



**Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church**  
Sanford, North Carolina

Dr. Mark E. Gaskins  
Senior Pastor

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**The Last Will and Testament of Jesus Christ**  
**John 17**

What a marvelous, awesome prayer!

It's been called Jesus' high priestly prayer, or his prayer of consecration before his death. He prayed it the night before his death in the presence of eleven of his disciples—Judas had already left to carry out his betrayal of Jesus.

Now this isn't the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane that we read about in the other Gospels. This is a confident prayer of consecration, as Jesus talks with the Father about fulfilling his mission and makes his last requests on that side of the cross for his followers. And he does all this in his disciples' hearing.

It's almost as though Jesus is giving his Last Will and Testament.

You know the purpose of a will—in our system, it's a legal document that specifies how a person wants their earthly belongings distributed or disposed of after their death. It's legally binding. Only extraordinary circumstances like proof that the person was not mentally competent when the will was written will stand up in a court of law to break the will or nullify it. If a person dies without a will, the state has one waiting for them, and their property is disposed of by a preset formula.

Jesus knew he was going to die and then be raised and then go back to the Father. So he wanted his disciples to know what he wanted for them, what he *willed* for them and to them. And so the night before he died, Jesus expressed to his Father his requests for himself and his followers.

It's really kind of hard to fathom that even though Jesus prayed for himself in this prayer, the vast majority of this prayer was for his followers—the eleven and the church—rather than for himself. But that's how he prayed!

His prayer falls into four broad parts, though the lines sometimes seem blurred . . .

- In verses 1-5, he prays for himself.
- In verses 6-10, he prays for his eleven disciples.
- In verses 20-24, he prays for future believers.
- And in verses 25-26, he concludes his prayer.

But if we look at it from just a little different angle, *Jesus' prayer tells us what he wills to and for us who follow him*. There are four things.

### ***His Father's protection***

First, he wills us *his Father's protection in the world* (17:6-19).

When a citizen of one country visits a hostile foreign country, the citizen's protection is not always guaranteed. His home government may do all it can, and issue travel warnings and advice. But sometimes the worst happens.

The New Testament (*e.g.*, 1 Peter) often describes Christians as strangers or aliens or exiles in the world—in other words, we are non-citizens living in a strange land. We live in a world that's hostile to Jesus, his gospel, and his way.

But God protects us as we trust in him. He may not keep us from hostility or harm, but he does keep us *in the midst of it*, being present with us and seeing us through it, as he did and does with those who are persecuted or even martyred for Christ.

That's what Jesus prayed for that night—protection for his people.

He asked the Father to protect us from division, so that we may be one, even as he and the Father are one (17:11).

He also prayed that the Father would protect us from the evil one, from Satan (17:15). He didn't ask for his followers to be taken out of the world, but that he would enable us to be faithful in the world as the Father keeps us from the evil one.

And Jesus prayed that the Father would consecrate his followers in the truth of God's word (17:17-19). In other words, Jesus desired that through this truth his followers would be set apart by God for his purposes in the world.

Now Jesus was focusing here on his remaining eleven disciples. But in reality, his prayer for protection is also for us as well—for all those whom the Father has given to him.

### ***Unity***

The second thing Jesus wills us is *the unity he has with the Father* (17:20-23).

This was part of his prayer for protection, but in verses 20-23, he emphasizes it for the whole church. In fact, it's a continual emphasis throughout the prayer.

And yet we Christians so often seem so divided!

It's directly contrary to Jesus' will—to what he prayed for, what was on his mind the night before he was to die on the cross!

Now he's not talking about *organizational* unity, but *organic* unity. Organic unity is based on our common faith in and fellowship with Jesus Christ! All true believers are one in him, whether we recognize it or not! The reality is there, but we must practice it!

I remember seeing a cartoon once—I can't remember where—that pictured King Arthur's Roundtable cut in slices like a pie, and the slices turned outward with the knights' backs turned to each other! Unfortunately, it seems like it's often that way in the Lord's church!

Listen to me carefully here—*division among Christians is contrary to what Jesus willed for us!* It is in direct contradiction to what he prayed for that night before his death! And when we are the source or the cause of that division, we are treading on dangerous ground!

