

When Jesus Prays

SCOTT HOEZEE

Someone once observed that if a person could overhear another person's every prayer, it would not take long to learn a lot about that person. Our prayer life, C. S. Lewis once said, is sort of our autobiography; our life's story, in which we reveal to God our deepest desires and fears and hopes. Well, in John 17, we as readers of scripture, get to overhear a long and important prayer uttered by Jesus; and indeed, as we listen to Jesus pray, we learn a lot about him. Today on *Groundwork*, we begin a study of his prayer as we refer to as the *High Priestly Prayer*. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are, with this program, kicking off a short, three-part series on John 17, and what is often referred to, as I just mentioned, as Jesus' high priestly prayer. So, in this first episode, we are actually only going to look at the first five verses of John 17; and in the next two programs, we will look at the section where Jesus prays for his disciples, and then we will look at the final section in the third program, where Jesus prays for all believers.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this section of the Bible, you know, it starts, actually, in John 13, where the Bible says now that Jesus is going back to the Father, he is beginning to show the full extent of his love to the disciples; and so, I think about when you have people who...they know the end is near for their lives, they pull their family close and they want to say something that is very near and dear to their hearts. I feel like this is the moment in the passage to the end, before he gets crucified, where Jesus begins to explain these very important things and pray for his disciples.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and this four-chapter-long powerhouse of teaching is often referred to as the *Farewell Discourses* of Jesus. It is John 14-17; and Darrell, I think it is probably the most significant section of Jesus' teachings in the New Testament, and it is right up there, then, with the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7; and you know, Darrell, scholars do wonder, with both the Sermon on the Mount, and these farewell discourses, did Jesus really teach all of this in one sitting? It would be like drinking from a firehose. Or is this a collection of teachings and prayers that John brought together? Either way, or both ways, we know, as you just said, this is a significant teaching that Jesus taught his disciples; and now, by the Holy Spirit, also teaches us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and in this context, we know that they are in the upper room, this is the time when he washes their feet; this is right before Judas betrays him in the next chapter; and so, Jesus is explaining these very important things to them, and then he has this prayer. So, it is a really intimate space and a lot of good things are happening that we can learn from.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, that is the setting, as you said, Darrell, for, really, John 13-17. The farewell discourses are 14-17; 13 kind of sets the stage when they have...well, they are celebrating the Passover, but Jesus turns it into what we now call the Lord's Supper; and so, really, this whole farewell discourse section begins in John 14, and it begins with these words:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

DARRELL DELANEY

So, now Jesus begins in John 14 talking about the Father; and so, he wants us to understand that he is going to prepare a place for them. So, Jesus is thinking, not just about what is going on now, but he is thinking about what his work would do for the people who were believing in the message of the kingdom of God. He is going to prepare a place for them; but he has more things to say about the Father in this passage.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and I like what you said earlier, that as the end is coming for Jesus, this is the time to get in all those last teachings that he can while he is still with them. Frederick Dale Bruner, the great Bible commentator, says that contained in these farewell discourses is Jesus' Father sermon, and Jesus' Holy Spirit sermon. Continuing in John 14, he has a number of things to say about the Father.

DARRELL DELANEY

He says: ^{9b}"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me: The words I say to you do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹²Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴You may ask anything in my name, and I will do it."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is; that is a lot of in-ness...a lot in language here; but Jesus is here, Darrell, really showing that utterly tight connection between the Father and the Son. Jesus says: You cannot even see only one of us at a time. You see me, you see the Father; you see the Father, you see me. So, the Father is in charge; the Father is the one who has sent Jesus; and everything Jesus has said...everything Jesus has done across maybe four or five years of his earthly ministry, it was all directly from the Father.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, Jesus is going on about the Father right here, but he also has things to say about the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is really important to note that this section is probably the longest collection of teachings about the Holy Spirit directly from Jesus that we find in scripture.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; there is no other section as long and concentrated on the Person and work of the Spirit as here in the Farewell Discourses; and what is really important for the disciples to understand is that Jesus was going to be leaving them very soon, but that after he is gone from this earth, the Spirit will become their ongoing connection to Jesus; and so, now here is some words from John 16, Jesus speaking:

