

May 17, 2026

John 17:1-11:

“What Jesus Desires for You”

- I. Our Inadequacy
- II. Christ Is More Than Adequate

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What Jesus Desires for You

John 17:1-11

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

These past couple of weeks, I have experienced one of the worst cases of writer's block I have had in more than three years of writing sermons. Oddly enough, those moments sometimes prepare a Pastor far more than he realizes at the time. There are times when a text of Scripture is difficult because it is confusing or challenging. But then there are texts like this one, where the difficulty comes from the exact opposite direction. The words are so profound, so beautiful, and so full of Christ that it almost feels impossible to know where to begin.

It was before a service that I mentioned this struggle to someone, and one thing led to another, leaving me trying to explain why this chapter had affected me so deeply. The more I studied Jesus' words, the more overwhelmed I became by the love of Christ revealed in them. Our Lord knew exactly what stood before Him. He knew the betrayal that was coming. He knew Judas was already moving toward his terrible act. He knew the disciples would scatter and deny Him. He knew the mockery, the crown of thorns, the nails, the agony, and the full weight of divine wrath that He would bear for the sins of the world. None of it would surprise Him. Nor was any of it hidden from Him.

And yet when Jesus prays here in John 17, there is no panic. There is no attempt to escape what is coming. There is no bargaining with the Father or pleading for another path. If we knew what He knew, we would collapse beneath the weight of it, and we would be consumed with fear. We would pray almost entirely about ourselves, about our suffering and preservation, and yet Christ speaks with a calmness that almost seems beyond comprehension. He goes willingly toward the cross because He knows what His suffering will accomplish. By His death, sinners will live. Christ knows that by His wounds the world will be reconciled to the Father. Truly, as the hymn says, "The Lamb goes uncomplaining forth."

As we continued talking, this person made another observation that struck me even more deeply. They said something to the effect of, "What overwhelms me even more than this prayer are the words Christ speaks from the cross itself. Even while He was hanging there in agony, nailed to the tree, struggling even to breathe, His words to the Father were still not centered on Himself. Even there, in the darkest suffering imaginable, He was interceding for His enemies: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

I. Our Inadequacy

That really is what makes the love of Christ so difficult for us to comprehend. Even in suffering, His heart is turned outward toward sinners, no matter how badly they have sinned. As the hour of His humiliation arrives, He is concerned about what lies ahead for the disciples at Pentecost and what that means for the future of His Church. With the cross standing directly before Him, His prayer is filled not with selfish fear, but with love, mercy, and the desire to save. Regarding this high priestly prayer of Christ, the theologian R.C.H. Lenski writes in his commentary on the Gospel of John,

"This prayer lies on a plane so exalted that no disciple can join in its utterance. Its serenity, its majesty, and its authority befit only the heart and lips of Him who is the Son. Before this prayer, all our prayers fade like tapers in the sun."

Indeed, not even the words of an experienced commentator like Lenski can fully capture such a magnificent moment. For here we are brought onto what we might call holy ground. The eternal Son of God, on the night before His suffering and death, lifts His eyes to Heaven and speaks to His Father. There is no hesitation in His words. Christ speaks here with perfect peace, perfect authority, and perfect confidence in the will of the Father. He speaks concerning those whom the Father has given Him. He speaks concerning His disciples and His people. As His hour has come, He reveals what He desires for them and ultimately, by their task of completing the New Testament scriptures, what He desires for us. In this prayer, we are allowed to hear the very heart of Christ laid open before us.

When we compare our own prayers to this prayer of our Lord, we quickly begin to see the difference. So often our prayers are consumed by the temporary and immediate things of this life. We pray about earthly concerns, daily troubles, bodily needs, anxieties, fears, and uncertainties. And our Lord graciously invites us to bring all these things before our heavenly Father. Yet in His prayer, Christ reveals what our deepest need truly is.

There is often a difference between what we want most urgently and what we need most deeply. We tend to focus on the things of this life because they press most heavily upon us. Without the Holy Spirit's intercession, our prayers are inadequate. But here, on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus reveals what He desires most for His people. And what is remarkable is that only a short time later, on the Day of Pentecost, we begin to see the Father answering this very prayer through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What does Christ ask the Father to give you? Not wealth. Not earthly success. Not even freedom from suffering. He prays that you would know the Father through Him. That His people would be one. And that they would be kept in the Father's name.

II. Christ Is More Than Adequate

The comfort of this chapter is not found in the strength of our prayers, but in the perfection of Christ's prayer for us. What we lack, Christ possesses fully, and where we are weak, He is perfect. It is true that our understanding is so often clouded by judgment and that our love so often turns inward toward ourselves. But regardless of all of that, Christ remains steadfastly fixed upon sinners even now. The perfect work of Jesus is not merely adequate; He is more than adequate. He is the perfect High Priest who intercedes for His people with complete authority.

As written in Hebrews,

“But he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.” (Hebrews 7:24–26)

With that verse from Hebrews in mind, notice how confidently Christ speaks throughout this prayer. He says, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” Even before the nails pierce His hands and feet, Christ speaks with absolute certainty regarding the salvation He is about to accomplish. From this, it becomes evident that the cross is the very purpose for which the Son of God came into the world. Jesus goes willingly because He knows that through His suffering, the Father will be glorified and sinners will be redeemed.

And if you are wondering what Christ desires to give to you through that sure and certain sacrifice, he answers the question here in his prayer. “This is eternal life,” He says, “that they know you, the only true God,

and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Our deepest need is not merely improved circumstances or temporary comfort. Our deepest need is reconciliation with God Himself. As we know far too well and need to be reminded of daily, sin has separated mankind from the Father. By nature, we neither know Him rightly nor desire Him rightly. We fear the consequences of sin, but left to ourselves, we do not truly love God's holiness. And no amount of earthly success, wealth, health, or comfort can solve that problem. But Christ can solve the problem. And He does.

Jesus says, “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me.” In other words, the Son came to make the Father known. If you want to know what God is like, you do not begin with the imaginations of sinful men. You look to Christ as the One who has welcomed sinners, forgiven the guilty, shown mercy to the broken, and wept over the lost. Above all, we look to the One who willingly carried our sins to the cross and even made provision for what would come to follow His glorious resurrection. It is in both the death and resurrection of Jesus that the Father is fully revealed. Not as distant or uncaring, but as the God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

As written in Colossians,

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:15, 19–20, ESV)

And what a comfort this is for the Christian. Because if our salvation depended upon the adequacy of our own prayers, our own devotion, or our own spiritual strength, none of us could stand. Our faith can waver and grow cold, and our hearts can become distracted by the cares of this life. Even the disciples whom Jesus prayed for here would soon flee in fear. Yet Christ remains faithful by uplifting and restoring them, and uplifting and restoring all who would be brought by Word and Spirit to receive His love and mercy.

Before you ever struggled beneath the weight of guilt, temptation, doubt, or fear, Christ already knew every weakness that would cling to you. Still, He prayed for His people. Still, He desired that sinners would be saved through Him. That is why your comfort rests in Christ's hold upon you. The Son of God who prayed this prayer did not fail in the work His Father gave Him to do. He drank the cup of wrath completely. And now the risen and ascended Christ still intercedes for His Church.

What did Jesus desire for you? He desired, above everything else, your eternal salvation. And because the One praying these words is the crucified and risen Son of God, these desires are not uncertain wishes. They are the saving will of the Savior who loved you and gave Himself for you. Praise be to our great High Priest!

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott