

The Lord's Greatest Prayer, Part 8

We come this morning to our final look at this marvelous seventeenth chapter of John. You can open your Bible to that chapter right now. We have covered the first twenty-three verses, which leaves the three at the very end. But I want to read, starting in verse 20, just so that you have the setting for that final portion.

[John 17:20](#), "I do not ask on behalf of these alone," - that is the disciples, the apostles - "but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

The final request of our Lord, in the last section of this chapter, or the last portion of this prayer, is given in verse 24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me" - "be with Me." That is the promise to everyone who is redeemed, everyone who is justified, everyone who is Christ's, that we will one day be in heaven with Him. On paper, on biblical paper to be sure, that is the great end, the glorious end, the incomparable end, the indescribable end to which all of us look and for which we long. But in reality, we live our lives so earthbound, that it's very difficult for us to experience real anticipation for heaven.

How often do you actually think about heaven? How often do you think about being free from sin? How often do you think about being perfectly holy? Beyond that, how often do you actually think about being in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Do you understand the anticipation of David in [Psalm 16:11](#) when he says, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever"? Do you really understand what Paul meant when he wrote that "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is much better"? Do you understand the longing of his heart to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord?

All of us as believers in [Colossians 3:1](#) have been told to keep pursuing, "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." All of us as believers are headed to heaven. I fear that we really don't grasp the reality of what heaven is. Yes, it is a real place, but it is not so much defined as a place as it is as a person. David said, "In Your presence, in Your right hand, that's where joy lies, that's where pleasures are kept." Paul said, "My desire, to depart and be with Christ," he said, "to be at home with the Lord." He told us to "seek the things that are above where Christ is."

We all know something about heaven. We all know what the Bible says about heaven to one degree or another, but it's easy for us to get caught up in descriptions of a place and not understand that the heart of heaven is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will never see God because God is invisible. We will never see the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is invisible. We will see Christ. We as believers are headed to heaven. We will see Him glorified there. We will share His glory. We will enter into love and joy and satisfaction and fulfillment that is beyond comprehension.

We actually should be living all the time in a full anticipation of heaven. Our Father is there, that's how we pray: "Our Father who art in heaven." Our fellow believers who have died are there, the generation of those who are enrolled in heaven, "the spirits of just men made perfect." Our names are there, which means there's a place that belongs to us; we have an entitlement.

In [Luke 10:20](#) Jesus said, "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." Our citizenship is there. Our inheritance is there - an inheritance which is "imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us." Our holiness is there. Our perfection is there. Our sinlessness is there. Our eternal reward is there.

Our Lord said in Matthew, chapter 5, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great." But most important, our Saviour is there, standing at the right hand of God, according to Acts 7 at the end of the chapter. When Stephen looked up, he saw the Savior standing at the right hand of God. He has gone there to prepare a place for us in the Father's house. Heaven is all about being with Him; our Saviour is there.

God's purpose in salvation was to bring us to heaven. God had an ultimate purpose from the very beginning. From eternity past - when He chose who would be in heaven - to eternity future - when all whom He chose will be in heaven - God is fulfilling His plan. God's purpose is simply stated in [Hebrews 2:10](#), "For it was fitting for Him" - that is God - "for whom are all things, and through whom are all things" - which is to say He's in charge of everything - "it was fitting for Him, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through suffering." The purpose of God is to bring many sons to glory.

For those of you who haven't been with us, just a quick reminder. We have been talking about God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - the triune God. God is a trinity - one being and yet three persons. God is love. Love can only exist where you have more than one person. God is a trinity and God is love, because God loves - Father loves the Son, and so forth.

The Father is love and He loves the Son. He loves the Son, as we've seen, with an infinite, eternal, intimate love - incomprehensible to us. God is satisfied in loving; God is fulfilled in loving; God is glorified in loving. God wanted many more sons to love, and He wanted to love them as He loved His eternal Son. So the Father decided to create a universe. If you wonder why we exist, it isn't an accident. It is because the eternal God is a God of love and set out to create sons that He could eternally love. He chose and prepared the creation. He allowed for sin and the Fall to put His mercy, grace, and salvation on display. He sent His own Son to die in the place of the sons of His love, to redeem them from judgment, in order that He might have His justice satisfied and forgive their sin and bring them to glory. The Lord Jesus was the sacrifice for our sins; He purchased our salvation.

