

John Chapter 17

This beautiful prayer between the Son and the Father is spoken between the upper room and arriving in the garden of Gethsemane. It is almost a summary of all that the Lord has achieved in His lifetime, and what He hoped to achieve through His own as an ascended man. There is no mention here of miracles or healings or such great things. It is all about Himself and those who in chapter 13 are called "His own".

It is the longest recorded prayer of the Lord Jesus in the gospels. John 17 is a far longer prayer than the so-called "Lord's prayer" in Matthew 6. That of course was not a prayer made by the Lord but rather a pattern of prayer left for the disciples. Even then, it is a pattern of prayer more suited to a future Jewish remnant than for us today. But here in John 17, we are privileged to listen in to a prayer from the Son to the Father. The Son is now reporting back to the Father on the accomplishment of His mission to Earth.

There could be many ways of looking at John 17 for it is a bit like a woven garment with numerous coloured threads running through it. We read for example of 5 things given to Him by the Father

Power over all flesh (verse 2)

Those whom the Father gave him (7 times in all)

The work which the Father gave Him to do (v4)

The words which the Father gave him to speak (v8)

The glory which the Father gave Him (v22)

We could speak of 5 things which the Lord has given to us

Eternal life (v2)

Thy name (vv 2 7 26)

The Father's words (v8)

The Father's word (v14)

Glory (v22)

And so we could go on eg 6 times He is the sent One, 5 times He speaks of our unity etc.

But perhaps the simplest and best way to deal with the chapter is just to speak of each verse in turn as the words were spoken by the Lord Jesus

He begins with His relationship with His Father (verses 1-5), then with His disciples (verses 6-10), and then with His disciples in the world (verses 11-26). He begins by lifting up His eyes to heaven – the idea is of lifting up His eyes **into** heaven. Though a man here on earth, He was able to look into heaven and see the Father there. In John 5:19, the Lord said "The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He **seeth** the Father do". He could see the Father's works and replicate them upon earth.

The prayer begins "Father, the hour is come". It would be wrong to think that the hour is always the Cross. In John 2:14, He says to His mother "Woman, what have I to do with thee, for mine hour is not yet come". The wine at the marriage feast would speak of the joy of His coming kingdom, and that joy is not yet come. In Jn 7: 6 & 8, He speaks of "my time is not yet come". This was in response to an invitation from His brothers to go up to the feast of Tabernacles, the very feast that will mark the joy of entering into His kingdom. But elsewhere though, in chapter 7:30 and 8:20, "no man laid hands on Him for His hour was not yet come". This clearly is the hour of His death. So, only the context can define the hour. What hour then does He have in mind in John 17:1 ? We might rush to assume it is the Cross, for it is only a few hours

ahead of Him, but let us ponder for a moment. In this chapter, the Lord is taking the position of one who is on the other side of death, and who is now contemplating the hour of His departure from this world and His arrival in the Father's house.

Large parts of this prayer are spoken in the past tense. Verse 4 – "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do". In verse 11 He says, "And now I am no more in the world...and I come to thee". In verse 12 – "While I was with them in the world...". Verse 13 – "And now come I to Thee". So, at this point of departure, what does the Lord ask for ? He prays first for Himself – "Glorify thy Son". This might seem strange words from the lips of the Saviour, asking for glory. In Heb 5:5, the writer says – "So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made High Priest". He would never consider taking this honour by Himself. It was given to Him by the Father. We are familiar with the language of Phil 2 – "He humbled Himself... He took upon Himself the form of a servant. He was active in His humility, passive in His exaltation. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name above every name".

So, in John 17:1, why does the Lord ask to be glorified ? He gives two reasons – one in the immediate present and one in the past. As to the immediate present, He adds " (in order) that thy Son also may glorify Thee." There are many ways in which God is glorified today. One is by our prayer life – John 14:13 says "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ". God is glorified, as we acknowledge the Father and the Son. In John 15:8, the Lord says "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Again, the Father is glorified in our lives.

