

The Gospel of John (100): Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer (1)

Introduction:

The Lord's farewell discourse to His disciples concluded with the end of John 16. We next read our Lord's prayer to His Father, which was expressed in the hearing of His disciples. It includes all 26 verses of John 17. It is commonly referred to as our Lord's high priestly prayer, in which He prays to His Father, interceding on behalf of His people. On this occasion our Savior prayed effectually for His own. We know from other places in Holy Scripture that this is a continual ministry of our Lord Jesus before His Father. We read in Hebrews 7:25, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come to God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them." Through our study of John 17, we may learn not only what He prayed on this occasion, but we may be instructed in His ongoing ministry of intercession on behalf of His people.

For the sake of our instruction, we might describe the major aspects of our Savior's high priestly ministry on our behalf. **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) wrote a book entitled, *The Intercession of Christ*. He identified our Savior's priestly ministry of prayer on our behalf in four arenas of our salvation. Jesus Christ serves us before the presence of His Father...

1. To pray that all the elect may be brought home to Him, that is, to God.
2. To pray that their sins committed after conversion may be forgiven them.
3. To pray that their graces, which they receive at conversion, may be maintained and supplied.
4. To pray that their persons may be preserved to His heavenly kingdom.¹

Or these four subjects of prayer on behalf of His people may be simplified by the following: Jesus Christ prays for His own to ...

1. bring them home
2. cleanse them and keep them
3. give them more grace
4. preserve them.

We will read of these spiritual matters expressed in the chapter before us.

The account of John 17 reads as though the Lord Jesus stepped back from His present time, in order to describe and depict, and to pray for, the realization of the overarching purposes of God in all of history. In His words He reaches back before creation, referring to God's initial decree of all that would transpire in the history of this world. Then He speaks of the great midpoint in history, which was just before Him, in which through His own glorification He recovers and restores His fallen people unto His Father. But then He looks forward to the consummation, when all things are completed, when He and God His Father would display the fullness of His glory to all the redeemed standing in the presence of God.

This is a chapter that has been given much attention by some of our puritan forbearers. **Robert Trail** (1603-1678) gave 16 sermons on this Lord's Prayer, which is in his second of four volumes of works that are presently published by The Banner of Truth Trust. **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) developed 45 sermons on this passage, of which I have in my library. Their extensive treatment of this passage suggests to us that there is much valuable and profitable instruction to be mined from these words. And so, in order for us to

¹ John Bunyan, *The Intercession of Christ* (Christian Focus Publications, n.d.), p. 19.

give appropriate attention to the details of this chapter, we will work through this passage rather slowly and thoroughly.

There are a number of other prayers of our Lord Jesus recorded in the Gospels, but this one in John 17 stands out quite remarkably. **Robert Traill** (1642-1716) wrote of this prayer

The Holy Ghost seemeth to put a mark of respect upon this prayer above other prayers which Christ conceived in the days of His flesh. Elsewhere the Scripture telleth us that Christ prayed; but the form is not expressed, or else only brief hints are delivered, but this is expressed at large. This was, as it were, His dying blaze. Natural motion is swifter and stronger in the end; so was Christ's love hottest and strongest in the close of His life; and here you have the eruption and the flame of it. He would now open to us the bottom of His heart, and give us a copy of His continual intercession. This prayer is a standing monument of Christ's affection to the church; it did not pass away with the external sound, or as soon as Christ ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father; it retaineth a perpetual efficacy; the virtue remaineth, though the words be over. As word of creation hath retained its vigour these five or six thousands of years: 'Increase and multiply, and let the earth bring forth after its kind;' so the voice of this turtle (turtle dove) is ever heard, and Christ's prayers retain their vigour and force, as if but newly spoken.²

On this Lord's Day in which we begin to address this section of Holy Scripture, let us read the passage in its entirety. Here is John 17:1-26

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

⁶"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. ⁸For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

⁹"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. ¹⁰And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. ¹²While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

²⁰"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

²⁴"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O

² Thomas Manton, **The Complete Works of Thomas Manton**, vol. X (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), p. 109.

righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. ²⁶And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

We might propose an outline of the entire prayer:

1. Jesus prays for Himself (17:1-5)
2. Jesus prays for His apostles (17:6-19)
3. Jesus prays for all true believers (17:20-26)

Today we will begin to address the first of these divisions, which is,

I. “Jesus prays for Himself” (17:1-5)

The chapter opens describing our Lord Jesus beginning this prayer unto His Father. The first sentence is contained in the first two verses. It reads,

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

Here we read that...

