

## The Densest Moment | Jesus Christ's Farewell Conversation "The Prayer of Jesus"

John 17.1-19

3.26.23

*Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, <sup>2</sup> even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. <sup>3</sup> "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. <sup>4</sup> "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. <sup>5</sup> "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

*<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> "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; <sup>10</sup> and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> "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, that they may be one even as We are. <sup>12</sup> "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.*

*<sup>13</sup> "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. <sup>14</sup> "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. <sup>15</sup> "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*

**This is the penultimate, i.e., second-to-last, sermon in this series** on *The Upper Room Discourse*. Jesus Christ is gathered alone with disciples for the Passover Meal. One of the twelve, Judas ("the son of perdition" v. 12), has gone from the meal into the darkness (the opposite of Nicodemus – 3.2, 19-21 comp. with 13.30). The City is packed with people come to this annual, international festival in Jerusalem. By this time, Jesus and the young men may be walking and will eventually settle in a garden called Gethsemane (Mt 26.36).

And now, the Teacher prays the longest recorded prayer we have – much longer than what we call *The*

*Lord's Prayer* but very similar, really an expansion of that best-known of Jesus Christ's prayers. He prays so that the eleven disciples can hear the words and learn some dense, mystifying, deep truths that they will remember forever but don't yet understand as they're being prayed. Every word is weighty. The finish-line is in sight. The *Light of the World* is about to be snuffed out... for "a little while" (16.16, 17, 18, 19). Jesus prays for Himself and for His students and for what lies ahead for them.

Back in the last century (1999), I preached SIX sermons in a row on this one prayer (only two this year), but I could see why it took six...could be more! It's DENSE!

Today I want to look at this heavy prayer in three ways:

- 1) **The View from the Top**
- 2) **The View from the Trenches**
- 3) **The View of the Race Before US**

We could try to get a grip on this prayer by noting the repeated words and themes. That's always a reliable way of understanding what you're reading AND I DO WANT TO DO THAT... The words "they, them, their" come up a lot! Jesus is praying for His protégés – "they." He has them in mind as He prepares to carry the weight of the world (always He thinks of THEM!) Given, given, gave – glory, glorify – the world – to understand or know – all these are repeated words/themes in this prayer.

But what if you found yourself on scaffolding in pitch darkness with only your cell-phone light trying to analyze the material of the wall you were leaning against... you had a test kit... you discovered some iron and some copper, and it was only as the sun rose hours later that the wall was a was in the middle of the Grand Canyon?

The point is – analyzing a MARVEL can't be done solely at (what today is called) the "*granular level*". We have to see this MARVEL of a prayer from the top, from 35,000 feet above. And from there, the wonder of this prayer comes into focus in a way the fine details, can't reveal. Let's look at three truths we can only see from from a Bird's Eye View: mystery, Moses and moment.

The mysteries in this prayer are many. Some have come to a wrong and anti-Christian conclusion that because Jesus is PRAYING to God that Jesus must not BE God. The early church saw this and concluded that from a Bird's Eye view, Jesus Christ IS God and IS Man. This is Jesus, in His human nature praying to God. AND this is Jesus, the infinite, eternal and unchangeable Son conversing with the infinite, eternal and unchangeable Father, through the infinite, eternal and unchangeable Spirit. It's all part of an eternal conversation in the One God.

The things Jesus Christ says here are mysterious and wonderful – like "You (Father), have given these men to Me for they are YOURS, and all things that are Mine are Yours and YOURS ARE MINE..." What mere Man could pray that prayer? Jesus owns all the Father owns.

Also, from the Bird's Eye view from the top, scholars have looked for some parallel in the literature of the first century. Does the form of this address/prayer conform to a genre from the ancient world. And while some of the suggestions are interesting, the one I find most plausible is the final speech and prayer-song of Moses.

At the end of the Torah, Moses is about to die. He gathers the heads of the twelve tribes and tells them that this is where he gets off the bus: he'll no longer help them to get INTO the Land of Promise. What an enormous disappointment... BUT he will give them another helper who will take them in and Joshua, the other helper will pick up where Moses left off – Joshua will take the baton.

And so, HERE is One better than Moses who disappoints His tribal leaders (the apostles, the leaders of the New Israel in Christ) by telling them, "You will no longer see Me but I will give you another Helper – One better than Joshua – the Spirit of Truth and HE will give you conquest over the Land." AND whereas Joshua gave them a beautiful strip of Land in the Middle East – the Better Joshua (God's Spirit) will give them conquest over the entire world. As we'll see next week, persons from every tribe, nation, tongue and people are included in this prayer of Jesus.

And whereas the first Joshua conquered by the sword, this Other Helper, the Spirit of Truth, will conquer the world by the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The better Helper who takes the baton from Jesus as Joshua took it from Moses, the Spirit of Truth will use His Sword to bring people to LIFE by the Word of Grace!

A view from the top shows us that this scene has happened before and that THIS time, the campaign of death becomes a world-wide campaign for LIFE, the Conquest of Church, led by the Spirit of Truth.

Lastly (Mystery, Moses and) MOMENT. The first words Jesus Christ prays are, "Father, the hour has come..." and it turns out that word ("HOUR") is highly significant to John's Gospel. You remember the first miracle: the wedding at Cana. His mother asks His help when the wine runs out (QUOTE) "*Jesus says to her, 'Ma'am, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.'*"

He's saying, "Once I work My first miracle – there will be NO TURNING BACK! They will not be able to stop hunting Me, haunting Me and eventually they will kill Me... Are you ready for that HOUR to begin, Mom?"

