

## Remembering Our Great High Priest (Jn 17.1-26) Part 5

*Jesus is Our Life-giving King (Jn 17.2-3)*

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*10-15-2006*

### Introduction

When we come to a communion message, we come knowing that Jesus is the *center* of every doctrine and the foundation of every sermon, but we also know that He is not the *subject* of every doctrine or the subject of every sermon. We might say that Jesus is the central reference point and foundation of every sermon, *but at the Table, He is the subject* because He said, come and partake of this symbolic feast “in remembrance of me.” Because we remember Him all the time, there must be some distinct and special remembering in view in the command to remember Him in communion.

Therefore, when we preach communion remembrances, we give special priority to the gospel remembrances, the Gospels of the NT, in order to focus in a distinct way on the Lord Jesus. Accordingly, today, I am continuing a series of communion messages on the view of Jesus that John gives us in chapter 17 of his Gospel. The title of the series is “Remembering Our Great High Priest.” Approaching the text this way is like putting on sunglasses that color everything we see. We put on the “remember me” glasses and they cause us to see things we might not otherwise see, or to accent things we might not otherwise accent. These glasses take us from blurred to clear focus for communion remembering. The focus for this message is “Jesus, Our Life-giving King.”

**Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (Jn 17.1-3).**

According to this text, Jesus offers Himself to the hour of the cross for the people the Father gave to Him. He did this in order to give *them* eternal life in the exercise of His universal and sovereign authority. This kingly authority is life giving. That is, because He has this sovereign authority, He is the giver of life. Thus, as we will now see, His giving of life is covenantal, powerful, gracious, and warm with love.

### 1A. Our King’s life giving is covenantal

Two things indicate the presence of the covenant idea in our Lord’s Prayer.

#### 1) Contrast

There is a contrast here between the particular and the universal. That fact could not be made plainer than by affirming the purpose of His universal sovereignty, specifically, that He has this Lordship over every human being for the precise purpose of giving eternal life to the Father’s elect people: **you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him** (17.2). God gave particular people from the fallen human family to the Lord Jesus. That they are fallen is evident in the fact that they lack life; eternal life is something that Christ must give them, and to give it to *them* is a central goal in His coming into the world as Messiah sent from the Father. Thus, His life giving arises from the eternal covenant of redemption: “to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (17.2).

#### 2) Design

Jesus came into the world on a mission to the fallen human family to give eternal life to the given ones by means of His sacrifice on the cross. Thus, Jesus pleads acceptance of His sacrifice based on this covenantal design. Jesus is in the process of fulfilling that eternal covenant to secure eternal redemption by blood (Heb 9.12, **he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption**). His blood is the blood of the eternal covenant (Heb 13.20). Accordingly, He offers Himself as

the sacrifice for specific sinners in the great high priestly prayer. Having universal authority, Jesus goes to the cross for the particular purpose of saving a particular people. Before they were born, before Jesus came into the world, these particular people were His brothers and sisters by covenant; they were His sheep by God's gift, as Jesus said, **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.** <sup>28</sup> **I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.** <sup>29</sup> **My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand** (Jn 10.27-29). Before He came into the world and before the Spirit saved any of them (before any of them became children of God by faith), they were already His covenant children. Hebrews 2 makes this point emphatically:

**For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,** <sup>12</sup> **saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."** <sup>13</sup> **And again, "I will put my trust in him."** **And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."** <sup>14</sup> **Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,** <sup>15</sup> **and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.** <sup>16</sup> **For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.** <sup>17</sup> **Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people** (Heb 2.11-17).

It is interesting to consider how the writer of Hebrews can refer to all the children of Christ as "the offspring of Abraham." Every person for whom Jesus died and made propitiation is the offspring of Abraham because God brings the eternal covenant to pass through His covenant with Abraham. That is, God promised Abraham and Sarah an offspring in their old age, Isaac, and through him, Christ. In this way, Abraham and his descendents become a blessing to all families of the earth. Accordingly, Matthew begins his Gospel with these words, **The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham** (1.1). He traces the ancestry of Jesus Christ back through David to Abraham. Wonderfully, our king's life giving authority is covenantal, and that tells us that Jesus is the covenant keeping Son of God who is faithful to God and to us.

## 2A. His life giving is powerful

Two things show that His life giving is powerful.

### 1) Securing *eternal life*

By means of an agreement between Jesus and the Father, Jesus received the appointment of Sabbath Lordship or universal sovereignty over all flesh in order to give His life on the cross for particular lost sinners. In harmony with that agreement that goes back before the creation of the world, Jesus presented Himself as an offering for sin to secure *the death of death* for those the Father gave Him. By the death of death in His death on the cross in their place, Jesus secured the gift of eternal life for the Father's elect. That is why we speak of the redemption He obtained as "eternal redemption" (Heb 9.12). Salvation in Christ is deliverance *forever* from slavery to sin and eternal death. Jesus loved His covenant children with an everlasting love. Therefore, as Sabbath Lord (as universal sovereign), and *with power*, He gives them *everlasting* life. It takes Almighty power to secure eternal life.