He also is the Great High Priest who prays us into glory - and that's what's going on in John 17. He not only lived for us a perfect life that could be imputed to our account; He not only died for us to provide the sacrifice for our sin; He not only rose for us to grant us life; but He ever-lives, making intercession for us, praying us into glory against all attacks, all assaults, all failures, all sin. He stands at the right hand of God the Father on our behalf, the attorney for our defence, praying us into glory. That is what Paul calls in Romans 5 his "much more" work.

As I've been saying, His death is a matter of hours on the cross, His resurrection after a matter of days. His intercession goes on as long as time goes on. He is both the sacrifice and the Great High Priest of our confession. In John 17, we have the only biblical example of His intercessory prayer, and the point of it all is to bring sons to glory, all His sons. In order to accomplish this, He brings requests before the Father.

Now as we come down to the text that I read you at the end of the chapter, you will remember from last week that I told you there are two final requests. Our Lord has two final requests of the Father. The first is a prayer for the regeneration of believers. The first is a prayer for the regeneration of believers, that we would be one in the world - and that's verses 21-23; and we talked about that in detail last time. It is a prayer that they may be one, not in some kind of practical outworking of visible unity, but "that they may be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You," which means that they are one in the sense that they possess eternal life, that they may be one in the sense of regeneration in life shared by the Father and the Son. This is a prayer for internal life.

To simplify it, it's a prayer for them to be given eternal life, salvation, the eternal life that He spoke of back in verse 3. This is a prayer that God would grant salvation and eternal life, the very life of God to all who believe, to all who believe. And by the way, He is asking for God to do what God already planned to do and promised to do for all who put their trust in His Son. The petition then is not that we would get along with each other. The petition is the dead, blind, deaf, alienated sinners who do not know God, who belong to Satan, who operate within the kingdom of darkness, and who are given the ability to believe by the Holy Spirit. Upon that believing will be granted life, forgiveness, and become literally one with God and Christ and the Spirit. He is not praying for some kind of progressive, external unity of behavior, He is praying for a perfected, instantaneous unity of being.

Just to remind you that that is what is on His mind. In verse 23 He said again, along those same lines, He's talking about making them one, in the sense that We are one: "I in them, You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity" – "that they may be perfected in unity." The original text here is what we call a perfect passive participle – "having been perfected," an already accomplished act. "I am praying that they will already have been perfected while they are in the world."

So He's not talking about glorification. He's talking about regeneration. In other words, He's talking about us being redeemed; being given new life, regeneration; conversion, the unity of common, eternal life. He wants that, of course, to take place in the world "so that the world may believe," the end of verse 21, "so that the world may know that You sent Me," verse 23.

So His first prayer is for the regeneration of believers in the world so that the world can see what transformation takes place by the power of God through the gospel. We then, as we already know from this chapter, are sent into the world to put that on display while we proclaim the gospel. He is praying for the salvation of those who believe, and that they would be granted the full eternal life that belongs to the triune God, that we would be in every sense joined to God and joined to one another. Like [1 Corinthians 6:17](#), "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit."

Such transformation will be manifest. It can't help but be manifest. It'll show up in good works to which we have been foreordained ([Ephesians 2:10](#)). It'll show up in the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control" – all evidences of transformation and the indwelling of God. So His first prayer is that God will bring eternal life to all who believe in the world so that the world may see the power of God in salvation and be drawn to it.

Now there's one final request. The first request was a prayer for regeneration and unity in the world. The second and last is, and fittingly, a prayer for glorification and one in heaven - that we might be one in heaven. He wants us one on the earth, manifestly possessing that eternal life which puts the gospel on display. But His final prayer is that we would all be one in heaven.

Here is the ultimate; here is the ultimate: the Son prays for the Father to bring all His chosen sons to glory. Again, Jesus is praying us into heaven. We're going to heaven; that's a promise. The reason that promise is fulfilled, the means for that to be fulfilled, is the intercessory prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Listen to the words of Paul to the Colossians in chapter 1: "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Jesus Christ and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." Paul says, "I'm like Christ; I'm following His lead. I have heard about your faith. I've heard that you believe the gospel, and now I'm praying on the basis of your hope that is waiting in heaven. I'm praying for you; I'm praying for you to get to heaven."

Our Lord is the one who prays us into heaven; He wants us there. Now go down to verse 24. Here's His desire, the ultimate desire of Christ: "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am." We can stop there for a moment. What a statement. He does not say, "I am willing to accept them into heaven because You cleaned them up." He says, "I desire that they also, whom You've given Me, be with Me where I am."

