

John 17:1-5

Pastor John Miller

You've heard me say a million times, "This is one of the great chapters of the Bible," right? This is one of those times that I wish I hadn't said that so much because we truly come to one of the great chapters of the Bible. The challenge is that these great chapters are so difficult to preach on because they're so infinitely profound in their own way that you can't really expound upon it at all. Simply stated, what we have in John 17 is Jesus praying to His Father. It is the Lord's prayer. You say, "Well, I thought the Lord's prayer was, 'Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,' and that's the Lord's prayer." Well, that's what we call the Lord's prayer, but it is not the Lord's prayer. Jesus never would've prayed, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Jesus did not pray the Lord's prayer, He was teaching us how to pray. That's the disciples' prayer. He said, "After this manner therefore pray ye."

Now, we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," Jesus, interestingly enough, prayed, "Father." He didn't say, "Our Father," He had a unique way which no one else has, He is the Son of God. He's not a Son of God, He's the Son of God. Lest I forget, we're going to this next couple weeks see some of the most marvelous proof texts and clear teaching in the Bible on the deity and the majesty and the glory of Jesus the Son of God. Jesus actually in this prayer calls Himself Jesus Christ or Jesus the Messiah, but a lot of evidence for His divine nature in this prayer, and we're going to see it in the first five verses tonight.

It's interesting that in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you have a few references to Jesus praying. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." But, they're always very short, very pithy, short little prayers, and this is not a short prayer. This is the longest prayer in the New Testament—if not the whole Bible—and it's given by the Son of God. It's Jesus actually praying, opening His heart. This chapter has been rightfully called the holy of holies of Scripture. What Moses had when he was at the burning bush and the Lord spoke to Moses, "This is holy ground. Take off your shoes," the same thing is true of John 17, this is holy ground, and we should take off our shoes when we approach this chapter. It's a marvelous, marvelous opening up to us the priorities of Jesus as He prayed for Himself, verses 1-5; secondly, He prays for His disciples, verses 6-19; thirdly, He prays for His church, verses 20-26.

It's actually when He prays for the Church, universal, it actually reaches out to today. You and I are actually as the Church prayed for in this prayer. Jesus prayed for us. In this chapter, too, on Jesus praying pictures and reminds us of what He's doing now in heaven. We know what He did in the past, He died on the cross for our sins and healed and so forth, performed miracles, spake like never a man spake, but what is He doing right now in heaven? What He's doing right now in heaven is what He's doing in this chapter, He's praying for us. He's our great High Priest. He's seated at the right hand of God the Father who always lives to make intercession for us. How marvelous is this prayer given by the Son of God Himself.

Now, where Jesus was when He prayed it, we don't really know. In John 13-16, we find that Jesus was in the upper room, and He was with His disciples. He's only a few hours away from being crucified on the cross, and it could be that He was praying en route from the upper room down through the Kidron Valley, down into the Garden of Gethsemane, or they stopped along the way and they prayed. But somewhere when Jesus was praying along the way or stopping and praying, the disciples and surely John heard Him pray. Some say maybe Jesus told them later what He prayed. I'm not sure that's the case. We don't really know, it doesn't say, but the Holy Spirit inspired John the apostle to actually record the actual words that Jesus prayed. I'm absolutely convinced that this is exactly what Jesus prayed when He was praying that night before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. What a marvelous, marvelous prayer though.

The first five verses, Jesus prays for Himself, and His focus in the first five verses is that God the Father might be glorified in and through Him. Let's read verses 1-5. It says, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father,"—again, this is the word Abba—"the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power"—or better is authority—"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." Interesting, Jesus praying to His Father making mention of Him being Jesus Christ, which is the Messiah, so He's laying claim to being the Messiah.

Verse 4, He says, "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." In these verses, as I said, Jesus starts by praying for Himself. I didn't read any commentaries that did this, but I did read commentaries that said some scholars sadly believe that Jesus was being selfish to start off praying for Himself. I don't know how anyone can think like that, obviously Jesus is the Son of God without any sin, and there's nothing evil or wrong about praying for yourself, especially when like Jesus you're praying that you can glorify God. You got that? That is the theme of these first five verses. He wanted to glorify His Father in heaven, so He's wanting to be glorified that He can bring glory to His Father in heaven.