### 2) *Securing* eternal life

His life giving is effectual; he obtained (secured) eternal redemption (Heb 9.12). This makes us probe more deeply into how He gives eternal life to His children. We know how He gives it once we know what it is. Eternal life is to know the only true God and the Savior-Messiah the Father sent. For the Father's elect that He gave to the Son to have the life that Jesus secured for them on the cross, they must come to know the only true God and His Messiah.

Therefore, to say that our Lord's life giving is effectual is simply to say that our subjective heart response is included in what He purchased on the cross. His life giving would be ineffectual if it was a mere offer of life, but it is much more than that. Calling it effectual is stabbing at that "much more." In other words, the giving of eternal life includes the giving of knowledge, of saving knowledge (or there would be no giving of life).

Pulling these things together, we should note that Jesus offered himself in this high priestly prayer to the cross for the purpose of granting eternal life, and for that to be accomplished he must look to our subjective need of a saving knowledge of God. Our knowledge of God as the only true God and our knowledge of Jesus as Savior-Messiah is the gift of His work on the cross. His death secured our subjective response, our very knowing; His death is the key in the life giving bestowal of saving knowledge.

The Westminster Confession of Faith captures the meaning of God's effectual call and clearly relates it to our understanding or coming to know God or as they put it, "to understand the things of God":

**All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace (WCF 10.1).**

This is simply saying that Jesus death on the cross was effectual securing everything that His eternal covenant people need to come to an eternal saving knowledge of God.

It is necessary because unless the death of Christ secured the bestowal of saving knowledge then He would not have secured eternal life for his covenant children. He would then fail to complete His mission on earth; He would fail to exercise His universal sovereign authority properly and effectively. That is impossible.

In order to secure, obtain, and guarantee eternal life (eternal redemption, Heb 9.12) for His covenant children, He must also secure the saving means as well. If we need a saving knowledge (and we do), then Jesus secured our very coming to know the only true God and Jesus Messiah. Therefore, in the words of the Westminster Confession, it is "by His *almighty power*" that God saves His elect "*determining* them to that which is good, and *effectually drawing* them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being *made willing* by His grace." He gives life to His covenant children *powerfully* by "*enlightening their minds* spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God."

### 3A. His life giving is gracious

It has to be gracious (and powerful) for otherwise no one would come to Christ. We would not love Him because we love only ourselves. In our natural state, we view Him as our enemy and He sees us as enemies. Fallen men love darkness and hate the light and will not come to the light (Jn 3.19; cf. Jn 2:23-25; 3:19-20; 6:44, 64-65).

Paul speaks of our death (Eph. 2;1) which for John is remedied by the Savior's call to us in our tombs. The quickening (Eph. 2:5) spoken of by Paul is illustrated by the miracle embodiment of gospel at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11). To what does this quickening bring us? It brings us near to God, into His presence, and into the household of God (Eph 2.13-19). It brings us from darkness in our understanding (Eph 4.18) to a renewing of the mind (4.23), and Paul thus says that when we became Christians we "learned" Christ (4.20; we come to *know* Him). This is telling us that His death secured the conquest of our hatred, disobedience, unbelief, and fleeing.

What Jesus certainly does for His covenant children is grant them 1) to know God as the only true God and acknowledge Him savingly. 2) Also, He grants them to know Him (Jesus), to know that God sent Him to keep covenant in obedience unto death, even death on the cross.

He not only gives us life by knowing Him. He also gives us the knowing that gives and defines eternal life. The gift is unmistakably and utterly gracious to undeserving, helpless, and rebellious sinners.

### 4A. His life giving is warm with love

To appreciate this point, we must consider what it means to know God (v. 3). We have to focus here because Jesus connects giving eternal life with coming to know God. To know God

does not mean that we have knowledge *about* the true God. It means more than having knowledge *about* the Messiah.

A good way to illustrate the difference between knowing God and knowing about God is to make a comparison with a king or a President that you know in a sense, but that you do not know in another sense. My wife, for example, knows the President of the United States better than I do because she has corresponded with him, and she recently received a letter back from the President. It “tickled her pink” to open the letter. You should have been there to see her face brighten up when she saw the Presidential seal. Still, you all know what I mean when I say that she does not know President Bush. You know that I mean she does not know him personally. She knows him and she does not know him. This makes us wonder what it means to know someone personally. Whatever else it may mean, it surely involves meeting the person, coming face to face, and having someone introduce you. What else might be involved in this personal encounter?

Given the dignity of a President, we should include the fact that the personal meeting must transcend some obstacles, especially the obstacle of distance. In other words, knowing someone personally means that we have access into that person’s presence. Of course, you could be in the presence of someone without an introduction. This happened to me a few years ago at a radio station in Detroit. I had some masonry repair work to do for the station. As I waited in a lobby for the person in charge of construction, I looked across the room and there sat a television star from the show *Bonanza* (it was the father in the show). It was as if he stepped out of the TV and into the room and sat down. I was in his presence, but, surprisingly, he did not notice me. I did notice him, but I did not run across the room to meet him. We were there for ten minutes or so, and you know what, he made no effort to introduce himself to me.