⁷"Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ¹²I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because

it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what is really beautiful about this, Scott, is that Jesus knows, and he says, even in the passage, that he has so much more that he is trying to get to them, but he doesn't have enough time to get it to them; but the good news is that when the Spirit comes, he can continue the teachings of Jesus; and so, he will remind them of everything he has said, and they will be empowered to carry out that gospel-filled mission to share the good news with everyone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, what we see here, Darrell, is that the Trinity of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; one of the things we learn in seminary, is that they never operate independent of each other. They are always deeply involved in one another's work. So, Jesus says: Why am I here? The Father sent me. Why did I say what I said? The Father told me. Why did I do what I did? The Father told me. Now, we are both sending the Spirit to you, and what is the Spirit going to tell you? What I tell him to tell you, which is what the Father told me. So, you know, you get this unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that they are always, always, always working in tandem; always, always, always working together to make known to the world the truth about God and about our salvation.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really good for them to work together to make sure that the gospel goes to a world that desperately hears the good news; and when we continue in the next segment, we will talk more about what it means to do what Jesus has done in prayer. So, stay with us.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we have already mentioned a few times on this *Groundwork* episode, that John 17 is known as the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus; and why is that? Well, Darrell, it is not because Jesus mentions being the high priest, because he doesn't, but rather, because the prayer Jesus offers here is an intercessory prayer. He is asking the Father for various things; and we know that in the history of Israel, that kind of intercessory prayer was the key work and task of the high priest.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; the high priest's role was to take the prayers to God. Actually, he would do the repentance on their behalf, sacrifice the animal in order for them to have a right relationship with God; and his role was to go in once a year on the Atonement to make sure that they got their sins and their relationship clear with God; and so, the priest's role was a very central figure in the history of Israel, and Jesus is showing that role in this prayer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The high priest always stood at the intersection of heaven and earth, and so was a mediator; a word that we also apply to Jesus now...a mediator...the vital go-between...the connection between God and God's people. So, as you just said, Darrell, he prayed, but he also offered the sacrifices; and all together, it leads to the forgiveness of people.

So, we just mentioned that Jesus in John 17 doesn't, you know, mention being a high priest, but he does the work of a high priest; and we know that because one place in the Bible, in the New Testament, that is, that really speaks a lot about the high priest is the book of Hebrews. Let's listen to these words in Hebrews 7, starting at verse 23:

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. ²⁶Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

DARRELL DELANEY

What is beautiful about this is because Jesus is eternal, his sacrifice is permanent; and he offers himself as the pure and spotless lamb. Remember John the Baptist: Look; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is what he shouted when he saw Jesus; and so, Jesus, because of his atoning sacrifice on the cross, is the one and permanent sacrifice; and he actually lives out this role in this passage when he prays for the disciples.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, we have looked at the context here of John 14-17: the Farewell Discourses. Now, Darrell, let's go into these first five verses, which is the focus of this program of John 17.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus is praying to be glorified. What does that mean? Well, it will mean something rather surprising, as we will see in just a second, Darrell; but in the Bible...certainly in the history of Israel...the very presence of God was always associated with glory. In fact, the Hebrew word for glory is *kavod*, and *kavod* most literally is translated glory, but literally it means something that is weighty, something that is heavy, serious; and so, glory is the very serious and substantive presence of God; and was usually visible in things that were bright and awesome and full of splendor. Think of Exodus 40, when God's glory cloud moved into that tabernacle in the wilderness. That sight was majestic and full of light. So, the shining effulgence of glory is often a sign that you are in the presence of Almighty God.

DARRELL DELANEY

When I used to teach this, I used to have someone carry a bunch of chairs while I am talking, because the weight of the chairs would start getting to them after gravity started pulling them. So, you know, it is often talked about how glory and weight are equated with precious metals like gold: You are worth your weight in gold, if you have ever heard that saying, it means that there is a lot of glory and a lot of integrity in it. So, the Lord is showing that his glory is something that we cannot carry. It is something that only he can carry in his strength because he has earned it with the creation and with the even powerful atonement that Jesus is going to show us after these chapters are done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and here is the paradoxical moment. So, although we usually think of glory as being bright and shining, and it sometimes is, in this case: When will the Father glorify the Son? When will the Father answer this prayer? On the bloody cross. That glory will be revealed in the Son's willingness to go all the way to death and hell to accomplish the salvation for which the Son had been sent by the Father into this world in

the first place.