It is not difficult to understand that we would desire to be with Him. It is staggering to think that He desires to be with us. He wants us to be with Him. He doesn't want everybody; He just wants "those whom," He says to the Father, "You have given Me." How many times have we seen that statement in this chapter? Verse 2: "All whom You have given Me." Verse 6: "The men You gave Me." Verse 9: "Those whom You have given Me." Verse 12: "Which You have given Me." He said the same thing, chapter 6: "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me."

What gives us value is not intrinsic to us. It is because we are the Father's chosen love gifts to the Son. I mean, you understand that in a simple way. You go to a store and see something nice, and you buy it and bring it home, and it sits around and collects dust, or it does whatever it does and serves a certain aesthetic or functional value for you. But if that same object had come into your home as a gift of love from the person who loves you most, it takes on completely different significance. It's treated very differently, because somehow it personifies all that is bound up in that love; and that is where we find our value. It is not that the value that I have to Christ that makes Him desire to have me in heaven with Him is intrinsic to me. It is because of the Father choosing me as a gift of the Father's love. It is the Father loving the Son and the Son loving the Father, and I get caught in the middle, thankfully.

In Ephesians, chapter 1, and verse 3, we know those familiar words: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." What gives me value to Christ is that I have been chosen by His Father, and I am a love gift from the Father to the Son. So are you if you're a believer.

So our Lord has a desire, in verse 24, and the desire is: "I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am." And by the way, He's certainly not talking about Jerusalem where He is when He prayed that. He's not talking about Gethsemane where He's about to be in a few moments after the prayer. He's talking about heaven. He's already anticipating heaven. It's on His mind, back in verse 11: "I am no longer in the world; yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You." Verse 13: "Now I come to You." He's already anticipating heaven, and His desire is for eternal fellowship with us, the chosen sons of God.

As I said at the beginning, God has more love to give than what He gave His Son. So in infinite love, He wants many sons. That's why Ephesians 1 also says, "God chose us to adopt us as sons." We are sons of God, given as a collective bride to Christ. We are headed for heaven - and please notice - "to be with Me," He said, "where I am." Fellowship. Psalm 23: "We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." He strongly desires to be with us, because we are the Father's love gifts to Him.

In 1 John, chapter 3, verse 1 we read, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are." Who can measure this love? All John can say is, "See how great a love." He doesn't even use a lot of adjectives.

We have been so loved by the Father. We haven't deserved it, we haven't earned it. Purely on the basis of God's uninfluenced choice and sovereignty, we have been given to Christ, we have become children of God - more sons. The world doesn't know this. Why? John says, "Because we are now the children of God, but it doesn't yet appear what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is." That's heaven, seeing Christ just as He is. Heaven is seeing Christ, being with Him.

And, again, as I said last week, if you love anything in this world more than Christ, then heaven is loss. If your affections are more attached to any other relation or any other possession on this earth than Christ, then heaven will be loss. Now, obviously, if you're a believer, you don't totally love the world. "If you love the world," 1 John 2 says, "the love of the Father is not in you." But it's amazing how entangled we become in the world. One of the reasons that in a lifetime of ministry my desire has been to cultivate in you Christ, constantly bringing Christ before you, is to fill your life with the realities of Christ, so that He draws out all your affections. And if you love Christ most, then heaven will be fulfillment.

Now, why does He want us there, to be with Him for what reason? Two reasons. Reason number one, verse 24: "So that" - that's a purpose clause - "so that." "I desire that they be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me" - "My glory which You have given Me" - "for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." He wants us there to see His glory. He wants us there to see His glory.

When He came down to earth, His glory was veiled, right? [John 1:14](#) says, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." What does John mean, "We beheld His glory"? What do you mean you saw His glory? He just looked like a man. He looked like any other man. What do you mean you saw His glory? "We saw His glory revealed in grace and truth. We knew that when we were seeing grace and truth, we were seeing the glory of God. We saw it manifest in those attributes." His true glory was veiled, but His attributes shone through. There was only a moment when they glimpsed His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew 17, and they all literally fell over in just a glimpse of His unveiled glory.

The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 that the Lord Jesus Christ is, is God, the glory of God *shining*. Christ is the glory of God *shining*. In fact, it even says, "The glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ."

But now we only know that by faith, don't we? We only know that by faith. The disciples only knew that by faith. Paul had some visions, but they were blinding on the Damascus Road. He went blind. He had some other visions, but they were very indistinct; and he even says when he went to heaven that he was not even permitted to speak of it, and couldn't even understand whether he was in the body or out of the

body. It was just too supernatural for him to define. But, when we get to heaven, I just read you [1 John 3:2](#), "We will see Him just as He is."