At one end – "Mother, it's NOT yet my hour" and at the other end, in this prayer, "Father, the HOUR has come" – this is the hour when the Love of God for sinners is most vividly portrayed for all the world to see. This is the MOMENT when the King of Love takes His throne and that Throne will be the Awful Tree.

Now to a briefer but more granular view of this prayer, a view from the TOP and now a view from the TRENCHES. The basis prayer is vv. 1-5 – Jesus praying for Himself and vv. 6-19 – Jesus praying for His

disciples.

When He prays for Himself, He asks the Father to glorify the Son. It's as if Jesus Christ who never said or did things in order to be validated by people, now says, "Father, the public opinion polls NEVER mattered to Me –YOUR opinion is all that ever mattered to Me."

We think back to the flattery of Nicodemus (John 3). It meant nothing to Jesus to get glory/affirmation from a great religious leader – He knew eternal glory, and what people were offering was nothing in comparison.

Or when the crowds tried to make Jesus King and He immediately withdrew to the mountain to pray (6.15).

Or when He told those who wanted to offer Him membership in the Clergy-Union: and He replies (quote) *"I don't receive glory from men...How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?"* (Jn. 5.41, 44)

Or in CH 8: *"Jesus answered, 'If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it's My Father who glorifies Me.'"* (54)

Or when the Greeks came to see Him and the disciples got super excited that their new start-up was about to achieve international GLORY and Jesus sees it very differently and says, *"Now My soul has become 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." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." (Jn. 12.23-32)*

And now He prays, "Father, I finished the task You gave Me – the gears are in motion, and I will sacrifice Myself as the True Passover Lamb... I finished it! Did I do all that You wanted Me to do...Did I make You proud."

That question will soon be answered distinctly when the Father raises His Beloved Son from the dead and crowns Him with glory (Heb 2.9). The fame or glory of the Father and the Son are eternally intertwined and intertwined in Christ the Head and Christ the Body, the Church.

Next Jesus prays for the Church represented by the new tribal leaders, the Apostles. They're NOT good men, they're sinners and they're still very mixed up; but they've kept His word, i.e., they do believe the Good News and they ARE Jesus Christ's prize; like Moses' speech in Deuteronomy, *"For the LORD'S portion is His people..."* (32.9)

Father, they belong to YOU. I kept them in Your way, in Your Name, in Your truth. I imparted the knowledge of God to them – and to truly KNOW YOU IS eternal life – and now I pray, keep them, sanctify them... that YOUR, that OUR eternal plans be carried out fully – even the one who perished had a role to play in that plan.”

Don't take them OUT of the world but protect them from the evil one while they're IN the world. Keep them unified on the Truth. May the decisions they make – like the decision of how to include the Gentiles in the Church (Acts 15) may those decisions be made in love and unity and truth!

And while there are other things to note, we have to see this persistent presence of JOY: *“so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.”* Jesus Christ wants to know the JOY of making His Father sing (by bringing His lost children HOME) AND He wants to share that joy of the Father with the disciples and with the Church that follows them. *“For the joy set before Him endured the cross and mocked the shame...”* (Heb 12.1-2)

Finally, a view from the top, a view from the trenches where Jesus won the battle for US and for glory that could only come from the One and Ultimate Source and last, the View of the Race Before Us. We fix our eyes on Jesus as we run the race given the Church to run.

This prayer of Jesus is not something we could pray exactly as He did; He's finishing the Task that only He could finish. BUT we ARE sent as He was sent and so this out-loud prayer does inform OUR prayers.

It exposes the fact that we often pray religious prayers (like you'd hear in any religion), and I hate critiquing anyone's prayers, but I THINK we pray mostly to get out of discomfort, trouble and pain. I mean if you were going to be tortured to death tomorrow... probably you'd pray for a stay of execution. If you're sick you'd pray for healing and we ARE invited to pray for those things and for other of our daily needs, “daily bread.”

But we have to see that while food is necessary, we *“cannot live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* (Deut 8.3) We pray for success but why ...so we can have the tokens/trappings of success and people will be impressed or give us glory...?

How much BIGGER our prayers could be! We can pray for and participate IN the biggest thing of all – that God be glorified in our tiny lives. We're being invited IN to the life of the Trinity and we can pray, “Lord, I want to YOU to be the Source of my applause... May it be the real I who now addresses the real THOU... get to the bottom of me...sort me out so that my acceptance and affirmation come from YOU and to actually participate in the JOY You have in Jesus... Make this sickness, this unemployment, this child of mine who's “out there”, these parents of mine who are “out there” – make this trial turn to gold and make me to see – if this pain and heartache can bring me closer to You and Your purposes, then let it be...

I want my glory, my identity, my purpose, my plans, my hope to come from YOU because...in the end... God's affirmation based on ALL the work Jesus accomplished/finished for us is the only Source of purpose, affirmation, hope that is true and permanent and truly satisfying. As John Piper says: "God is glorified in us to the extent that we are satisfied in Him."

This is what it means when Jesus asks that His disciples be sanctified in the truth, that we are IN THE WORLD, but not running after the applause of the world and the goals and esteem the world can give – we're set-apart for better and greater things – our destiny (the finish-line) AND our way of getting there is different – we're looking for the real Thing... He's a Person and to know Him and the One He sent is the very essence of LIFE – 17.3)

Lastly, and I hope to talk more about this in the finale next week, but WE are the Body of Christ... and we're sent into the world as Jesus was. We're looking for World Conquest.

The Sword we wield heals and makes alive... AND it also destroys everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10.5) – that's weighty stuff!

The Church's Mission ("*missio dei*") is something we take seriously... because we ARE, as it were, an extension of Jesus – the One sent to US is committed to also send us and use us in the world – that's the race before us... More on that next week.