



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | [believerschapeldallas.org](http://believerschapeldallas.org)

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 17: 1-5

Spring 2023

"The Lord's Prayer For Himself"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. Good to see all of you here to hear a great text of Scripture. We begin a marvelous chapter this morning with John chapter 17. We're not going to cover it all today, just the first part of it, verses 1 through 5, but this is certainly a glorious text.

We read, "Jesus spoke these things," and of course, the "*things*" He's speaking of here, or that John is writing of here, are what is known as 'the upper room discourse' that began in chapter 13 with the washing of the disciples' feet, and then all of the glorious text that He gave us on the Holy Spirit and the promise of His coming. He's finished this great discourse, and now we read,

**17** Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, <sup>2</sup> even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. <sup>3</sup> This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. <sup>4</sup> I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. <sup>5</sup> Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

John 17: 1-5

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, we do ask You to bless this text to our understanding. And we are so thankful that, as believers in Jesus Christ, our hearts have been sealed with the Spirit of God who is our teacher, ultimately, who gives us understanding of these things and how they apply to us. And we pray that You would bless us with understanding—and beyond that, LORD, as Paul wrote in Ephesians, 'You do exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.' (Eph 3:20).

Our prayers are inadequate, but the prayers of the Spirit and the Son are not and You know our needs better than we do. But You do know that we need to understand these things. You know that we are fed spiritually, nourished spiritually, through Your Word; so it's vitally important that we understand and know It. And through it we "know You", and that, as we've been told in verse 3, is "eternal life".

So LORD, we pray that we who have believed in Christ, we who have trusted in Him for our salvation would be nourished, built up in the faith, would know Your Word better, and in so doing, know You better. And if there be any attending who don't know Christ, who've not put their faith in Him and therefore have not eternal life, that You would bring them to a conviction of that and bring them to faith—as only You can do.

You are the source of every good thing: 'Every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of lights', as James tells us. (Jas 1:17). And that is every blessing that we have; faith, life—everything. We thank You for it.

And thank You that we can come to You, and You can intercede for the material things of life as well and pray for those that are in difficulty. There are some among us who are sick and struggling with issues. You know them. We pray that You'd bless, encourage, and strengthen them. May we see You glorified in all of that.

LORD, You're glorified in our reception of Your Word and the growth that It produces; and so we pray You'd be glorified in this hour, and glorified in the way we

respond to this text of Scripture. So bless us, LORD, build us up in the faith. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

*(Message)* A couple of years before the Supreme Court banned prayer in the public schools, my fifth grade teacher decided that we would begin class each day with prayer—'The Lord's Prayer'. There were just two problems: What to do with the one Jewish boy in class, and what to do with that line about 'forgiving our debts.' Should we say, "forgive us our debts," or, "forgive us our trespasses?" We took a show of hands. We were evenly divided. She solved both problems with a single solution: Silence. Our Jewish classmate was allowed not to recite the prayer, and none of us recited the line about our sins being forgiven.

I mention that because the Jewish man who gave us that prayer couldn't have recited it either because of that line, "forgive us our debts." He had no debts. He was sinless, and could never have asked for forgiveness. 'The Lord's Prayer' of Matthew 6 is really misnamed. It's more accurately named 'The Disciples' Prayer', or, 'The Model Prayer'.

The real 'Lord's Prayer', is John 17, sometimes called 'the high priestly prayer'. It has been a favorite passage of multitudes of saints for 2000 years. John Knox, on his death bed in 1572, asked his wife to read him John 17, "Go read where I cast my first anchor," he said.

It divides into three parts: First, in verses 1 through 5, the Lord prays for Himself. In verses 6 through 19, He prays for His disciples; and then thirdly, in verses 20 through 28, the Lord prays for His church; He prays for believers down through the ages; He prays for us.

It's worth noting that the shortest part of the prayer is for Himself. The larger part of it is devoted to the disciples and to the church universal. The whole prayer is for blessing—for our joy, our holiness, protection, and unity—and for the truth. The first five verses He prayed that the Father would give success to His mission of saving His people,

that He might have an eternal relationship with them. So He came out of a love and longing for you.

The Lord and His disciples were still in the upper room when Jesus turned from speaking to them to speak to His Father on their behalf, "...lifting up His eyes to heaven He said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.' " (vs1).