A. Jesus prayed for His Father to glorify Him (vs. 1, 2).

The Holy Spirit moved our Gospel writer to record our Lord’s words of prayer so that we might learn and be encouraged from His words. Of course we know that all of our Lord Jesus’ petitions were granted by His Father. Not one of His words fell short of realization; none of Christ’s prayers were ineffectual. What the Lord Jesus requested, the Father granted Him. Let us consider what is recorded of our Lord in this prayer.

First, take note of how John described Jesus praying: “Jesus spoke these words, *lifted up His eyes to heaven.*” This posture of praying, looking up to heaven, is not one that is commonly practiced by Christians. We read of many who lifted up their voices in prayer, and lifted their hearts in prayer, but they did not commonly lift up their eyes, as did our Lord on this occasion. Rather, because godly people seem to be keenly aware of their personal sin, they tend not to lift up their eyes, but to bow their heads and close their eyes in prayer. They are as the sinner in the temple, which Luke described:

“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13)

He was humble and needy. He understood that he had no merit, no claims upon God to hear him. But his desperation drove him to bow before God in the temple to plea for God’s mercy and grace to forgive him of his sin.

There was an occasion when our Lord Jesus also prostrated Himself before the Father in prayer. We read of this account of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane:

Then He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.” ³⁹And going a little farther *He fell on His face and prayed*, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt. 26:38f)

Thomas Manton compared these two occasions of Jesus praying, one on His face, and the other lifting His eyes toward heaven:

‘And lift His eyes to heaven.’—The scripture taketh notice of the gesture. Christ’s gestures are notable, real significations of the motions of His heart. In the garden, when He began His passion, He fell on His face and prayed (Matt. 26:39); but here He lifted up His eyes. When He travailed under the greatness of our sins, His posture is humble; but now, when He is treating (petitioning) with God for our mercies, He useth a gesture that implieth a more elevated and generous confidence. Gestures, being actions suited to the affections, are significant, and imply the dispositions of the heart.³

This manner of our Lord Jesus praying suggests to us His relationship as Son to His Father. He is not merely a man, but He is God’s Son, who may stand before His Father and look Him directly in the face and speak with Him with the familiarity and the close relation of a son to his father. Even if we were without sin, we would not do so, because of the infinite degree of difference and distinction between us as mortals and God as immortal, between us as His creatures and He as our Creator. But this was not so with regard to our Lord Jesus. He shared in the glory of His Father from eternity. And though there are distinguishable persons in the godhead, there is not distinction in essence, for the Father and the Son are one God. Here the Son lifted up His eyes toward His Father, a posture that had characterized Him from eternity. He looked fully into His Father’s face and prayed for His own. Thankfully we have Jesus Christ as our Advocate who represents us and petitions on our behalf to His Father. You may feel so low and so debased that you do not feel that you could even lift your words to God, but if you believe on Jesus Christ, He is before His Father’s face, praying for your preservation and your betterment.

But Jesus was, of course, in His human nature lifting His eyes toward heaven. Jesus exhibited a confidence in His standing before His Father as a man, as one who had been faithful and true to God His Father throughout His sojourn in this world. The psalmist once asked the question and then posed the answer:

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
Or who may stand in His holy place?
⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
Nor sworn deceitfully.
⁵He shall receive blessing from the LORD. (Psa. 24:3-5)

Jesus could lift “up His eyes to heaven” for He was a righteous man, who did all of His Father’s will. He knew that His Father delighted in Him for He had shown Himself to be His dutiful and devoted Son in all of His words and ways.

We read secondly, that our Lord Jesus acknowledged before the Father that “the hour had come.” Here, again, is verse 1: “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, *the hour has come*. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.”

