

10-13-19 SERMON CCI John 17: 1-5 Jesus' Prayer List: Part 1

It's not always easy to know what to pray for, is it? You're with a Christian friend and before you part, they ask, "What can I be praying for you about?" What do we say? In our Prayer and Praise time each Sunday, we share together our praises and prayer requests. We share praise for what makes us happy and prayer for concerns like health, financial concerns, and safety. But every now and then, I change it up, and invite us to share our praises for the things that we cannot lose, that cannot be taken from us by tragedy, loss, the aging process, or even death. Have you noticed that on those Sundays what we praise God for changes dramatically? "My salvation! God's Grace! God's love! Forgiveness! That God's always there! God's Word! God's faithfulness! The promise of eternal life!" Suddenly, our praise is less about feeling happy and more about how faithful and good God is. The same thing happens when we lift our requests above the personal and pray for what God longs for in the world and the church.

Today and the next 2 Sundays, we're going to be learning about prayer from what's on Jesus' Prayer List. We know the short prayer list Jesus provided in the Lord's Prayer. But there is another prayer of Jesus found in John 17. We call it the Great Prayer. On the night he was betrayed, on the night before he was crucified, Jesus offered a different kind of model prayer list. We're going to look at the first part of Jesus' Prayer List from John 17 this morning.

Jesus' Great Prayer in the gospel of John comes at the conclusion of the evening Jesus shared with his disciples we refer to as "the last supper." The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the private prayer Jesus makes in Garden of Gethsemane that evening. But John focused instead on Jesus' public prayer he prayed with his disciples that night. The first part of this prayer, the part we will look at today, focused on his own awareness that the "hour had come," that all that was left now was the cross and the legacy of his ministry through his disciples after his death.

It's been said that leaving a legacy isn't just about leaving a will distributing what you've earned—a real legacy is what we've learned and then taught others, the ways we were able to leave a mark in people's lives, the ways we made a difference because of our values and what we believe in, how we finished the work we were given to do. And that is exactly what consumed Jesus' heart and mind when he began his prayer that night—what his legacy would be. Did you hear the two things he hoped his legacy would be?

- That the remainder of his life on earth would bring **glory** to God

- That those to whom eternal life has been given because of him would live as those who **know God**.

He prayed, *“Father, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”*

In the Greek, the word *glorify* means to bring praise and honor to someone in a way that reveals his or her importance to others. Jesus was saying that he had spent his whole life on earth trying to glorify God by completing God’s purpose for his life. His teachings and modeling God’s desire for humans, his demonstrations of love to people on the margins, his healings and miracles, his fighting for truth and uncovering hypocrisy were all done. All that was left was the cross he was about to endure. And with that cross he was asking God to bring to fruition his life’s work. Even as he faced the hour of his own death, his prayer was that his life would bring glory to God. That was the first concern of his legacy.

The second concern for his legacy was that those who followed him may truly know God. He says:

“For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Most of us have been taught that eternal life is the promise of a never-ending life in the hereafter. Most people believe eternal life only begins the moment you die and go to heaven. So we would expect verse 4 to say something like: “Now this is eternal life: that those who have believed in Jesus will one day live forever with God in heaven and with Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” But that’s not what Jesus said. Eternal life, he says, is “Knowing God as the only true God and knowing Christ” as the one sent to reveal God’s character and God’s deepest concerns and purposes. That’s a pretty stunning difference from what most people believe eternal life is.

The confusion comes because we think of the words eternal and eternity as describing a **quantity** of time— endless time. But the actual language in this passage refers to a **quality of relationship** not a **quantity of time**. It refers to the intimate quality of coming to really Know God and truly experience God’s purpose for our life. So Jesus’ prayer reveals that

Eternal Life is not something that begins after we have died.

Eternal Life is something we are already experiencing **if we know God**.

Eternal Life is not knowing facts about God, but actually knowing God.

Eternal Life is about having abundant life right now as we learn to trust the God we know more and more with our lives.

Eternal Life is about connecting with God as the very source of our life now, not when we die.

Jesus prayed that we would grasp that our eternal life has already begun and continues as we grow in our knowledge of God. Not just about God, but knowing God. I know about George Washington, our nation's first President, but I've never known him. It's the difference between knowing facts about your spouse- when and where they were born, their name, career, their favorite food and TV show- and being married and knowing them personally and intimately, talking and living life together, sharing dreams, going through rough times together. Long-married couples who know each other well, often can finish sentences for each other, they know how the other thinks and what's important to them. When we know God, our whole frame of life takes on an eternal dimension. We grow in seeing life from God's eyes and God's heart. Jesus prayed that we would live in that reality, that when we give our lives to his Son Jesus Christ, a new dimension of life called eternal life has begun. That as we get to know God more, our lives will reflect more and more of God's character and purposes. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, his will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. And in the Great Prayer we learn that means now, not sometime in the future. His will be done on earth as it is in heaven in **our** lives, yours and mine. Because we know God and his Son Jesus Christ.

The first two items on Jesus' Prayer List were:

1. That the remainder of his life would glorify God *Is that on our prayer list?*
2. That his followers to whom he has given eternal life, will live in the eternal dimension of knowing God, and grow in their knowing God more and more. *Is that on our prayer list?*

Those are pretty different from what we normally pray for aren't they? So what do we learn about prayer from Jesus' Prayer List? For Jesus, the purpose of prayer is not about getting what we want from God; it's about drawing near to God and connecting with what God wants, and what's on God's heart. And that changes how we pray. What if Jesus' requests were at the top of our own prayer lists? What if we began each day praying that in whatever happens that day, "*Lord, help me glorify you by every word I speak and every action I take. Lord, help me glorify you in what I spend my thoughts on, how I treat people, how I face the problems that come, help me live each moment through the fruit of Your Spirit- in*

peace, joy, love, gentleness, goodness, patience, and Lord, that temptation I keep stumbling on, please give me the self-control I need today. And Lord, help me know you better today, see you more clearly with the eyes of my heart. May what's important to you become what's important to me." What would change about our focus for the day?

What would it look like if Jesus' prayer list became this church's prayer list? What if we prayed that everything we do and say, our goals, our real purpose as a church, was that this church would, first of all, more than anything else, bring glory to God? Church board members, what if your prayer was that in your leadership role, you would glorify God- in your faithfulness to your responsibilities, in your listening for the Spirit's guidance? At board meetings and congregational meetings, what if votes and decisions were made more from what's on God's heart than which option **we** preferred? What if knowing God better through studying his Word and prayer became more of a focus of our ministry together as a church?

And how would our prayers for each other look? What if we prayed for God to help one another glorify God in the situations that concern us as much as we ask for God's help or rescue or relief? What if when we pray for a person, we prayed they would draw near to God in the situation they face? What if we began to understand that when we feel led to pray for a person or situation, perhaps God placed it on our heart, not just so we would hand it off to God in prayer, but as an invitation to be part of God's answer to that person or situation's need? All so that the people and situations we pray for would experience the glory of God. That was the essence of Jesus' ministry in the world and it is meant to be the essence of our ministry as well.

What if Jesus' Prayer List became our prayer list?