
WHAT JESUS' PRAYER TEACHES

How many of you have told someone, after hearing of a trial in their life, that you will pray for them?

- Now, how many of you said that you would do that, but truth be told, did not? (*No, don't raise your hand.*)

How many of you have had others say to you, "I'm praying for you," or "I'm keeping you in my prayers"?

- Do you know whether they really did that or was it just something they were saying?
 - It's frequently the case that the person being prayed for never gets to hear what is actually said in those prayers.

I think it's easy to overlook the content of prayer, even when it is we who are praying.

- Even when JESUS prays, I suspect we look at it as simply a conversation between HIM and GOD,
 - too personal for any kind of helpful, applicable aspect to it.
- We spend a great deal of time looking at the commands and teachings of JESUS,
 - but, with the exception of "The LORD'S Prayer," we quickly pass over the prayers of JESUS rather than seeing them as having value for learning about our relationship with GOD.
 - Commands are easier to live by and, when we follow them with success, they make us feel productive or faithful.
 - Being told what to do, especially when it comes to faith, is often more comfortable than having to interpret the words of JESUS as they are spoken between the FATHER and HIM.
 - The stories of JESUS help us discover what is best to believe about GOD, but I'm not sure that we consult the prayers of JESUS to help us determine our understanding of GOD.

So today, I want to take some time to look more in depth at what is known as JESUS' High Priestly Prayer in John 17 and what it teaches us.

- What does JESUS' prayer assume about GOD?
- What does JESUS reveal about GOD that HE would want us to remember about GOD?
- What can we learn in this rare moment when the disciples—when we—get to listen to JESUS praying...for us?
 - Because that is what JESUS is doing here—praying for HIS followers before HE goes back to the FATHER.

Clearly, if we start digging in, there is much more here than could ever be covered in one sermon.

- So, let me focus on just one verse—one statement that reveals a truth about GOD that I think might be helpful for us to hear this week.
 - Let us take this time to sort of recapture the experience of the disciples, the experience of listening to JESUS praying to GOD for them and for us.

Consider John 17:3: *“Now this is eternal life: that they know YOU, the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom YOU have sent.”*

- Anyone ever hear of this passage? Perhaps a few.
 - But it's not one of those verses that shows up on poster board at a football game or on tracts handed out on a street corner.

“Now this is eternal life...”

I think it is important to clarify this idea of being in relationship with GOD and what that means about eternal life.

- From time to time, people hoping to comfort others over the loss of a loved one will say, “I’m sure he or she is looking down on you.”
-

The first sermon I ever preached came a week or so after my grandmother died.

- She was a pastor’s wife and was one of my greatest encouragers, not just to be a pastor, but in whatever I chose to try.
 - Following that sermon, I mentioned to someone that I wished my grandmother had gotten to hear me preach at least once.
 - That person quickly responded, “Oh, I’m sure she heard you and saw you preaching today.”
 - My first thought was, “I sure hope not, because if she can see and hear me preaching, she can see and hear anything and everything else I’m doing.”
 - Think of the loved ones in your life who have passed.
 - While it may be comforting to think that they are looking down on you, watching over you,
 - just how comfortable are you with the idea that, if they can see the good things you do, well...what about the rest?
-

As I’ve thought about it over the years, it seems to me that eternal life—life after this life—is more likely to be wholly and completely in relationship with and focused on GOD.

- When fully in the presence of GOD in the afterlife, I believe our attention will be exclusively directed toward GOD.
 - No looking down or looking back.
 - Remember what happened to Lot’s wife when she looked back at where she had come from?
-

It’s no accident, then, that JESUS’ definition of eternal life is located, not in HIS teachings, but in HIS praying.

- It’s no accident that on this last Sunday of Easter, JESUS’ definition of eternal life is not limited to our future resurrection.
 - JESUS doesn’t say “this will be eternal life.”
 - HE says, “This *is* eternal life.”
 - JESUS wants us to hear that knowing GOD, being in relationship with GOD, is also the promised possibility of eternal life here and now,
 - and that this knowing GOD is exactly what eternal life feels like.

“Now this is eternal life: that they know YOU, the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom YOU have sent.”

- JESUS is saying that eternal life here and now is found in knowing GOD here and now.

The word, “know,” in this text, as in other places in scripture, expresses more than a merely imagined acquaintance with GOD.

- It includes not just the impressions of the mind, but also the experiences of life where we gain insight into the true nature of GOD:
 - that GOD is lawgiver, ruler, protector, creator, parent, and friend are part of knowing GOD;
 - that GOD is love, compassion, forgiveness, hope, truth, and life are also part of that experience of knowing GOD.
 - Even our experiences with others can help us to better know GOD.
-

There once was a little boy who wanted to meet GOD.

- He knew it would be a long trip to where GOD lived, so he packed his bag with Twinkies and a bottle of root beer and started his journey.

When he had gone about three blocks, he saw an older woman sitting in the park just staring at some pigeons.

- The boy was hungry so he sat down next to her and opened his bag.
 - He was about to take a drink from his root beer, when he noticed the lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie.

She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him.

- Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a drink of root beer.
 - Once again, she smiled at him.
 - The boy was delighted.

They sat there all afternoon, eating and drinking and smiling, but they never said a word.

As it grew dark, the boy got up to leave.

- But before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned, ran back to the woman, and gave her a hug.
 - She gave him the biggest smile of all.

When the boy got home, his mother was surprised by the joy on his face.

- “What did you do today?” she asked.
 - He replied, “I had lunch with GOD. You know what? SHE’S got the most beautiful smile I’ve ever seen.”

Meanwhile, the old woman returned to her home.

- Her son was struck by the sense of peace on her face and asked, “Mother, what did you do today?”
 - She answered, “I ate Twinkies in the park with GOD. You know, HE’S much younger than I expected.”
-

Knowing GOD is not a mystery here, which is why this definition shows up in JESUS’ prayer.

- JESUS’ ministry in John reveals what a relationship with GOD looks like, feels like, tastes like, sounds like, smells like, and more.
 - JESUS has not simply offered truths about GOD.
 - JESUS has been the presence of GOD and shows us what an ongoing relationship, what eternal life, is like.

Eternal life feels like relationship.

- Eternal life feels like being loved—unconditionally.
- Eternal life feels like being wrapped in the arms of JESUS who loves you more than anything else—even life.
- Eternal life feels like belonging—to JESUS, to GOD, and to each other.

Maybe the next time you offer to pray for someone, you might actually write out that prayer and send it to the one for whom you are praying.

Maybe you even offer your prayer right there in front of them and with them.

- In doing so, you might just give them a new glimpse of what a relationship with GOD is like.
- In doing so, you might just find a new perspective on eternal life here and now.

“Now this is eternal life: that they know YOU, the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom YOU have sent.”