**JESUS PRAYS THAT WE MAY KNOW GOD**

March 11, 2018

John 17:1-26

Key Verse 17:26 “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

The deepest desire of the human heart is TO BE KNOWN….to be seen for who we are, to be understood, honored and accepted. Our fundamental human needs are our desires for significance and contribution. Our God is the only true God. He is the Creator God. Knowing the true God and being known by him is the greatest blessing we can have. It satisfies our deepest desire. It is in fact the eternal life. Today’s passage is Jesus’ high priestly prayer. It is a beautiful picture of his present ministry in heaven where he sits at the right hand of God and prays for his people as our High Priest. First, Jesus prayed for himself to fulfill his priestly duty by offering himself as the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. We can learn how to live for the glory of God in this world as royal priests. Next, he prayed for his disciples. He did not say anything about their shortcomings or failures. He did not pray for riches or worldly success. Jesus prayed to protect them from evil and sanctified them by the truth. Here we can learn how to pray for our Bible students. Lastly Jesus prays for all believers. It is amazing that Jesus prayed for you and me 2000 years ago. His prayer is that we may be one, namely we all bear the likeness of Jesus Christ, and that we may be brought home safely in heaven to be with him forever.

I. Jesus prays to glorify God.

Look at verse 1. Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and prayed, “Father, glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” Jesus called God “Father.” Even though terrible suffering and painful rejection lay ahead, Jesus did not doubt God’s love. He loved the Father and he knew that the Father loved him. At the beginning of his ministry God said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” Now, even though Jesus faced the cross, he called God “Father.” He loved and trusted his heavenly Father. It is important that we never doubt the love of God. The evil one is always working hard to make us doubt God’s love.

What was Jesus’ prayer topic for himself? Jesus prayed, “Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” Jesus’ life purpose was to glorify God. He did not seek glory from people, but he sought the praise and glory from God. Because of this he could overcome the criticism and accusations of the religious leaders of his time and minister to the people who were like sheep without a shepherd. He sought God’s glory and praise so that he might live a life that glorifies God. One meaning of glorify is to reveal. Jesus revealed God. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, he revealed God’s love to the whole world. God demonstrated to the whole world, saying, “This is how much I love you.” Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Look at verse 5. “And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” Before Jesus came into the world, he dwelt in heaven with the Father. When the angels looked upon him, they saw the glory of God Almighty. But when he came among men, the glory of God was veiled and hidden. People saw him merely as the carpenter’s son. Here Jesus is praying that the original glory in heaven may be restored. This is the great hope every Christian should have. This is called glorification. When we are clothed with the glorious resurrection body, we will share the glory of Jesus. The apostle Paul said in Romans 8:18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” This glorious hope gives direction to life. Without hope of glory in heaven we become restless wanderers with no destination.

In his prayer Jesus reveals his life purpose. For Jesus, to live for the glory of God was everything. In order to glorify God, he could even die on the cross. Jesus’ prayer, “Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you,” tells us what all human beings’ chief end ought to be. What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever (Rom 11:36). When we have to live in this world, we are confronted with various kinds of problems which make us fearful and distress us. When we see the situation of the world, we wonder if we can live for the glory of God. But as Jesus showed us how to live to glorify God even through his death, we also must set our life purpose to live for the glory of God. Paul was a selfish person before his conversion. But after his conversion, he said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” We must know that Jesus’ people must pray first to live for the glory of God. When we live for our own glory, we may feel happy and free for the time being. But we become self-centered and slaves of pride and stubbornness. Also we have to always think about what others think of us and we become tired. We just had Winter Olympics. All athletes competed for the gold medals. We honored and praised the gold medalists for their achievements. This is human beings’ deepest desire for significance. But only the true God can give us true glory. Michael Phelps is the most decorated Olympian in history with 28 medals, 23 of them gold. However, they did not satisfy him. He tried to commit suicide. But when we live for the glory of God, we have to empty ourselves and we become humble and enjoy true joy and happiness in our soul.

Look at verse 3. “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Many people mistakenly think that eternal life is simply living forever in heaven. We think in that way because we think about time. But God transcends time. Eternal life is independent of time. What does it mean to know God? First, it involves far more than simply an acknowledgement of the existence of a Supreme Being. There is quite a difference between believing God exists and knowing God. James 2:19 says, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” Second, knowing God is different from knowing about God. It is not just the gathering or memorization of information about God. There are a lot of people about whom I know a lot of things. But that doesn’t mean I “know” them as individuals or have an intimate relationship. Third, to know God is to love God. To know God is to treasure him and to honor him. To know God is to trust him, to believe him and his promises. Truly to “know” God is to be willing to submit to his authority over our lives, to yield to his will and ways, even when they don’t always make good sense to us. In other words, to “know” God is to obey God, joyfully and spontaneously. Knowing God is the consummation of our salvation. Seeing God in his glory, beholding his beauty, understanding his infinite and incomparable power, tasting the sweetness of his person, his kindness, his love, his mercy, this is what it means to know God. This is indeed eternal life.

