

Lesson 5 | July 4, 2021

Christ's High Priestly Prayer

Study Text: John 17:1–26

Central Truth: Jesus Christ's prayer details His desire for His followers.

Key Verse: John 17:22

The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one (KJV).

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one (NIV).

Learning Objectives

- Grasp the meaning and critical importance of Christ's high priestly prayer.
- Desire to emulate the values of Christ's high priestly prayer through attitudes as well as actions.
- Take steps to make Christ's desires a reality in day-to-day living.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: Last week, we looked at the pattern for prayer that Jesus gave His disciples. This week we move forward to the time when Jesus was nearing the conclusion of His earthly ministry, and praying for His followers was one of His last acts before His crucifixion. This speaks to His commitment to prayer and His concern for His disciples.

Opening Activity—"Important Prayers"

Ask: Who is the most prominent person who has prayed for you? Examples may include a high-level government official or a church or denominational leader.

Say: We might assume that the most prominent person would be a high-profile leader. But actually, **the most prominent person who has prayed for you is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** In John 17, He prayed for His disciples who surrounded Him at that time, but He also prayed "for those who will believe in me through their message" (John 17:20 NIV). We are among those who believe through their message. And He continues to pray for us. Hebrews 7:25 declares that Jesus "he always lives to make intercession for them" (NIV). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Have you ever wondered whether or not the prayer you prayed for something or someone was God's will for that individual or circumstance? At times it is hard to know God's purposes. Jesus, however, is God himself, and therefore has perfect knowledge of the will of the Father.

This week's study explores the high priestly prayer of Jesus. As we consider this wonderful prayer, let's contemplate its meaning and determine how we can fulfill God's desire for our lives.

Part 1—“Father, Glorify Thy Son”

Complete Obedience

John 17:1

[Jhn 17:1 KJV] 1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

Say: When we think of receiving glory, we think of personal praise or accolades. However, while Jesus is indeed worthy of all glory directed at His Person, here He prayed for a different aspect of glory. He was looking for the glory that would come as a result of fulfilling the plan His Father had for Him. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus desired to glorify the Father. He glorified the Father by consecrating himself to do the Father's will. There was no aspect of Jesus' life and ministry that fell short of complete obedience. The cross was to be the ultimate means of Christ's glorification.

The end of John 16 concludes John's account of Jesus' farewell discourse to His disciples. Chapter 17 opens with Jesus taking the posture of prayer, which typified His full surrender to the will of the Father. John simply stated that He looked toward heaven and began to pray. Jesus' focus at this point was that He would complete the task that was established before the foundation of the world—dying for the sins of the world.

Verse 1 declares that Jesus prayed to be glorified by the Father. That glory would come through the Cross. We should not assume that His determined focus was without struggle, however. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record Jesus' response while praying in Gethsemane. He asked that, if it were possible, the Father would allow Him to be spared the “cup” of the Cross (see Luke 22:42). This request though was accompanied with a resolve to submit to the Father's will.

While the Cross represented shame to the Jews and the Romans, to Jesus it would be the means of glory. Fulfilling the plan of salvation would be the path to glory. What was to bring glory to the Son would do the same to the Father. As Jesus arrived at end of His earthly journey, He was fully consecrated to seeing it through.

Discuss

? In what way was the Cross glorifying to Jesus?

? How can we participate in glorifying Jesus?

Eternal Life Came through the Son

John 17:2–5

[Jhn 17:2-5 KJV] 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. 4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

Say: In addition to being glorified by completing the work the Father had sent Him to do, Jesus would be glorified when He would return to be at the Father's side, as He had been from eternity past. He left the realm of glory to become the Sacrifice for our sins. He was ready now to return to that glory. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus previously claimed all authority to both judge and forgive human beings. (See John 5:27 and Mark 2:10.) Only He has the authority to grant eternal life. This authority came through the Father and was to be conferred through His atoning death and bodily resurrection.

