

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: John 17:1-5

Sermon Title: "Jesus' Hope-filled Prayer" (Trekking through the Gospel of John)

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The Gospel of John records the longest prayer that we have from Jesus. It might not be the longest prayer he actually prayed, but it is the longest we have from him.

We know that Jesus prayed throughout his ministry. The Gospels tell us of times, in which Jesus found a quiet corner of the world, far away from disciples and crowds, and prayed with God the Father for hours. Sometimes he prayed the whole night, and then would return to the disciples and crowds to carry out more ministry. Jesus would pray in front of people, for example, in John 12. He simply says, "Father, glorify your name!" A voice comes from heaven and says, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." People think they heard thunder or an angel speaking, but Jesus says, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine."¹

We don't know if Jesus' prayer in John 17 was prayed aloud or in a quiet corner. Jewish prayers

¹ John 12:28-30.

were said aloud most of the time, so the disciples were probably within earshot to hear what Jesus was saying. We don't know if Jesus is still in the Upper Room with his disciples, or in the Garden of Gethsemane with only three of them. We do know that Jesus prays at some time between his celebration of the Passover and his arrest by the chief priest's troops.

Jesus' prayer is similar to a last speech a dying military leader might give to his officers. Departing leaders, prophets, and rabbis could commonly provide "final words" of instruction for their students who were left behind.² Moses gives a similar going away speech in the Book of Deuteronomy 32 and 33. It is a form of prayer, in which he gives praises to God in front of the assembly of Israelites, proclaiming the name of the Lord as great. God is graciously yet vigorously moving the people from Egypt and through the Wilderness. Then Moses thinks about the future of Israel in Chapter 33, as he prays a blessing upon them. In Leviticus 16, Moses' brother Aaron, the high priest of Israel, learns how to sacrifice and pray to God. He begins with a few words on his own behalf, and then he presents the sin offering and prays for the people.³

² Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 459.

³ *Ibid.*

In the longest prayer we have from Jesus, he begins with offering words about himself. He wants the Father to glorify the Son (Himself), and that the Son would glorify the Father. This has been happening throughout Jesus' time on earth – Jesus would keep saying that he does all things to glorify God. But it is in those most important moment in which Jesus will be put on trail, killed, and resurrected that he wants both Father and Son – and the Holy Spirit, too – to be revealed as magnificent before the whole world.

Jesus then moves to praying for the disciples. Although they spent time with Jesus, they are God's men. Even the women who weren't counted as The Twelve belong to God the Father. Now they know all things, Jesus says, and they have received them, and they believe that the Father has sent the Son. Jesus prays that, although he will no longer be physically present with them, they would be physically present to each other. They should remain as one in all love and ministry, and they should be spared from the evil one.

Lastly, Jesus prays for all believers, us included. Before we were born, Jesus prayed for us. He wanted us to be one as the disciples were with each other and with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He wanted us to be shining examples to the world that the Son

did come to save everybody. He wanted us, along with the disciples, to join him in eternal glory, when the time comes for us to shed this mortal coil as Shakespeare puts it.

Jesus covers all bases in his prayer. Even under the stress of considering his own brutal death on the cross, he has the time to pray that all things will run according to God's great plan for the world.

The Gospel of John is the only Gospel that records this compassionate discourse from Jesus. We can't help but wonder why this is. Why is it that John created a Chapter 17 to record Jesus' wonderful last prayer, but the other Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) did not? It isn't as though John had exclusive rights to Jesus' prayer, and that the other writers would have had to pay copyright fees. It isn't as though John was the only one to hear the pray. If Jesus did as any good Jew did and prayed out loud, Matthew was certainly present to hear the prayer and possibly record it. But only John does, and that makes us think.

Once again, we don't know where Jesus prayed this prayer, and who was actually listening. These aren't the facts we are doing after right now. What we can do is observe the tone of each Gospel, and possibly

get some clues.

When we read the last chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, we read a lot of warnings from Jesus.⁴ He warns the disciples to be mindful of the signs of the times, because they will point toward the end of things and eventually Christ's second return. Jesus uses the time of Noah to illustrate how people weren't ready for the great flood. He tells the parable of wise and foolish virgins who had or didn't have enough oil in their lamps to receive the bridegroom. It is as though Jesus is preparing the troops for battle, getting them ready for some massive onslaught that can overtake them at any moment. Matthew's Gospel is very serious about Jesus' arrest and death, and he wants everybody who reads the words to be on their toes.

The Gospel of Mark, however, doesn't have Jesus warning the disciples of anything to come. Yet, there seems to be a lot of confusion about what Jesus is going to do in Jerusalem. The disciples are on edge and even scared. Will there be a revolution against the Roman government? What does Jesus mean that he will die – does this mean the band of 12 disciples won't exist nevermore? Even after Jesus' death, in Mark 16, we find the disciples trembling and saying nothing about Jesus' resurrection, because it is all so

⁴ Especially Chapters 24 and 25,

confusing.