All through the Gospel we have been moving toward "*the hour*"—to the appointed time when the Lord's ministry would reach its conclusion in His crucifixion and exaltation. Now that *hour* was upon Him and He prayed for glory. That is the great concern of His prayer for Himself—that He be glorified.

But the glory He was praying for has to do with our salvation. And by achieving that He would bring glory to His Father as the One who had drawn up the plan of salvation. So the Father would have glory through the Son's glory, and the Son would be glorified in the agony of the cross, the victory of the empty tomb, and the triumphal coronation He would receive in heaven.

That's what He prayed for here, and the most striking of those venues, or places of glory, is the cross, (which is hardly what we would consider an instrument of glory). Certainly in the first century a Roman cross was an instrument of torture and symbol of shame; it was reserved for the worst of humanity. And yet it was through the cross that the Lord was glorified in His perfect obedience to the Father—obedience unto death, which revealed in the clearest way the love of God for sinners. Paul said it plainly in Romans chapter 5, verse 8. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Now that's love—the innocent dying for the guilty.

And that's glory: He was glorified in the revelation of His power because by His death on the cross He overcame the world—conquered the world, defeated the devil, and saved us from wrath and judgment by suffering sin's penalty in our place. That's power. The cross is where the decisive battle for our salvation was waged and won—and

His resurrection and triumphant return to heaven were God's seal on the victory. There's great glory in that.

And that was what the Lord prayed for—for the work of salvation and that it would be successfully completed. It was not self-serving glory, it was self-sacrificing glory. That hour was the great moment of history—the turning point of human history when salvation would be accomplished, when He would redeem, ransom, and rescue His people from sin and Satan.

You might even say He rescued His people from God the Father—that is from His wrath as the judge. That's where it happened, at the cross. This is the reason He came into the world. He speaks of that in verse 2 where He said that the Father had given Him authority over everything in order that He might give eternal life; "...even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life." (vs2). The Baptist and Greek scholar A. T. Robertson called this statement about universal authority, "A stupendous claim, impossible for a mere man to make."

But also it introduces the doctrine of election. Christ was praying for the elect. That's the meaning of the phrase, "all whom You have given Him." In verse 6, they are those who were given to Him "*out of the world.*" It's the language of John chapter 6, verse 37, where Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me."; and then added in verse 44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father ...draws him." Who comes to Christ? Those given to Him by the Father—and they're "*out of the world.*" (Jn 17:6). Our coming to Christ is based on God *giving* us to Him; and that is based on God's grace in eternity past when 'the *giving*' happened.

And that's what Paul teaches; Paul wrote it in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," —in eternity past, before the world began. That is divine election. It's not based on what we have done; we were *chosen before* we ever were. We were chosen before we had done anything good or bad. Election is based solely on God's grace, 'who has mercy upon whom He has mercy', which is to say, 'whomever He wills to have mercy upon.' (Rom 9:18). And He has mercy

on a vast multitude of helpless souls whom He gave to Jesus to save by His death in their place as their substitute.

Now, would He have done that if we were not helpless, if we could save ourselves? Would He have done that if we could accomplish salvation ourselves by the things we do; the good things we do, or by taking the sacraments, or following some religious rites? No, of course not. That's Galatians chapter 2, verse 21. It's because we couldn't save ourselves, (because we were utterly lost and helpless), that He *gave* us to Christ to save by His sacrifice. And the cross, as Paul makes the point in Galatians 2:21, is the proof of that. And there's glory in that.

That's what this 'high priestly prayer' is about—He would go to the cross for the helpless. He would lay down His life for the sheep. He would suffer for their trespasses, pay their debts in full, and save them. He was asking the Father to bless that, and then afterwards, to raise Him up from the dead, and exalt Him to heaven, to glorify Him by bringing the work of salvation to a triumphant conclusion.—And He did that.

And now, having overcome the world, and having sat down at the Father's right hand, God has given, "Him authority over all flesh", He said. (vs2a). That means, 'Over everyone who has ever lived.' Jesus Christ rules over them: The great and small alike, the rich, the poor, whoever, whatever—everyone; they are all under His authority. And some day, all without exception, will confess that. "Every knee will bow...", Paul wrote in Philippians, chapter 2, "and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (vs10-11).