Eternal life is no mere transaction; it is walking in the knowledge of and relationship with God. When a person comes to salvation through Jesus, that person enters into a relationship with God through Christ. Jesus made this clear in verse 3. “This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (NIV). The believer's joy is to grow in the knowledge of God throughout all eternity.

Although Christ's work on the cross was yet to take place, Jesus spoke of it as if it were completed, or accomplished. In its fulfillment, the Father was glorified. Christ's very act of obedience brought glory to the Father. The suffering that awaited Christ would be accompanied by the joy of perfectly fulfilling the purpose for which He entered the human realm.

With this knowledge, Jesus prayed one other prayer for himself. “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (verse 5, NIV). Only the Cross stood between Jesus and the glory He had in His eternal state. He had come to earth to bring glory to the Father through the Cross, and nothing would keep Him from returning to His state of eternal glory.

Discuss

? What does Christ's obedience teach us about what pleases God?

? How can we imitate Christ in our attitudes and actions?

Resource Packet Item 1: The Mind of Christ

Distribute the work sheet and let students work on it in small groups. Then ask two or three of the groups to report their findings and discuss them.

Part 2— “Keep Them from Evil” The Father Revealed through the Son

John 17:6–12

[Jhn 17:6-12 KJV] 6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. 7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. 8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received [them], and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. 9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. 10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. 11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we [are]. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Say: Throughout his Gospel, John portrayed Jesus as representative of the Father. In the first chapter of the Gospel, he said, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18, NIV). Jesus had taught His disciples about the Father as He lived among them. He was now interceding for them with the Father—just as He continues to intercede for us (see, again, Hebrews 7:25). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Knowing His death was imminent, Jesus turned His attention to His disciples. We quickly see why this is called “Jesus’ high priestly prayer.” A priest is, among

other things, a representative. Jesus had represented the Father to His disciples, and was now representing the disciples before the Father.

John 17:6 represents a change of focus as Christ transitions from praying for himself to praying for His disciples. Jesus felt a deep burden for their well-being. Chapters 14 through 16 of John’s Gospel detail His promise that the Holy Spirit would come, even as Jesus was fully aware that the following hours would test them tremendously. With this in mind, Jesus committed them to the care of the Father.

Certainly, Jesus revealed himself and His purposes to His disciples over time. They observed and heard from Him throughout His three-year ministry. **It is clear, however, that by this time they understood who He is. They had come to the conclusion that Jesus had come from the Father (verses 7–8). He had protected them as a Shepherd (verse 12; see John 10:1–18). Jesus also understood His disciples’ vulnerability. Danger awaited them, and only God’s supernatural hand could keep them safe in a world that would be increasingly hostile and dangerous.**

Jesus fulfilled His role as “Good Shepherd” perfectly. **Verse 12 makes clear that none of the disciples given to His protection had been lost—with the exception of Judas who had fulfilled that which was prophesied concerning His betrayal, the one “doomed to destruction”** (verse 12, NIV). **Today, Jesus continues His intercession for His followers (1 John 2:1).**

[1Jo 2:1 KJV] 1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

Resource Packet Item 2: Jesus, Our Faithful High Priest

Distribute the work sheet “Jesus, Our Faithful High Priest.” Have students answer the questions on the sheet. After they have taken a few minutes to do so, conclude the exercise by emphasizing how we can have confidence in Christ’s understanding of the human struggle.

Discuss

? In what ways can Christ’s prayer for His disciples provide us comfort?

? Why do you think Jesus prayed for protection for His disciples?

Set Apart in Truth

John 17:13–19

[Jhn 17:13-19 KJV] 13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated

them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

Say: Jesus was “set apart” for a specific purpose. As He died on the cross, He made it possible for His disciples, then and now, to be set apart for Him. No amount of effort on our part could do this; it took the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God. Jesus prayed that the disciples would be sanctified through His death so they could be sent into the world with the message of Christ. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus made clear that His disciples were not of the world just as He is not of the world. As a result, they would experience the same rejection as would He. Christ’s prayer to the Father is not for Him to take His disciples out of harm’s way. Rather it is that they be kept from the power of Satan. As His followers, they would have to endure the same kind of persecution, but they would not have to do so without God’s abiding presence and sustaining power.

