

Remember: Jesus is Your Priest (Jn.17.1-26)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

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8-16-2009

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father" (Jn. 17.1)

Introduction

Note some things in the opening verse of John 17 that bring the passage before us in an introductory way.

A. This is a prayer of Jesus

John 17 records a prayer of our Lord; it is the most extensive prayer that we have on record: **Jesus...lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said** (v. 1b); He lifted His eyes and spoke all the words of this chapter.

B. This is a prayer of our Lord in the hour of the cross: **When Jesus had spoken these words** (v. 1a). "These words" refer to the Upper Room Discourse (Jn. 14-16) where Jesus instituted the Christian Passover Meal, which is the Lord's Table. Soon after leaving the Upper Room, He experienced Gethsemane, endured the injustice of a false trial, and suffered crucifixion. The detailed prayer gives us the thoughts of our Lord when the dark shadow of the cross cast its frightful image over Him, marking Him as a prized target.

C. This is an intimate prayer in the hour of the cross for when Jesus lifted His eyes to heaven He said, "**Father**" (v. 1c). He directly speaks this way to the Father four more times (5, 11, 21, 25) and throughout the prayer we hear the intensely personal language of I, and me, you and your. At the end of verse one, Jesus expresses His personal willingness to face the hour of crucifixion: **Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you** (17.1b).

D. This intimate prayer in the hour of the cross reveals Jesus to you who trust in Him. It reveals Him to you as *your* priest. Remember, He is your priest. Just consider the welcome that you have into the presence of the Father and Son. You overhear this intimate pouring out of the Son's heart to the Father. Moreover, He draws you into this awesome conversation of God the Son just days before He died on the cross. He had this prayer put on the record for you, to share His thoughts with you, so that you would know that He is there for you as your mediator.

E. This intimate prayer at the time of the cross has the design of revealing your priest to you in two fundamental ways: Jesus is your priest by sacrifice and by intercession. Accordingly, we will consider these two things today: 1) Jesus is your priest by sacrifice, and 2) Jesus is your priest by intercession.

1A. Jesus is your priest by sacrifice

The divisions of the chapter are 17.1-11a and 17.11b-26. There is a definite shift in thought midway through vs.11. You pick this up when you notice that although the prayer begins in verse one, there is *no specific petition for the church* in the prayer until we get to 11b where Jesus expresses the first of a number of petitions: **keep them in your name** (11b). The specific petitions show Jesus as your priest by intercession, but what do we have in the first eleven verses? In three words, we have His offering, His commitment, and His mediation.

1) His offering

In 17.1-11a, Jesus offers Himself as the sacrifice for His people. He first presents Himself to the Father as the offering, and per the context, as the Passover Lamb. Therefore, it is the hour in which the Passover lamb is to be killed. That is the hard truth. In the context of the transformation of Passover into Communion, Jesus said, **this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins** (Mat 26.28). The linkage with the Passover brings into view the inseparability of the hour of glory, the cross, departure, accomplishment; it brings together love, communion, and thus Passover sacrifice, the sacrifice of sacrifices for sinners, for you and me,

for the forgiveness of our sins. The "hour" informs us that the climax of His redemptive work has come. Wicked hands will take the true Passover Lamb and slay Him while His disciples run from His side in fear ("friends through fear, his cause disowning"). The shadow of the cross looms large. The dark clouds of Golgotha's hill are quickly forming. The stage is set; the hour of *sacrifice* has arrived.

Clearly, His prayer has the cross at its center. We know that because He states in verse one that **the hour has come**. This is the dreaded hour for which He came into the world, the hour when the grain of wheat will fall into the ground and die in order to bear much fruit (Jn.12.24). You will remember that Jesus recoiled from this hour in anticipation of it, saying, "**Save me from this hour**" and then saying, "**But for this purpose I have come to this hour**" (Jn.12.27).

