

Listening to Jesus Pray For Us #1

John 17

Call: Ps 46:1-3, 10-11 (ESV)

Scripture: John 17 (all of it, ESV)

I. Introduction

Thank-you Jeremy! Good Morning! As you can tell, we are back in John today. I never want to leave John! And, we enter back into John in the ever-growing shadow of the cross.

Let's Pray

Lord God, Thank-you for the gift John 17 is for us. By your Word and by your Spirit, we ask that you would illuminate our minds, rekindle our hearts & strengthen our wills this morning as we study this sacred text. In Jesus' name, Amen.

It happens nearly every week in my life. At one point or another, I begin to feel overwhelmed. Anyone identify? In the face of the break-neck pace of life in the modern world in the bay area, I try to keep up. But regularly, life in this modern world seems like it is so overwhelming. I feel unsettled, anxious, sometimes agitated, but largely, overwhelmed. Anyone identify?

Where do you go when those feelings hit? Where do you go to recover? For me, I like to go for a run or a bike ride or a hike. But, I've also found that Scripture is a place I can go, like Psalm 23, Romans 8, or Psalm 46.

But, this past winter, I discovered a new place to go, John 17, that text that Jeremy so helpfully recited for us, the text that my friend Darrell Johnson likes to call, "The conversation at the center of the universe." John 17 actually takes us to that place of Psalm 46, that place of "*being still and knowing that He is God*" while living in this overwhelming world. I know, now, that if I go to John 17, I can breathe again.

Why? Because John 17 is where I hear Jesus pray for me. It is where we hear Jesus pray for us.

It is, of course, not the only place in the Gospels where Jesus prays. The Gospels record many times when Jesus prays. Actually, at every major turning point of his earthly life, we see Jesus praying. He's praying at his baptism, Luke 3:21. He prays all night before selecting the 12 disciples (Luke 6:12). Can you imagine those prayers? Father are you sure about these guys? Peter – a great guy, but a bit unstable. James and John – a little judgmental don't you think? Matthew – great with numbers, but in his head a lot. Jesus is praying when at Caesarea Philippi he poses the question, "Who do people say I am?" (Luke 9:18). He's praying at the Transfiguration, where, like at his baptism, he hears his Father's voice confirm his identity (Luke 9:29). Not long after John 17, he'll be praying in Gethsemane. And, he prays while dying on the cross. Jesus lives and dies praying.

He is “the man of prayer.” So much so that the only thing the disciples are recorded to have asked Jesus to teach them to do is to pray: “Lord, teach us to pray,” they say. There is no record of “Lord, teach us to heal,” or “Lord, teach us to preach,” or “Lord, teach us to plan a Sunday morning service.” Only “Lord, teach us to pray.” Why? Because they realize that everything Jesus says and does flows out of his relationship with his Father which is grounded in prayer.

But most of these times where we read of Jesus praying, he is off by himself, and we don’t hear what he is praying. But this time, in John 17, on the night before he goes to the cross, on the night he was feeling unsettled, maybe even anxious, maybe even overwhelmed, Jesus prays in the presence of His disciples. And they, and we, hear everything he prays!

II. Why In Our Hearing?

So, it begs the question – why does Jesus pray in our hearing this time? Why does he let us hear what he prays at this point? I can think of at least three reasons:

1. **The Desires of Jesus’ Heart:** First, so that we might know what is on his heart. We hear his prayer so that we might know His heart’s desires. Earlier that night, if you remember from the upper room discourse, Jesus called the disciples “friends.” He says this, *“I no longer call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you”* (John 15:15). Friendship is all about sharing the most intimate thoughts of the mind and the deepest desires of the heart. And now, in the growing shadow of the cross, Jesus shares with his Father – and in the hearing of his disciples then and now – the most intimate thoughts of his mind and the deepest desires of his heart. And, he wants us to know these things.
2. **The Desires of Our Hearts:** Secondly, Jesus prays in the hearing of the disciples so that we might be caught up in his praying and find our hearts beating with his. He intentionally lets us hear what he prays so we will join him in his praying. The one who records the prayer is “the beloved disciple.” If you remember, the beloved disciple is the disciple who has his head on “Jesus’ heart” at the last supper. “The beloved disciple” remembers and passes on to us Jesus’ prayer, making it then possible for us to rest our own heads on Jesus’ heart. And, when we do, our hearts begin beating to the rhythm of his heart, and slowly our hearts begin desiring what his heart desires.
3. **The Prayers of Jesus Even Now:** And, thirdly, Jesus prays in the disciples’ hearing so that we might know what he will be praying when he ascends to the throne. He prays in our hearing on earth in AD 33, so that we can know what he is praying in heaven now in AD 2023. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews declares, *“He (the risen Jesus) always lives to make intercession”* (Heb 7:25). Jesus prays what he prays in John 17 so that we might know the kinds of things he is praying right now in the Father’s presence.

