

## John 17:6-17

### Introduction

I believe the first five verses of Jesus' prayer in John 17 are the key to understanding the entire prayer. So, before we go forward this morning, we need to go back. Jesus prayed:

- John 17:1 — “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...”

This entire prayer is concerned with the *glorification* of the Father in and through the *glorification* of the Son. Which is to say, this entire prayer is concerned with the *glory* of God. And *how* is God to be glorified (not made to be more glorious, but glorified)? He is glorified in the gift of eternal life that He gives to us, and so He is glorified “*in [us]*” (17:10).

- John 17:1–3 — “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, *even as* You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

God is glorified not primarily by what we give to Him (our obedience and praise), but rather by what He has given to us – the gift of eternal life; the gift of knowing the only true God through the revelation that He has made in Jesus Christ. God is glorified when He is known, and this *is* the gift of eternal life. It's in this light that Jesus prays:

- John 17:4–5 — “I glorified You on the earth, having finished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

Jesus prays this because He desires that *we* should be with Him where He is and that *we* should see His glory (17:24-26), because to see and know Him is to see and know the Father, and because this *is* the consummation of our eternal life. With these things in mind, we see that there's a sense in which God is glorified already because we have, already, eternal life. We've come to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. So Jesus prays in verses 6-8:

**I. John 17:6–8** — “**I have manifested** Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and **they have kept** Your word. Now **they have come to know** that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me **I have given** to them; and **they received** them and **truly understood** that I came forth from You, and **they believed** that You sent Me.”

All of which is to say, “I have glorified *You* by giving *to them* eternal life.” I have finished the work on earth which you gave Me to do. But how are the men whom the Father has given to Jesus from out of the world (in this context, specifically the eleven disciples)—how are these men to arrive at the goal of that fullest experience of eternal life when they are with Jesus where

He is and they see the glory that Jesus had with the Father before the world was? How is God to be glorified in this most ultimate sense? How do we get from here to there?

On the one hand, if we have eternal life *now*, we can never fail to enter into all the fullness of that eternal life in the future. This is true, first, because of the sovereignty of God's grace. The ultimate ground of our eternal life is not to be found in any choice that we make (though we do make a free and willing choice), but in God's choice of a particular people to give to His Son ("I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world"). This is true, secondly, because of the immutability and faithfulness of God. God doesn't give to us the saving knowledge of Himself and then change His mind later and withdraw that gift. And this is true, thirdly, because of what eternal life is, in itself. We can't be truly alive with eternal life and ever ultimately fail to be living that life that we have.

And yet eternal life isn't something that works "automatically" (mechanically; fatalistically). For Jesus, the completion of His work on earth was not a reason for Him to "rest easy" or be apathetic about the future of those to whom He had given eternal life; it was a reason for earnest, persevering prayer. The fact that Jesus could speak of those who "*have kept* Your word," who "*have come to know* that everything You have given Me is from You," who *have "received"* "the words which You gave Me," who *have "truly understood* that I came forth from You," and who *have "believed* that You sent Me"—the fact that Jesus could speak of these accomplished realities was not a reason for presumption, but rather the ultimate reason for earnest, persevering prayer. We see this in verses 9-10 when Jesus prays:

**II. John 17:9-10** — "I *ask* on their behalf; I do not *ask* on behalf of the world but of those whom You have given Me; *for* they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them."

Can you imagine any stronger statement of our safety and security? Jesus prays for who? For those *whom the Father has given Him*. This is a completed transaction; this is a gift already given. And God doesn't take back from Jesus what He has once given to Him. Jesus prays for who? For all those who *belong to the Father* and then He rejoices that "all things that are *Mine* are *Yours*, and *Yours* are *Mine*." This is an irrevocable ownership. Those who belong to the Father can never cease to belong to the Father. Jesus prays for who? For those in whom He has *already been glorified*. To say that a day may come when Jesus will no longer be glorified in those in whom He was once glorified can only be a slander against Jesus.