Luke's Gospel is similar to Matthew's, in that Jesus issues several warnings to the disciples about the End Times. Luke only devotes one chapter to these warnings, while Matthew devotes two chapters. Luke tells an excellent story about the last supper of Jesus and the arrest of Jesus, presenting the story as it is with all its confusion and sadness and wonder.

And then we come to John's Gospel. We find that Jesus is pretty upbeat about the last moment of his life. Upbeat, positive, hopeful: these are words we could use to describe the tone of John's Gospel. Yes, Jesus is going to be arrested, but in his prayer in John 17 he knows that the Son and the Father will be glorified through it. Yes, Jesus is going to die a brutal death, but in his prayer he trusts that the disciples will carry on the message of life. Others will hear the message and believe that Jesus Christ saves.

In Matthew and Mark, we aren't sure what the disciples will do next, because they hide in a house, or because they don't say anything to anybody. In Luke's Gospel, slowly but surely we know that the disciples will move toward Pentecost and receive tongues of fire. The message of life will move forward.⁵ Before

⁵ Luke wrote both a Gospel and the Book of Acts. He seemed to end the Gospel, so that it would flow nicely into the next book. Try reading one after the other, and you will see how they come together like pieces of a puzzle, with the Books of Acts picking up the story from the Gospel without interruption.

Jesus is arrested in John's Gospel, we already sense that everything will be okay. The Son will be glorified, and so will the Father. The disciples will go through a rough patch, but they will remain as one. Followers like us will hear the words and believe them, and the kingdom of God will grow.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we read about Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, pleading for the Father to take away the cup of his suffering. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is sweating blood because he is in such agony about what he has to do next.⁶ In John's Gospel we read none of this. In John 18, Jesus is in the Garden but there is no pleading with the Father. There is no sweating blood, or reprimanding the disciples for falling asleep. Once again, this may have to do with the tone that John wanted to set in his story about Jesus. Jesus is confident. He is hopeful. He faces the calamity and heartbreak that await him. As he and the Father were one, they will remain one with the Holy Spirit, and they will be glorified despite an inglorious situation.

It is good to know that through the blood, sweat, and tears that Christ was hopeful. We usually see paintings and pictures of a down-and-out Savior, who

⁶ Cf. Luke 22:43-44.

gazes up to heaven with this agonized, bewildered stare. We will not see such a stare in John's Gospel. We do not hear bewilderment in Jesus' prayer, as he hopes for the future for himself and his followers.

Through the blood, sweat, and tears of life, it is good to know that Christ is still hopeful. Just when we think we have gotten ourselves stuck in some dead-end, Christ is hopeful that we will find the way out. Just when we are stuck in our confusion about the courses of our existence, Christ is hopeful that we will find some answers to move us along. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Christ is with us. He faced death, knowing it was not the end of things. We face death, knowing there is life on the other side of it. We walk through the valley and Christ gives us hope to travel across the jagged and dark ground, in order to find the light of the dawn of a new day.

It is good to know that Christ was hopeful in the face of his own death, because we can lose our grip on hope at times. Just listening to the news may cause us to lose a grip on hope. The wrangling that goes on in DC, and the state of our economy, and the Dow Jones tanking 400 points every day. Natural disasters such as a hurricane sweep across the east coast, and

we are bothered by the destruction it brings. We have failure of health and financial problems and the general unpleasantness of things that we have to endure each day. We can lose a grip on hope quite quickly, and get sucked in to the vortex of despair.

It is good to know that with all the thoughts and emotions our Savior expressed in all the Gospels during the last supper with his disciples and during his death on a cross, hope was one of them. A confident smile that says things will be okay. A strong resolve that believes the bad will serve God, and bring about the good. Chest out and chin held high, knowing that prayers will be answered. We hear it in Jesus' prayer this hope he expressed. We hear it when he asks the Father to glorify Himself and to glorify the Son. There is no despair in glory. There is no darkness in magnificence. Hopelessness and darkness and confusion do not stand a chance with glory.

Jesus is hopeful that the disciples will see glory together, and that they will experience glory together. Jesus prays for the same thing to happen to us. Before we were born, before we could experience our first failure, before we could become worried about anything, Jesus prays in confidence for us. Jesus is hopeful that we may be united together in our joys and struggles; that we would be one with God the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit through any situation; that Christ's glory would be our glory; that we would live each day with glory.

It is good to know that through the blood, sweat, and tears that Christ was hopeful. We can face another day. We can stand against any onslaught that hopelessness throws at us. We can keep our chins up, knowing that Christ stands beside us, knowing that Christ never stops praying in confidence for us to the end of time.