We have read much in this Gospel about this “hour” to which Jesus gave His attention. In **John 2:4**, when His mother all but directed Him to solve the problem of wine shortage at a wedding party, Jesus said to His mother, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? *My hour has not yet come*.” Later when some Jewish leaders attempted to arrest Jesus, John gave this word in John 7:30: “So they were seeking to arrest Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because *His hour had not yet come*.” Similarly we read in the next chapter, “These words He (Jesus) spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; but no one arrested Him, *because His hour had not yet come*” (John 8:20). But in the last few days before His passion, Jesus began to speak of His hour having arrived. In John 12:23 we read, “But Jesus answered them, saying, ‘*The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified*.’” And then He prayed to His Father a few verses farther

³ Manton, vol. 10, p. 111.

verse 27, “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from *this hour*’? But for this purpose I came to *this hour*. Father, glorify Your name.” And then John once again made reference to His hour in John 13:1, “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.” And now we read in John 17:1, “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘*Father, the hour has come.*’” The use of “My hour”, “the hour”, and “His hour” is used by the Holy Spirit to keep before the readers of this Gospel the importance of His glorification through His death on His cross and of His resurrection. As one once expressed, “It is the hour for which in a special sense Jesus had come into the world, 12:27, not the hour of His death merely but the time for His death, His resurrection, and His ascension, these taken together.”⁴

Our Lord expressed in **verse 1b** His petition to His Father, “*Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You...*” Even though the “hour” had arrived for Jesus to be glorified, we see no presumption on His part, but rather prayer comes forth from Him to His Father that He would glorify His Son. We are not to be fatalistic or presumptive in our knowledge of what the Lord has in store for His people and the world in which they live. We are to be prayerful. Even as we see the day of the Lord approaching, when He brings an end to the history of this world and He calls us into His presence, we are not to be passive and presumptive, but we are to be expectant and prayerful. We are to be as Daniel upon learning of the soon release of his people from exile in Babylon to return to their homeland. He learned of the fact of their soon release and return to their homeland. He then began to pray fervently for His God to bring it to pass. We read of the reaction and response of Daniel in Daniel 9:1-3:

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—²in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

³Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes...”

Our Lord’s hour had arrived that God had decreed that He would be glorified. But then Jesus began to pray that His Father would glorify Him, even as He knew would come to pass. And so, it is

“True, God will do whatever He has decreed, not only though the whole world were asleep, but though it were opposed to Him; but it is our duty to ask from Him whatever He has promised, because the end and use of promises is to excite us to prayer” (John Calvin)

We are also to pray even on those occasions when we know that we are about to enter some great trial or experience a great calamity from which we know we cannot escape. **Thomas Manton** wrote:

The hour is come, saith Christ, and therefore prayeth. When the sad hour is come, the only remedy is prayer. We should not despond, but meet sorrows with a greater confidence. Now the only way is to pray. If we cannot look for a deliverance, we may pray for a mitigation (lessening), for shortening affliction: Matthew 24:20, “Pray that your flight not be in winter, nor on the Sabbath-day,” when it may be tedious to body and soul. Pray that you may glorify God in sufferings, as Christ sueth out support in this request. Usually when evils are unavoidable we give over all our addresses (i.e. we stop praying); yet our condition is capable of mercy. If the hour be come, beg that a spirit of glory may rest upon you.⁵

Now, again, this is a word of prayer by Jesus offered to His Father. But it is significant to consider the form of this petition. Normally when we pray to the Father, offering our requests to Him, we ask God to

⁴ Richard C. H. Lenski, **The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel** (Augsburg Publishing, 1942), p. 1115.

⁵ Manton, vol. 10, p. 119.

show favor to us, to be merciful and gracious to us in granting our request. But here the Lord Jesus did not pray to His Father for this request in the same manner that we normally pray. Jesus expressed His petition in the form of a command. The verb is in the imperative mood: “*Glorify Your Son.*” If you are I prayed in this way to God our Father, we should be rebuked and put to shame for our brashness and presumption and disregard of His divine nature. But here we have the Son of God speaking to His Father, both “of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided.” There is a boldness on the part of Jesus, but it is right for Him for He is one in essence with His Father in the godhead.

But I would also say that the Holy Spirit was suggesting much more to us by our Lord Jesus praying to His Father in the form of a command. It is as if Jesus were saying to His Father,

“You commissioned Me long before, even prior to creation, that I should come into this world, become one with the ones You gave to Me to save from sin and damnation. You promised Me that upon the completion of this great work that You would glorify Me with the glory that we had in common from eternity. I have fulfilled My calling, completed the work to which You sent Me. Now fulfill Your promise to glorify Me.”

