

# Exalting Jesus Christ

## "The Greatest Prayer in the Bible"

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. One essential practice that should be found in the life of every Christian is the practice of prayer.
  - A. And yet, there is a great amount of confusion over the purpose of prayer, the kinds of prayer, when to pray, what we can pray for, and even how to pray.
    1. I think there are basically two reasons for all this confusion.
      - a. Part of the problem comes from a lack of teaching on the subject of prayer.
        - (1). Some preachers and Bible class teachers don't see a need to cover this subject as often as other subjects because we just assume every Christian already knows how to pray.
      - b. I also think part of the problem regarding prayer comes from a lack of practice.
        - (1). We simply don't pray as often as we should.
        - (2). Or, we find ourselves praying only when a need suddenly arises, or when calamity strikes without warning.

- II. And so, as we continue our series of studies, "Exalting Jesus Christ," I want us to take a close look at "The Greatest Prayer in the Bible" so that we can learn more about prayer.
  - A. This prayer is found in the seventeenth chapter of the gospel of John.
    - 1 It takes about six minutes to read this prayer reverently out loud.
      - a. So, it's certainly not a lengthy prayer.
      - b. However, it's a prayer of great depth and meaning.
    - 2. In his book *"All The Prayers In The Bible,"* Dr. Herbert Lockyer says there are 650 prayers recorded in the Bible, but none of them can even begin to compare to the prayer Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven on the night before His crucifixion.
  - B. What is it about this prayer that makes it so great?
    - 1. When we take a closer look at this prayer, there are at least four reasons why this prayer is so significant.
    - 2. And, it's those four reasons that we want to examine more closely in this lesson.
  - C. Then, in a follow-up lesson, we're going to take an even closer look at the specific things Jesus prayed for when it came to you and me as His disciples.
    - 1. And so, in that lesson, we'll take a microscopic look at the last six verses of this particular prayer.

**BODY:**

- I. The first reason why this prayer is so great comes from the One who prayed the prayer – none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
  - A. Not only is He the Son of God, but more importantly He is God the Son – the eternal God Who came to earth in human form, and lived a sinless life in the flesh.
    1. When we look at the gospel accounts of the life of Christ, we see that each one emphasizes a different attribute of Jesus.
      - a. For example, Matthew emphasizes Christ the King – the promised Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures.
      - b. Mark, on the other hand, emphasizes Jesus the Servant.
      - c. Luke emphasizes Jesus as the Son of Man, and focuses more on the humanity of Jesus.
      - d. But John's gospel presents the deity of Jesus Christ as no other gospel does. In fact, John summarizes this fact in the 20th chapter of his gospel.
        - (1). **John 20:30-31** – *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

- B. This is why this particular prayer of Jesus is included in John's gospel.
1. It magnifies the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is God the Son, and almost every verse in John 17 expresses this great fact.
    - a. For example, only God the Son could ask the Father to glorify Him: **John 17:1** – *Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You. . ."*
    - b. In **Exodus 33:18**, Moses asked to see God's glory, but in this verse Jesus asked to receive God's glory, and He identified this glory as being the same glory He had with the Father *"before the world was."* (**John 17:5**)
    - b. The only one who could rightfully claim to have the same glory as God *"before the world was"* would be the One who was also God – the One who was also divine, the One who was also deity.
  2. Furthermore, only God can give sinners eternal life, and yet Jesus reveals in this prayer that God had also given Him that authority.
    - a. **John 17:2** – *". . .as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him."*
  3. And notice in verse 3 how Jesus puts Himself on an equal basis with God.

- a. **John 17:3** – *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*
  - b. Jesus says that sinners are granted eternal life when they come to know God and when they come to know Jesus Christ.
  - c. Who else could make that claim except God the Son?
- C. Furthermore, Jesus revealed four times in this prayer that He had been sent by God the Father.
1. Look at these verses:
    - a. Again, in: **John 17:3** – *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*
    - b. **John 17:18** – *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them [the apostles] into the world."*
    - c. **John 17:21** – *". . . that they [His followers] all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."*
    - d. **John 17:25** – *"O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me."*
  2. Of course, the apostles and prophets of old could also say they had been sent by God, because they were.