The purpose of prayer is the glory of God. The purpose of prayer is not to get your will done on earth. The purpose of prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. The purpose of prayer is "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name," praise and glory be to thy name. Everything we do when we pray should be all praise and all honor and glory be to God.

It starts with, "These words spake Jesus." Now, "These words spake Jesus," I believe goes all the way back to John 13, and it's the whole Upper Room Discourse, which we have been studying for the last many weeks, so everything in John 13-17 is the reference to, "These words spake Jesus." Then, Jesus ". . . lifted up his eyes to heaven." There's nothing in the Bible that tells us what our physical posture needs to be when we pray. When we pray today, I don't know where it comes from, but we say, "Fold your hands, close your eyes, and bow your head." I think that was invented by Sunday school teachers to keep kids from goofing off in class. The

Jews certainly didn't bow their heads and close their eyes. The Jews actually opened their hands and lifted them up and looked up to heaven, like it says Jesus did here, because they expected to get something. I think that's kind of cool. We kind of go, "Oh, God," it's like we're waiting for God to strike us with lightning or something. But they would actually lift their hands to the Lord and they would look up.

I like to go outside and pray at night under the starry sky. Go out tonight before you go to bed and look at the beautiful moon and remember that Jesus spoke that into existence by the word of His power. Look at the stars that He flung into space. I like to look up into the heavens and call to the Lord, or during a beautiful day with the blue sky and the white clouds just look into the heavens, "... from whence cometh my help."

Picture Jesus with His hands perhaps raised, it doesn't mention His hands, but He "... lifted up his eyes to heaven,"—and the first word out of His mouth was Abba, He said—"Father." Again, we're going to see that His prayer confirms the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity is that teaching in the Bible that there's one God, but that one God is manifested in three Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. They're not three Gods—one God, three divine Persons. They're one in essence, three in Persons. God the Son is talking to God the Father.

Remember when Jesus was baptized and the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and there was an audible voice from Heaven. The Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." So, we have God the Father speaking from heaven; God the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove; and God the Son being baptized, so God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, prayer is to the Father in the merits of the Son. We had that in this Upper Room Discourse, and we pray in the energy and the power of the Holy Spirit, so Christians praying is trinitarian—we pray to the Father, through the merits of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit—but He's talking to God. It also reminds us again that Jesus revealed God the Father as "Abba," that He is a personal God. He's not just some force, some inanimate power out there in the cosmos, He is a personal Father to those who have been regenerated and are the children of God.

Jesus opens in verse 1 with "... the hour is come." Now, "... the hour is come," is interesting in light of John's gospel which started in John 2:4 where Jesus was at a wedding in Canaan and His mother asked Him to do something about the situation with the wedding party running out of wine, and He said to His mother, "What does that have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." That's when it started. Then, all the way through the gospel we find that repeated phrase where He would actually say, "My hour is not come," but now in this prayer He knows His hour has come.

What is His hour that has come? The time when He would die on the cross, the time for which He came into the world. He came into the world to die upon a cross for the sins of humanity. That's the purpose for the incarnation. Why did God become a Man? God became a Man in order to die. He became a Man to reveal God to us, but He came to redeem us. He came to

reconcile us. He came to bring us back to God and to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The Bible teaches that He was the substitution for our sins on the cross. I believe the Bible teaches what's called penal substitutionary atonement that Jesus actually was punished on the cross, He took the cup and drank it to the bottom of the wrath of God, the judgment of God, on the cross as He substitutionarily bore our sins on the cross so that His righteousness can be imputed to us. It's called imputation. He takes my sin on Him, pays for it on the cross in full, and then when I believe in Him by faith, He gives to me as a free gift imputed to me His perfect righteousness, thus I'm forgiven and I'm justified. I'm reconciled and I stand complete in Christ—faultless before the throne I stand. So, His hour had come.

