

The Hour of Glory

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Preacher: Jeremy Sarber

[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to John 17. That's where our scripture reading is this evening. John 17, 1-5.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work you gave me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. Well, it's been a long road up to this point.

For nearly three years, Jesus had declared himself to be, and revealed himself to be, the long-awaited Messiah. He is the Son of God, who came to save God's people, and ultimately glorify his Father in a way that no one else ever could.

[1 : 52] And this was seen from the very beginning when Jesus was baptized. You might remember, as soon as he emerged from the waters, God the Father spoke from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

This is him. This is the anointed one. He's the one you've been waiting for. He's the one who will satisfy me and will ultimately bring me the glory I deserve.

Now, over the years, Jesus did reveal who he was through what he taught and through the power he displayed. And his disciples believed in him.

Peter happily confessed, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Later, when given the choice to turn away as so many others had done, Peter said, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Along the way, Jesus also revealed to them what he came to do.

[3 : 01] In Luke 9, he said, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

His disciples, however, were slow to learn, slow to understand. In fact, later in the same chapter, he said again, Let these words sink into your ears.

The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. They couldn't quite comprehend what he meant or why this would be necessary.

And it was then, just a few verses later, that we are told how Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. From that point forward, the Lord's suffering and his death were not on the periphery.

Jesus had turned and set his face toward the cross, meaning the remainder of his life and his ministry would be a straight line to that agonizing death at Calvary.

[4 : 12] We're told the days drew near for him to be taken up. It was coming very soon. And by the time we reach John 17, Jesus is there.

He has marched all the way to Jerusalem. He's spent the Passover week in the city. He shared the Passover meal with his disciples.

Judas has already left to commit his act of betrayal. Jesus has delivered a final discourse to his disciples.

He's answered all of the questions they could think to ask. And evidently, they've exhausted all of the questions they could think to ask. And before the night is over, Jesus will be arrested and he will be crucified the next morning.

And as the evening winds to a close, Jesus turns away from his disciples and to his Father in heaven. And that's what's recorded for us here in John 17.

[5 : 21] When Jesus had spoken these words, all the words recorded in chapters 13 through 16, that he spoke to his disciples, he lifted his eyes to heaven.

And he prayed. Now, I have always enjoyed reading through what are sometimes called synthetic harmonies of the Gospels.

This is where men have attempted over the years to combine all four Gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, into a single narrative, including every detail from all four Gospels.

It's really a compelling way to read through the life and ministry of Christ. It's not inspired that way, but it's interesting nonetheless. And whenever I'm reading one of those, and I'm following the Lord's entire ministry from beginning to end, and I'm seeing every last detail, and it's all in chronological order, I always feel the need to pause when I come to this prayer in John 17.

There's something so intimate about it. If it weren't recorded in Scripture, I might think, I'm not supposed to hear this. This is too personal.

[6 : 33] This is between a son and his father, or the son and the father. I'm struck with a sense of reverence when I come to this prayer.

I also feel a profound sense of gratitude as the Lord allows me to step into this very intimate moment between God the Father and God the Son.

This, after all, is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus in Scripture. We frequently read of him praying, and occasionally we get some insight into what he prayed, but nowhere is a prayer of this length recorded outside of John 17.

So, I consider this a wonderful privilege, but it also makes me pause. I feel like I'm stepping into a sacred space here. And, you know, maybe that's how we should feel.

Some of your Bibles have a subtitle at the start of the chapter that says, The High Priestly Prayer. And that's because this has been a relatively common name for this prayer since at least the time of the Reformation.

[7 : 46] But you'll notice that neither Jesus nor John give us that title. In fact, I don't believe the Apostle John ever refers to Jesus as our High Priest.

So, where does it come from? Why do we call this the High Priestly Prayer? Well, under the Old Covenant, this takes us all the way back to Leviticus chapter 16, God gave the Israelites very strict instructions regarding that special room in the tabernacle and later the temple called the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies.

