



**“This is eternal life, that they may know you,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”**

John 17:3

The Priestly Prayer of Jesus

JOHN 17:1–11a *¹After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.*

⁶“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

The direction of Jesus' words turns from his disciples to his heavenly Father (verse 1). Though Jesus lifts his eyes to heaven, Jesus certainly wants his disciples (and all of us) to eavesdrop on this intimate conversation. In this parting prayer of Jesus, the longest prayer of Jesus in any gospel, every word and phrase carries great significance: the hour, glorify, and eternal life. The scope of his prayer extends from the time before the world existed, when he was in God's presence, to the complete accomplishment of his earthly ministry.

"The hour has come" for the climax of his life. Jesus asks the Father to "glorify" the Son: "Glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed" (verse 5). The glorification of a person in the Bible means the external manifestation of a person's deeper, hidden nature. Jesus had glorified the Father through his healing miracles and wondrous teaching (verse 4), but the full revelation of God's nature would occur as Jesus offers his life on the cross. The glorification of the Son is this manifestation of his love to the whole world. His deepest nature is his glory as the eternal Word of God, the glory he had in the Father's presence before creation and before his mission in our human history. Yet, Jesus does not want to return to the Father alone. He wants to take us with him.

The purpose of Jesus' mission, as we have seen throughout John's gospel, is to give us "eternal life" (verses 2–3). The new characteristic of this life is not just the fact that it lasts forever; more importantly, it is a new quality of life for the believer. Eternal life is God's own life, a life that he wants us all to share because he loves us so much. Jesus describes this life as "knowing" the Father and the Son. This knowing is a personal, experiential union with God, an experience that is entered through the gift of faith when we surrender to God's incomparable love.

Although Jesus' revealing ministry is ending and he is about to return to the glory he had with the Father before creation, Jesus points to the fragile group of disciples sharing his table. These are the ones given him by the Father "from the world," a part of God's larger gift of "everything" to Jesus (verses 6–7). Jesus has given these disciples the words that the Father gave him, and "they have received them and know in truth" that Jesus came from the Father, and "they have believed" that the Father sent him (verse 8).

Because the disciples have received and believed the revelation Jesus has given them from the Father, Jesus has completed the task given him by the

Father. This description of the disciples makes them models of faith for the readers of John's gospel. They have received from Jesus the revelation of God that comes to Jesus from God, and they have believed that Jesus is the one sent from the Father.

So Jesus now prays for his disciples who remain in the world while Jesus returns to the Father (verses 9–11). Jesus will now be glorified in them, as they repeat in their own lives the loving self-gift of Jesus. They will continue expressing in the world this same quality of love and will thereby glorify Jesus. Though Jesus' mission to the world is coming to an end, his disciples will be the ongoing bearers of his mission in the world.

Reflection and discussion

- What does Jesus mean by God's gift of "eternal life"? In what sense am I living eternal life today? Do I appreciate this gift?
- What is the work that the Father gave Jesus to do? In what sense has Jesus finished that work? In what sense does that work continue?

Prayer

Eternal Word of God, you have revealed the true nature and love of God to us through your life, death, and resurrection. Help me to experience union with God as I long to share eternal life more completely and more deeply.