III. The Invitation

A. Listen

So, today and the following three Sundays, for four Sundays in a row, I invite you to come with me into what has rightly been called “the Holy of Holies.” I invite you to come with me into John 17 and simply listen, listen to Jesus pray. That’s it. Just listen. Four times, four weeks in a row. Nothing fancy. Nothing sophisticated. Just listen to Jesus pray for you. Listen to the Lord of the universe pray for you and me, and all those whom he calls to himself.

B. Ask

And, for these four weeks, we will also ask one question of this prayer. As you may have noticed during Jeremy’s recitation, this prayer is pretty “thick.” The topics and themes are many and varied, and are intertwined and keep reoccurring. And, it is such a “thick” prayer, it’s easy to get bogged down. So, what I have found, as with many others throughout history, as the best way to get inside this prayer, is to simply ask, “What does Jesus desire?” or “What does Jesus want?”

Look at verse 24: *“Father, I desire ...”* We will come back to this in week 4, but for now, *“I desire”* captures the spirit of the entire prayer. This entire prayer is what Jesus desires for us. The Greek word connotes strong and unwavering determination. *“Father, I desire ...”* “Father, my deepest heart’s desire is...” Father, I want. That’s the Spirit of this prayer.

So, we will spend the next four weeks listening to Jesus pray and asking, “What does he desire?” And, specifically, what does Jesus desire *for* us? Not, what does Jesus desire *from* us? That’s for other texts. Here in John 17, Jesus is simply asking the Father *for* us, which is why I’m now drawn to it when I’m feeling overwhelmed. Jesus is asking his Father to act for us! He’s not asking us to act. He’s not asking you or me to do anything. He’s praying *for* us.

IV. What Does Jesus Desire?

So let’s now begin to walk through John 17 asking, “What does Jesus desire?”

Verse 1: *“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come.”* Jesus has now finished His teaching ministry. He has finished speaking all the things recorded in the previous chapters of John, and now lifts his eyes to heaven saying the “hour” has come.

The hour. We’ve talked about the word “hour” before, but hour in John is a technical term for “the great weekend of his humiliation and exaltation” (Bruner, 139). In short, it is the hour of revelation. It is the moment when Jesus decisively reveals who he is, and thus, who the Father is. Throughout the Gospel, he tells those closest to him that his hour has not yet come. And, now in the shadow of the cross, the hour has come. That means that Jesus is now praying *“in the valley of the shadow of death”* (Ps 23:4). And, “in the face of death, ultimate concerns dominate” a person’s thinking (Johnson). And what is dominating Jesus’ thinking at this moment?

- **The end of verse 1:** *“Father, the hour has come. [Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,](#)”*

Which is also alluded to in verses 5 and 24:

- **Verse 5:** *And now, Father, [glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.](#)*
- **Verse 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.](#)*

V. Glory and Glorify

A. Definitions

There is one ultimate desire of Jesus’ heart. It is the driving force of his entire life: glory and glorify. We’ve talked about these words throughout our studies in John. Let me review again.

Glory has a few different nuances, such as luminosity or weightiness. In the Christmas story, *“the glory of the Lord shines around the angels”* (Lk 2:9). That’s luminosity. When Solomon dedicates the Temple, the glory of the Lord filled it (2 Chron 7). That’s weightiness. The luminosity of the Lord made the space heavy. That’s weightiness. But for John, glory has to do more with the third nuance, the nature and essence of a person or thing. In this case, glory is the revelation of the nature and essence of God. Glory is what God is like. So, when Moses prays his great prayer, *“God show me your glory,”* Moses wants God to reveal who he really is and what he is really like (Ex 33:18). “God, show me yourself” is what he is actually praying. And, God amazingly obliges. God reveals himself by passing before Moses declaring what he is really like, Ex 34:6-7, *“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet who by no means leaves the guilty unpunished.”* God reveals his glory. He reveals what he is really like.