2) His commitment

Furthermore, when He says, **Father the hour has come, glorify your Son** (17.1), there is more than a simple acknowledgement of the hour; it involves submission to it. It involves commitment to suffering the deepest humiliation as the appointed path to the highest exaltation. Committing Himself to the appointed pathway shows us that He grounds His self-sacrifice in the eternal covenant (17.4, **I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do**). He is on a mission with work to do that has its roots in times eternal. To fulfill the eternal covenant, Jesus presents Himself to the cross for the given ones, that is, for the particular sinners given to Him by the Father in the eternal covenant of redemption (1b-2, 6, **Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him...yours they were and you gave them to me**). Per the pact of salvation (the *pactum salutis*, the agreement, covenant of salvation), the Father gave the Son universal authority over each and every human being for a precise purpose, namely, to give eternal life to the people the Father chose, owned for Himself (**yours they were**, 6b), and gave to the Son. Clearly, the cross is the place where Jesus did His work for His children by covenant, and the purpose of this sacrifice is the giving of eternal life to all the given ones. How do we identify the given ones? Giving them eternal life involves giving them a saving knowledge of God: **And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent** (17.3). You are a given one, a child of Christ by the eternal covenant if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is the risen Lord of glory (cf. Rom.10.9-10).

3) His mediation

Therefore when you hear Jesus speak about how He completed His work by manifesting the name and glory of the Father to His disciples, you know that you are in view in these words. He speaks about all disciples when He speaks about the apostles: ⁶ **"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me** (17.6-8). When He goes on to state that His sacrificial offering of Himself to the cross is not for the world, but for the given ones, He has in mind all His disciples by election, both the apostles and the church they represent: ⁹ **I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you** (17.9-11). He has the fact in mind that the church, built on the apostles as representatives and foundation, has a journey to make through this world before arriving at the heavenly Canaan. Jesus has the time between His comings in mind.

Summary: He mediated for you by sacrifice and that mediation by death on the cross secured your eternal salvation, but it did not immediately bring you into the Promised Land. His death secured your saving knowledge of God, so, the cross explains why you now know Him when earlier in your life you opposed Him. It explains your saving faith that He authors and finishes (Heb.12.2; Jn.6.44). Still, coming to know Him is just the beginning of your Christian

foot race. Concern for the time between, for your safe arrival in glory underlies the words of 11a: **I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.** Note that both death and resurrection are now immediately and certainly in front of our Lord in the way He states that He is no longer in the world (by sacrificial death) and He is going to the Father (by victorious resurrection). His love for His church (**they are in the world**; they remain in the world generation by generation until I return), for you and me, leads Jesus to make a number of specific petitions for you as your priest. To that part of the prayer we now turn.

2A. Jesus is your high priest by intercession

Again, the two sections of the prayer are 17.1-11a and 17.11b-26. As we said, there is a definite shift in thought midway through vs.11. You pick this up when you notice that although the prayer begins in verse one, there is *no specific petition for the church* in the prayer until we get to 11b where Jesus begins making petition: **keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one** (11b). What do we have in 1-11a? In the first section, we have the record of Jesus as your priest giving Himself to die in your place as the offering on the altar of sacrifice. Now there is a transition from intercession by offering to intercession by specific petitions based on the offering.

We need to keep these things together in our thinking. We have *two halves of a single intercession* that is by priestly sacrifice and by priestly petition. One more thing we should keep in mind is the fact that His entire priestly work is for all disciples: for the apostles then and the church now; it is for the apostles and all who will believe through their word. Accordingly, He prays for all the given ones, apostles and all believers (**17.2, to all whom you have given him; 17:6, the people whom you gave me out of the world; 17:20, for those who will believe in me through their word**) He prays for His children by eternal covenant in contrast to the world, those not given to Him, for whom He plainly states He does not pray (**17:9, I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours**).

Therefore, in 17.11b-26, Jesus shifts in thought to offering petitions as the advocate for His covenant people. He petitions the Father *on the basis of His sacrifice* asking for four things for us: preservation (17.11), sanctification (17.17), unification (17.21), and glorification (17.24). As we meditate on each, you have the opportunity to absorb into your hearts more of the love of God that encircles your pathway before and behind to find knowledge that is too wonderful for your heart to take in; it is too high to attain (**Psalm 139:2-6** ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up... ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways...⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.).

1) First, Jesus petitions your preservation in 17.11b-15 (**Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.** ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one). Just as He did not lose a single apostle, except Judas to fulfill Scripture, likewise not a single given one will be lost. His plan is that we remain in the world but protected from the evil one. Because of His intercession for you, the greatest and darkest evil in this world cannot defeat you. Therefore, under your feet is the roadway of joy: you have His word that you may have His joy, for He says, **that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves** (13b).