So, no one really expected the full glory of God to come in that form of Golgotha...on Skull Hill. To the world, it would look like an utter defeat, but we now claim it is the ultimate victory over death and sin and hell.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is really interesting that the world thinks of this in a very opposite way that Christians believe this, because when you hit the game-winning shot or you score the touchdown or when you get hoisted up because you won a championship, that is glory to the world. This is the glory that they are bathed in, they are clothed in it, and it is powerful; and everybody is celebrating; but this is totally the opposite of what Jesus did. You think of the Triumphal Entry. He came in on a donkey when most people come in on horses and stallions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Even Jesus turned it upside down at the Triumphal Entry.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is why, to quote a key line from a sermon on John 17, by the preacher Debbie Blue: True glory does not shine, it bleeds. Glory isn't fame and riches and accolades, but it is sacrifice and death; and again, what looks to many people like something that is more about shame than honor.

So, Jesus is asking the Father to glorify him; and in this case, that means to give him the strength to go all the way to the cross to die for all humanity; and then they can inherit eternal life, as Jesus says that he came to bring here in John 17.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I think the disciples are not too far off from where we are as far as what expectations of glory were. I mean, Peter carried his sword around, and when Jesus got arrested, he cuts off the guy's ear. He is looking for a political overtaking. He is looking for the new Caesar; the new Israel...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But Jesus is saying: My kingdom is not of this world; and so, the way that Jesus went about it was totally counterintuitive, and it really took the disciples by surprise as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you are not going to see my glory in a throne room, or with me sitting in a bejeweled throne in some bright palace somewhere. That is not where you are going to see it. You are going to see it on the cross.

I just want to jump down to the bottom of John 17, here in verse 24. We will look at that in the third program, but Jesus does share here his desire for the disciples and all believers to accept the true, cross-shaped nature of his glory, but Jesus will say this in verse 24:

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

So, we want to share Jesus' glory, and that is going to have some implications. We are going to think about that as we wrap up this initial look at the high priestly prayer of Jesus. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, we have seen that Jesus begins his prayer in John 17 with that request for the Father to glorify the Son, and the Son will then, in turn, glorify the Father by completing the work the Father had sent the Son to do; but we also said we have to come to understand, Darrell, that the glory in question here will be a very specific and unique form of glory. It will be the glory that emerges from a bloody sacrifice on a cross at a place called Skull Hill. The glory will emerge from the darkest moment of human history, when sinful people put the very Son of God to death.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, it reminds me of Philippians 2, where it talks about our attitudes should be like that of Christ Jesus. We don't look at what he had when he looked at how his equality with God was not something that he held onto, but he made himself nothing. He came into the very foundation of a human and actually became obedient to death, even death on a cross. So, we see this glorification; we see this humiliation; and then we see this exultation comes afterward. That is the path that Jesus takes, and he is praying right now to prepare himself for that exact sacrifice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And to prepare the disciples that that is what they are going to share with him; because if we want to share Christ's glory properly understood, Darrell, then we know that is not going to be anything like what the rest of society would call a *glorious* life. Again, as we said in the previous segment, it is not fame and riches; it is not having access to the levers of political power and influence; quite the contrary. In fact, Darrell, we recently did a *Groundwork* series from the letters of 1 Peter and 2 Peter, and here in the context of Jesus' prayer in John 17, it kind of reminded me of some of the things that Peter wrote to the First Century Christians who were scattered throughout Asia Minor.

DARRELL DELANEY

He says: (1 Peter 4:12) Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you have to be thinking Peter was remembering this high priestly prayer when he wrote these words because he is right totally on track with what Jesus said in these first five verses of John 17; so, there in 1 Peter 4, it was a time of great persecution. People were suffering. They didn't like it. They wanted to know why. I like what Peter says here. He says: Hey, look; when fiery ordeals come, that is not strange. That is not a surprise. That is exactly what you should expect. Look at what happened to Jesus. You want his glory? That is it. So, when you are persecuted; when those fiery trials come; when you are insulted because of the name of Christ; then you share Christ's cross-shaped glory—a glory that does not shine but it bleeds.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, it is interesting that Paul made the distinction between these super apostles who he talked about, where they are getting loved by the world and they are getting appreciated by the world. Then he said, but we...we are getting suffering...we are getting persecution...we are getting beat down and we are getting flogged for the name of Christ.