The verb *glorify*, then means to “honor” and to make “manifest.” In other words, pull back the curtain that shields your nature and essence, and reveal who and what you are. Honor your nature by manifesting what you are really like.

B. Deepest Desire of Jesus’ Heart

“Father, the hour has come. [Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.](#)” Here is the deepest desire of Jesus’ heart.

Honor me that I might honor you. Reveal and make manifest my essential nature to the world, that I might reveal and make manifest your essential nature. Reveal and make manifest the truth of what we are really like Father. This is his deepest desire. And, we will not understand Jesus, nor anything he says and does, unless we understand this: Jesus lives and dies to honor His Father. Jesus lives and dies to manifest who the Father is and what the Father is like.

Verse 4 – *“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”* In every deed Jesus does, in every word Jesus speaks, he is glorifying the very nature of God. He is honoring and revealing the nature and essence of the living God to the world.

VI. The “Glory Narrative”

And, of course, John makes this clear in the way he puts his Gospel together. The glory narrative of his Gospel goes like this. In chapters 2 through 11, John gathers together a number of selected events in Jesus’ life and ministry.

He then brackets these events with the word “glory.” In chapter two, after Jesus’ first great sign, turning water into wine, John writes: *“and so Jesus manifested His glory”* (2:11). Then in chapter eleven, just before Jesus’ last great sign, raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus says: *“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”* (John 11:40). I believe John wants us to see the manifestation of glory throughout these chapters.

So what I want to do now is walk through John’s narrative with a set of glory glasses:

- In chapter 2, at a wedding in Cana, Jesus turns water into wine – not water and grapes into wine – just water, without grapes, into wine! Jesus is meeting a real human need, but he is also manifesting the nature of the glorious God. The Son is revealing what the Father is like, that here is a God in which impossible is nothing.
- In chapter 4, Jesus asks an outcast woman for a drink of water. He then breaks down all racial, ethnic, religious, and gender walls to offer her what He calls *“living water”* (John 4:14). Yes, Jesus is meeting a real human need. But He is also manifesting the nature of the glorious God. In this interaction with an outcast woman, Jesus is revealing the steadfast love and forgiveness of the Father.
- In chapter 5, Jesus finds a man lying by a pool in Jerusalem. He’s been unable to walk for 38 years. Jesus says, *“Get up, take up your bed, and walk”* (John 5:8). And the man does! That is glory. Jesus is meeting a real human need. But He is also manifesting the nature of the glorious God. He is revealing what the Father is like, a God who wants to make us whole.
- In chapter 6, Jesus is teaching near the Sea of Galilee. It’s getting late. There are about 5,000 men – plus women and children gathered around him. A young boy has a lunch of five loaves and two fish. But what are they in the midst of such overwhelming need? Taking the scarce supplies in hand, Jesus gives thanks and begins distributing more loaves and more fish, enough to feed everyone! And, don’t forget, there’s an abundance of left-overs. That’s glory. Jesus *is* meeting a real human need, but Jesus is also manifesting the nature of the glorious God. The Son is revealing what the Father is like. He is a God of abundance, not scarcity.
- In chapter 8, Jesus finds himself before a woman caught in sexual sin. She’s on the verge of being condemned to death by the religious leaders. Jesus counters the condemnation with wisdom and grace, then truth. Jesus is obviously meeting a real human need – he saves her life – but he is also manifesting the nature of the glorious

God. The Son is revealing what the Father is like, a God "*merciful and gracious,*" and full of truth.

- In chapter 9, Jesus meets a man blind from birth. People judge him, then begin to debate why this has happened. Jesus doesn't debate, he simply spits on the ground, makes some clay and applies it to the man's eyes. Jesus tells the man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. The man does, and comes back seeing! Jesus is meeting a real human need. But he is also manifesting the nature of the glorious God. The Son is revealing what the Father is like, a good father who wants to bring light into all of our darkness.
- In chapter 11, Jesus is in Bethany, outside of Jerusalem. His dear friend Lazarus has died, and has been in the tomb four days. Lazarus' sisters are weeping. Jesus is deeply moved by their grief. Jesus trembles with sorrow as he is overwhelmed with the same grief. That's glory. In that moment, Jesus is revealing what the Father is like. Jesus then goes to the tomb, where he weeps some more. That is glory. Jesus is revealing what the Father is like, a God who weeps with us before the pain of the world, a God who loves, a God who cares and a God who hurts with us. Jesus says, "*Take away the stone*" (John 11:39). Mary objects. "*Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days*" [and] Jesus said to her, "*Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?*" (John 11:39-40). Then, Jesus cries out, "*Lazarus, come out!*" And he does! A dead man walks out of the tomb! At the extreme helplessness of the human condition Jesus manifests the nature of the glorious God. Jesus reveals what God is like, a God of resurrection and life.