But now in John 17:2, we read of another way in which the Son can glorify the Father – "As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him". Universal power was already in His hands in John 13 – " Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands... ". But those hands take up, not the reins of government, but a basin and a towel as He begins to wash the disciples' feet. Power over all flesh here in Chapter 17 could have enabled Him to confound every foe, to vindicate Himself before Pilate, Caiphas, Herod, and the people. But He never appeared to His enemies after His resurrection. "Ye shall seek Me and shall not find me", He says to the unbelieving Jews in Ch 7. In a future day, He will use this power over His enemies. The Father has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man." But in this day of grace, He uses this power only towards His own – "That He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him". This latter expression is used no less than 7 times in this chapter. It is a lovely phrase and shows that we have been given by the Father to His Son. And what is it that we have been given here ? – eternal life. This is more than just life for evermore. The ungodly will also participate in a day of resurrection – "some to a resurrection of life, some to a resurrection of damnation". The ungodly will live for evermore in the lake of fire, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

Eternal life however is a quality of life, it is the very life of God. The Lord Jesus Himself is described in I John as "that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us". Eternal life is also our guarantee of eternal salvation. In John 10:28, the Lord said "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand". The word for "never" is very strong – it is indeed a triple negative and means literally "By no means, no, not unto the ages". Apart from this, we have two hands holding ours. The Lord's in verse 28 and the Father's in verse 29.

Eternal life is unique to the Church of this age. In the whole of the OT, there is but one reference to everlasting life, in Daniel Ch 12. Even then, this is a reference to a future day, still unfulfilled. Dan 12:2 says "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the

earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt.". But we have it today and Paul says we are to "lay hold of it". Not in case we should lose it but just to make full use of it.

John 17:3 gives us a reason why we have eternal life. It is not a definition of what eternal life is but rather a reason why it has been given to us – "that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent". It is noteworthy that every means of divine communication always takes us back in a closed loop to divine Persons. The Lord gives eternal life, that we might get to know God and His Son. The Lord gives us the Spirit of Truth that He may glorify Christ, and take of His things and reveal them to us. The Lord gives certain men as gifts to the Church in Ephes 4, that we may grow up to Him who is the Head, even Christ. Everything that comes down from heaven is with a view to leading us up to God.

The Lord has described His present work, what He will do with His power in heaven. Now, in verse 4, He takes a backward look - "I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do". In what way did the Son bring glory to the Father ?. In Ch 1, John writes - "We beheld His glory, the glory of an only begotten of the Father". I believe this was not the fleeting glimpse of the Man on the Holy Mount but rather a glory which only the disciples could see every day they were with Him. The glory of a Son who spoke the Father's words, did the Father's works, went where the Father sent Him, and did the Father's will. In this way, the Son brought glory to His Father. The Father was also glorified in the death of His Son. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." We see the glory of an obedient Son, moving towards the Cross to comply with the Father's will. And what about the phrase "finished the work". The Cross was still before Him as far as time was concerned but He speaks of His work as being "finished". We have already suggested that the Lord in this chapter speaks as though He were on the other side of death, ready to ascend to the Father. Only God can look ahead into the future and speak in the past tense. And what was the work which the Lord finished ? Our mind might go at once to John 19 and His word on the Cross - "finished". Was the Lord referring to the work of salvation ? Certainly, that was true, but something even greater than salvation was accomplished. You might be thinking "What can be greater than salvation ?" The word "finished" in John 19, is I believe His fulfilment of every scripture that had ever been written concerning Himself. When He had taken the vinegar, He said "finished" or literally "fulfilled".

But now in verse 5, the Lord is asking for glory again, and now no reasons are given for receiving it. "Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was". In verse 1, the Lord is seeking to be glorified as the Son, the ascended man. But in verse 5, He is thinking of that eternal glory that was ever His. The amazing thing is that He should ask at all for that which had been His for all eternity. He is really asking for two things – the place and the glory. He is asking to be glorified along side of the Father (the place) with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. The preposition "with" in the AV is "PARA" which means "alongside of". It is always used of persons and never with things. The Lord never gave up this glory but He gave up the majesty and the splendour which were linked with the place. In Phil 2, Paul says of Him "(He) thought it not robbery to be equal with God but emptied Himself". Now we know that the Lord never emptied Himself of anything as to His Person. He was just as equal with the Father on earth as He was in heaven. It is interesting that "equal" in this context is neuter plural ie "equal things". These were the outward trappings of His glory and His majesty – things that were hidden from men in the days of His flesh.

