

## 17:1-26

This next section focuses on Jesus' prayer following the Farewell Discourse. As far back as the fourth century with Cyril of Alexandria, the Lord has been portrayed as "a holy high priest" in this chapter.<sup>1</sup> By the late sixteenth century, with David Chytraeus, it was referred to as the "High-Priestly Prayer."<sup>2</sup> Today, most know this chapter by that name, and many modern writers are content to follow suit.<sup>3</sup> It is so called because Jesus' prayer is similar to the intercessory prayers of a high priest in that it deals with his glorification via the cross and how that atoning work, "in a distinctly mediatorial way—a priestly task," impacts his followers.<sup>4</sup>

However, some theologians have objected to calling this section the High-Priestly Prayer for two reasons: first, there's a lack of overt sacrificial language in 17:1-26 and, second, the Lord's priestly phase is more indicative of his ascension (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1). As such, other titles have been proposed. One major contender is "The Prayer of Consecration." The rationale behind this title argues that the proper emphasis of this prayer is on how the Lord *consecrated* himself on the cross so that his disciples would be *consecrated* to God—i.e., sanctified—through his sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> But emphasizing the consecration aspects of this prayer ignores some of its other elements (e.g., glory, love, hatred of the world, truth, etc.).

If we must give it some designation, given that Christ's prayer focuses on *various* important topics, a *broader* approach is preferred. This is why most commentators propose something like "the Prayer of Jesus,"<sup>6</sup> "Jesus' Parting Prayer,"<sup>7</sup> "Jesus' Prayer for Disciples,"<sup>8</sup> or "Jesus' Final Prayer for His Disciples."<sup>9</sup> The label "Jesus' Parting Prayer" seems best given that it comes at the end of "The Farewell Discourse." The symmetry between the two headings highlights a common thread: *departure*. Before Jesus left, he gave one final sermon *exclusively* to his disciples and one final prayer *specifically* for his followers. From the introduction to the

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<sup>1</sup> Elowsky (2007), p. 240, quotes Cyril of Alexandria, "Christ, then, prays for us as man and also unites in distributing good gifts to us as God. For he, being a holy high priest, blameless and undefiled, offered himself—not for his own weakness, as was the custom of those to whom was allotted the duty of sacrificing according to the Law, but rather for the salvation of our souls."

<sup>2</sup> Keener (2012), 2:1051.

<sup>3</sup> Morris (1995), p. 634.

<sup>4</sup> Carson (1991), p. 552-553.

<sup>5</sup> Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 291; Klink (2016), p. 706.

<sup>6</sup> Carson (1991), p. 550; Kruse (2017), p. 393.

<sup>7</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 482.

<sup>8</sup> Keener (2012), 2:1050.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson (2015), p. 346.

conclusion, every *principle* in the Farewell Discourse and every *petition* in Jesus' Parting Prayer is directed toward *believers*.

Surprisingly, while we know that Jesus prayed quite a bit (cf. Mat. 14:23; 19:13; Mar. 1:35; 6:46; Lu. 3:21; 9:18; etc.), we know only a *handful* of his prayers. Depending on how you count them, only *eight* of his prayers have been recorded: two short prayers of thanksgiving (Jn. 11:41-42; Matt. 11:25-26), one prayer for glorification (Jn. 12:28), Jesus' Parting Prayer in Jn. 17, the same prayer prayed three times in Gethsemane (cf. Matt. 26:39-44), and Jesus three prayers while on the cross (cf. Mat. 27:46; Lu. 23:34, 46). Thus, compared to the others, Jesus' Parting Prayer is, by far and away, not only the *longest* of his prayers but also his most *intricate* and *fully developed*.<sup>10</sup> In fact, it is so well-rounded that the prayer follows a neat three-fold movement: first, the Lord prays for himself (vs. 1-5); secondly, he prays for his present disciples (vs. 6-19); and, lastly, he prays for his future disciples (vs. 20-26).

Whatever can be said about this prayer, one thing is for sure; it is "a rare glimpse" into the mindset of the Son of God on the eve of his crucifixion.<sup>11</sup> John has given us VIP access to the consciousness of the Word incarnate and invites us to meditate on Jesus' personal petition to the Father. It was often the Lord's habit to read the minds of his creatures. But now, thanks to John, the creature gets to read the mind of their Creator. Was he fearful of the cross? Did he worry about his followers? Was he overly concerned about his legacy? Jesus' Parting Prayer gives a resounding "no" to all three questions.

This is not to say there would be no prayerful lament. In a few short moments, Jesus will ask that he *not* be given the cup of God's wrath, and he will pray so earnestly that he will sweat "great drops of blood" (cf. Lu. 22:41-44). But that time was not now. As with the Farewell Discourse, Jesus' Parting Prayer is not filled with words of gloom, despair, and failure but those of joy, hope, and triumph.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus would be victorious, and the apostles would not be the only ones to benefit; all his followers, even those who weren't even born yet, would reap the rewards of the resurrection. As such, though the Eleven were the first to hear these words, they would not be the last. Jesus' prayer for disciples, both present and to come, implies that his work would continue. That the Lord even thought to pray for future believers *before* Calvary demonstrates that the cross was

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<sup>10</sup> One might argue that the Lord's Prayer might be a contender. However, that prayer is better thought of as the disciples' prayer.

<sup>11</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 483.

<sup>12</sup> Morris (1995), p. 634; Carson (1991), p. 552, Jesus' prayer in Jn. 17 "yields no hint of suffering, personal agony or physical pain."

his coronation, not his termination. Long before we became citizens of his kingdom, the King of Kings prayed for us.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

### **Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 69 | Intro to John 17**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Tonight, we'll begin to unpack John 17 and what is commonly called "The High-Priestly Prayer." After the Farewell Discourse, the Lord began to pray. And while that might not seem noteworthy at first, the longer the prayer goes, the more impressive it becomes. In fact, compared to Jesus' other prayers, this one is by far and away not only the *longest* but also his most *intricate* and *fully developed*.<sup>13</sup> In fact, it is so well-rounded that the prayer follows a neat three-fold movement: first, the Lord prays for himself (vs. 1-5); secondly, he prays for his present disciples (vs. 6-19); and, lastly, he prays for his future disciples (vs. 20-26).

That Jesus prayed for those who would follow in the apostles' footsteps must've been confusing, even heartbreaking, for the Eleven immediately after the crucifixion. But the fact that the Lord prayed for future believers *before* Calvary demonstrates that the cross was his *coronation*, not his *termination*. Long before we became citizens of his kingdom, the King of Kings prayed for us.

**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:** <https://bit.ly/3PJggg4>

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