Christ asks the Father to “sanctify them by the truth” (verse 17, NIV). The word “sanctify” means to make holy by separation. Just as Jesus is not of the world, neither are His followers. His disciples are to be holy, separated from the things associated with the world and dedicated to the service of their Lord. The disciples of Jesus must be set apart by the truth. Christ’s words “your word is truth” (verse 17, NIV) binds His revelation of who God is to the concept of truth. It is only truth that can set humanity free (John 8:32,36).

Looking forward to the Cross, Jesus declared that He was about to sanctify (set apart) himself for the sake of His disciples or, in other words, do what they could not do for themselves: pay the penalty for their sins (John 17:19). This sacrificial act would also be an example to them as they would follow Jesus into the world to proclaim salvation through Jesus alone.

Discuss

? What does it mean to be “not of the world,” even as we are living in the world?

? How does our ability to set ourselves apart unto God impact our witness to the world?

Part 3— “That They All May Be One”

For All Who Will Believe

John 17:20–23

[Jhn 17:20-23 KJV] 20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Say: At this point in His prayer, Jesus begins to pray for us. Think about the significance of this. It is easy to understand how He would pray for the men who had faithfully followed Him throughout the previous three-plus years. **But now He looked through time and prayed for us. And take note of what He prayed: Jesus prayed specifically for unity among believers. He certainly knew that as the Church grew, it was inevitable that there would be conflict. So He prayed for unity—and He did so with a very important purpose in mind.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

John 17:20 begins the third segment of Christ’s prayer: first He prayed for himself, then for His apostles, and then He switched focus onto the following generations of Christians who would walk with Him throughout the Church Age: “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message” (verse 20, NIV). This element of Christ’s prayer emphasizes the glorious truth that we, too, were on His mind as He prayed.

As Jesus prayed for the Church of the centuries that would follow, He focused on the need for unity. It is critical that those who follow Him be one—just as He is one with the Father and the Father is one with Him. **In this segment of His prayer, the segment that embraced the ages to come, Jesus highlighted the reality that there is no greater threat to the Church than disunity.** This seemingly bold statement is explained well as the reader realizes the potency of unity within the Church—as we will see in the verses to come.

On its face, it seems that there should be no reason to not experience the unity that Christ so fervently desires. After all, the same Spirit dwells in all of us and we follow the same Lord (Ephesians 4:1–6). Unfortunately, the Church has an adversary in Satan, who continually seeks to undermine the Church and its unity. **Believers face the temptation to have conflict with one another by highlighting unnecessary disagreements, whether they be over debatable or non-essential doctrines, or matters relating to personal convictions or opinions. Simply put, Christians are wise to focus on what holds them together, not on the things that would threaten to tear them apart.** As a result, unity is not just an abstract

goal. Unity in the Spirit is possible as God's people seek Him. And, indeed, unity is essential.

The importance of Christian unity is stated in verse 21. It is critical that the world believe that Jesus is more than just a mere man. The world must see that He and the Father are One. The unity of believers provides powerful evidence that this is true—that Jesus and the Father and the Spirit are who we, as believers, proclaim the Triune God to be. When followers of Jesus are able to resolve their difficulties and disagreements in love, the world will take notice. They will know that the Jesus that is proclaimed in Scripture is the Jesus of salvation. The Jesus of transformation. The Jesus Who is the one and only Son of God..

Resource Packet Item 3: The Call to Christian Unity

Distribute the information sheet "The Call to Christian Unity." Take a few of minutes to emphasize important items on the sheet. You may wish to read some of the biblical passages. Note the important points that are made regarding unity.

Discuss

? Why do Christians find unity to be so elusive?

? Considering all of the things Jesus could have prayed for regarding the Church, including us today, why do you think unity was the subject of His prayer?