From verse 6 onwards, the Lord's thoughts now turn to His disciples whom He was about to leave behind. "I have manifested thy name, unto the men which thou gavest

Me out of the world they have kept thy word". This is the reason why He came into the world. John 1:18 says "No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him". In John 14:8, Philip said to the Lord "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us". To this, the Lord replies "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." He has made known the Father to us. As a result of this manifestation in verse 6, the Lord says "they have known that all things that thou hast given me are of Thee". The disciples witnessed at first hand the words and the works of the Lord Jesus. They had come to know that everything they saw and heard from the Son had come from the Father. When he was about to feed the 5000, the Lord looked up into heaven and gave thanks for the bread and fishes. When He was about to raise Lazarus, He looked towards heaven and asked the Father "Glorify thy name".

The disciples believed in Him because of the words which the Father had given Him to speak. As a result, He adds "They have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me". He came from the Father as the willing One, but He was also sent by the Father as the obedient Son. We take these things for granted but they are not accepted in general by the men of this world.

In John 9:29 the Jews said "We know that God spake unto Moses : as for this fellow, we know not whence he is". As regards to His words they said "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned" In verse 9, we have the first of the three occasions when the Lord says "I pray". These are specific prayers, and in the first of them, the Lord says "I pray for them. I pray not for the world but for them which Thou hast given Me". These are the words of the One who is the heir of all things in the world. "Ask of me", says God in Psalm 2, "and I will give Thee the nations for thine inheritance". But the Lord today prays, not for the world, but for people like you and me. In Isaiah, we read that the government is upon His shoulder (singular), but in Luke 15, when He finds the sheep that is lost, He puts it on His shoulders (plural). He takes more care of us than He does of the whole world.

The Lord's praying for us is a continuous action, still being sustained in heaven. Our great high priest (Heb 7) ever lives to make intercession for us. He differs in 2 ways from any other high priest that might have gone before Him. A man might get a sympathetic ear from the high priest, but then that priest dies to be replaced by a priest who may have little knowledge or sympathy for his case. But it is said of our High Priest that He ever liveth. He will never be replaced by another. Also, the priest of old was pre-occupied with sins. He had to offer sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people. But of our Lord it is written – "But this man, after that He had offered one sacrifice for sin for ever sat down at the right hand of God". That work never had to be repeated, so that He can devote His full attention to us.

It is perhaps worthy of note that the Bible never says that Christ loved the world. God so loved the world that He gave..... Even God's love is qualified by the word "so" ie in like manner, God loved. It is a point of comparison between what God did in giving His Son, and what Moses did in raising up a serpent of brass in the wilderness. When we read of the love of the Lord Jesus, it is always for His own eg the Lord loved Lazarus. He loved the Church, and says Paul "He loved me"

Verse 10 continues " All mine are thine and thine are mine". We belong equally to the Father and the Son. Then He adds – "and I am glorified in them". This is difficult to comprehend. We can understand it when the Lord says of Himself – "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him". The Son ever brought glory to His Father, but here He says it is true of us, that He is glorified in us. It is true that as we honour the Son in our lives, we do bring honour and glory to the Son. Paul, in II Tim 2:21 speaks of "vessels unto honour". This is our present hope – to glorify our Lord,

but it will certainly be true of us in a future day. II Thess 1:10 speaks of a day "when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe". The world will one day marvel at the glory of the saints, and give glory to the Lord who bought them.

From verse 11, the Lord is still considering "His own", but now they are His own in the world. Thus He prays "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given Me". He prays for their preservation and also for their sanctification. He prays "Holy Father" for sanctification is in view, whereas in verse 1, He says "Father" because of His personal relationship with the Father that is in view. The Lord had kept the disciples while He was with them, but now He seeks the help of the Father in keeping them in the world.. We have already considered eternal life and those divine hands that will preserve us unto the end. The reason for the prayer is "that they may be one, as we are". Five times in this chapter, the Lord speaks of us as being "one". It is His pre-occupation that the saints should be one. Notice the standard here – "as we are one". Did the Father ever fall out with the Son, or the Son with the Father. Did the Son ever go "in the huff". We reply "of course not". There was of course the silence of the 3 hours of darkness on the Cross, but the Lord was then the great Sin-bearer and God had to turn away His face. But throughout His lifetime, the Lord could say "He that sent Me is with Me. The Father hath not left Me alone". The Lord kept the disciples together while He was with them. They were as one, yet it did not mean that there were not sometimes disagreements amongst them. Twice in the Gospels, once as they walked on the way, and once in the upper room, they disputed as to who should be the greatest. But they were as one while He was with them in the world.