II. Jesus prays for his disciples

Look at verse 9. “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me.” We cannot change anyone. So we must pray for those with whom we study the Bible. This is what Jesus did. He taught the Bible and prayed. What was Jesus’ prayer topics for his disciples? The first prayer topic is that God may protect them. Look at verse 11. “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me so that they may be one as we are one.” Jesus prayed that God might protect his disciples. He was praying that the small mustard seed of faith which he had planted in their hearts might be protected and grow. He was praying that the word of God which he had planted in them might grow and bear fruit in their lives. He was praying that the love he had put in their hearts might grow. He was praying that they love one another and be one in Jesus.

The second prayer topic is that God may sanctify them. Look at verse 17. “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” Here “sanctify” means to make holy, or to set apart for sacred use. First, Jesus wants us to be holy, and separated from the world. God is holy. We are called to also be a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1Pe 2:9). But it is not easy for us to be separated from the world, and yet in the world. We cannot hide away like monks. We are sent into the world, but should not be worldly. We should not follow the standard of this world, but live according to the truth. The word of God is truth. When we hold on to God’s word, God’s word begins to change us on the inside. We are being sanctified, or molded into the image of Christ. Without God’s word, human beings cannot but live according to their sinful nature. They become the slaves of their sinful nature, compromising with sin, thinking that they are not so bad because everyone does it. Then when we become saved, we receive the Holy Spirit, yet our physical body is not changed. All of our old sinful habits may still be there. Then begins our real struggle with sin. How can we live a holy life in this tempting world? Only God can do it. We see here that Jesus prayed to God to sanctify them. Through the word of truth, our heart begins to conform to Christ. This is called sanctification and it takes a life-long effort. That is why we emphasize daily bread, which is daily Bible reading and reflection writing. When we are faithful to daily Bible study, God’s word purifies us. Second, “sanctify” means we have been set apart for special purpose. We have been chosen as royal priests in this generation to bear much fruit. Verse 19 says, “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” Jesus set himself apart for the work God sent him to do, namely, dying on the cross. Likewise, God set apart each of you for his special purpose in this generation. It is an awesome privilege and responsibility to be chosen by God.

III. Jesus prays for all the people of the world (20-23).

Look at verses 20b-21a. “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” The unity for which Jesus prayed was not a matter of external church union. Nor does it mean that we should all be alike, having the same hobby and the same talent, enjoying the same food. Jesus is praying that we may be one in displaying the character of God. This is the unity which makes the world say, “I see Christ in those Christians as the Father was seen in Christ.” Acts 4:32 says, “All the believers were one in heart and mind.” Peter and John were very different in character. But when they were one in Christ, they could work together to boldly testify Jesus Christ. The second prayer topic of Jesus for all believers is in verse 24. “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you have loved me before the creation of the world.” Jesus really wants all of us to be with him in heaven to see his glory. What a blessing it will be when we sing loudly together with millions of angels, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev 5:12)

Look at verse 26. “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” Right now we know in part. But some day when Jesus comes again, when eternal life reaches its perfection, we will know God perfectly. We will know Christ perfectly. We will love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, even in its glorified capacities. So when we get to heaven, we will be consumed with a perfect knowledge and a perfect love of God and Christ. That is eternal life. What a joy it will be! May God bless you know God and be known by God, and have eternal life and joy in him.

What is the key to truly knowing God? First, it is imperative to understand that man, on his own, is incapable of truly knowing God because of man’s sinfulness. The Bible says that we are all sinful (Romans 3) and that we fall short of the standard of holiness required to commune with God. We are also told that the consequence of our sin is death (Romans 6:23) and that we will perish eternally without God unless we accept and receive the promise of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. So, in order to truly know God, we must first receive Jesus into our hearts. Once we have received this truth, we can begin the journey of knowing God in a personal way. One of the key ingredients in this journey is understanding that the Bible is God’s Word and his revelation of himself, his promises, his will. The Bible is essentially a love letter written to us from a loving God who created us so that we may know him intimately. What better way to learn about our Creator than study his word, revealed to us for this very reason? Next, truly knowing God involves our commitment to obey what we read in the Bible. We should live out what the Bible says in order to know God. Then our lives can be filled with God, and we can experience knowing him intimately and personally.