Now more precisely, what is meant or what occurred when Jesus Christ was “glorified”? Being glorified speaks of regal, sovereign authority being conferred upon Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ to be glorified speaks to Jesus Christ being enthroned as the Messianic King over the promised kingdom of God. It is the conferring of authority by God the Father, entrusting and inaugurating His Son to be Lord of lords and King of kings. Revelation 5 speaks to this event which was the answer to our Lord’s petition expressed here in John 17. There we read these words of John as he witnessed the heavenly scene:

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. (Rev. 5:6f)

We then read of the acknowledgment and celebration of the heavenly hosts upon the enthronement of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. When Jesus prayed to His Father, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son”, He was asking His Father to enthrone Him as Lord over all creation.

In verse 1b we read of...

1. The first purpose for Jesus’ prayer to be glorified: to enable Him to glorify His Father.

When Jesus prayed that the Father would glorify Him, He did so with the desire and intention to glorify His Father with the glory that He received from the Father. Again we read our Lord’s words, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, *that Your Son also may glorify You.*” Here, we read that the first purpose for which Jesus prayed for glory was so that He might glorify His Father.

Now the Father gave authority to Jesus Christ over all of creation because He could trust His Son to use that authority in service first to Him--His Father--and in service to His people and to truth and justice. Here we see the divine purpose and will for authority within God’s creation. Authority is never to be used to be self-serving, but authority is always to be used in service to others, and that service is to be according to the righteousness of God. When a man or woman uses the authority that he or she has to oppress others or to show unjust favor to someone over another, or, if authority is used in a self-serving manner, it is sinful and damnable. Our Lord Jesus never once gave consideration to Himself above others about Him. He always employed His authority in service to others and, of course, was in most service to His Father. And here in John 17:1, Jesus requests “glory”, or kingly authority, in order to glorify His Father. He desired to have all authority over all of creation, in order to bring all of creation into subordination and obedience to His Father. This was the mission on which the Father had sent Him, to reconcile, recover, and restore His fallen creation to full, willful, joyful, submission and obedience to God the Father. Jesus Christ accomplished this work

through His life, death, and resurrection, and through being granted sovereign, kingly authority over all the world.

John Gill (1697-1771) commented on the words, “*that Thy Son also may glorify Thee*”:

as He had done throughout the whole of His life and conversation, and by His ministry and miracles; so now at His sufferings and death, through the salvation of His chosen ones, in which the wisdom, grace, justice, holiness, power, and faithfulness of God are greatly glorified; and in the after discharge of other branches of His mediatorial office, in making intercession for His people, in the ministry of His word and ordinances, by His servants, attended with His holy Spirit, and by the administration of His kingly office.

We next read in **verse 2** how Christ brings glory to His Father. Again, Jesus said, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²*as You have given Him authority over all flesh*, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.”

Let us consider these words of our Lord, “*as You have given Him authority over all flesh.*” But here Jesus spoke as though the Father had already given Him authority over all flesh. His words are in the past tense: “as You *have given Him* authority over all flesh.” This authority, however, was not granted Him until after His death and resurrection. God the Father conferred sovereign authority upon the incarnate Son of God when He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. It was then that Jesus Christ sat down on the throne of God, having become King of kings and Lord of lords. It was then that the Father “highly exalted Him” and gave Him “the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11). But Christ speaks of it in the past tense as though it had already occurred. How can this be? It could be argued that He spoke in the past tense although it had not yet occurred in history because it was so certain that it would take place.⁶ The answer is that Christ was speaking of the eternal decree of God to give Him authority over all the world. Jesus was saying that the Father had “given Him authority” in the beginning, when the Triune God entered into that covenant of redemption, in which God purposed to glorify Himself in history by redeeming a people from fallen humanity. God the Father “had glorified” His Son, that is, had in eternity decreed, that is, purposed to glorify His incarnate Son in giving Him authority over all flesh, all humanity. After stating that verse 2 was the basis for verse 1, **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) explained the matter this way:

Verse 2b refers to the Father’s gift, *in eternity past*, of authority over all humanity, on the basis of the Sons’ *prospective* obedient humiliation, death, resurrection and exaltation. It is nothing less than the redemptive plan of God, for the second part of the verse makes the purpose of this grant clear: it is that the Son might give eternal life to those the Father has given Him.⁷

We read that God the Father gave regal authority to His Son “*over all flesh.*” When our Lord Jesus died and rose again and ascended into heaven, the Father seated Him on His throne, from which He has ruled over history ever since. It was then that the promised kingdom of God was inaugurated. John the Baptist had announced the kingdom was at hand. That kingdom was formed when Jesus Christ died, rose, and ascended to the throne of His Father. The kingdoms of this world are all under the authority of King Jesus.