3. But no apostle or prophet could claim that he "*came forth from God*" – and yet, Jesus clearly made that claim.
  - a. **John 17:8** – "*For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.*"
  - b. Jesus told His disciples: **John 16:28** – "*I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.*"
- D. And while any Christian could pray, "*all Mine are Yours*" – meaning "*everything I have is Yours*" – only the Son of God could add, "*and Yours are Mine!*"
  1. **John 17:10** – "*And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them.*"
  2. What makes this claim of Jesus so unique is that He claimed to possess everything that the Father possessed!
  3. The reason He could make that claim is because He and the Father are One.
    - a. **John 17:11** – "*Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.*"

- b. **John 17:20-21** – *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."*

- E. There are a number of other examples in this prayer where Jesus affirmed His deity, but consider this:
  - 1. If anyone else prayed in this manner and made these claims, we would conclude that he was either confused or mentally disturbed.
    - a. Only Jesus Christ, God the Son, could pray this prayer.
  - 2. But the fact that Jesus prayed to God in this manner and made these claims raises a question. Why would God the Son pray?
    - a. Over and over again the gospels present Jesus as a man of prayer.
    - b. In fact, there are some 19 instances of Jesus praying.
  - 3. So, why did He pray all the time?
    - a. The reason is because Jesus was dependent on the Father.
    - b. Everything He did during His earthly ministry – all of His words and all of His works – showed His total dependence on God.
  - 4. Now if Jesus – with all His power and all His perfection – found it necessary to depend on prayer, how much more do you and I, with

all our imperfections and all our weaknesses, need to depend on prayer!

5. The answer to that question should be obvious!
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- II. There's another reason why the prayer of Jesus in John chapter 17 is great, and that's because of the occasion that demanded the prayer. So, what was the situation, and how did it relate to this prayer?
    - A. Well, to begin with, Jesus had just finished instructing His disciples in John chapters thirteen through sixteen.
      1. And immediately after Jesus taught His disciples, He prayed for them.
      2. Why? Because prayer and the Word of God go together.
        - a. Imagine how we would struggle through life if we had the Bible, but not prayer?
          - (1). We would have the truth, but we wouldn't have the power to practice or live by that truth.
        - b. Now imagine what it would be like if we had prayer, but didn't have the Bible.
          - (1). Prayer would certainly draw us closer to God, but we would have no direction.
        - c. Either way, it would be like having a one-way conversation.



3. The Bible without prayer would be like God speaking to us, but we couldn't tell Him about our deepest needs and desires.
4. And having prayer without the Bible would be like speaking to God, but hearing nothing in return.
5. In fact, we wouldn't really have any assurance that He was even hearing our prayer, or that He was even there!
6. That's why every faithful Christian needs to understand that Bible study and prayer actually complement and reinforce each other.
  - a. Samuel the prophet certainly understood this.
    - (1). **1 Samuel 12:23-24** – *Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.*
  - b. The apostles certainly understood this as well.
    - (1). When the issue came up of caring for the daily needs of the Grecian widows, the apostles appointed seven men to handle this problem. Why?
    - (2). **Acts 6:4** – *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*
  - c. The apostle Paul also understood prayer and Bible study work hand in hand.

(1). **Acts 20:32** – *So now, brethren, I commend you to God [that's prayer] and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up [that comes from Bible study].*

7. One of the reasons we have unbalanced Christians in the Lord's church today is because of a lack of prayer further complicated by a lack of study of God's Word.
  - a. That's why we need both!
  - b. You simply cannot mature as a Christian unless you immerse yourself in both prayer and Bible study.
- B. But Jesus not only prayed for His disciples, Jesus also prayed for Himself.
  1. **John 17:1-5** – *Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."*

2. Remember, Jesus was only hours away from the cross.
  - a. When Jesus began His ministry, He was baptized by John, and prayed to the Father.
    - (1). **Luke 3:21** – *When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened.*
  - b. Throughout His ministry He depended on prayer – rising up early in the morning to pray, and even praying all night.
    - (1). **Mark 1:35** – *Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*
    - (2). **Luke 6:12** – *Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*
  - c. But now that He was approaching the end of His life, Jesus once again spends a lot of time in prayer.
2. Do you realize what the consequences might have been if Jesus had not prayed for Himself?
  - a. If Jesus had not prayed for the Father to glorify Him and receive Him back into heaven, and if God had not answered that prayer, you and I would have no Redeemer, no Savior, no Mediator, no High Priest Who has ascended into the heavens.

