

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "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. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed (Jn. 17.1-5).

Introduction

Looking back at John 17, a good challenge is to try to take in the whole picture that John paints for us. Last time, we tried to do that in the following single sentence:

John presents our great high priest, the Lord Jesus at prayer in the hour of the cross from the perspective of eternity as one in glory with the Father, but having come forth from the Father in covenant obedience to reveal Him to sinners, to gather back to fellowship all those the Father gave to Him before the creation of the world, and to bring glory to the Father by the manifestation of His name, love, holiness, and righteousness through the redemptive work of His life, death, and resurrection enthronement as Sovereign King and Savior of the world.

As that sentence shows, we have to leave some details off the canvass or leave them in the background to concentrate on particular things in the foreground. But a packed sentence like this does help us take in some of the wholeness of the prayer. It can be a good tool for further meditation, to ponder line by line looking for each item in the prayer itself.

Now another way to overview the big picture of this text is to center our attention on the goal that Jesus reveals through this prayer. In a word, the goal is threefold or it has three parts: He takes up this mediatorial office in order 1) to present Himself as a sacrifice 2) to save the elect 3) for the glory of God.

1A. First, our Lord's goal is offer Himself to die a sacrificial death

Jesus presents Himself to the fearful hour of the cross.

He presents Himself to the Father in presenting Himself to the hour that has now come. It is the hour that involves the paradox of humiliation and glory for He prays for glorification by means of the hour of suffering (17.1c, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you). In other words, "I submit myself to this hour as the way to glory."

Therefore, the idea of sacrifice derives from the reference to the hour that has come. Some background passages on *the coming of the hour and its arrival* confirm that priestly *sacrifice* is an aim of this prayer. We should spend some time to make this point stick.

1) We begin with the coming of the hour

The coming hour is in view from the beginning. It is in the account of the wine miracle in John 2: **My hour has not yet come.... After this... Jesus went up to Jerusalem...In the temple... Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."** ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.... (4-21).

Note how Jesus, again in the temple (per Jn. 8.20-21), indicates that this distinctive hour was "not yet": **These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.** ²¹ So he said to them again, "I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come."

2) Now, notice the passages that stress the arrival of this hour

In John 12:23, the description of the hour parallels its description in John 17. It is the hour of glory. Moreover, the glory is by death in order to gain much fruit: **And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.** ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Then the paradox of glory hits the high chord of extreme tension when Jesus says, **"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour!' But for this purpose I have come to this hour.** ²⁸ **Father, glorify your name!"** Remember, at the same time that Jesus recoils from the cross, He commits Himself with determined resolve to

experience it. He speaks ambivalently, in effect, saying, "My soul is exceedingly troubled, and what shall I say? With every ounce of self-preservation in my being, I must say, 'Father, save me from this hour!' Nevertheless, with determined resolve for covenant obedience rooted deep in my soul, I must say, 'Father, for this purpose I came to this hour, Father, glorify your son in and through the unspeakable suffering of the cross.'"

In Matthew 26, Jesus spoke of this hour as His time, and He linked it with the Passover: **He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples'"** (v. 18). Shortly thereafter, Jesus instituted the Christian Passover of communion that links His death with the sacrificial lamb of the Passover:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper (Jn 13.1-4).

The linkage with the Passover brings into view the inseparability of the hour of glory, the cross, departure, accomplishment, love, communion, and thus Passover sacrifice. The "hour" informs us that the climax of His redemptive work in humiliation 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; many hands were raised to wound Him, none would interpose to save"). 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. The immediate goal of His prayer is *for His death* as the sacrificial lamb *par excellence*.

Of course, His death is not something good in itself. It is not something that He aims at as an ultimate goal. He has the goal before Him of dying on the cross for a greater goal, which is our next point, namely, the saving of the elect.

2A. Our Lord's greater goal is the salvation of the elect

We can easily see that the Father and Son made an agreement that brought Jesus from heaven to this earth on a mission. Note the reference to the work the Father gave Jesus to do on earth (17.4, **I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do**). They planned and agreed on that work before the creation of the world (17.5, **And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed**). A mission led Him from glory to earth. On earth, He is bringing the covenantal mission to realization in human history in a special way in the paradoxical hour of the cross.

Specifically in verse 2, Jesus gives us insight into this covenantal relationship by focusing on the authority that God gave Him as Sabbath king and redeemer of the Father's elect. Because of this gift to Him, Jesus came into the world to do the will of God by the *sacrifice* of Himself on the cross. God gave Jesus supreme authority in covenant before He came into the world; He exercises that authority in specific ways. So, we should consider the description of this authority.