So that's the "glory narrative" from the first half of the Gospel. But, it turns out there is more in the second half of John's Gospel, what John Calvin called "The Theatre of Glory."

- On Palm Sunday, Jesus declares: "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Father, glorify Your name!*" (John 12:23, 28). Father, reveal to the world who you are and what you are like! Show the world your nature and essence. And Jesus says, "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*" (John 12:24). What does falling into the earth have to do with glory?
- Later that week, on that Thursday evening, Jesus gathers his disciples together in an upper room somewhere in downtown Jerusalem. During dinner, Jesus rises from the table, lays aside His outer garments, takes a basin of water and a towel, gets down on His knees, and washes His disciples feet, every single one of them, even Judas. Glory? This is glory? This reveals what the Father is like? Really?
- A few hours later, Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas and the religious leaders, accompanied by a host of soldiers, come to arrest Jesus. He does not resist. They haul Him off to Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate. Pilate has him scourged, beaten 39 times with leather straps and pieces of broken glass. The soldiers weave a crown of thorns and pound it into Jesus' head. They hit him in the face. Jesus does not retaliate. Glory? This is glory? This honors and manifests the Father's nature? Really?
- They take Jesus out and make Him carry His own cross to the place called Golgotha. They lay the cross on the ground, and lay Jesus on its beams. Nailing His hands and feet

to the wood. The Son is glorifying his Father. They lift the cross up and drop it into a hole. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Lk 23:34). This is glory? *“It is finished,” He cries* (John 19:30). And he bows His head and gives up His Spirit.

VII. The “Glory Narrative” Explained

And, we ask again, this is glory? This reveals what God is like?

Yes! A thousand times yes! John knows the mystery. The disciple who rested his head on Jesus’ heart knows the mystery. The nature and essence of the luminous, weighty God is finally manifested **NOT** in a blazing burst of light or in a dazzling display of raw power. The nature and essence of the living God is finally revealed in the Son taking upon himself the sin of the world, bearing in himself all that we deserve.

On that cross, Jesus *is* meeting the greatest of human needs. But he is also glorifying his Father. He is also revealing what God is like. The glory of God is not the self-gratification of an egocentric monarch. The glory of God is the ceaseless, and limitless, emptying of God’s self for the life of the world. That is what the living God is like. That is glory.

“Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.” This is Jesus’ deepest desire, and Jesus knows how that prayer is answered. He knows all that it entails. But, his deepest desire is the glory and honor of his Father. Yes, he desires our salvation, but our salvation is not the driving force of Jesus’ life and ministry. G. Campbell-Morgan puts it best when he said, “The deepest passion of the heart of Jesus was not the saving of men (and women), but the glory of God; and *then* the saving of men (and women) because that is for the glory of God” (Morgan, 270).

VIII. Conclusion

So what does Jesus desire? What does he want? He wants you and I to know – so that the whole world will know – what his Father is truly like. He wants you and I to know – so that the world will know – the full embrace of the glorious love of God.

As I rest my head on Jesus’ heart today and simply listen to him pray his heart’s desire, I find I really can *“be still and know”* – deep down in the center of my being – I can really *know* that he is God, and that he is for me with, as the Jesus Storybook Bible put it, “a never-stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever kind of love.” And I can breathe again. Amen.

Benediction

If you would like prayer this morning, there will be pastors and elders up here who would love to pray with you.

As you leave here and enter back into a busy, frantic, overwhelming world of the bay area, Find times to be still and know that He is the living God, that He is for you, that he loves you and that he is praying for you right now from his throne.

Amen. Go in peace.

Resources

Burge, Gary, *John (NIV Application Commentary)*

Carson, Don, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*

Johnson, Darrell, *John 17 (Regent College Course, #3810)*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Morgan, G. Campbell, *Studies in the Four Gospels*

Newbigin, Leslie, *The Light Has Come*