Sacrifices, you know, were offered all year long, but only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest, and only the High Priest would enter into the Most Holy Place.

This is where the Ark of the Covenant was housed. It was the most sacred place on the planet. And on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter to present a sacrifice for the sins of the people and to pray for them.

No one else could go in and the High Priest could enter only on this one day. Now, you can read all of the regulations in Leviticus 16, but in summary, the priest would offer a young bull for his own sins and for the sins of the other priests who are working with him.

[9 : 12] And he would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat of the Ark. And then he would take two goats. One would be sacrificed while the other would be released as the scapegoat.

One was a sin offering for the people while the other represented those sins being carried away. Now, before these sacrifices, the High Priest would eventually come to engage in an all-night vigil. So with the help of some of the other priests, he would stay awake all night to devote himself entirely to prayer. Now, to be clear, this was not required by law.

This was not in the commandments of God, but it had become a very standard practice, certainly by the first century. And the High Priest would pray for three things specifically, according to the Jewish Mishnah.

He would pray for himself and for the ministry he was about to perform. He would pray for the other priests who were helping him and were consecrated to help him.

[10 : 18] And he would pray for all of God's people. So this three-fold prayer. And what do we see Jesus doing here in John 17?

The night before he, the Lamb of God, will offer himself as a propitiation for our sins. Well, in verses 1 through 5, he prays for himself.

In verses 6 through 19, he prays for those disciples who had been with him for the past several years, who had assisted him throughout his public ministry. And in verses 20 through 26, he prays

for all believers.

He says, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. And of course, Jesus is described in the New Testament as our High Priest.

John doesn't say it, but the author of Hebrews does. Hebrews 4, we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. Christ did not exalt himself to be made a High Priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, You are my Son, today I have begotten you. [11 : 33] And as the Great High Priest, Jesus follows the custom of his day and he offers that same three-fold prayer for himself, for his disciples, for all of God's people the night before atonement would be made.

So, we are entering into sacred space here. Our Great High Priest is offering his final evening, nighttime prayers before he goes to God the Father to make atonement for our sins.

However, there is a considerable difference between Christ and the High Priests of the Old Covenant. Those men entered the holy place, the most holy place, year after year because the sacrifice of bulls and goats was never enough.

Listen to what the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 9. The priests go regularly into the first section of the tabernacle or the temple performing their ritual duties, but into the second, the most holy place.

Only the High Priest goes, but only once a year and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. But when Christ appeared as a High Priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

[13 : 21] For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Notice that line. He entered once for all into the holy places. This is it. This will be the sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

And Jesus would make this once for all sacrifice by means of his own blood, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, the blood of the sinless Son of God, the perfect Lamb of God, as Hebrews says, thus securing eternal redemption.

redemption. It's no surprise then that Jesus would have this impending suffering and death at the forefront of his mind this evening.

It's only hours away. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. He's been willingly and intentionally moving toward this moment for a while now, and it is here.

[14 : 48] It's time. And after he's given his disciples a few more words of instruction and encouragement, he humbles himself before God the Father in prayer.

And what does he pray? Well, let's look at these first five verses. He begins, Father, the hour has come.

Now, at least twice before in John's gospel, anyhow, he was very clear to say, my hour has not yet come. But things have changed since then.

Back in John 12, there was a group of Greeks who came to see Jesus, Gentiles, that is. And when Jesus heard this, he said, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Now, even when we read that in context, it seems a little strange. Jesus doesn't really explain why these people coming to see him would indicate that it's almost time for him to go to the cross and be crucified.

[15 : 52] But once we consider Old Testament prophecies, not to mention their fulfillments later in the New Testament, we realize that these Greeks represented the nations coming to Christ in faith.

Through Isaiah, the Lord said, my salvation will reach to the end of the earth, well beyond the borders of Israel, you see. Well beyond the Jewish people, even to the Gentiles.

