turned away from His disciples, turned His eyes toward heaven, and prayed unto God the Father as though nobody was present to listen. May the Lord give us the humility and grace to listen as we should to our Saviour as He talked with His heavenly Father!

This chapter is, in very truth, "The Lord's Prayer." Our Lord could not have used for Himself the petitions which He taught His disciples to use in "The Model Prayer," including as they do a request for forgiveness. In the real "Lord's Prayer" we have an unanswerable argument for the deity of Christ.

### I. For Himself. John 17:1-5.

The first four words in this chapter, "These words spake Jesus," refer to the whole consolatory discourse which is recorded in chapters fourteen to sixteen inclusive. Our Lord passed from preaching to praying. He began His prayer with the word, "Father," which expressed two things; first, sonship; and, second, affection. The word expressed veneration, confidence, love, and submission.

In His prayer to the Father, Christ said, "The hour is come." Christ's public ministry was over, and He looked back on it with a measure of detachment, for He was absorbed in His prayer and in His immediate task. Christ's first request of the Father in this prayer was, "Glorify thy Son." He wanted the Father to reveal that He was truly the Son of God, and not just a crucified man; that He was righteous, and not a criminal worthy of execution; that He was majestic, and to be worshiped, and not mocked; and that He was mighty, manifesting supernatural power, and never a single weakness. As the Son of God, Christ wanted to make known the character, the majesty, and the might of the Father. He expected to glorify God the Father in His crucifixion and His triumph over the grave.

It is one of the great facts of history that again and again it was in death that great people found their glory. It was when and how they died that showed people what and who they really were. They may have been misunderstood, underestimated, and condemned in their lives, but their deaths showed their true nobility and their true place in the scheme of things. Abraham Lincoln had his bitter enemies during his lifetime; but even those who had criticized and undervalued him saw his greatness when he died. Someone came out of the room where Lincoln died, and said, "Now he belongs to the ages." Stanton, his Secretary of War, who had always regarded Lincoln as an uncouth man, and who had not taken any pains to conceal his contempt of him, even calling him a baboon, looked down into his face, and with tears in his eyes said, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Joan of Arc was burned by the English as a witch and a heretic. Amidst the crowd there was an Englishman who had sworn that he would add a fagot to the fire. He said, "Would that my soul were where the soul of that woman is!"

Again and again a martyr's majesty has appeared in his death. It was so with Jesus Christ, for even the centurion at the foot of the cross said, "Truly this was the Son of God." Christ was never more majestic than in His death. The cross drew men to Christ in a way that His life never did.

The cross was the glory of Christ because it was the completion of His work. If He had stopped short of the cross, it would have proved that there was some length to which the love of God was not prepared to go for men. By His going to the cross, Christ showed that there was not any limit to the love of God.

There is only one way to glorify God, and that is to obey Him. A child brings honor to his parents by his obedience. A citizen brings honor to his country by obeying the laws thereof. A pupil brings honor to his teacher when he obeys and follows his instructions. Christ brought honor and glory to His Father by perfect obedience to Him.

Christ prayed for God to glorify Him and to glorify Himself through Him. The cross was not the end, for the resurrection was to follow. The crucifixion was the worst that men could do, but the resurrection proved that Christ could triumph over death and the grave. It was as if God pointed to the cross and said, "That is what men think of My Son," and then pointed to the resurrection and said, "That is what I think of My Son." The glory of the resurrection obliterated the shame of the cross.

Christ declared that He had come into the world in order that He might give eternal life, which is the greatest good. There are only two classes of people in the world -- those who have received eternal life from the Lord Jesus Christ, and those who have not received it. Eternal, as applied to life, has to do not only with duration, but also with quality. Eternal life is the life of God. To come into possession of eternal life is to experience here and now something of the splendor, majesty, holiness, peace, power, and joy which are characteristic of the life of God.

## II. For His Disciples. John 17:6-19.

In these verses Christ was praying directly for the eleven disciples or apostles. They are here viewed in a representative character. If this were not true, there would not have been any place in this prayer for all of the other believers at that time. Christ designedly employed language that was applicable to all of His believing people at that time.

