

## Jesus' Prayer for His Followers

**17** <sup>1-5</sup> Jesus said these things. Then, raising his eyes in prayer, he said:

Father, it's time.

Display the bright splendor of your Son

So the Son in turn may show your bright splendor.

You put him in charge of everything human

So he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge.

And this is the real and eternal life:

That they know you,

The one and only true God,

And Jesus Christ, whom you sent.

I glorified you on earth

By completing down to the last detail

What you assigned me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me with your very own splendor,

The very splendor I had in your presence

Before there was a world.

<sup>6-12</sup> I spelled out your character in detail

To the men and women you gave me.

They were yours in the first place;

Then you gave them to me,

And they have now done what you said.

They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt,

That everything you gave me is firsthand from you,

For the message you gave me, I gave them;

And they took it, and were convinced

That I came from you.

They believed that you sent me.

I pray for them.

I'm not praying for the God-rejecting world

But for those you gave me,

For they are yours by right.

Everything mine is yours, and yours mine,  
And my life is on display in them.  
For I'm no longer going to be visible in the world;  
They'll continue in the world  
While I return to you.  
Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life  
That you conferred as a gift through me,  
So they can be one heart and mind  
As we are one heart and mind.  
As long as I was with them, I guarded them  
In the pursuit of the life you gave through me;  
I even posted a night watch.  
And not one of them got away,  
Except for the rebel bent on destruction  
(the exception that proved the rule of Scripture).

<sup>13-19</sup> Now I'm returning to you.  
I'm saying these things in the world's hearing  
So my people can experience  
My joy completed in them.  
I gave them your word;  
The godless world hated them because of it,  
Because they didn't join the world's ways,  
Just as I didn't join the world's ways.  
I'm not asking that you take them out of the world  
But that you guard them from the Evil One.  
They are no more defined by the world  
Than I am defined by the world.  
Make them holy—consecrated—with the truth;  
Your word is consecrating truth.  
In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world,  
I give them a mission in the world.  
I'm consecrating myself for their sakes  
So they'll be truth-consecrated in their mission.

<sup>20-23</sup> I'm praying not only for them  
But also for those who will believe in me

Because of them and their witness about me.  
The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—  
Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,  
So they might be one heart and mind with us.  
Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me.  
The same glory you gave me, I gave them,  
So they'll be as unified and together as we are—  
I in them and you in me.  
Then they'll be mature in this oneness,  
And give the godless world evidence  
That you've sent me and loved them  
In the same way you've loved me.

<sup>24-26</sup> Father, I want those you gave me  
To be with me, right where I am,  
So they can see my glory, the splendor you gave me,  
Having loved me  
Long before there ever was a world.  
Righteous Father, the world has never known you,  
But I have known you, and these disciples know  
That you sent me on this mission.  
I have made your very being known to them—  
Who you are and what you do—  
And continue to make it known,  
So that your love for me  
Might be in them  
Exactly as I am in them.

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**John 17**

**“Jesus Prays: Father, It’s Time”**

**Kerra Becker English**

Let’s take a quiet moment and reflect on how Jesus starts this prayer. Hear his words again. You can think about what’s on his mind in this prayer, or what’s comes to your own mind in hearing these words.

Father, it’s time.

It’s time.

Those are heavy words. I hear them, and I can almost feel them make a split in temporal reality. After those words are said, there is a time before, and a time after. This moment, this instance in time and space becomes particularly charged with the relevance of right now. A decision has been made. A diagnosis has been given. A pathway has been set. A transition has begun. An ending. A beginning. The hour has come.

It’s time.

It makes sense now that this prayer got me thinking about time. The end of the prayer also talks about time, perhaps in an even more multi-dimensional, even heavier kind of way. Jesus is *remembering*, I guess *remembering* is the right word, he was *remembering* what it was like that God loved

him even before the foundation of the world. In this translation, verse 24 says this, “Father, I want those you gave me to be with me, right where I am, so they can see my glory, the splendor you gave me, having loved me *long before there ever was a world.*” According to this prayer and a few places elsewhere in scripture, for the time before there was a world, the lone pre-existing condition was love. Love pre-exists creation. And love seems to be the motivation for creation. And then, in time, God so loved – the world – that God gave the world a Son to be the embodiment of that love in a particular time and a particular place. Jesus is the temporal split, so much so that we set our calendars by his interruption into the historical narrative. I don’t think that’s an accident. Jesus bears the full reality of the love of God dropped into time and space.