How do we maintain unity today ?. By our appreciation of the unity of the Spirit in Eph 4, and by the ministry of those evangelists, pastors and teachers given to us by the ascended Christ to work amongst us. The objective is "till we all arrive at the unity of the faith" ie the unity of the whole body of truth. Growth must surely follow this ministry, and the only way to grow is to grow upwards – unto Him who is the Head. When we reach Him, unity follows almost as a by-product of that growth. All the saints are working together, and as we do so, we are fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth.

In verse 12, however, the Lord adds that there was one exception to all this – the son of perdition, Judas Iscariot. Judas was not one of "those whom Thou hast given Me". Therefore he could not be kept. His feet were washed in John 13, but were they washed a thousand times, he would never be clean. He had not been bathed all over by believing in the Lord Jesus. But the loss of Judas was no mere misfortune. The Lord adds – "that the scripture might be fulfilled". In John 13 :18, the Lord said "He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me". The Lord is quoting the words of David in Psalm 41:9, about David's friend and counsellor Ahithophel. David spoke of him as "mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted", but the Lord omits these words as they could never be true of His relationship with Judas. Other scriptures too were fulfilled in the betrayal by Judas. The prophet Zechariah writes "they weighed for my price 30 pieces of silver". The final destiny of those coins was foretold by the same prophet who wrote – "I cast them unto the potter in the house of the Lord". The chief priests picked up the 30 pieces of silver from the floor of the temple and bought with them the potter's field.

The Lord's impending departure for heaven is again brought to our notice in verse 13. "And now come I to Thee. And these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves". What was the "joy" of the Saviour ?. Was He not the man of sorrows acquainted with grief ?. I suggest the Lord had 3 things to bring Him joy in His lifetime.

1. The joy of service

In Hebrews, the Lord says of Himself "I delight to do thy will, o my God" It was the Lord's joy to do the will of God throughout His life of service.

2. The joy of salvation

In Luke 15, we are told that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. Every one who came to faith in the Lord Jesus must have brought joy to His heart. We too can have this joy – "Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10). Think too of the joy of the Ethiopian eunuch "who went on his way rejoicing".

3. The joy of divine revelation

In Luke 10, we read "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank Thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes". Father and Son rejoiced together in the revelation they were giving to men. We have already seen how this is being done through eternal life, the Spirit of God, and gifted men.

In verse 8, The Lord mentioned the words which the Father had given Him to speak. Now, in verse 14 He says "I have given them Thy word". Words I take it to mean specific words and sayings, whereas "word" would be the sum total of all that the Father had revealed to men. The disciples received this word, and it immediately brought upon them the hatred of the world. In Phil 2. Paul desires to know "the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death". Without knowing and living in the power of His resurrection, he would never know about the Lord's sufferings or His death, for only one who was living a resurrected life would incur the hatred of this world.

In verse 15, we have the second of the Lord's "I pray". They were not of the world but still physically in it, hence He prays that they might be kept from the evil of the world. But how are we going to be kept from the evil of the world ? In verses 17-19, the Lord is going to give us 2 reasons.

1. Verse 17. "Sanctify through thy truth: thy word is truth"

In Eph 5 :25-27, Paul writes concerning the love of the Lord for his Church. That love is seen in the past, the present, and the future. As to the past, "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it". As to the present, he adds " That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" ie He wants to maintain that love and communion with the church presently, by using the word to remove any defilement that might interrupt it. Both past and present lead to the future, the culmination of that love – "That He might present it to himself a glorious church etc". Hence, presently we are sanctified by truth – "Thy word is truth".

2. Verse 19. "And for their sakes, I sanctify myself"

Did the Lord ever need to sanctify Himself ?. Not personally, of course, for He could not sin. Not just did not, but could not. So, what else could this verse mean ?. We go back to the literal meaning of the verb "to sanctify". It is separate oneself, so for our sakes the Lord has set Himself apart. He has gone back to heaven, so that we may have in heaven someone to view outside of this world. It is to take our eyes off this world and look rather up to the man in glory.