I also thought about Philippians 3, where Paul says: (Phil 3:10) I want to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection, *and* the fellowship of his sufferings— (2:8) unto death, even the death on the cross— (3:11) So, therefore, there will be somehow attained in the resurrection that comes after that. So, Paul understands, and Peter is also understanding by the power of the Spirit, to be reminded that suffering is a component that is necessary and part of the Christian's life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And just by remembering Paul, and a lot of that was in 2 Corinthians, that you were referring to with the super apostles and all that; isn't it interesting, Darrell, that both Paul and Peter, but really all the disciples who turned into the apostles, they had to keep teaching this over and over and over, because, you know, we don't like suffering. We would just as soon not have suffering. We would much rather have comfortable lives. We are not keen on the idea, and so that is why, among the biggest tasks of the early apostles, was to keep telling people: Look, this is the path to glory. It was Jesus' path to glory; it is your path to glory; so, when these fiery trials come, you don't have to be thankful for them, but you can be thankful *in* them because you know you are sharing what you just said from Philippians 3, the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings.

DARRELL DELANEY

Isn't it beautiful that the glory is not negated when they are suffering. It is not canceled out because things are not going well all the time. So, Jesus is actually going to demonstrate in his life that even through death and crucifixion, the glory is made manifest. So, in this world, where we have a lot of brokenness and a lot of problems and a lot of sorrow, God's glory can still shine in the life of a believer, even though all the crazy is happening; and that is encouraging for me, because not only did Jesus pray for it, but we can encourage one another in that situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And right; as you kind of hinted at there, Darrell; the world's definition of glory cannot coexist with suffering and sorrow and death; but we cannot avoid suffering and sorrow and death forever. Eventually, we are going to come to it. So, as you just said, the good news is that God's glory does not depart from us when we go through hard times; that is when it is revealed the most. So, it is consonant with those terrible circumstances that sooner or later, we all face.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing, because Jesus models this. He shows us that it can be done. He shows us by obeying the Father, displaying the kingdom on this earth in the form that he showed by teaching and preaching and healing and showing his love to the disciples; and not only that, praying for them, because he knows he is going to leave; promising the power of the Spirit that will keep that ministry going that he has already setting the stuff up so that the Lord can be made known, even after he is gone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We mentioned a sermon by the pastor Debbie Blue from John 17: Glory does not shine, it bleeds; and she, in that sermon on John 17, this very passage, she says: You know, the way glory gets used in society, it usually feels kind of empty and hollow and fake; but that, Blue says, is why the true glory that we find emphasized...it is a key theme all throughout the Gospel of John...is such a good thing, because glory is not when a human person becomes larger and more famous; glory is when the Almighty Son of God is made smaller; he is made flesh; he is by all rights diminished compared to the state he had had before being made human in the womb of a young woman. So, you know, we always think when you are large and in charge, and when you are famous and the spotlight is on you, that is glory. No, Blue says. With Jesus, it was all upside down. It was when he became small that he really was in a position to reveal God's glory later on that cross.

DARRELL DELANEY

When the eternal king of the universe, who is all powerful, becomes a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger, and when he walks on this earth and endures human suffering, Hebrews says that Jesus learned obedience through suffering; and he is actually modeling what it means to glorify the Father. He is our example, and we learn a lot from him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, indeed, maybe that kind of cross-shaped bleeding glory...that sounds odd; it sounds strange; but as the Apostle Peter said in those verses from 1 Peter 4 that we just quoted a little while ago, it is not odd; it is not strange; it is not surprising that glory takes that shape. It did for Jesus; it will for you. The disciple is not greater than the master. So, what Jesus suffered, we can suffer; but that is what lets the glory actually shine through, thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the next section of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer found in John 17:6-19.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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Printed on July 16, 2025