

## 36. What Jesus Asked for in His Prayer

If you were facing death, you might want to pray to God. You would ask Him for forgiveness of sins you had committed. You would entrust to him your loved ones, asking that He be with them and bless them materially and spiritually. And if your life had been dedicated to a particular cause, you might ask that He would use your death to advance that cause.

In John 17, we find Jesus in prayer on the night before his death. He prayed for himself, for those who were dearest to him—that is, his disciples whom he had spent more than three years training, and for the future of the work to which he had dedicated his life. In this prayer, we discover several truths about the greatness of Jesus and what was important to him.

### ABOUT HIMSELF

As we have said, Jesus prayed first for himself. He didn't ask, as we would have done, for forgiveness of his sins. He hadn't committed any. Rather, he asked that God would give him the glory which he had left behind in coming to this world. Listen to what he said in John 17:1-8:

"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, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world... 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.'"

Far from being conscious of his life's failures, as we very often are, Jesus knew that he had accomplished the work that God had sent him to do. He had lived in perfect conformity to the righteousness of God. He had trained the men who believed in him, and in only a few hours he would allow himself to be crucified for the salvation of the world. By his obedience, Jesus glorified the heavenly

Father. He knew that the Father would glorify him in return.

Let us emphasize one idea here: Jesus said, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world." What did Jesus mean by "manifested [God's] name" to his apostles? Weren't they Jews? Hadn't the Jews known the name of God for centuries? God had told Moses that he was called "I Am" or "Yahweh" in Hebrew. In English, some have transformed this name into Jehovah. Those who identify themselves by the term Jehovah's Witnesses think that Jesus claims to have taught his disciples that the name of God is Jehovah. The Pentecostals and some other groups think that the Lord had made his disciples to understand that the name of God is Jesus.

Actually, the expression "name of God" in this passage has nothing to do with the name that is to be used in speaking of God. In Jewish thought "the name" did not signify so much the name by which a person is called but rather his character or nature as far as it is revealed or known. For example, in Psalm 9:10, the author says, "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You..." Obviously that does not mean that those who know that God is called Jehovah will confide in Him—the pagan neighbors of the Israelites knew the name of the God of the Israelites (1 Samuel 6:2, 2 Kings 18:22). It means that those who know the character and nature of God, who know how He is, will be ready to trust Him for everything.

Psalm 20:7 says, "Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God." That does not mean that we boast about the fact that God is called Jehovah. Some trust in human help, but we will trust in God because we know how He is. In Isaiah 52:6, after having promised to deliver Israel from its oppressors, God said, "Therefore My people shall know My name..." His people had known for a long time the words to use in talking of God, but when God delivered them from their enemies, they understood more clearly the great power and faithfulness of God.

Thus when Jesus said that he had made known to the apostles the "name of God," he meant that he had made them see how God is. Actually this is another way of saying what Jesus said to Phillip in John 14:9:

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father...” Jesus does not mean that he is himself the heavenly Father, but that through him and his character, people could know the character of God the Father. By Jesus, we know “the name”, that is, the character of God.

On the eve of his death, Jesus looked forward to his return to the glory that he had enjoyed before coming to earth. “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5).

### ABOUT HIS APOSTLES

Jesus, seeing that he was about to bring his mission to an end, prayed for himself that God would return to him the glory that he had left. But he also prayed for his apostles. He said:

“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... I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours... 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... 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. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” (John 17:6,9,11,14-18)

Jesus had come to serve people, and he lived in the world among sinful people who were separated from God. But Jesus did not have the same values as the people of the world. He was not one of them. When one is different from others, one is likely to be ridiculed, excluded and persecuted. Wanting to be righteous in an unrighteous world is dangerous. People feel condemned when they find themselves in the presence of one who refuses to participate in sin with them.

Jesus had experienced the hostility of men. From now on, he would not be in the midst of these people, but his disciples would be. Like him, they would be in a world to which they did not belong, and they would be hated. Jesus knew trials through which they would

go. And so he prayed for them. But notice what he asked. He did not want God to take them out of the world. The type of Christianity that would hide behind monastery walls was not what Jesus wanted. He had taught that the disciple must be the salt of the earth. But salt must be in contact with food or it cannot season it. Yes, it is good to take moments to withdraw from the noise of the world to commune with God, as Jesus used to do. But we are nevertheless sent “into the world” as Jesus was. So knowing that the disciples would be in surrounded by a hostile world, Jesus prayed that the Father would guard them, protect them from evil, and sanctify or consecrate them by His word.

### ABOUT US

Faced with his approaching death, Jesus prayed for himself and for his apostles, but he also prayed for those of us who believe in him today... we who have believed thanks to the words of his apostles. He said in verses 20,21, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 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.”

Jesus asked that those who believe in him might be one, in the same way that he and the Father are one. Jesus and his Father were not the same person. We’ve already seen that Jesus was loved by his Father, had glory with the Father and was sent by the Father. They were not the same person, but they were one in their nature, unified in a flawless love, and united in perfect harmony when it came to the truth, the Word to be preached. Jesus said in John 7:16, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”

If those who believe in Jesus are one, as he and the Father are one, this will show itself on at least two levels: in local congregations one should find that members of the church of Christ love one another. They work together in peace, doing away with selfishness and quarrels, mutually accepting and encouraging one another. At the level of all believers, we would find those who identify with Jesus Christ, preach the same doctrine and follow the same practices in worshipping God. They are in accord with one another as God and Jesus are in accord with one another.

Unfortunately we do not find this kind of unity. Too often in local congregations we see discord, gossip, murmuring and even blows! If we look at the

unity or disunity of all believers, we see hundreds, even thousands of supposedly Christian religious groups, or denominations, with numerous contradictory doctrines. Some claim that, fundamentally, all Christians are united, since they believe in Jesus and the Bible. But Jesus prayed for a deeper unity than that. He and God are perfectly one—not just on one or two fundamental points. One result of this division among believers is that the world is not yet won for Christ. Jesus prayed “that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me...” (John 17:21). He knew that division among believers would be an obstacle to faith for many people.

### **CONCLUSION**

Jesus fulfilled his mission. He made known the name, that is the very nature, of God. His apostles accomplished their mission. In the midst of a hostile world, they remained faithful and took to all nations their testimony concerning Jesus Christ. They were in the world without being of the world. All those who believe in Jesus are also called to be in the world without being of the world. They also have a great challenge: to seek and then to preserve unity. This cannot be done by force. True unity can only be achieved by returning to the Bible, by a sincere decision to only put into practice the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, which are contained in the New Testament.

Before death, one thinks of what is most important. We see that which was most important to Jesus. He wanted us to be holy in a sinful world, to bring to this world the word that can save it, and to be unified in brotherly love and Biblical truth. May the desire of our Lord be our deepest longing as well.