In other words, things are changing. Something's about to shift in a drastic way, and the turning point is the death and resurrection of Christ.

Christ. So when Jesus saw these Greeks coming to him, he knew what it meant. The hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. But there were other signs.

For example, when Jesus and his disciples were sitting in that upper room for the Passover meal, just moments before this prayer in John 17, we're told in John 13, during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hand and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

[17:16] And a little later, John writes, Satan entered into Judas Iscariot. Jesus said to him, what you are going to do, do quickly. You see, Jesus knows that the devil is mounting his last and greatest attack.

The hostility of the Jewish leaders has reached a fever pitch. Judas is prepared to betray him and while the Roman government is completely ignorant of anything going on, they're prepared, they're in position to play their part in Jesus' death.

Everyone is in place, you see. And Jesus knows this. And as he says here, the hour has come. It's time.

Time for what? Time for the oldest prophecy in the history of the world to be fulfilled. Do you remember what God told the serpent way back in Genesis 3?

I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

[18:29] It was time for Satan to strike the Lord's heel. But it would be Christ who delivers the fatal blow. Now, with everything that's unfolding and everything that's about to happen, you would think Jesus, when praying for himself, would immediately, first of all, pray for strength or pray that there might be another way.

And those prayers are coming. But not here. Here, Jesus prays, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son.

Now, this is truly a unique prayer. Who else could pray this way other than Jesus Christ? First, you'll notice his bold claim to be God the Father's Son.

This is not just any man praying to God. And second, you'll notice the bold petition he makes. If desiring glory weren't enough, you'll notice he doesn't even ask for it.

He doesn't ask, Father, will you glorify me? No. He offers this petition with a confident expectation that the Father will glorify him.

[19:52] Now, keep in mind that Jesus knew the Old Testament. For instance, he knew what God said through the prophet Isaiah. My glory I will not give to another.

There, God says, I refuse to share my glory with anyone. Yet, Jesus is now requesting that God glorify him with that same glory.

So, what does this tell us? Well, it reaffirms what we learn about Jesus in the very first chapter of John's gospel. Verse 1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And a little later, we're told, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.

You see, this is a glory that belongs to Jesus. Yes, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, Philippians 2, but he is still the Word who is God.

[21:09] He never ceased to be that Word. He never ceased to be God. Notice verse 5, Jesus says, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you, the glory they shared before the world existed.

This glory belongs to Jesus. And furthermore, Jesus knows that his Father is faithful. The Father will glorify him because the Father has never failed to accomplish a single word he has ever spoken and he will not fail now, not in the hour for which the Son of Man came, not in the moment when redemption hangs in the balance and not when the glory of God is about to shine most brightly through the obedience and through the sacrifice and through ultimately the triumph of his beloved Son.

But what is this glory? this is something we talk about often enough, the glory of God, the glory of Christ, but what does it mean? What is Jesus praying for here?

Well, in the most simple terms, glory, or God's glory, is God revealed. You see, when we think of glory, we're prone to think of his brightness, his greatness, his majesty, if you will, and all of that is true, it's all included in his glory, but it's not limited to those things exactly.

His glory is the revelation of who he is. When he reveals himself, what you see is glory. Let me show you a couple of places.

[22 : 56] Psalm 19, 1, the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Similarly, Psalm 29 says, the voice of the Lord is over the waters, the God of glory thunders the Lord over many waters.

You see, creation reveals God the creator. So, the heavens, the sky, all of creation declare or give voice to the glory of God by revealing him.

You see that? This is why Paul writes in Romans 1, for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them for his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

Of course, physical creation isn't a complete revelation of God, but it declares his glory by revealing something of him. In Psalm 29, when the people hear the thunder, they see the lightning, everyone in the temple cries out, glory!

Just that, glory! They've heard God in a sense. When they see the lightning, they've seen something of God and they say, glory.

[24 : 19] It's his glory. God, of course, is invisible, but when he makes his attributes visible, that is his glory.