Interesting, too, that in the redemption of mankind on the cross, God had preordained and planned it before the foundations of the world, and that God has a redemptive program and plan and timetable. God has a perfect time. Do you know that God's never late? Some of you are looking at me, "I don't know. He's been pretty late for me, lately. He didn't show up last weekend when I needed help." He's always perfectly right on time. He doesn't follow our schedule. When you ask Him to do something, He's not, "What time do you need that by Friday? Okay, Friday night, five o'clock. Okay, I got that." He doesn't do that. He's got His own plan, His own timetable. So, in redemption and in the unfolding of the redemptive story, God has His hour, God has His perfect time. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

So, this hour that had come was something that was planned before man was ever created in the Garden of Eden. Before time ever began, God planned this hour when the Son of God would die upon the cross. Jesus only had a short time of ministry here on earth because He came for this hour to suffer and die upon the cross. That's basically what it means that His time for Christ to be crucified. Just within hours He would be hanging on a cross atoning for the sin of the world.

Notice, ". . . the hour is come"—then notice the next statement—"glorify thy Son" One of the great ways God is glorified is in the work of Jesus on the cross, and I have no doubt but what the cross of Christ brings the greatest glory to God. In the weakness of the cross, the stigma of the cross, the death of the Son of God on the cross brings the greatest glory and honor to God. All the attributes of God are displayed in the theater of the cross, so what a blessed thought to think that Jesus was glorified, that He would be glorified in His suffering upon the cross.

A couple times this is brought out where He says, "O Father, glorify thou me," down in verse 5. It's interesting that that prayer could not be prayed by you or me. We don't pray, "Lord, glorify me." That would be a blasphemous prayer. We just kind of read over that and don't ever think about that. This supports the deity, the majesty, and the sinless nature of Jesus Christ—that He could actually ask God the Father to glorify Him, and in glorifying Him it would bring glory to God the Father. If you want God the Father to be glorified, then glorify God the Son. If you want to know God the Father, then you get there through God the Son. If you want to be going

to heaven and have your sins forgiven, it's all about Jesus Christ. They're inseparable. They're tied together. This is an indication that He is divine, that He is the Son of God, “. . . glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” I love that. “. . . glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.”

Verse 2, “As thou hast given,”—three times in verse 2 we have ‘given,’ ‘give,’ and again the word ‘given’ and notice the references—“As thou hast given him power over all flesh”—again, this is an indication of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. God the Father gave to God the Son authority over all human life, all flesh. “. . . that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him”—God, You’ve given Me authority over all flesh that I should give eternal life to as many as thou hast now the Father given to Him.

A great place to ask yourself what is eternal life. Eternal life is not just quantity, it's quality. It's not just living forever, it's living in a dimension of spiritual life. When you are born again, when you are saved, you immediately have eternal life. You got that? You're not going to have eternal life when you die and go to heaven. You're not hoping that you have eternal life, you actually have eternal life.

I don't want to get sidetracked, and I know I do this a lot, but it's a great point for me to say that if you have been born again and you have eternal life, you can never be lost because if you ever lost, you never had eternal life. The thing about eternal life is that it's eternal life; but it's not just living forever, it is that, but it's life in the spirit. It's life in a new dimension, so the life of God in the soul of man. The minute you are regenerated or born again you have present possession... you all know John 3:16, right? “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” not hope to have it, not maybe have it, not might have it and you cross your fingers and put a rabbit's foot in your pocket and hope that when you die you're going to go to heaven. No, you already have eternal life. Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” At the end of the chapter, there is no separation. Nothing can “. . . separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.”

So, Jesus, verse 2, is actually the One who gives eternal life. Who does He give it to? Verse 2, “. . . as many as thou hast given him.” Again, this is a prayer of Jesus, and we don't want to do every phrase the theological and doctrinal implications, but it's actually teaching here when He says, “. . . as thou hast given him,” that those who are saved are actually given by God the Father as a gift to God the Son. In Ephesians 1 it says that “. . . he hath chosen us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world.” You say, “Well, does that mean that only the elect are going to be saved?” No, that means that whoever will can still believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and Jesus said “. . . and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” But in a way I cannot explain it or reconcile it, the Bible also teaches that I was chosen by God the Father, and I was given as a gift to God the Son. Again, an indication that I am secure. That gift is God giving me to God the Son. If you're a Christian, you actually were a gift from the Father to the Son. Isn't that an amazing thought? You're His child. You were given to Him, so a gift from God the Father to the Son.