This event was prophesied long ago in great detail. God revealed this purpose for His Son in visions that He gave His prophet Daniel. When God had judged His people and sent them into exile to be under bondage to their pagan masters of Babylon (6th c. BC), He promised that He would one day deliver them from their oppressors into the promised kingdom of the Messiah. The vision of Daniel 2 speaks of this quite directly. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream that greatly troubled him. He called for the wise men of Babylon to tell him his dream and give him the interpretation, but they were unable to do so. But

⁶ This was done in Romans 8:30 when Paul declared that we have already been “glorified” though it is a future event.

⁷ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 555.

God sent Daniel to the king, who described the details of the dream and then gave him the interpretation. The king had seen a great image, which is described by Daniel 2:31-35.

“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. ³²This image’s head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel then gave Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of this dream:

“This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. ³⁷You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; ³⁸and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. ³⁹But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. ⁴¹Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. ⁴²And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. ⁴³As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. ⁴⁴*And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.* ⁴⁵Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

God had revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that inclusive of his kingdom, there would arise four world-wide kingdoms, each succeeding the other. **Babylon** was the first kingdom, the head of gold, whose king had absolute uncontested authority. The second kingdom was **Media-Persia**, the chest and arms of silver, that had defeated Babylon in 539 BC. The third kingdom was Greece, the “belly and thighs of bronze”, which defeated the Persians in 490/480 BC. And then there was the **Roman Empire**, with “its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.” Rome ascended to world domination in the 2nd century BC. It was during the days of the Roman Empire that God would raise up His Messiah to become King of kings and Lord of lords.⁸ God raised up His Son, Jesus Christ, who was represented to Daniel as a great “**stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**” The “mountain” is an emblem of a kingdom. The kingdom of the Messiah, the promised kingdom of God, was inaugurated when God the Father had raised His Son and seated Him on His throne in heaven. Jesus Christ has had authority over all flesh since His ascension and His coronation. He is governing the nations of the world, judging His enemies even while He is redeeming His people, all those whom the Father had promised to Him before creation. **Donald Carson** wrote,

⁸ It is really quite silly that dispensationalists have taught that the Roman Empire did not officially end, but disintegrated, so that it can emerge again at the end of the church age to be ruled over by the antichrist during a future seven year tribulation, for only then, they say Jesus will return to set up His earthly 1,000 year Jewish kingdom during the days of “the Roman Empire.”

Everything and everyone in the universe is subject to this kingdom, whether the point is acknowledged or not. The saving subset of this universal reign, the ‘kingdom’ which one ‘enters’ only by the new birth (3:3, 5; cf. Matt. 7:21-23; 13:24-30), is the dynamic equivalent of that peculiar exercise of the Son’s authority that issues in eternal life for all those the Father has given to the Son (cf. also 5:21-27).⁹

2. The second purpose for Jesus’ prayer: the salvation of the elect

Our Lord declared in the second portion of **verse 2** the second purpose for God His Father giving Him kingly authority over all the world. The first purpose for which Jesus prayed for glory was so that He might glorify His Father. ***The second purpose for which Jesus prayed for glory was to secure the salvation of the elect of God.*** Jesus prayed, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, ***that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.***”

The Father gave His Son authority over the entire human race so that He could give eternal life to the ones that the Father had chosen in eternity out of the fallen human race to give to His Son. The writer to the Hebrews described Jesus Christ as the glorified Son of God, who was surrounded by His “brethren” whom He had redeemed through His sacrificial death on their behalf. Here is Hebrews 2:10ff in which several Old Testament quotations are cited, including **Isaiah 8:18**, which speaks of God giving “children” to Jesus:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²saying:

“I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”

¹³And again:

“I will put My trust in Him.”

And again:

“Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.” (Heb. 2:10-13)

And later in John 17:6 we read of these gifts to Jesus Christ, given to Him by His Father: “I have manifested Your name ***to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.*** They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.”