What do you think you're going to see? When you think about heaven and you think about Jesus. Forget the nonsense in all the books written by people who didn't go to heaven but said they did. When you think about heaven, what do you think about? You think about Jesus. What do you think about?

Kind of an olive-complexioned man with long hair and a nice robe with a rope around His waist maybe. Or maybe, you come out of a Catholic background, when you think in your mind about Christ, you see Him on a cross, because you saw that so long in your life. You can't sort of get rid of it. Or maybe there are a few of you who even when you were kids saw Christ coming out of a tomb in a picture or something, and maybe He had a glowing light around His head or halo, and that's the Jesus you think of. Or maybe some of you had a picture in your house of Jesus hanging somewhere – supposed to be Jesus – and you grew up with that, and that's your view of Him.

You can forget all of that. That isn't even close; that is not even close. When you see Him as He is, you will see Him the way He is described in Revelation 21. So let's look at Revelation 21.

Now we can just kind of pick part of the description of heaven. The material is jasper. The city is pure gold like pure clear glass, a transparent gold. And then there are precious stones adorning the foundation stones, all beautifully coloured stones, mentioned in verses 19-20. And then there are shining, brilliant pearls that you know reflect the colours of the rainbow. And the street is pure, transparent glass.

Okay, now you're looking into the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the infinite heaven, infinite heaven. It has no boundary, it has no end, the infinite heaven. "And there's no temple," verse 22, "for the Lord God and the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it." You are now in eternal heaven and there is no, no light. You don't need any light, "for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb."

There's one light in infinite heaven - it's Christ. That's beyond comprehension. "All the peoples will walk by its light. Kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime, there will be no night."

Down in chapter 22, verse 3, "There'll no longer be any curse; the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it...His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face." Oh, here we are: the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus. "And His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of a sun, because the Lord God will illumine them."

There's one light. God lights up infinite heaven with one lamp, and that lamp is Christ - full display, full display. The glory of the eternal Son, incomprehensible to us. We will see Christ in *all* His glory - limitless. Unlike Moses, who saw a little bit of glory when God tucked Him into a rock, we will see the full, blazing glory. And we will not be consumed, because we will be holy.

Why does He want us to see this glory? So that we "will see," back to verse 24, "see My glory" - Why? - "because I want them to see that You loved Me before the foundation of the world." How does that connect? Again, all the glory, all the glory, all the glory of God is shining in the face of Christ limitlessly. It lights up infinite heaven, and our Lord is saying, "All that glory given to Me to become the Lamp of an infinite heaven is an expression of the Father's love to Me." When you enter heaven and you see the glory of Christ, you will know how much the Father loved the Son to give Him that much glory.

When we read, "My beloved Son, in whom I'm well-pleased," we have such a small, infinitesimal, puny concept of what that means. Some day when you walk into heaven, whether you go by rapture or by death – we're all going to go there – you're going to see such glory radiating from Christ that He's the only lamp in the infinite, eternal heaven forever. And that glory coming through Jesus Christ, which you will see face-to-face, that glory coming through Christ will demonstrate to you how much the Father has eternally loved the Son to give Him such infinite glory.

The Father loves the Son, and all of redemption is to get us to heaven so that we can see how much the Father loves the Son. We are loved as well. We are loved into heaven, so that we can see how much the Father loves the Son. We will see His staggering, incomprehensible glory; and we will know the fullness of the Father's love for Him. We will spend forever praising and honouring our Saviour and redeemer as we behold His glory.

So, first of all, the Lord wants us into heaven to see His glory; and, secondly, to know His love, to know His love – not just to see that He is love, but to experience it. Look at verses 25 and 26: “O righteous Father” - called Him “holy Father” earlier in verse 11 - “O righteous Father, although the world has not known You” - we’ve seen that – “yet I have known You; these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them” - His disciples, apostles, those who believe – “and will make it known.” That’s right.

Christ says, “I’m going to continue to make Your name known, and I’m going to fill out the whole history of redemption by gathering in all your beloved sons. I will continue to make it known.” And He does that through His Spirit, through His Word. Why? Here’s the second “so that,” the second purpose clause. First, “So that they may see My glory” - here – “so that the love with which You loved Me may be” - Where? – “in them, and I in them. I want them with Me, to see My glory. I want them with Me to know My love, the love with which You love Me.” It is just stunning.