1B. His authority is comprehensive (**since you have given him authority over all flesh, 17.2a**)

This is a reference to His authority over all things that He receives by resurrection enthronement. He is Sabbath king prospectively. Here, the focus is on His absolute authority over every human being from Adam to the end of time. He does not exercise this authority until God makes Him Lord by the resurrection. (cf. Acts 2.36). Still, the Father gave Him this authority *as promise and guarantee* of the eternal covenant.

2B. His authority is purposeful

Jesus received authority over all flesh 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. From 17.6, we learn that the Father chose them and gave them to the Son (**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**).

The design is that Jesus will give them eternal life 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, **when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 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**). 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. 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, children of the eternal covenant. Hebrews 2 makes this point emphatically:

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin [are one]. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." ¹⁴ 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, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ 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).

The purpose of the incarnation was to secure deliverance from slavery to sin and death and protection from God's wrath, which is the meaning of propitiation (2.14, 17). He did this for the children that God gave Him (2.13); they make up the redeemed family of brothers and sister for whom He took flesh and blood: **Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same (2.14).**

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, chosen out from the fallen human race. 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 the redemption He obtained is "eternal redemption" (Heb 9.12). Jesus loved His covenant children with an everlasting love. Therefore, on the cross, He made their salvation certain and secure forever. The purpose beyond His death was the saving of the Father's elect.

3A. Our Lord's ultimate goal is to glorify God

He prays in order to die; He dies to save the Father's elect; and He dies for the Father's elect for the Father's glory, as He says: **Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you (Jn. 17.1b)**. He tells us that He seeks His glory in the fearful humiliation of the cross and that has the great end "**that the Son may glorify you.**" Two observations help expand this point.

1) We have here what some people call the paradox of glory.

Paradoxically, Jesus submits to the deepest conceivable humiliation, the suffering of the cross, by saying, glorify your son. How can the cross be the place of glory? How can Jesus look at it this way by seeking to submerge the humiliation in a display of glory? The reason that Jesus can focus on the shame of the cross and submit to it as the place of His own glory is because there His perfection as God the Son comes to expression in a public, matchless, and permanent way. There He displays in the eyes of a fallen world, in the presence of angels, and for time and eternity His obedience on mission, His righteousness, holiness, justice, grace, and truth. There love and mercy, loving-kindness, "from His head, hands and feet they flow mingled down."

2) However, we must not miss the relationship here between a subordinate goal and an ultimate goal.

Seeking His death and the salvation of the elect has a greater goal beyond it of “glory to God in the highest.” This fact leaps off the page. Seeking the glory of the Father is the Son’s chief and ultimate end. It is what He seeks above all other goals; every other goal He had is inferior to this superior and chief goal, to glorify His Father. Every other goal is a subordinate goal in relation to this ultimate goal. Glorifying the Father is the Son’s ultimate goal in His coming, His life, His ministry of proclaiming the gospel by word and deed, and it is the ultimate goal of His death. This is what sustained our Lord when He was overwhelmed with apprehension of the darkness of Calvary. This is what guided His steps each day of His life. As the obedient Son, He organized everything in His life in accord with the great, chief, ultimate, and singular goal of all goals to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. As the redeemer of the Father’s elect, the obedient Son and high priest displays the glory of the Father in the perfection of all His attributes, revealing them in a matchless and permanent way.

Conclusion

The prayer gives us glimpses of the inter-trinitarian relationship before creation; it gives us glimpses into the inter-trinitarian covenant of redemption.

As the great high priest of the Father’s elect, Jesus is the obedient Son (the covenantally obedient and faithful Son). He sets His head like a flint to face the fearful hour that has now arrived. He appeals to His fulfillment of the work the Father gave Him to do as the basis of His confident expectation that the Father will accept His Passover sacrifice in death and apply it in the keeping, sanctifying, and glorifying of the brothers and sisters of the eternal covenant; these family members are the people the Father gave to the Son so that the Son may give them eternal life.

To the triune God be all glory, now and forevermore, amen

What then shall we say to these things?

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 and the sure and certain work that you accomplished on the cross with nothing from me in it.

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. I determine to live under your absolute authority, by your word and for the glory of the Father as my supreme goal in all things.”

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: ²⁶ that the love with which you have loved me may be in them (17.26). Ultimately, displaying that love glorifies God.

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 anothering love, mutual correction, and forgiveness. I resolve to so live for the honor and glory of God.