On the one hand, we see how safe and secure we are because of the sovereignty of God's grace. And yet on the other hand, we see that God's grace doesn't work in an automatic or mechanical way. There's nothing automatic or fatalistic about the Christian life, or about our future entrance into the fullness of this eternal life that we already have. And we see this in the fact that Jesus prays for us. We see this in the fact that Jesus *asks* on our behalf.

**III. John 17:11a** — “And I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me...”

The world is a place of real threat and real danger to God’s people. By the “world” we mean a system of values that’s opposed to God as well as the people who hold and promote those values. Because we live in this world, therefore we live surrounded by threat and danger — not one that’s physical or temporal, but one that’s spiritual and eternal. If this was something to be taken lightly, we can be sure that Jesus wouldn’t be praying as He does. He wouldn’t be asking on our behalf.

“Holy Father, *keep* them *in Your name*...” While they’re living *in* the world, keep them *in* Your name. To keep, here, is to guard, to preserve, to sustain. The world in which we live threatens to mold and shape us after its own priorities and values – which can only result in death. Do we recognize that this is a threat to each one of us every day that we live *in the world*? So what Jesus asks on our behalf is this: Do not let them be pressed into the world’s mold, but rather sustain them in their true knowledge of You – in their true knowledge of Your name, which You have given to Me and I have manifested to them. “Keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me.”

Notice the form of address Jesus uses: “*Holy* Father...” When we truly know God, instead of being like the world, we’ll be set apart unto Him – we’ll be holy even as He is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:13-16). We’re either in the process of being conformed to the values and priorities of the world (which is spiritual death), or we’re being kept in the Father’s name and are in the process of being conformed to His image and likeness as that image and likeness has been manifested to us in His Son (eternal life). These are the only two alternatives, and there’s zero common or neutral ground between them.

What Jesus is praying, then, is that in the midst of this dangerous and threatening world, the Father would keep us always living out the eternal life that we have. He’s praying that the Father would sustain us while we’re living in this world in the true knowledge of Him. “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me...”

**IV. John 17:11b** — “...that they may [always] be one even as We are.”

Why does Jesus introduce this theme of “oneness” *here*? He doesn’t pray that we might *become* one, but rather that we might *remain* one” (cf. Lenski) – that we might always be one. In other words, our oneness is the sign not only that we have eternal life, but that we’re being kept and sustained in that eternal life by the power of God. Jesus said in John chapter ten:

- **John 10:14–16** — “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; **and they will become one flock with one shepherd.**”

And then John writes in chapter eleven:

- John 11:51–52 — Now [Caiaphas] did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but **in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.**

If we should ever cease to be one flock, then that would mean that Jesus is no longer our shepherd. If we should ever cease to be gathered into one, then that would mean we've been scattered abroad and are eternally lost. It would mean that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross—when He laid down His life for the sheep—was of no avail. Our eternal life can never be separated from our oneness.

On the one hand, this oneness is an accomplished reality. If I've come to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and if you've also come to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, then we *are* one. If you're being kept in the name of the Father, the name which He gave to Jesus, and I'm being kept in this same name, then we *are* one. Our eternal life can never be separated from our oneness.

But this oneness isn't just an accomplished fact. It's something that's *lived* in our relations with one another. Jesus prays: “that they may [always] be one *even as We are*.” The Father and Son are one in being. They are one in the sense that *God* is one. But this oneness of being is a oneness that's “lived” in relationship. Throughout this Gospel, the Father and the Son are one in love, in purpose, in action, and in word. In a similar (but not identical) way, the oneness of eternal life (one flock kept in one name) is lived in the context of our relations with one another. So when Jesus prays that we might be always one even as He and the Father are one, He's praying that we might be one in practice, one in love and one in purpose, and therefore one in word and in action. This oneness is the visible sign to us that we have eternal life and that we're being kept and sustained in this eternal life until the end.