That’s what was said at the end of verse 23, right? “You loved them, even as You loved Me.” That’s why I try to help you to imagine how much the Father loves the Son. If there is no light in heaven but Him, He’s the only lamp in the infinite glory of heaven; and that He, being given all glory, becomes the sole source of glory in all of heaven is therefore on display as the One whom the Father loves - loves so greatly that all glory is in Him displayed. And now, He says, “I want them here, not only to see My glory, but I want them here to experience My love, the love with which the Father loves Me, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” And, of course, that incorporates that we would love Him back.

So if you want to define heaven, you just got the definition. It’s all glory and all love, all glory and all love. God is love and eternally loved His Son - infinitely loved His Son, intimately loved His Son; and eternally, infinitely, and intimately loves all of His sons, all of us. And His eternal Son wants to bring us all to glory so that we can see the manifestation of how much the Father loves Him, and so that we can also experience it ourselves. God cannot love His Son any more than He does; He cannot love us any more than He does. His mediatorial work, to bring us to glory, is to bring us into that incomprehensible love; and He will get us there.

Hebrews 7 says, “The former priests existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing.” They all died. “But Jesus” - on the other hand – “because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently; therefore, He is able to save *forever* those who draw near to God through Him, since He *always lives* to make intercession for us.” He’s able to get us to glory.

Patricia and I were in Scotland some months ago, and we were travelling around the borderlands in the south of Scotland with Iain and Jean Murray. And we were on a bit of a trip to discover some of the locations of the great ministry of Samuel Rutherford - obviously Iain Murray’s theologian and historian without equal, and had a special love for Rutherford. So we were chasing around the borderlands of Scotland and eventually ended up in Anwoth, a tiny, tiny village where Samuel Rutherford, probably the second greatest figure in the Scottish Reformation next to John Knox, had ministered so effectively for years. Very, very small, small little church; the walls were still there. We spent some time getting to know Samuel Rutherford.

In preparation for that trip, I read a biography of Rutherford, and he died in 1661. In that time of history, there was a very, very looming reality in everybody’s life, and that was death. People didn’t live very long, and there were all kinds of diseases, all kinds of plagues, all kinds of things that could take lives. They lived without a lot of earthly treasure, and they lived with a very stark reality that death was looming over everyone’s life. So they talked about that; they preached about that.

Samuel Rutherford said a lot about death and heaven. He talked about heaven; and when talked about heaven, he talked about Christ. He talked about what theologians called the “beatific vision,” the ultimate beatitude. The ultimate blessing is the vision of Christ in glory. That was Rutherford.

Two hundred years later, after Rutherford, there was a pastor in a free church, a Presbyterian church in Scotland, whose wife Anne – Anne Cousin was her name – was a Scottish poet. And Anne loved Samuel Rutherford’s writings two hundred years later, and she was writing hymns. She would write hymns for her husband’s church. And in 1854 she wrote a hymn, a poem, and the title of it was “The Last Words of Samuel Rutherford.”

That's an odd title for a hymn. It was based on his deathbed saying as he anticipated seeing the Lord. That hymn had nineteen verses. Six of them are in our new hymnal under the title "The Sands of Time are Sinking," which was the first line of the original nineteen verses. The hymn is a reflection on seeing Christ. The hymn ends with this line: "The Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land." That's how it ends. That's the vision you have to have.

John Owen, powerful English Puritan, was a contemporary of Samuel Rutherford, and he, like Rutherford and like many others, thought a lot about seeing Christ in heaven. John Owen wrote, "God in His immense essence is invisible to our corporeal eyes, and it will be so for eternity; we will never see Him. As also He is incomprehensible to our minds, for nothing can perfectly comprehend that which is infinite, but what is itself infinite. The blessed and blessing sight which we shall see of God will always be the face of Christ," so says John Owen, "the face of Christ."

We will see the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ in lighting the eternal heaven. We will see that glory and know that glory as a manifestation of divine love. We will be swept up in that glory. We will become reflectors of that glory. That glory will shine on us and off of us. We will radiate that glory through all of heaven, and we will also swim in that same love. We will be loved by the Father the same way He loves His eternal Son.

Father, we thank You for a wonderful morning and wonderful weeks looking in this chapter, and feel like we've been inadequate in grasping its immense realities. Lord, just the smallest grasp of Your garment is more than we could ever have hoped for. Thank You for the grace that redeems us, the grace that promises us this glorious heaven. We pray for those who have not confessed Christ, who resist, who hold out. Lord, may they see what awaits those who believe, and may You fill their hearts with dread for what awaits those who reject. Send us on our way, rejoicing for what is prepared for them that love Him. We ask and thank You for all these things in the name of Christ. Amen.