In this prayer, Jesus takes personal ownership of this claim that he and the Father have co-existed from the very beginning, and that their desire to demonstrate love in the world is the same. He says, “You, Father, are in me, and I am also in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Marianne Meye Thompson, commentator on the gospel of John, calls this sameness the mutual indwelling. And to that she adds that the unity of the Father and Son is also described in their mutual love for each other. They are one in spirit and one in love, united in the goal of turning the world toward belief in this universal love for all creation. Therefore, Christ with God before creation, becomes God in Christ within creation.

For me, the amazing thing about this is that God is willing to embody love in all the ways that being limited by time and space can be so terribly painful to those of us who experience those limits every single day. God the Father, whom we know from scripture and from our own basic religious impulses as human beings seems to stand outside of all time and space as the creator of it, and the Spirit, which we’ll get to in a minute, seems to stand within all times and all spaces sustaining creation as we know it, but this God, our God, constricts to human form in order that we humans

might know, intimately, and truly the love God has for us. This willingness to become human means that the God of all time and all space is willing to experience temporal realities like hunger, headaches, worry, parent issues, friends who make him mad, sore feet, bad breath, and ultimately the vile humiliation and torture that human beings do to one another as he faces accusation, trial, and the severe punishment of execution. Jesus also experiences the joys of a human life as well – the love of a family, the joy of friendship, the delight of the wind off the lake blowing in his face during his fishing excursions. But for the God of all that is – does that experience make the pain worthwhile? Only Jesus can answer that, and he seems to not only answer it, but to want to transfer the immense gratitude he has for this human life to his disciples and later his believers and followers. For Jesus, it's about being sent and then sending others. He experiences his earthly reality, not as a fall from the heavens, but as a mission to the creatures of earth that God so loves. However, he knows his earthly mission has a beginning and an ending, a finite timeline, and in this prayer, he acknowledges that his end is about to happen soon. We're may not have a similar awareness about our own deaths, that is unless we've lived long and can be reflective about the limited nature of human bodies to endure beyond a certain point. But we are all keenly aware of our situation in time and space. We are mindful that past, present, and future all play a role in our understanding of who we are.

Maybe, just maybe, this speaks to the nature of the Trinity, especially as Jesus relates to it in this mysterious prayer language. Jesus was with God from the very beginning of time itself, before even. Jesus had his moment in a time that would be called the present, his earthly years. And then he sends us the companionship of the Spirit who guides us toward our future. The Trinity can be known in relationship, by the jobs that they do, and maybe also by how we know God both inside and outside of time. So, thanks to the connectiveness of social media, I was able to ask my collection

of scholarly friends if they could describe this paradoxical continuum about God. Why is it significant that Jesus pre-existed with God? What was it exactly in this primordial time that expressed itself in godly ways? The Word with God? Christ with God? The Spirit breathing life into creation with God? The answers may not be completely satisfying, but the questions are magnificent. It's the kind of endless mystery that has no one solution, but many inexhaustible possibilities. Fun times. I like to think of it as the gift of "unknowing" that leads us to be filled with awe at the beauty of the universe and the majesty of God.

You see, there's a theocentricity to this pondering, a delight in knowing that God is in the center, at the heart of all that is, and though it is mind-blowing, it also brings me great comfort to know that me being able to figure it all out really isn't the point. Living into the reality of human life and love, that's the point. And Jesus is going to make that point too in this prayer in the way he lovingly sends the disciples and commissions absolutely everyone who might catch a glimpse of this loving reality to follow in his footsteps.

The petitions Jesus makes in this prayer are encouragement for the kind of actions he has been calling us to take in the preceding speech found in chapters 14-16. Even as he is challenging us to do as he did and love as he loved, he prays for us – God, protect them from all the evil and hatred that will be turned toward my followers. God, sanctify them, make them holy, give them eyes to bear the bright light of your glory. And finally, God, unite them, so that their hearts and minds might be together like we have been together. Those are tremendous blessings, and that's exactly how Jesus is praying for us, even now.

And circling back to the Spirit, the Spirit is the friend that in John's gospel, always bears witness to the truth. John is going to make us delve into the land of philosophy, imagining the personification of God's Word in human lives. The Word was with God. The Spirit was with God. Christ was with

God. And all are in God, and all are God. This has launched a thousand theological arguments – big ones too about who God is and how these aspects of God fit together. It’s a fascinating history, and a remarkable exercise in the logic behind theology – which simply means God logic. We could talk Trinitarian language all afternoon – really – and for some of us, that might be really fun. But for others of us, it is sufficient to allow God to be both known to us in Jesus, and unknown to us in these kind of doctrinal Mysteries we can ponder for a lifetime. God is. God always was. God always will be. This is the reality we sing just about every week called the Gloria Patri – “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. World without end. Amen. Amen.”