- b. And, worst of all, we would have no salvation.
  - 3. Therefore, when Jesus was praying for Himself, He was also praying for us.
  - 4. And, in praying for Himself the Lord shows us there are times when prayer is absolutely essential – not only in the everyday affairs of life, but especially when we face difficult times in our life.
- III. But there's a third reason why the prayer in John 17 is also great, and that's because of the petitions in the prayer.
- A. We need to always remember a fundamental truth about prayer – Prayer that asks nothing, accomplishes nothing.
    - 1. First, as we've already seen, Jesus prayed for Himself. **(cf. John 17:1-5)**
      - a. He asked the Father give to Him the glory He had before He came to earth.
      - b. And because God answered that prayer, you and I enjoy the salvation of our souls.
    - 2. But, as we also mentioned earlier, Jesus also prayed specifically for His disciples - the apostles.
      - a. **John 17:6-19** – *"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now*

*they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. 8 For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. 9 I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.*

*10 And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*

*13 But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

*17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

*19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."*

- b. To fulfill their mission of preaching the gospel of Christ, these disciples needed to go out into a world filled with sin, and so they needed all the help they could get.
  - c. Therefore, God needed to keep them from the temptations Satan would constantly throw in their path.
  - d. But before they could fulfill their mission to preach a resurrected Christ, God needed to sanctify them by the truth.
  - e. They would be set apart from the world by their faithfulness to the truth contained in God's Word.
3. Finally, Jesus not only prayed for Himself and His disciples, He prayed for you and me – His church.
- a. **John 17:20-26** – *"I do not pray for these alone [the apostles], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made*

*perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

*24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

- b. The Lord's petition in these verses is that all believers would be united: *"That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You..." (v. 21)*
- c. The Lord prayed that there would be a common faith and a common love between us, so that the world would believe our message.
- d. The apostle Paul put it this way: **1 Corinthians 1:10** – *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

- e. Unless we do everything we can do to bring about unity among believers in Jesus Christ – to bring about peace and unity in the Lord's church – we are simply preventing the prayer of Jesus from being fulfilled.

IV. And finally, the prayer in John 17 is great because of the victory it gives us.

A. There's a close link between the final words of Jesus to His disciples in the Upper Room, and the words of Jesus in this prayer.

1. In the Upper Room Jesus said: **John 16:33** – *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

- a. In other words, Jesus told His disciples that in Him they would have peace, but in the world they would have tribulation.
- b. However, there was no need to worry because the Lord said He has overcome the world.

2. However, in the prayer of John 17, Jesus tells His disciples how we can also overcome the world – as we've already seen in **John 17:6-19**.

- a. When Jesus talked about overcoming the *"world,"* He was talking about the ethical and moral use of the word *"world"* –



those things that are of the world, or those things that are worldly and sinful.

- b. This is the "world" we belonged to before we were saved – before we were redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.
- c. This is the "world," according to Paul: **Ephesians 2:2** – *in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.*
- d. But when we obeyed the gospel of Christ, we received citizenship in heaven: **Philippians 3:20-21** – *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*
- e. Now that we have obeyed the gospel of Christ, we no longer belong to this world system.
- f. While we are in this world physically, we do not belong to this world spiritually. We've been delivered and set free!

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. And so, here is the greatest prayer in the Bible – the prayer of Jesus in the 17th chapter of John.
  - A. And in that prayer Jesus prayed for Himself – that He would be glorified by the Father with the glory He had in heaven.
    1. That means there are times when we also need to pray for ourselves – because, even though our ultimate goal is to get to heaven, we will need God's help along the way.
  - B. Jesus also prayed for His disciples – the apostles – that they would be protected and sanctified in the work of taking the gospel of Christ to the world.
    1. That means there are also times when we need to pray for those who preach the word of God.
      - a. If the apostle Paul urged Christians to pray for him – to pray that he might boldly proclaim the Word – then I want to urge you to do the same for me.
      - b. Having the courage to stand up and speak the truth of God's word is no small task.
  - C. And finally, Jesus prayed for the whole church – for all of us who would eventually become His disciples through the preaching of the apostles.
    1. And so, that means there are also times when we need to pray for the whole church.

- a. If the Lord prayed that there would be a common faith and a common love between us (so that the world would believe our message), then we need to be praying for the same thing.
  2. And in His prayer for us, Jesus shows us how we can also overcome the world – just like the apostles would overcome the world:
    - a. By truly knowing God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ – and this can only come through knowing the Word of God.
    - b. By coming out of the world, and by refusing to be part of the world.
    - c. And by being one – by being united together in love as believers in Jesus Christ.
- II. Are you doing your part to make this prayer of Jesus a reality?
- A. Take a close look at your life.
    1. Are you doing your part to be a faithful disciple, or are you someone who has gone back into the world
    2. Or, could it be that you are one who has never completely left the world?
  - B. If you've gone back into the world, or if you've never completely left it, and you sincerely want to change that, then I've got some good news.

1. The Lord is offering you an opportunity to become a faithful disciple at this very moment.
  - a. For some of you it means coming to Christ in obedience to the gospel and being baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins.
  - b. For others, it means renewing your commitment to Christ and repenting of the sins in your life that are interfering with your relationship with Christ.