Until that day, in the present, Christ is exercising His universal authority to gather His particular people. They are in every age and in every place of the world. Revelation chapter 5, verse 9, 'He redeemed, He purchased with His blood some out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.' Those are His people; those are His elect ones. And in every age, He brings them to Himself by providence—by means of events and

messengers. No barriers can block His work and will, or prevent Him from gathering those given to Christ.

Acts 16 is an example of that. Paul and his companions were in Asia Minor; they wanted to go west to the great city of Ephesus but they were prevented from doing that. So they tried to go east into Bithynia; but Luke wrote, "The Spirit of Jesus did not permit them." (vs7).

Well, it seems that they were wandering without direction when they came to Troas on the northwest coast. They must have wondered, 'What now—What are we doing here?', when Paul had a vision in the night of a man standing and calling to him saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." (vs9).

So they crossed the sea and came to Philippi. They didn't know who the man was or didn't know who the elect were, (the elect don't have any identifying mark on their forehead or back). But they knew that the elect were there, so they went where the people gathered on the Sabbath. Strangely, there were no men there, only a few women. But Paul preached. And as he did, 'The Lord opened the heart of Lydia to believe the Gospel.' (vs14).

So, Paul responded when a man called, and a woman responded when Paul preached, 'God has mercy on whom He has mercy.' It's all according to His will. He shut doors across Asia in order to bring the Gospel to Europe. By His providence He prevented Paul from going east in order to direct him west.

And Paul had a significant ministry there in the west, there in Macedonia, there in the city of Philippi—even in the jail where he and Silas were put because of that ministry; 'Then, at midnight, God shook the prison with a great earthquake that shook open the prison doors, and shook off the prisoners' chains.' (vs26). And all of that, in order to bring the Roman jailer to despair, and then to faith in the Good News that Paul spoke to him, (and then spoke to his family). Now that's the *authority* of Christ: He shuts doors on one continent to bring the Gospel to another. He shakes the earth to bring a man and his

family to salvation. He is Lord of heaven and earth; He shakes kingdoms for the sake of the Gospel.

He did that in the 16th century when the Ottoman Empire, the Turks, threatened to overrun Europe. The Sultan's army advanced to the gates of Vienna. Charles V was Europe's emperor. It was Charles who opposed Luther and it was his determination to crush the Reformation, but he had to abandon that plan to rescue his kingdom from the armies of Islam. "Without that providence," one historian wrote, "the young faith, the Reformation, might have been successfully suppressed."

Christ even uses infidels to protect the church and advance the Gospel. His Father gave Him "*authority over all flesh*". He is the Almighty, and He is at work now, today, and always. When we are obedient, when we are where we are supposed to be, doing what we are supposed to be doing, the Lord opens doors in the most unusual ways. And He does it to "give eternal life." (vs2c).

But what a magnificent truth this second verse of John 17 is. It informs us of the infinite and eternal love and care that God has for every one of His people—all of His sheep, individually. If you have believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you should know that it is because you were *given* to Jesus Christ from the foundation of the world, and that He died *particularly* for you.

I've said this before, and I believe this to be true: That in His divine nature He had you, personally, on His heart and mind; and knew what He was doing for you, individually purchasing your salvation at great cost—and knew that He would move heaven and earth to bring you to Himself.

Why would He do that? So that He might know you personally—and you might know Him. That's eternal life, 'knowing God'. And that's according to verse 3; "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

That's an amazing statement. It's an amazing statement because God does not need us. One of His attributes is His *aseity*, which is His *self-existence*. His existence is



from Himself; that's the idea of the word. He's not dependent on anything. He's self-sufficient. He doesn't seek us because He lacks anything. He lacks nothing. For all eternity, the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit had existed in joyful, perfect fellowship.

He has established fellowship with us, His creatures, out of His goodness, out of His unfathomable, incomprehensible love. And this fellowship, the Lord said, "is eternal life." It is endless life on a higher plane, in a glorified state, in a regenerated world, and ultimately in a glorified new heavens and new earth. Life is forever, life that never ends. But essentially, eternal life is fellowship—it's 'knowing God.'