In between the two causes of sanctification, we have the Lord's commission to His disciples. It is not now as in Matthew or Mark where the command is "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel". Rather it is more of a promise – verse 18 reads "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world". This commission is repeated in Ch 20:21, when He appears to the disciples in that closed

room. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you". When the Father sent the Son, did the Son ever lack anything? Apart from those 3 hours of darkness on the Cross, did the Father ever abandon His Son? The answer is "never". So, says the Son, in the same way I am sending you. He is ever with us to support, to sustain, and to guide us. We will lack nothing if He is there with us. Paul knew this in the prison cell. All of Asia had forsaken him, but he is able to say that the Lord stood by him and comforted him.

The third "I pray" of John 17 is in verse 20 – "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word". Strictly speaking, all that has gone before was directed towards the 11 disciples, but with obvious lessons for all of us. But here in verse 20 the Lord widens the scope of His prayer to all believers in this present dispensation. Again, His chief concern is, verse 21, that they all may be one. Again, divine persons are the examples to follow – "As thou Father art in me, and I in thee". And this has an effect upon the world – "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me". We have believed this as a result of hearing his words (verse 8), but the world which does not take time to listen can believe the same by seeing the saints, and observing their unity. The same result would be seen by our love towards one another – "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another". How sad that the world sees rather the total disunity and disarray of the Church today. How different from those pristine days of early Acts when they were all of one mind and had all things in common.

Now, in verses 22 and 24, the Lord returns to the subject of glory. There is a glory which He gives, and a glory that is to be viewed. Verse 22 – "And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one as we are one". What is this glory that He has given to His own? One cannot be dogmatic here but I believe it is the glory of verse 1 of this chapter. "Glorify thy Son" ie the glory of sonship. In Romans 8, we are foreknown, called, justified, and glorified. The very thing we fell short of in Rom 3:23, the glory of God, we now have as the sons of God. It is the glory of our position today, but the glory will be manifested on the Lord's return to earth. The whole of creation groans waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. The glory will then be seen. Then we will not just be "as one" but we will be made perfect as one. Perhaps only then will the Lord's prayer be realised, when the saints will be made perfect in one. Then the world will not just believe as a result of Christian unity, but they will know "that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me". The world will then know that the Father loves the believers in the same way that the Father loves the Son. This will be apparent then to all, in the day of His appearing.

In verse 24, there follows another request – "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory". He had prayed that we might be kept in the world. But now He looks ahead to the time when He desires His saints to be where He is that we may behold His glory. And what glory is this? I believe it is not the glory which He has given to us, but that glory which is uniquely His ie the glory of verse 5 – "The glory which I had with thee before the world was". For now in verse 24, He speaks of the love which the Father had for Him before the foundation of the world.

In verse 25, He mentions again the name of the Father. It is not "Father" as in verse 1 – His personal relationship – or "Holy Father" when He speaks of the preservation of the saints. But now it is "Righteous Father" because He is dealing with the world. In John 16, when the Lord spoke of the Spirit in relation to the world, He said that the Spirit's coming would convince (make demonstration) of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. Of righteousness, because He says "I go to my Father and ye see me no more". The Lord Jesus has been justified because the One whom the world

refused has been received into heaven, and the proof of it is that the Spirit of God has come into the world.

In verse 6 the Lord has said "I have manifested thy name". Now in verse 26 He says "I have declared thy name". Not only up till then, but He adds "and will declare it". The Lord continues presently to make the Father known to us. Again, as we have seen throughout this chapter, there is a "so that" added. There are no less than 13 "so that's" in Ch 17. One statement after another is followed by "that". So the final reason is "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. Who can imagine the love that the Father has for His Son. "My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Well, the Saviour prays that this love may be in us. Love for the lost, love for each other, love for the Father and the Son. Is it possible ?. The Saviour prays for it to be so. Finally, He concludes – "and I in them". This was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Ch 3 – "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith". "To dwell" here is to dwell in a house ie that the homeless stranger of Galilee might at last find a permanent dwelling place in the hearts of His saints. We know that the Spirit dwells in every believer, but if we keep the Lord's words (John 14), His promise to us is – "We will come and make our abode with him" ie both Father and Son abiding in us.