Back in John 6 we read of our Lord speaking of the ones (the elect) whom the Father had given to Him. Jesus said,

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of ***all He has given Me*** I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” (6:38f)

God has chosen out of fallen humanity a people for Himself, vast in quantity, diverse in ethnicity and rich in diversity (to use a rather tried and tired word, but true word.) The Son of God redeemed them through His death. And so, we join the great chorus of heaven, singing,

⁹ Carson, p. 555.

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:9f)

God’s election of His people whom He purposed to save through Christ was wholly due to His sovereign grace. There was nothing about His elect that moved Him to choose them and leave the rest of the human race to its just damnation. The elect are no better than the non-elect. God did not choose them because of what they would do or not do, for God is not a respecter of persons. He chose each one of his own because He purposed to glorify Himself in saving them from their sin and bringing them into the kingdom of His Son.

Now after Jesus prayed for His Father to glorify Him (vs. 1, 2), we read that...

B. Jesus defines and describes the true nature and essence of eternal life (v. 3).

Jesus had prayed, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*”

Eternal life is not merely a temporal matter, an unending existence. Eternal life is a quality of existence, one in which the people of God have come to know and enjoy fully the true nature and presence of God.

Otherwise put, the glorification of the Son entails the glorification of God (v. 1) – i.e. God is clothed in splendour in the eyes of those who perceive what has been achieved by God Himself on the cross, resurrection and exaltation of His Son. To see God’s glory, to be given eternal life – these are parallel, and, lest the reader miss the point, the two themes are drawn together in v. 3. Eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God. Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One.¹⁰

Coming to know God the Father is only possible through coming to know His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ not only is the only Mediator for us in order to bring us to God, but He is the only Mediator to reveal His Father to us. We can only know God the Father through God His Son. As our Lord once declared as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel:

“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Matt. 11:27)

C. Jesus appeals to His Father to glorify Him because He had completed the work the Father sent Him to complete (vs. 4, 5).

We read our Lord’s words in **verses 4 and 5**, *“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”*

All that our Savior did while on earth was intended to bring glory to His Father. “Jesus has so clothed the Father with splendour that many human beings creatures of the earth, not of heaven) have come to praise Him. After all, the incarnation itself was a display of glory.”¹¹

¹⁰ Carson, p. 556.

¹¹ Ibid.

It is interesting that our Lord said, “*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*”, when He had not yet been arrested, tried, and crucified. Had He “finished” His work? Yes, His great trial was before Him, but He had successfully served His Father faithfully throughout His 30+ years on earth, and He had all but reached His end. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote of this:

His Father gave Him His work, His work in the vineyard, both appointed Him to it and assisted Him in it. *The work that was given Him to do* He finished. Though He had not, as yet, gone through the last part of His undertaking, yet He was so near being *made perfect through sufferings* that He might say, I have finished it; it was as good as done, He was giving it its finishing stroke *eteleiosa —I have finished*. The word signifies His performing every part of His undertaking in the most complete and perfect manner. Herein He glorified His Father; He pleased Him, He praised Him. It is the glory of God that *His work is perfect*, and the same is the glory of the Redeemer; what He is the author of He will be the finisher of. It was a strange way for the Son to glorify the Father by abasing Himself (this looked more likely to disparage Him), yet it was contrived that so He should glorify Him: “*I have glorified thee on the earth, in such a way as men on earth could bear the manifestation of Thy glory.*”

The Father had sent His Son into the world to perform “work.” Jesus saw Himself to be on a mission, to accomplish that for which He was sent. This purpose guided Him and motivated Him throughout His life. At the end of His life on earth He could say to His Father, “*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*”,

We, too, as Christians, should have this understanding of our relationship with God who is our Creator and with His Son our Savior. He has called us out of the fallen kingdom of the evil one into the glorious kingdom of His Son. And He has commissioned us to glorify Him in this world in how we act and react, how we think and how we live. God has given each of us who have come to know Him a purpose, which is a glorious privilege and sacred duty, to which we should give ourselves prayerfully and fully. Paul could write of his own life:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

May He enable each of us see this glorious calling and great privilege to glorify Him in the life that He has given us. May we see this work through to completion, so that each of us will hear our Savior say to us one day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt. 25:21).

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)