As Jonathan Edwards said, God's glory is the shining forth of his excellency. Or you might say, of who he is. Lewis Burkhoﬀ said, the glory of God is the majestic revelation of God's inherent excellence.

And I've been working on a relatively concise definition, compiling all of these great definitions I've read before. And here's what I've come up with. The glory of God is the outward shining of all his divine perfections, the visible display of his infinite worth by which he makes himself known and magnified in creation, redemption, and judgment.

Now, at one time, God the Son fully shared in this glory with God the Father, I mean, in its fullness, but when he became a man, much of that glory was veiled.

Paul says, though he was in the form of man, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself. himself. And Jesus himself is praying here, Father, glorify me with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

[25 : 55] So he's emptied himself of much of that glory, not so much by subtraction as much as the addition of human flesh. Right?

Now, that's not to say people didn't see glimpses of his glory when he was here on earth. We read that. Again, the apostle John readily confesses, we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

John says he manifested his glory at the wedding in Cana when he turned the water into wine.

According to Luke, some of the disciples saw his glory at the transfiguration.

It was there. They saw it, but it was mostly veiled, which is why Jesus prays that it might be revealed again. Let everyone see it.

Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. Through the cross and through the resurrection, God the Son will be glorified and God the Father will be glorified.

[27 : 02] And it isn't really surprising that one would accomplish the other since Jesus, according to Hebrews 1, is the radiance of the glory of God. When you think about it, if Jesus isn't God in the flesh, we could hardly imagine a more blasphemous prayer than this.

What is he really saying here? His glory is God's glory. He goes on, he has authority over all flesh. He gives eternal life, meaning Jesus. To know him is equal with knowing God.

Well, yeah, that's just it. At the heart of this prayer is the acknowledgement that Jesus is the God. He is in fact God. As Jesus himself said, I and the Father are one.

But let's back up. How does the cross of Christ lead to his glory and to the Father's glory? Son, do you For example, His holiness is upheld as sin is judged.

His justice is satisfied as the substitute for our sins is punished. His love is displayed as the Son willingly lays down His life for sinners.

[28 : 52] His mercy is poured out on those who deserve nothing but wrath. Now, His faithfulness is proven as every promise and every prophecy is brought to completion.

His wisdom is revealed in the way that He uses the schemes of wicked men from Judas to the Jewish leaders to Rome, even the assault of the devil himself to accomplish the salvation of His people.

In other words, at the cross, the veil is pulled back and the radiance of God's character just bursts forth, not in some golden light or angelic splendor necessarily as we might expect, but actually in the suffering and the obedience and the sacrifice and ultimately again the triumph of the crucified Christ.

Now let's consider verse 2. But I need to read the complete sentence here. Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son. The Son may glorify You since You have given Him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him.

So, the logic goes like this. The Father gives Jesus authority over all flesh and Jesus, in turn, gives His life for that flesh, for those people.

[30 : 30] And because He will pay the penalty for sin, which is death, of course, He is ultimately giving that flesh, those people, eternal life.

But notice that His death does not procure eternal life for everyone. Jesus very specifically says He will give eternal life to all whom the Father has given Him.

And this is actually a very common refrain throughout John's Gospel. So, this is not universalism. This is not every last person, but those whom the Father has given Him.

And again, notice how everything here is shared between Father and Son. The Father is glorified when the Son is glorified and vice versa.

The Father chooses a people and gives authority over those people to the Son. And the Son uses His authority to accomplish the Father's will by redeeming those people and giving them eternal life.

[31 : 38] So, while they may fulfill very distinct roles here, they are of the same essence and of the same mind. And this unity continues in verse 3, Jesus says, And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Now, before we focus on that word know, again, we see how God and Son are brought together here. Earlier in the evening, Jesus said to His disciples, Let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God. Believe also in Me. Now, why did He say that? Why isn't believing in God enough? Well, for starters, it's a contradiction. Everyone in Israel claimed to believe in God, while so many of them simultaneously rejected Jesus outright.

