

JOHN 17

JESUS, THE GREAT INTERCESSOR

“There is no voice which has ever been heard – either in heaven or in earth – more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than this prayer offered up by the Son of God Himself.” Such were the words of Philip Melancthon, and such has also been the verdict of the Christian Church throughout the centuries of time. This chapter constitutes “the most precious fragment of the past.” Here, according to all commentators, we enter the “Holy of holies” of the New Testament; for here we are given the most profound revelation of the very heart of our Savior! If we wish to have one unanswerable argument to prove the Deity of Christ, it can be supplied in this single chapter. The sublime self-consciousness of the Speaker, His claim of universal dominion, His reference to a previous existence in living unity with the eternal God – these things leave us with only three possible explanations: insanity, blasphemy, or true Deity!

Jesus prays, first of all, for Himself (verses 1-5); but His petitions on His own behalf are as far as can be from selfishness! He prays to be glorified, in order that He may glorify His Father, and thus give eternal life to His followers. By His request to be glorified, Jesus referred to His crucifixion, His triumph over the grave, His ascension, and especially His outpouring of the Holy Spirit. To “glorify” someone is to make them publicly known; Jesus here desires to be made known in His true character as the Divine Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world. And by the glorifying of the Son, the glory of the Father was also secured. God was never so fully revealed in all His justice, love, holiness, and grace, as He was at this time. Furthermore, by this revelation, life was secured for those who “know” God. To “know,” according to John’s Gospel, is not merely an act of the mind; for in that sense, even the demons “know” God. Rather, it denotes love, obedience, and faith – in short, the response of the entire being! Thus, to know the Lord, as He is revealed in His Son, is to have eternal life. This life, therefore, is not only a future experience; it is also a present one.

Jesus also prayed for His immediate disciples – that is, for “the twelve” who had been with Him (verses 6-19). But He first describes them in phrases which have a meaning and a message for all who call themselves His followers. He calls them “the men whom thou gavest me out of the world.” He says that “they have kept thy word”; that “the words which thou gavest me ... they received”; and that “they believed that thou didst send me.” For these people, Jesus prays that they may be kept from evil. During His earthly ministry, He has guarded His disciples; but now He is leaving them. The world will hate them;

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Lord Jesus prays for Himself – verses 1-5
- ❖ He prays for His disciples – verses 6-19
- ❖ He prays for all believers – verses 20-26

and therefore, He commits them to the care of His Father. He does not ask that they shall be taken out of the world. He does not ask that they shall be kept from sorrow, pain, and temptation; but from gloom, discouragement, and sin. But He also prays that His disciples may be sanctified. In this particular passage, this word does not specifically refer to holiness, or to separation from sin – that was the essence of His first petition. Rather, Jesus is requesting that they may be set apart for service – particularly, the service of witnessing to the truth. This second petition is really a prayer for the consecration of His chosen messengers for their appointed mission: “Sanctify them in thy truth: thy word is truth.” The revelation of the Father which Jesus had given – “the truth” which He had revealed to them – was to be not only the instrument of their consecration, but also the sphere of their service. Therefore, He adds, “As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world” – that is, to be His messengers, to testify to “the truth.”



Having prayed for Himself and His disciples, Jesus now prays for all believers (verses 20-26). He beseeches His Father “that they may all be one,” and that they may at last be with Him in heavenly glory. The petition for the oneness of believers refers to something quite different – and far more wonderful – than “church unity.” In its essence, it consists of a union with Christ – and through Him, with God. Even now, “there is one body” – that is, one Church – and it is composed of all who are united with Christ. However, there does remain a further fulfillment of this petition; and for it, we are to work and pray. This spiritual unity must be made manifest – so manifest, in fact, that it may be an irresistible argument for the Divine mission of Christ: “that the world may know that thou didst send me.” And the time is surely coming when this manifestation will be complete! “When Christ, who is our life, shalt be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory.” It is with a petition for this future “glory” of the Church, that the prayer of Jesus reaches its climax: “Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.” Of course, believers do enjoy a present glory in being children of God and possessors of everlasting life. But there is even greater blessedness in store for them; and that is an actual vision of Christ, and a share in the ineffable glory which was granted to the Son by the love of the Father! And Jesus pleads for such glory for His people, upon the grounds of His own abiding presence with them. It is the last phrase – “I in them” – which is the assurance and condition of the answer to this High Priestly prayer of intercession. The indwelling of Christ, by His Spirit, is the power and agent by Whom His followers are being kept from sin, sanctified in service, given unity of life, and made ready for glory!

Lord Jesus, we pray for the full fulfillment of Your petition for the oneness of believers with Yourself; and through You, with our heavenly Father! Amen.