

Jesus Praying for the Preservation of His Covenant Family (Jn.17.11d-15)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

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4-13-2008

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 (Jn. 17.11d-15).

Introduction

Today, we return to John 17 as the context for communion remembering. Jesus is praying for the church in a decisive way as high priest in the shadow of the cross. In these words (Jn. 17.11d-15), how does John help us remember the Lord Jesus?

What we have here are words of a Son to His Father on behalf of His brothers and sisters for He says, “Father” I pray for “them.”

Our duties are implied here, duties that relate to spiritual conflict in a hostile world (v. 14, “the world hates them”); the world hates the exposure of their sins by Christ and by His people who represent Him. However, our duties are not the point we should take home from meditation on Jesus prayer. He gives us a distinct view of our spiritual warfare. The orbit of thought begins with the eternal covenant between the members of the trinity and it accents the work of God through Christ that insures the safety of the people that the Father gave to the Son in that covenant. The conflict is real, but more importantly, so is the working of God behind the scenes.

Accent is therefore on the work of the Lord Jesus by which He faithfully realizes the covenant of redemption. Instead of concentrating on our duties, we concentrate on His and how fully He fulfilled them as an obedient Son to His Father. He is the obedient Son who loves His brothers and sisters and secures their safety.

The title is therefore “Jesus Praying for the Preservation of His Covenant Family.” The text is John 17.11d-15. The outline covers the core, the ground, and the aims of His prayer. Although there are many implications and applications here, we want to concentrate on remembering the Lord Jesus as our focus throughout this message. That is so because communion is a time to remember Him in a distinct way.

1A. The core of the Son’s prayer

We get the core of this petition from these words: **keep them in your name, which you have given me** (17.11d). Note the parallel language in verse 12: **I kept them in your name, which you have given me**.

To what does this phrase refer: “which you have given me”? We might think He is referring to the given ones (17.2, **all whom you have given him** and 17.6, **the people whom you gave me out of the world**). However, here the phrase refers to the Father’s name as something He gave to the Son. This is somewhat ambiguous at first glance. But things become clear when we consider how a person’s name stands for his character and attributes. In this phrase, “name” refers to the self-disclosure of the Father that He makes through Christ. He gave His name, that is, His self-revelation in the fullness of time to and through Christ. This made Jesus the revelation of the Father *par excellence*. He manifests and discloses who God is. Jesus does so in His very person, work, and words. Thus, earlier in the prayer, He said, **I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world** (v. 6).

Therefore, Jesus is a Son to His Father in an inconceivably profound way. Note that we cannot penetrate to the depths here. God is uniquely His Father (cf. “my” Father, Jn. 6.40). His unique relationship pertains to both His essential deity and to His true humanity. He is the eternal Son of God who became incarnate as the serving Son of the Father. Therefore, we have the

astounding truth that there is only one man in all of human history who knows God fully and only God can know this one man fully. In Matthew 11.27, we read: **All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.** This one man, of course, is Jesus the eternal Son of God.

Remarkably, then, the Gospel of John gives us a glimpse into the relationship between the Father and the Son that transcends and antedates the entire history of the created world. By recording the prayer of John 17, the Gospel writer remembers the Lord Jesus as not only the eternal Son of God but also as the incarnate Son of the Father *who came to earth to fulfill His part in the eternal covenant* (see 17.1-11). His coming involved a “tabernacling” among men in the form of a man (Jn. 1.14, **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth**). That means that He came to live in the tent of human flesh and blood, adding to His essential deity all the properties of a true and complete human being. Thus, He became the redeemer of God’s elect and, in the words of the WSC, “he became man with two natures and one person” in such a way that in our thoughts about Him, we must not divide the person nor confound the natures. Furthermore, this state into which He entered for our redemption is permanent: “he continues to be one person with two natures forever” (Q 21).

Therefore, we know that as “God with us” Jesus embodied the name of the Father, He preached the Father’s words, and He did the Father’s work. In short, He is the speech of God, the radiance of the glory of God, and the exact imprint of the Father’s nature: **but in these last days he [the Father] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.** ³ **He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power** (Heb. 1.2-3).

At its core the prayer of Jesus is for the preservation of His disciples “in firm fidelity to the revelation Jesus himself has mediated to them.” He seeks their preservation “in loyal allegiance to his gracious self-disclosure” (Carson, *John*, 562-63).

2A. The ground of His prayer to the Father

In 17.12, Jesus grounds His prayer for His disciples in His work on their behalf. Here, He appeals to the covenant arrangement that exists between the Father and the Son. Consequently, He petitions that the Father continue the work He began: **Holy Father, keep them in your name...While I was with them, I kept them in your name... I have guarded them** (v. 12). In appealing to that arrangement, Jesus appeals to His covenant obedience. He was covenantally faithful (and continues to be faithful by loving His own to the end, cf. 17.25-26 with Jn. 13.1).

Thus, He appeals to the Father’s promise as He seeks the good of the given ones.

