

Lessons From The Prayer Of Jesus

Introduction. This country has produced some of the greatest orators in history. Americans have always elected extraordinary and powerful orators to be President, and I have several examples I want to share with you.

John F. Kennedy, in his Inaugural Address, said, “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his address before Congress on December 8, 1941, said, “I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us.”

Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address, said, “It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Theodore Roosevelt, in his Duties of American Citizenship speech, said, “Nothing worth gaining is ever gained without effort. You can no more have freedom without striving and suffering for it than you can win success as a banker or a lawyer without labor and effort, without self-denial in youth and the display of a ready and alert intelligence in middle age. The people who say that they have not time to attend to politics are simply saying that they are unfit to live in a free community.”

Ronald Reagan, in his comments about the Space Shuttle Challenger, said, “The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning, as they prepared for the journey and waved goodbye and ‘slipped the surly bonds of earth’ to ‘touch the face of God.’”

But some of the most momentous words in history were spoken by Jesus in John 17. These words are so special because they record the prayer of the Son of God to His heavenly Father. It is the longest recorded prayer in the New Testament, and it shows what occupied the mind of God’s Son before He went to the cross.

The prayer is easy to outline. First, Jesus prays for Himself (vv. 1-5). Second, He prays for His disciples (vv. 6-19). Finally, He prays for all future disciples (vv 20-26). In this prayer are four wonderful, practical lessons that the religious world in general and all of us specifically could learn and apply.

I. Jesus Finished The Father’s Work

- A. Those who teach that God’s plan was thwarted when the Jews rejected Jesus are mistaken. Premillennialists believe that the church was God’s substitute for the prophesied kingdom.

- B. Jesus' mission was to bring God's message of saving grace into the world and ultimately die for the sins of humankind (v. 4). This was God's plan before the beginning of time (Ephesians 3:10-11).
- C. The prophets predicted it (Isaiah 53:4-9; Jeremiah 23:5-6). Jesus promised it (Luke 24:7; John 3:14). And the inspired writers affirmed it (Ephesians 1:3-10; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

II. God Used Death And Destruction For Glory And Victory

- A. In the shadow of the cross, Jesus prayed that He glorified the Father (vv. 1, 4). Even in death? Yes.
- B. In one of the great paradoxes of all time, God used the shame and suffering of the cross to highlight His power (Colossians 2:15), to save the world (Acts 5:30-31), and to teach us humble obedience (Hebrews 5:9) and self-sacrifice (Luke 9:23).
- C. Thus, Paul would write, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14; cp. 2 Corinthians 4:4-6).

III. God's Word Is Valuable

- A. Four times in this prayer Jesus refers to the word (vv. 6, 14, 17, 20). He said that the disciples were given the word; they kept the word; that God's word is truth; and that future believers would come to Him through the word.
- B. Without the word, we are left in the dark religiously. We are left to our own devices, opinions, and human wisdom. However, the word is our light (Psalm 119:105, 130). It illuminates, guides, directs, and dispels darkness. It reflects the wisdom of God and the character of Christ for us to follow.
- C. Philosophers and theologians tell us that truth is relative. They opine that there is no absolute truth. What is truth for me may not be truth for you. Truth changes; it is constantly in flux. The Barna Group found in 2009 that only about one-third of Americans believe in absolute moral truth.
- D. Yet, Jesus' words reveal the absurdity of that idea. God has given us His word, and it is the truth, and it will sanctify and set us apart (v. 17). Jesus affirms that He was the embodiment of truth (John 14:6). The truth would set us free from the shackles of Satan and the servitude of sin (Ephesians 6:12). And it is the truth that He sent the Holy Spirit to reveal to the apostles, which they recorded in the Bible (John 16:13; Ephesians 3:3-5). Truth is absolute, accurate, authoritative, unchanging — and beautiful for the souls of men.

IV. God Wants Religious Unity Among Believers

- A. Jesus prayed for oneness, for harmony among His followers.
 1. J. Gordon Melton is an American author, theologian, and the founding director of the Institute for the Study of American Religion. Currently, he's the Distinguished Professor of American Religious History with the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, where he resides.
 2. The author of more than 45 books, Melton is known for his encyclopedic knowledge of world religions, religious traditions in America, and his research into cults and extremely unusual religious groups. "In 1900 there

were 330 different religious groups,” Melton observed. “Now, there are over 2,000, and I find every one of them incredibly interesting.” Here are a few of the more unusual:

- a) “The Church of God Anonymous.”
 - b) ”The Embassy of Heaven.”
 - c) “The All-One-God-Faith Inc.”
 - d) ”The Church of the Mystery of Universal Wisdom.”
 - e) ”The Nudist Christian Church of the Blessed Virgin Jesus.”
3. Among mainstream Protestant groups there are 22 different kinds of Presbyterians, 42 various groups of Methodists, and 88 denominations that identify as Baptists.
- B. We are not to be divided into over 2,000 groups following different doctrines, engaging in conflicting practices, and wearing weird names. The Savior’s desire is that we may be one, just as He and the Father were one (vv. 21-23).
1. Unity is maintained and is therefore only possible by the preaching of the gospel and strict adherence to it.
 2. The apostles were faithful to this ministry.
 - a) There was a single message in New Testament times (1 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 16:17; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 Peter 4:11; 2 John 9-11).
 - b) Other scriptures also address the unanimity of truth (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 5:11, 17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3).
 - c) Truth has specific characteristics.
 - (1) It is discernible (Matthew 5:6; John 7:17; 1 John 2:20-21).
 - (2) It is knowable (John 8:32).
 - (3) It is identifiable (Romans 16:17; 1 John 4:5-6).
 - (4) It is duplicatable (Matthew 28:18-20).
 - (5) It is teachable (2 Timothy 2:2).

Conclusion. May Jesus’ prayer become our profession, purpose, and practice. As it does, we will be a more pure people, set for the defense of the gospel. But we do not want to leave our time together today without offering a chance to obey Christ. He died on the cross for our redemption (Hebrews 9:22, 28), and He will one day come again for you, so follow truth so He will declare, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21, 23).

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http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_poll5.htm for The Barna Group survey results