A disciple is a child of God who realizes that the Lord Jesus is God's ambassador, who in listening to Christ's words hears the voice and message of God, and who sees in the deeds of Christ the actions of God. Discipleship issues in obedience. There cannot be any discipleship without obedience. So long as a person desires independence, and complete freedom to do entirely as he pleases, he cannot be a disciple of Christ. Christ trusted the Father and He trusted men. We should rejoice and be grateful that Christ put His trust and confidence in us.

Through His disciples glory has come to Christ. It is the patient to whom he has brought a cure that brings honor to a physician. It is the pupil whom he has taught who brings honor to the teacher. It is the athlete whom he has trained who brings honor to the athletic director or coach. It is the men whom Christ has rescued, saved, and enabled to succeed who bring honor to Him.

Christ glorified God in His person, by His miracles, by His words, and by His holy life. In this prayer Christ spoke freely of what He had done, of what the Father had done, and of what the disciples had done. Our Lord told the Father that He had completed all of the work which had been assigned to Him to do.

Christ mentioned three things about the early disciples in recommending them to God. He said they were acquainted with the Father's name, they were the subjects of His distinguishing grace, and they were obedient to His will. Knowing that He was leaving them to return to the Father, and that they would be subjected to all sorts of dangers and pitfalls, Christ prayed that the Father would exercise His power in their behalf and keep them. Our Lord had something for them to do for Him, and that is why He left them here on the earth. That is the reason the Lord did not take you to heaven the day that He saved you. He left you here because He had a specific work for you to do. This is the only opportunity that you will have to serve Him. He gets more glory by leaving us here than He would by taking us home to be with Him. Being left here should enable us to appreciate all the more the coming glory.

Christ was not praying then for the world, but for those whom God had given to Him out of the world. Of His disciples Christ said, "They have kept thy word," meaning, they had held on to it tightly. That was why the world hated them. It is the Bible that the world does not like. Oh, people of the world may talk about it, but when you quote it and live by it, they do not believe it, and they do not want it. The more tightly one holds to the Word of God, the more he will be hated and criticized by those who do not know, love, and obey the Lord. When the true Christian is taught the Word of God, he becomes stronger and more appreciative of it. But when you quote the Word to people who have not been regenerated, it will pierce their souls to the very quick, and they will be very much displeased, and most likely will turn away from it.

There were two things for which Christ when He prayed for His disciples:

1. Their preservation. John 17:6-16.

While Christ was with His disciples, He guarded and guided them. He preserved them from the machinations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. But, when He was about to leave them in the midst of a hostile world, He wanted them to have that which they needed so much, the protection of God. Christ knew that the world would despise, hate, and persecute His followers, so He committed them into the care and keeping of God the Father. He did not ask that they be kept from temptation, pain, and sorrow, but He did want them kept from discouragement, gloom, and sin. Christ prayed that they might not be brought under the control of the devil, or be deceived by the allurements of the world.

2. Their sanctification. John 17:17-19.

Our Lord prayed that His disciples might be set apart unto God for His use in Christian service, and specifically for the service of witnessing to the truth. He wanted His chosen messengers to be set apart to and for their divinely-appointed mission.

Christ prayed for His disciples because He loved them. In talking about His disciples, Christ never said anything against them. This fact is very significant. You may criticize the Lord's followers and servants, but Christ doesn't. When you do, you certainly publicize your unlikeness to Christ, and you grieve Him. Regardless of your attitude toward them, Christ loves them. He died for them. He saved them from their sins. He has a place of service for them, and is going to use them and bless them. They are closer to Him than any of their critics. He is going to protect and take care of them, and some day is going to take them home to be with Him forever.

III. For All Future Believers. John 17:20-26.

What an inestimable privilege to be included in "The Lord's Prayer"! How grateful I am that Christ my Saviour prayed for me! Aren't you glad that He included you in His prayer?

There were two things for which Christ prayed for all who would henceforth believe on Him as their Saviour.

1. Their unity. John 17:20-23.

Christ was not praying for their organic union, but that they might have oneness of spirit. The Father and the Son are distinct personalities within the Godhead, but they enjoy unity of spirit and love. He prayed "for them also which shall believe on me through their word." It is the testimony of believers to the truthfulness of the Word that leads other souls to Christ.

2. Their glorification. John 17:24-26.

Christ wanted and prayed for every believer to spend a blissful eternity with Him in heaven. That prayer will be answered.