It says in verse 3, “And this is life eternal,”—again, you have eternal life mentioned in verse 2, and you have eternal life mentioned in verse 3. This is a description of what it involves. It says, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee”—Jesus speaking of the Father—“the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Again, Jesus is God. He’s coupled together with God the Father as being the One who gives eternal life, and He’s also the Messiah. The word “Christ,” is the New Testament equivalent of Old Testament “Messiah,” the anointed one.

What is eternal life? Eternal life isn’t going to church and becoming a member of a congregation getting baptized. Eternal life is believing in Jesus Christ and knowing Him in an intimate, personal way. That word “know” there is an interesting word. It means intimately and personally and experientially, the same concept that’s used of Adam knew his wife. It meant that they were intimate with one another. So, you know God. When you become a Christian, you have eternal life, and you have eternal life because you know God. We use that kind of concept of, are you a Christian? We’ll say, “Do you know the Lord?”

Now, that can freak some people out, “What do you know the Lord? Like, you know God? You have a relationship to God?” It just freaks people out, but the truth is, “Yes! I do know Him. He happens to be my best friend. He’s a friend that sticks closer than a brother, and He walks with me, and He talks with me / And He tells me I am His own / And the joy we share as we tarry there, / None other has ever known. Right? So, I know God. I have a relationship with God. That’s what it means to be a Christian, and it means I have eternal life.

There are religions in the world today that believe they are leading people to God or teaching people about God, but they deny Jesus Christ or they eliminate Jesus Christ or they leave Christ out of the equation. You can’t have God the Father without God the Son. If you’re wrong about Jesus, you’re wrong about God. If you don’t have Jesus and you don’t know Jesus, you don’t have God, and you don’t know God, you’re just religious going through the outward motions. Jesus is “ . . . the way, the truth, and the life,” there’s that eternal life, and Jesus Himself said in John 14:6, “ . . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by”—or through—“me.” So, knowing Christ, knowing God means I have eternal life. What a joy. What a blessing that is.

Notice verse 4, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” This causes some people a little confusion. They say, “Well, He hasn’t yet gone to the cross. He hasn’t yet been crucified. He hasn’t yet been resurrected from the dead. He hasn’t yet ascended back to heaven. How can He say, ‘I finished the work which thou gavest me to do?’” Well, in a couple different ways He’s finished the work. He did come to earth through the incarnation by being conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary taking on humanity. He had to take on humanity to redeem man, and He had to be sinless Man, so He’s born of a virgin. I believe the Bible teaches the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. If you deny that or you take it out of the Bible, you don’t have a sinless Savior. You don’t have a Savior, you don’t have Christianity. It’s an essential Christian doctrine. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. He was fully Man, but He was a Man who had no sin. He didn’t inherit sin or ever acquire sin.

Jesus did come under the law to redeem those who are under the law. He kept the law

perfectly. But He hadn't yet been to the cross, but He knew that He would in a few hours go to the cross, die for the sins of the world, be buried, raise again from the dead, and that He would ascend back into heaven, so He speaks as if it were already accomplished. Remember when He hung on the cross and cried, "Tetelestai," or it is finished or paid in full? He's basically saying, "It's a done deal." Nothing can thwart the purpose, plan, and program of God. Nothing can intervene to keep Him from going to the cross. Even though Jesus in Gethsemane did pray, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," He knew it wasn't possible, but in His humanity He was praying that in His agony. But He did go obediently to the cross and suffered and died, so He would finish the work even though He hadn't yet been actually crucified, and that would include His death, His burial, His resurrection, and His ascension and exaltation at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus came and accomplished His mission. He came on a mission, and that mission was accomplished.

Notice verse 5, He says, "And now, O Father,"—by the way, I love the fact that Jesus said, "I did what You asked Me to do." We should do the same thing, right? We should finish the work that God has asked us to do. Verse 5, "And now, O Father,"—O Abba—"glorify"—again—"thou me with thine own self,"—and then He puts this in there—"with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Again, this is a very clear, powerful statement on what is called the preincarnate glory of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ pre-existed before Bethlehem. Do you know before you were conceived in your mother's womb you didn't exist? Have you ever tried to think about what it would be like if there were no you, if you were never born? When it comes to Jesus, there was never a time when He was not. There's two things here involved: Jesus was pre-existent before Bethlehem, Jesus was eternal as well. So, He was eternal and pre-existent. He existed from all eternity. You say, "Well, when did He come into existence?" He was eternal. He is God. He never was unexisted, He always was, that's why He said, "I Am," not "I was," or "I will be," "I Am." This is something that doesn't compute. We don't really understand that. We can't really fathom what that means. But the Jehovah's Witness wrongly teach that Jesus was created by God and that He was created as an angel, and that angel was Michael the Archangel and then He became the Son of God. That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that He is eternal and that He is pre-existent before Bethlehem.