To know someone personally means that we have to meet the person in a person-to-person encounter. Each has to be aware of the other and take notice of the other. There must be an introduction. There must be a point in time when you meet. Of course, there can be no personal introduction unless you are present with the person and the person is present with you. Clearly, being in the presence of someone does not mean that you know the person. Personal knowledge includes a number of things: access, presence, and an introduction.

There is also the ingredient of intimacy in personal knowledge, and it is voluntary because it involves not only the intimate sharing of your person, but it also involves *letting* someone into your thoughts by making yourself known to the other. Thus, you establish lines of communication, and the communication is ongoing. Moreover, voluntary intimacy translates into friendship. You do not establish lines of communication with an enemy; you do not share your person or your thoughts with an adversary. To do that, you must have friendship; you must be friends. Knowing someone personally therefore at least includes access, presence, introduction, intimacy, and ongoing communication.

To add one more element to round things off, knowing someone personally, having access to their presence, having lines of communication, and sharing thoughts of the heart is love. To know in a rich biblical sense is to love (i.e. knowing as intimate sexual love, Gen 4.1 and knowing as distinguishing electing love, Amos 6.2; Rom 8.29).

It puts things in perspective when we think through the case of a person who pays a lot of money for a photograph that shows him shaking hands with the President (as if they are best buds). Okay, they are in one another’s presence *for less than a minute*, an introduction occurred, and they are smiling like old friends. However, the access, the presence, and the introduction are not sufficient to establish knowledge. This photo opt does not allow the little person to say, “I know the President of the United States.” He cannot say that meaningfully. What is missing? Intimacy, mutual communication, friendship, and love are missing.

To *know* God involves all of the above. It involves access to His presence, meeting Him by some introduction, the intimacy in which He reveals Himself, and ongoing communication. He takes note of us. God comes to us and introduces Himself to us. He communicates His

thoughts to us, and shares His wisdom with us. He makes us aware of His presence with us in such a way that we know Him. He communicates with us and enables us to communicate with Him. He shares His thoughts with us with love and friendship. His life giving is warm with love.

Our coming to know God, our taking notice of Him being aware of His presence with us, is the result of the saving death of Christ. By the cross, Jesus brings us into the presence of God where God introduces Himself to us and where Jesus introduces Himself to us. In other words, by His death, Jesus secured the certainty of effectual calling. By His offering His own blood in our place, He did all that was necessary and sufficient to bring to pass that moment in time when God called us to Himself. He noticed us, called us into His presence, made Himself known to us, and established an “eternal life long” friendship with us.

### Conclusion

Looking through our communion sunglasses, we come to these concluding remarks in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. We remember that our high priest is the great king, universal sovereign, and Sabbath Lord. As our king, He is the giver of life, eternal life. Moreover, in giving of eternal life to you and me, He is faithful with covenant keeping faithfulness before God and on our behalf. He is gracious and loving. Our priest is our gracious, faithful, and powerful covenant-keeping king and friend. **To Him be all glory and love now and forevermore, amen.**

What then shall we say to these things?

#### 1) I need Him

You are saying in symbol what you should be praying in heart: I need the Lord Jesus more than I need daily bread. I need this great high priest and king who gave His body and blood for my salvation. I need the life giving priest-king who is faithful, powerful, gracious and warm with love. O Lord Jesus, I need you.

#### 2) I own Him as my very own

By taking the bread and wine to your palate, you symbolically appropriate the body and blood of Christ. In this way, you manifest the prayer of appropriation saying, “I own the Lord Jesus as my prophet, priest, and king. He is not merely a great high priest, a great king, and great prophet. He is mine-loving me, seeking me, finding me, keeping me, He is mine. Therefore, I submit all that I am and hope to be to Him. I submit my will, my soul, and my all to His service. O Lord Jesus, I give myself away to you to be yours forever. I entrust myself to you. I cling to your work on the cross, I submit to the learning and doing of your word.”

#### 3) I own His family as my family

It is so easy to speak about being one loaf, but the rubber meets the road when we become what we are, when we display the kind of conduct that shows that we are one loaf. When we take of the single loaf, this illustrates our participation in Christ. That is, it illustrates our joint participation in His family. He is our elder brother and He is the king. That means that we are a royal family. In the family, we need to love one another as He loves us. He opens Himself up to us and shares His thoughts with us. Therefore, we should do this with one another; we should not be strangers in the family, but we should have personal knowledge of one another in a context that is warm with love. How can we aim at anything less for our life-giving king said, “love one another as I have loved you.” O Lord Jesus, I own your family as my family.

In this spirit, let us eat and drink in remembrance of our risen Lord Jesus.