This unity that Jesus prayed for is grounded in the unity of the Father and Son—their relationship as they abide in union with each other. This unity is for the purpose of mission—“that the world may believe that you sent me,” Jesus said (17:21).<sup>1</sup>

Don't underestimate the importance of unity for mission! How can we embody Christ's presence to the world if we're divided? How can we bear a winsome witness about Jesus when we have unresolved conflicts? How many times have people outside the church responded when

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

someone tries to witness to them: “If that’s what it means to be a Christian, I don’t want any part of it!”

Division and disunity has been a problem from the beginning, even among the apostles. And ultimately, its source always turns out to be self-will, self-centeredness, and self-interest. Somebody wants to be more important, somebody wants to have power, or somebody wants to advance his or her own personal beliefs, agenda, or advantage.

Now we have to realize that Jesus wills *unity*, not necessarily *uniformity*! Unity incorporates individuality (not individualism), but uniformity stifles it. God created us all different for a purpose!

It’s like a choir. Sometimes there is harmony, sometimes everyone sings in unison. Both unison and harmony are appropriate at different times. In the church, sometimes there must be unison (such as on the foundational truths of our faith). But most often harmony expresses the message in a more powerful and beautiful way—different notes, yet the same song! But there are limits even with harmony, since not all notes blend. In the church, if we’re not singing according to the Master’s music, singing notes that blend in harmony, then there is discord! And Jesus’ will is dishonored!

Both unison and harmony can equal unity, and what Jesus wills for us is a unity that’s grounded in his relationship with the Father!

### ***See and share his glory***

The third thing Jesus wills is that *we will one day see his glory and share in it* (17:22-24).

Jesus prayed that those whom the Father had given him would one day be with him and share his glory. Friends, that’s the Christian hope—to be with Christ in eternity, seeing and sharing his glory as we are made like him, brought to fullness in the resurrection (1 John 3:1-3)!

Isn’t it encouraging to know that Jesus prayed for this, and that he prayed it when he was facing such difficult circumstances? We can draw much hope and strength from this prayer! It focuses us toward eternity and what awaits us there.

Fanny Crosby, the great hymn writer, contracted an eye infection when she was just a little baby. The physician who treated her put hot poultices on her inflamed eyelids to help with the infection. It cured the infection, but unfortunately, it was the wrong way to do it. It scarred her eyes and blinded Fanny for life. Fanny once said about her blindness:

It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.

If I had a choice, I would still choose to remain blind . . . for when I die, the first face I will ever see will be the face of my blessed Savior.<sup>2</sup>

I think she understood something of what Jesus was praying for us here!

### ***His Father’s Love***

The last thing Jesus wills us is *his Father’s love* (17:25-26).

This possession of the Father’s love is based on Jesus’ revelation of the Father and the believer’s knowledge of Jesus through personal experience. As one of my teachers, Dr. Charles

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.eaec.org/faithhallfame/fanny\\_crosby.htm](http://www.eaec.org/faithhallfame/fanny_crosby.htm).

Allen, used to put it, this subjective experience has to be confirmed by the objective witness of God's revelation as it comes to us in Scripture. In other words, if our experience doesn't line up with what Scripture says about how God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, then there is a problem with our experience!

Our experience of the Father's love is found in our union with Jesus Christ. It's to be lived out in our lives as we love others! As John put it in 1 John 4:19, "We love, because he first loved us."

Now that's not always easy. Some folks just aren't very loveable! Sometimes like a wall-plaque Jo Ann and I saw many years ago that said: "God loves you, and I'm trying!"

No, it's not always easy, but when we experience his love, he enables us to love others, not necessarily to *feel* loving affection toward them, but to *act* in loving ways toward them, seeking their truly best interests. And that's what Jesus wills for us!

So how well are we honoring his will? These things that he wills have to come to us from the Father as his gracious gifts. We can never do them or accomplish them on our own or by our own power.

But to receive them, we have to be open, obedient, and submissive to the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting only in him, depending completely on him. Then we'll experience these things in our lives and our life together.

It's his will!

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