And what did Jesus say? If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God, and I am here.

[32 : 55] In other words, to believe in God, but not His Son, is not to believe in God at all. God the Father cannot be separated from God the Son.

Earlier this very night, Jesus said, No one comes to the Father except through Me. And a few minutes later, He told Philip, Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.

So, when Jesus prays, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. He is not making a distinction between Him and God the Father.

He can't. No, He's binding them together. To know the only true God is to know Christ, whom He sent. By the way, verse 3 is one of two verses in the Bible that at one time completely transformed the way I understood salvation.

I guess in my youth and immaturity, I saw salvation as little more than, number one, escaping hell, and number two, going to heaven.

[34 : 13] That's pretty much it, right? But according to Jesus, that's not the essence of salvation. It's not really about a place, nearly as much as it is about a person.

If we want to get to the very heart of what it means to be saved, the greatest privilege of all is knowing God and knowing Christ.

Throughout the Bible, knowing often carries the idea of an intimate relationship. Adam knew his wife, and she bore a child.

Israel was called to know the Lord in covenant faithfulness. It is so much more than mere awareness. This is not limited to intellectual knowledge.

Most everyone in the world knows who Jesus is. But they don't really know Jesus, you see. This is trust.

[35 : 18] This is love. This is communion, Jesus is talking about. This is intimate fellowship. And in the case of sinners and God, it is reconciliation through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

So when Jesus asks to be glorified here, He's asking the Father to reveal Him through His death, through His resurrection, so that sinners might, yes, be saved and go to heaven, but also be reconciled to Him.

His prayer is that sinners will know Him personally, intimately, which could not happen apart from the Lord's atoning work on the cross.

In other words, when He prays for His glory, this is good news, He's simultaneously praying for our blessing. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, right?

These two things go very much hand in hand. When God is glorified, sinners are made to enjoy Him. And when we enjoy Him, God is glorified.

[36 : 39] Verse 4, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. This is how He knows He and the Father will ultimately be glorified.

This is how He knows sinners will come to know Him and have eternal life. He accomplished what Adam failed to accomplish. He accomplished what no sinner ever could.

He kept the law perfectly. Paul says, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but not Jesus.

Not Jesus. He lived all His life in perfect obedience to His Father, and in a few short hours, He will give Himself up as that perfect sacrifice to please God, to satisfy His demands for justice, and to save sinners once and for all.

And just before He takes His final breath, what does He say? It is finished. And then what?

[37 : 49] Well, as we learn throughout the rest of Scripture and even through personal experience, people from nations all over the world, even as far away from Jerusalem as places like Bremen, Indiana, for all time would come to see His glory, would come to know Him personally, would be given, be granted eternal life, and in turn glorify Him, revealing Him through our witness to those around us.

And that's to say nothing of the fact that Jesus now sits at the right hand of His Father. Verse 5 again, Father, glorify me in Your own presence.

With the work complete, Jesus will return to His Father's side and share in His glory forevermore. And one day, every last soul will know.

Every last soul will see. He will be revealed to everyone. Paul writes, in Philippians 2, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

But of course, this would come only after Jesus, being found in human form, humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[39 : 36] Let's pray. Father, we thank You for allowing us to hear Your Son speak to You on the eve of His suffering and to see the glory that shines through His obedience and sacrifice.

I ask that You would help this prayer to sink deeply into our hearts. Teach us to marvel at Christ, to trust Him, to follow Him, and to rest in the eternal life He gives to all who know Him.

As we go from this place tonight, help us to walk in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. That is, to glorify You in our thoughts and in our words and our desires and in our daily lives.

Keep us near to Christ, Lord. Strengthen our faith. Shape us more and more into His likeness as we go. And may everything we do, in public and in private, reveal something of Your goodness and Your holiness to those around us.

and we ask all of this in the name of Jesus, our great High Priest. Amen. Amen.