Appealing to the eternal covenant, He shows His obedience and submission to the Father’s will. Strikingly, He submits to the divine plan and choosing of some and passing by others. Accordingly, He tells us that His focus is on the ones the Father gave to Him in order for Him to give them eternal life (17.2, **you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him**). Included in the given ones (and representatives of the church as a whole) are the apostle-disciples (17.6, **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**). Not included in the election, giving to Christ, and saving by the work of Christ is Judas (17.12b, **I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled**). In effect, Jesus says, “My focus is where you want me to focus. It is according to our agreement before time. In its fulfillment, I kept them in your name and I did not keep Judas. I ask you to do what you promised to do; you promised that if I keep them and not Judas, than you would keep them in your name. Thus, I made covenant with you in the eternal covenant to keep them and I have fulfilled that promise. Now I ask you to carry our covenant agreement forward to the next step, I ask that you also keep them in your name.” This brings us to the aims of His prayer.

3A. The aims of His prayer to the Father for the family

Jesus prays that the Father keep them in His name as one, with joy, and in deliverance as He returns to heaven leaving them behind to face many trials and challenges. Accordingly, His prayer aims at unity, joy, and protection.

1B. Unity

In light of church history past and present, how does this work out from the certainty that the Father will answer His prayers? This is not an easy subject. Just consider the different answers that you might give to the question: “What kind of unity is Jesus talking about? Is it a saving unity, an organizational unity, a doctrinal unity, a fellowship unity, or some combination of all of these things?”

We have to note that He prays for a unity between the members of His family on one hand, but, it is also reflective of the unity between Father and Son on the other hand.

The idea of analogy is surely central in understanding the text. The family is to reflect the relation of Father and Son in an analogous and creaturely way. We are His image bearers and we are fallen. Thus, the oneness will truly be like that that exists between the Father and Son; it is in the way of family love and grounded in truth (*keep them in the name* that the *Father* gave to the *Son*). But the way the redeemed family reflects the Father and Son unity (as brothers and sisters) is incomplete and imperfect. Granted, the goal is perfection (**that they may become perfectly one, 17.23**). There has to be growth toward the goal of perfect unity.

Therefore, the church will always make forward progress in a unity of family love grounded in truth *because of Jesus prayer for it*. The church will move forward in unity. This concern for unity weighs on our Lord’s heart as He nears the end of His work on earth. It is a thread that runs throughout His ministry. This is a promise; this is good news. The creeds, confessions, and formulations of the past are building blocks of the present that promise progress in the future.

Of course, we have to account for our creatureliness and fallenness. Thus, there is a now and a not yet to this unity. It reaches across the apostolic to the post-apostolic time in the history of the church. It extends across history to the end of the age. Progress is an under current flowing throughout the history of redemption from Jesus first to His second coming. This under current exists even though the waters above are restless, turbulent, and even chaotic at times. He is bringing the church (then and now, the apostles and us) onward, forward, and upward to glory. What is not yet is the perfect unity that will come when we all get to heaven.

This leads naturally to the next aim of His prayer.

2B. Joy

The view that we have of the eternal covenant in its sure realization in the work of the Son draws utterances of praise from our hearts and on our lips: “Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts, thou fount of life, the light of men; from the best bliss that earth imparts, we turn unfilled to thee alone.” Jesus is the joy of loving hearts far beyond “the best bliss this earth imparts.”

Our joy is also something that Jesus secured for us. It is in front of us in a final and unimaginable way in glory. We must say and sing, “When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be.” Furthermore, joy is always out in front of us on our journey. Granted, it may be the case that there will be times when weeping endures for the night, but, because of Jesus, we know that joy comes in the morning. Consider His aim in this word: **But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves (17.13)**. Where do we find that joy? Of course, it is in His word that is the word of the Father and the revelation of the Father’s name. There are many hard things for us to face in life. Therefore, knowing that Jesus aims at the goal of bringing us joy is a welcome word and a wonderful word of life, peace, hope, and joy. Jesus is the faithful Son and bringer of joy.

3B. Protection

Finally, Jesus considers our needs as His disciples. The world hates those who stand with Him, and the evil one opposes them as well (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**). Thus, our Lord reveals His loving concern for His disciples that He will leave behind to face deceptive schemes and strong hatred (for the entire time between).

His prayer is a means, a real, essential, and vital means in the preservation of the disciples, then and now. Otherwise, we would all be overcome by the trials that we face due to the hatred of the world and the schemes of the devil. The apostles represent the church; thus, these things apply to the church of the time between His comings (note how all the given ones are in view in vs. 1-3, the apostles as given ones in 6-19, and all the given ones in 20-26; when the apostles are in view in 6-19 they do so as representatives of the church).

Protection from the evil one is by the Father's keeping, and the Father's keeping is what Jesus secured for us by His priestly intercession that is anticipated in this prayer, accomplished on the cross, and perpetuated by the resurrection. He lives and makes intercession for the saints, **Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us, Rom. 8.34).**

Conclusion

How do we see Jesus through the lens of this text? As the Son of God incarnate, He presents Himself a son to his father in the greatest and best of ways.

1) Respectful

Addressing the Father, He acknowledges His holiness (**Holy Father**, v. 11). He speaks with respect, honor, and praise. He gives us a marvelous example to follow.

2) Faithful

He did His part in the covenant and appealing to His obedience, He asks the Father to carry on this work (**keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...** ¹² **I kept them in your name**).

3) Loving

By His life fully and completely, Jesus secured the salvation of the Father's elect. The Father cares about the needs of His covenant children that are the brothers and sisters of Christ. Jesus cares about the needs of His brothers and sisters. He cares about our needs, yours and mine.

Unity, joy, and protection are promised to us in the eternal covenant of redemption and they are secured for us by the respectful, faithful, and loving Son.