Write down John 1:1. I know I quote it a lot, but it's a classic. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "In the beginning was the Word,"—that means when time began, Jesus was there—"and the Word was with God,"—means that He was face to face with God the Father, and then God was the Word is that He is divine. He is the eternal Word, the personal Word, and the divine Word. This is a clear statement from Jesus' own lips " . . . the glory which I had with thee before the world"—ever—"was."

If Jesus Christ is not God, what He's saying in this prayer is either blasphemy or insanity or deity. He's either insane, a blasphemer, or He is divine. It's kind of like the liar, lunatic, or Lord. Anyone that would pray this has to be either crazy, a blasphemer, or in truth the Son of God that coexisted with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit from all eternity. I love the truth that God

is eternal, God is immortal, God is invisible. He's the only wise God. Either you believe in an eternal, all-existent God or you believe that there's some kind of eternal matter or something caused all of this to come into existence. I'm no scientist, but it doesn't take a lot of brain to think, Where did creation come from? Where did matter come from? Where does life come from? If there was no God and nothing existed, nothing comes from nothing. Nothing comes from nothing, and the Bible has the answer, it came from God who is eternal and self-existent. He doesn't need anything.

God didn't create man because He was lonely, by the way, or because He needed anything. He created man for some master plan that He would get greater glory and He loved man, wanted to redeem man, have a relationship with man. But it's so marvelous to think about, Jesus is actually praying in verse 5, "I want to come back to heaven, O Abba, and I want to be reinstated with the glory which I had with Thee before the world ever was."

In light of that, it's interesting that we have communion tonight. Put Philippians 2, what is known as the great kenosis passage where it says that Jesus, "Who, being in the form of God, thought"—equality with God not something to hold onto, but He emptied Himself, which means He laid aside His glory and His majesty and His splendor, His preincarnate glory, He set it aside. He didn't lay aside His deity, that's an impossibility. He laid aside His majesty, and He took on humanity and became a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Jesus, who is God in heaven, laid aside His majesty, came from heaven, took on humanity, now He's asking the Father that He could be glorified in heaven again " . . . with the glory which I had . . . before the world"—ever—"was."

Remember in John 13 when we started the Upper Room Discourse how Jesus rose from supper, laid aside His coat, put a towel around His waist, got down and washed the disciples' feet? That's a picture of the incarnation. That's a picture of God leaving heaven and the person of Christ, taking the badge of a slave, the badge of a servant, humanity. This is why Jesus, when He was on earth, wept. He was a Man clothed in humanity. This is why Jesus groaned in spirit. This is why Jesus was troubled sometimes. This is why Jesus was thirsty. This is why Jesus was tired and took a nap.

If you're ever tired, take a nap. Jesus understands. He was in a boat on the Sea of Galilee in a storm, and He was lying on His pillow. He doesn't have anything in the boat, but He had His pillow with Him. I love that. And, He was sleeping. They had to wake Him up. When He was at the grave of Lazarus, it says, "Jesus wept." God in flesh, a tear trickled down His face. How amazing is that?

Tonight, when we drink the cup and eat the bread and we remember that Jesus' body " . . . was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . and with his stripes we are healed," and He was broken for us. So, now He's praying that as I'm resurrected and I'm ascending back to heaven, I'm with You in heaven, can I be reinstated with the glory and the majesty and the splendor " . . . which I had with thee before the world"—ever—"was." What a beautiful picture.

There's a couple things I want to close with. Jesus prayed that He might glorify God the Father. Secondly, Jesus said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." I would take those two points tonight and say what a great two points of application. First, let's pray that our lives glorify God. Let's pray that our lives bring glory to God. Secondly, let's pray that we finish the work that God has given us to do. Amen? Whatever God has called you to do, that we do it faithfully as unto the Lord. Let's pray.