Once again, our eternal life can never be separated from our oneness. And as we should be able to see by now, our oneness can never be separated from our holiness. Eternal life and holiness and oneness are all of a piece together. And so as Jesus leaves the world and goes to the Father, He prays for us who are still “in the world”: “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may [always] be one even as We are.”

**V. John 17:12** — “While I was with them, I was **keeping** them in Your name which You have given Me; and I **guarded** them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.”

When Jesus was keeping and guarding, His keeping and guarding was 100% effectual (“not one of them perished”). But what about Judas? Did Jesus fail in guarding Judas? Or is Jesus saying that it's not ultimately His guarding that determines our eternal life, but rather our own hearts and choices? This ought to be a terrifying thought to us! There's mystery here; but let us acknowledge with joy that the keeping and guarding power of God is what is ultimately determinative. Those that God keeps and that God guards will not and cannot ever perish *because* they are kept and guarded by God. Judas, therefore, was not among those that Jesus was keeping in the Father's name. If He had been, He couldn't possibly have perished. Judas chose

freely to go his own way. He went out from the disciples because he was not ultimately “*of*” the disciples (cf. 1 Jn. 2:19)—because he never had eternal life—and even this happened so that the word of God would be fulfilled (Ps. 41:9 & Jn. 13:18; Ps. 109:4-13 & Acts 1:16-20).

When Jesus was keeping and guarding those who belonged to the Father and whom the Father had given to Him, His keeping and guarding was 100% effectual (“not one of them perished”). Now He prays as He leaves the world and comes to the Father that the Father would continue keeping and guarding *us* in the same way. Can there be any doubt that the prayer of Jesus will be answered? Can there be any doubt that the Father’s keeping and guarding will be 100% effectual?

The Father keeps us not just *for* eternal life *at the end*, but *in* eternal life *now* – which is to say that He keeps us—He preserves and sustains us—in true holiness and oneness. So we go on to read in verses 13-17:

**VI. John 17:13-17** — “But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves [the joy that I Myself have in keeping Your commandments and abiding in Your love; cf. 15:10-11]. I have given them Your **word**; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to **keep** them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. **Sanctify** them [set them apart in holiness and oneness] by the **truth**; Your **word** is **truth**.”

This world lies in the power of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19; cf. Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). It’s values and priorities are shaped by the evil one. So what is the *means* by which God keeps us in the midst of the constant threat and danger of living in this world? He keeps us by His word – the word of truth which He gave to Jesus and which Jesus has given to us. He keeps us *in* His name by the revelation *of* His name that He has given to us in Jesus. This is why we gather each Sunday to hear the word of truth read and preached and to pray the word of truth and to sing the word of truth. This is why we gather each Sunday to immerse ourselves together in the revelation of God’s name in Jesus Christ. We gather not so that we can be more moral, or so that we can learn something new. We gather so that we might be kept in eternal life – in true Gospel holiness and oneness.

The knowledge that we are “kept” is not an incentive to apathy, but to the utmost exertions on our part. We’re being *kept* not just *for* eternal life at the end, but *in* eternal life now. Therefore, we must always seek to be growing in our knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. We’re being *kept* not just *for* holiness at the end, but *in* holiness now. Therefore, we must always seek to be conforming not to the values and priorities of this world, but to the image and likeness of God as He’s revealed this image and likeness in Jesus Christ. We’re being *kept* not just *for* oneness at the end, but *in* oneness now. Therefore, we must always seek to be more and more one in love and in purpose, and therefore in word and in action – even as the Father and the Son are one.

And here again is the good news: We seek these things *because* we’re being *kept in* these things, and because the One who keeps us has promised that He will never lose us. Therefore, it’s when

we're seeking these things—growth in eternal life, and holiness, and oneness—that the joy of Jesus is made full in us (v. 13). It's when we're seeking these things that God is glorified in us (vv. 1-5). It's in and through (not on the basis of, but in and through) our seeking of these things that we will arrive one day at the goal of that fullest experience of eternal life when we are with Jesus where He is and we see His glory, even the glory that He had with the Father before the world was (vv. 24).