2) Second, He petitions your sanctification in 17.16-19 (¹⁶ **They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.** ¹⁷ **Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.** ¹⁸ **As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.** ¹⁹ **And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth**). There are many things here but note how pointedly Jesus relates His word, your growth in holiness and His death on the cross. Because of His intercession you will make progress in holy living over your journey through this world. That progress is by His word, which is truth, and your sanctification

in truth is why He consecrated Himself. What does that mean? It means that He dedicated Himself to suffering in death on the cross in your place for your advancement in godly living. If that was a primary focus to which our Lord dedicated Himself, then how deeply and fully ought you to make advancement in godly living a focus in your walk with Him.

3) Third, He petitions your unification in 17.20-23 (²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me). He includes you with the apostles because His prayer is for the apostles and all who will believe **through their word** (v. 20). He seeks your oneness with one another in a glorious unity that involves nothing less than the saving of the very world. Today, you are a little flock; tomorrow you will be the world.

4) Fourth, He petitions your glorification in 17.24 (**Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory**). These are heart-warming words to all the children of the eternal covenant: He desires by resolute and effectual petition that you, He says, **may be with me where I am**. These are words rich with promise: **with me where I am**. Then a still higher note is struck when He states that His goal for you is that you see His glory. This is the beautiful vision; as a blessed man or woman, you shall see God. You will see Him and live; you will see Him and be fully fashioned in His image. You shall be like Him for you shall see Him as He is. Jesus secured your glorification when He died on the cross and He sees to its full and final realization by His continual intercession for you as your priest. Remember, He is your faithful high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek because, by His resurrection, He now lives and intercedes for you in the power of an indestructible life (Heb.7.16).

Conclusion

Jesus closes the prayer with an expression of confidence and loving commitment in 17.25-26 (**O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them**).

The prayer opens with a welcome to come and listen to this marvelous conversation. The prayer ends with our Lord's determined resolve to share His knowledge of the Father with us. On the sure basis of His Passover sacrifice, He will continue to reveal the Father's glory to all that the Father gave to Him. He will keep us by continuing to reveal the Father to us to the end of the age (**I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known**). This is a saving revelation that plants God's love in our hearts (**that the love with which you have loved me may be in them**). Ultimately, this is very personal because as the perfect revelation of the Father, the incarnate God prayerfully commits Himself to dwell in His people and never leave them. Thus, He closes the prayer with these profoundly simple words: **and I in them**. His love for us is truly amazing love. It may seem redundant and repetitive when He says these words that are truly precious: **that they...may be with me where I am**. The strong affection of His deep desire is such that He repeats His point and, in effect, puts an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. He is being wonderfully emphatic; He is giving vent to His affection for us; He says that to the Father and He says it to us by this record.

Thus, with personal, beneficial, emphatic desire, Jesus shows us that He holds us in His heart with great affection. The Savior of the world is our tender, loving, and affectionate Savior.

What then shall we say to these things?

When the details of this prayer begin to settle into my thoughts, my mind tends to shut down. I am overwhelmed. It seems that the first thing we have to do is bow our heads in shame, awe, thankfulness, praise, and worship that begins with speech and rises inevitably to song. That

is why we have to sing the truth, and sing it to our risen Lord: "Jesus thou joy of loving hearts, thou fount of life, thou light of men..." O how deep is His love: O the deep, deep love of Jesus vast, unmeasured, boundless, free rolling like a mighty ocean over me." Therefore, "more love to thee O Christ, more love to thee."

1) I need Him

These elements represent the body and blood of Christ. Taking them, we acknowledge our sinfulness and need of the work Jesus did as the great high priest offering Himself to God as the supreme sacrifice for sinners, to give forgiveness, the knowledge of God, and eternal life.

As a prayer, you are saying in symbol and ought to say in heart: O Lord Jesus, I need you.

2) I own Him as my very own

You take the elements to your lips and palates. You symbolically appropriate the body and blood of Christ. This symbolizes ownership of Christ, the appropriation of His person and work by faith. You are saying more than: "He is a great high priest." You are saying, "He is my great high priest." As a prayer: "O Lord Jesus I submit myself to you, I cling to your priestly work for my salvation and to that work alone, and I commit myself to you as my prophet, priest, and king to learn from you and to live for you by your sanctifying word."

3) I own His family as my family

Note how Jesus ends this profound prayer with an emphasis on love. His ultimate goal is to glorify the Father and His immediate goal is that we reflect the love the Father has for the Son: **that the love with which you have loved me may be in them** (17.26).

O Lord Jesus, I commit myself to love your brothers and sisters as I have been loved by you. In love for you, in response to your love for me, I dedicate myself to love the Christian family and to engage in the give and take of one another's love, mutual correction, yieldedness, and forgiveness.