But to have the personal knowledge of God, we must have informational knowledge of Him—which is right doctrine. That is implied in the Lord's statement, "the only true God." (vs3b). The world is full of false gods, just as it is full of 'false Christs'. The Lord warned of that in Matthew 24, verse 24, "...false Christs and false prophets..." We see that today in the 'Jesus' of the cults, and the 'Jesus' of the secularists.

The only true God can only be known as the Triune God, the one God who exists in three Persons—and we can only know God the Father and God the Holy Spirit through God the Son. Jesus made that connection clear in His statement that, 'eternal life is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ.' (vs3). It's both; they cannot be separated. Christ cannot be separated from the Father. They're distinct, but they're inseparable because Christ is the mediator, 'the go between', 'the link'. That's John chapter 14, verse 6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

Through knowledge of Him as the God-man and Savior, and personal trust in Him, we come to the Father. Those who do that receive eternal life—forgiveness and endless life. But here it's with an emphasis on the *quality* of that eternal life which is measured in fellowship—a depth of fellowship and personal knowledge.

We see that in some of the earliest pages of the Bible. Enoch is described as, 'a man who walked with God for three centuries'. (Gen 5:22). Noah is described in the

same way; he "walked with God." (Gen 6:9). The picture of walking implies agreement with one another—going in the same direction. And Enoch had no desire to go in a different direction; he wanted to stay in God's path. And the joy or pleasure of that is not only drawing close to the destination, (which for us is great glory), but also drawing close to the companion in the walk—progressing in our knowledge and relationship with God. Enoch walked with God for 300 years. He must have enjoyed his companion; no one would walk with someone that long without wanting to, enjoying it, and learning from it.

Frédéric Louis Godet was a Swiss scholar and minister, who died in 1900, and who wrote a number of helpful commentaries on the New Testament. In the forward of one, his son, Philippe, wrote, "I like to rise early. It is a habit I learned from my father, who was always early astir. I often went out walking with him. I can see him going slowly to-and-fro in the road. He has his Greek testament in his hand, and he meditates and ponders." A child learns a lot from his father, just by observing him. And that son learned a lot while walking with his father and observing his father walking with God.

We walk with God as we meditate in His Word. And as we do, the Lord walks with us and teaches us the most important things in life, and in the universe. We gain wisdom; we learn of Him. And what we learn about God, the Triune God, is that He loves to walk with us. God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, Christ who holds all things together by the Word of His power, the Holy Spirit who imparts life to us, loves to walk with us.

There are many things that we do that please the Lord. Evangelism being one, serving the saints another. But nothing pleases Him more than knowing Him, meditating on His Word, and walking with Him in a personal relationship that involves prayer, meditation, and study. Jesus said, "This is eternal life", knowing Him. And as we learn of Him, we become like Him.

Relationships change us. They can be good relationships or bad. They can change us for the better, they can change us for the worse. But relationships change us, and this greatest of all relationships, changes us for the best.

In one of his books, John MacArthur told the story of a famous actor who was the guest of honor at a social event. He was asked to recite favorite excerpts from various literary works. An old preacher was there also, and he asked the actor to recite the 23rd Psalm, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." He agreed to do it on condition that the preacher would also recite it.

The actor's recitation was beautiful in tone with dramatic emphasis. And when he finished, he got a lengthy applause. The preacher's voice, on the other hand, was rough and broken from years of preaching, and his diction wasn't polished—but when he finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. Someone asked the actor, "What made the difference?" He replied, "I know the Psalm, he knows the Shepherd."

As we walk with Christ, we're changed. We increasingly know Him, and in so doing, we increasingly become like Him. This is a knowledge that transforms. I can do nothing better for you than simply expound the Scriptures and set before you the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ—the glories of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, because it's as that happens, you know Him better. And as we know Him better, we become like Him, become more useful to Him, and a blessing to all.

Well, that was the Lord's mission: "eternal life", which is knowing Him and growing in Him. That was the Lord's mission and in verse 4 He speaks of it as having already been completed; "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." All the work that He did on earth, He did perfectly. It was said of Him, He does "all things well." (Mar 7:37). He taught perfectly; He lived perfectly. He revealed God to the world in His sinless life and character. He did all things well—and accomplished His work.

Now, with the completion of that work on the cross just a few hours away, He was so certain of finishing it and glorifying the Father that He spoke of it as already

accomplished. It could not fail to be accomplished; it was God's will, and His will cannot be frustrated—cannot be frustrated.