To Behold My Glory

John 17:24–26

[Jhn 17:24-26 KJV] 24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare [it]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Say: Jesus summarized His prayer with a petition that the disciples would be with Him. As we read this passage, we can almost feel the emotion in Jesus' prayer. He left the glory of heaven to come to earth to be the perfect sacrifice. Now, He was about to return to that glory. He had the cross and the resurrection ahead of Him, but He knew what was waiting beyond that. **He loves His disciples, not just those who had walked on earth with Him, but all of us, and He wants us to be with Him in that glorious place.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The words “to be with me . . . and to see my glory” (John 17:24, NIV) almost certainly refers to Christ’s desire that His followers enter into eternal glory with Him. He is looking toward eternal life. The final words of Jesus to His Father seem to reflect back to what He had already prayed. They may be a summary of Jesus’ heart as He anticipated the Cross. He expressed His deep desire for His followers to be with Him in heaven and know the glory of the Godhead.

For more than thirty years, Christ had experienced the limitations and frustrations of the human struggle. Christ’s humanity demonstrated His identification with the human condition. He now was ready to return to the Father. He wanted those whom He loved to experience true glory.

Verses 25–26 provide a note of finality, not only to Jesus’ prayer but also to His ministry. His entire life pointed to the hours that were immediately ahead. While extraordinary pain and suffering lay before Him, so did an indescribable joy. As the writer of Hebrews put it, “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, NIV).

[Heb 12:2 NKJV] 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Discuss

? How would you describe the emotions Jesus might have been feeling as He faced the end of His time on earth and the glory that would follow?

? How might the way Jesus prayed for you in John 17 impact the way you live for Him?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: As Jesus was facing the Cross, He prayed for himself, His immediate disciples, and all of us. His primary prayer for us was that we would have unity. What are some ways you demonstrate unity with other believers? What are some things that challenge that unity, and how can you overcome those things?

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Examine yourself to identify traits that might lead to division in the Body of Christ.
- Pray for opportunities to demonstrate to the world who Jesus is, as the Son of God and Lord of your life.
- Look for an opportunity to repair a strained relationship, to whatever extent you are able, this week.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Moses Prays for Israel.

Numbers 14:11–20

[Num 14:11-20 KJV] 11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? 12 I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. 13 And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear [it], (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) 14 And they will tell [it] to the inhabitants of this land: [for] they have heard that thou LORD [art] among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and [that] thy cloud standeth over them, and [that] thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now [if] thou shalt kill [all] this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, 16 Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. 17 And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, 18 The LORD [is] longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing [the guilty], visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth [generation]. 19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. 20 And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

Tuesday:

Choose Obedience and Live.
Deuteronomy 30:11–20

[Deu 30:11-20 KJV] 11 For this commandment which I command thee this day, it [is] not hidden from thee, neither [is] it far off. 12 It [is] not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 13 Neither [is] it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 14 But the word [is] very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. 15 See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; 16 In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. 17 But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; 18 I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, [and that] ye shall not prolong [your] days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: 20 That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, [and] that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he [is] thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest

dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Wednesday:

Unity Among Believers.
Psalm 133:1–3

[Psa 133:1-3 KJV] 1 [[A Song of degrees of David.]] Behold, how good and how pleasant [it is] for brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 [It is] like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, [even] Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; 3 As the dew of Hermon, [and as the dew] that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, [even] life for evermore.

Thursday:

Call to Unity.
Philippians 2:1–4

[Phi 2:1-4 KJV] 1 If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2 Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind. 3 [Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. 4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Friday:

Jesus Intercedes for Us.
Hebrews 7:22–26

[Heb 7:22-26 KJV] 22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. 23 And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: 24 But this [man], because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. 26 For such an high priest became us, [who is] holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

Saturday:

Resist the Devil.
1 Peter 5:6–9

[1Pe 5:6-9 KJV] 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: 7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9 Whom resist

stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.