And so based on what He had done and would do, because He had glorified the Father on earth, He asked the Father to glorify Him in heaven; "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (vs5).

What man talks like that? Well, the person of John chapter 1, verses 1-5,—“the Word”, who was there in the beginning with God; the eternal Son of God who became one of us, a man with a true body and a reasonable soul. And now, with the end near, He looked forward to His return to heaven and to His eternal Father.

If you've ever worked away from home, maybe had a assignment abroad in another country, a distant land, then you know the feeling of approaching the completion of your assignment and returning home. You're looking forward to that. That, I think, was on the Lord's heart. He longed to go home to His Father, and return to what He had been, and enjoyed, and had for all eternity—the heavenly glory that had been veiled within His humanity.

But He desired to do that only through the triumph of the cross with the joy of having saved His people. The author of Hebrews, (12:2), speaks of that, "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." The joy of saving you, saving everyone who's put their faith in Him. So that was how He wanted to leave and be glorified. That's what He prayed for: That they would have, (all those He represented), eternal life.

Now that is significant, not only because it shows His great love for us, His people, for whom He came to lay down His life, but also because He prayed for those whom the Father had already given to Him. Put another way, He prayed for the elect—those whom Paul said in Romans 8:29 and 30, were “predestined to be conformed to Christ's image.”

'Well, wait a minute, isn't prayer *inconsistent with that*, isn't prayer *inconsistent* with divine sovereignty?' —Well obviously not! Jesus spoke clearly about sovereign grace throughout the Gospels...and He prayed. And He prayed for what He knew was God's will, because prayer is the *means* of obtaining it. And that's the reason we pray—because the God who has ordained the ends has also ordained '*the means to those ends*'. And one of the means given for us to obtain the blessings of God is prayer. It's essential. So Jesus prayed for His mission that He knew would succeed. Even though it was determined, He prayed for it—and that is how it was accomplished.

Now we don't understand everything about God's ways. His ways are "past finding out." (Rom 11:33). They're "too high for us." (Ps 131:1). But we know enough to know this, that Christ prayed genuine, earnest prayers. He prayed as a man because He needed to. And if the Son of God needed to pray, how much more do we?

We are to pray like He did—and for what He prayed for. He prayed that the Father would be glorified; that was the chief end of His prayer and His life. And it is to be our goal as well. And now if that may mean accepting difficulties instead of ease, it may mean taking a hard path in life. It did for the Lord, the most difficult path, but He took it because it was for the LORD, His Father's glory.

But God will always lead us into blessing when we take His path. Ultimately, it always ends in blessing. The life of faith is knowing that and obeying it, and trusting the LORD. It's how the Lord instructed His disciples to pray in the model prayer, or if you like, 'The Lord's Prayer'; 'Your kingdom come, Your will be done.' (Mat 6:10). That's what we're to pray for.

That's all part of the fellowship we have with Him. He walks with us, He never leaves us. Over time He gives us understanding—and increasing understanding: And in that way, strength to stand firm in life. But we grow stronger as we increase in our knowledge of Him, personal knowledge based on truth, God's Word. That should be the goal of our lives. It makes us men and women of God—and He will always prove faithful to us.

But, to know Him you must first believe in Him. Christ left the glories of heaven and came into the world to find and save the lost. All of us were born, in this life, lost and guilty. So if you sense that about yourself, look to the Savior. Look to Christ—He has the authority to give eternal life. He obtained it through His sacrifice at Calvary and He gives it to all who believe in Him. He will receive you and walk with you through this world—and never leave you. That's the Gospel, that's the Good News. So come to Him, if you've not.

And you who have, rejoice in the relationship you have with God Almighty, with the Triune God, and live faithfully in that relationship.

*(Closing prayer)* Father, we will sing Your praise forevermore, because we will understand more clearly than ever when we are in Your presence, what we owe our Triune God: The Father for choosing us, the Son for purchasing us, the Spirit for bring us to saving faith. All of it is Your work—we contributed nothing to it. We give You all the thanks and praise.

That should humble us, Father, and make us grateful for all that we have in Christ; so give us the desire to live faithfully for You. May we do that and grow in our knowledge of You and walk with You consistently every day. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In the name of God's Son, Amen.

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