

## G. Interceding for the Disciples (17:1-26)

When He finished instructing the Eleven Jesus raised His eyes and began to petition His Father in prayer. This prayer is commonly referred to as Jesus' "high-priestly prayer" (a tradition going back at least to the fifth century and Cyril of Alexandria) because much of it focused on His intercession for His own – both the men present with Him that night and those who'd become His disciples through their testimony. But the prayer also included Jesus' petition on His own behalf and, in all of its particulars, it provides a profound glimpse into His heart and the intimacy He enjoyed with His Father. Even more, Jesus' prayer focused the Father-Son intimacy on its primary outward dimension: their mutual commitment of love, intent and effort to see the creation – with man at its center – attain its divinely-ordained destiny.

This prayer brought the Upper Room episode to its climax, even as it provided the capstone for all Jesus had told His apostles during their final meal together. It was their Lord stepping into His "inner sanctum" to commune with His Father, but with a view to their edification and encouragement. Jesus brought them into His prayer, not just because it mentioned them, but because it underscored for them the nature and purpose of His mission and their role in it. In a very real way, this final prayer brought to a summary conclusion all of His instruction in word and deed over the past three years, even as it shone a light on what was to come. It reiterated in concentrated fashion the significance of Jesus' coming into the world as the Son sent by the Father, but for the sake of the apostles' insight and understanding in view of their own calling. Thus Jesus ordered His prayer around three focal points: Himself, His apostles and those who'd believe through their witness. Notably, each of the sections surrounding these focal points has several features in common: Jesus directly petitioning His Father (vv. 1, 9, 20), His mention of those the Father gives to Him (vv. 2, 9, 24), His revelation of the Father to them (vv. 6, 14, 26) and the glory associated with His messianic work (1-5, 10, 22).

1. Jesus' prayer concerned His messianic mission in the world, but this mission originated in the eternal determination of the triune God. Everything that had transpired and was yet to come represented the outworking of God's purpose for the world and so testified of Him. The prophets had said that the messianic event would constitute Yahweh's return to Zion to fulfill His good purposes and manifest His righteousness by "keeping covenant" as He'd pledged to the fathers; the Spirit bore this same witness when the appointed day arrived (Luke 1:67-75). All that God had promised – indeed, all that He *is* with respect to His creation – He declared to be "yea and amen" in His Messiah, so that the messianic event would constitute the pinnacle expression of the divine glory (cf. Isaiah 40:1-11, 42:1-12, 49:1-6, 59:16-60:3; Haggai 2:1-9; Zechariah 2-3 with Luke 2:1-14; John 1:14).
  - a. This is the context for understanding Jesus' opening petition, "*Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You*" (17:1). Many have interpreted this as Jesus asking His Father to display His essential deity through His resurrection and ascension. In this way, then, the divine Father would also be glorified. But Jesus' plea didn't concern the manifestation of divine attributes in the Son and Father, but the Son's completed work as manifesting the Father's faithfulness. The Father was going to glorify Jesus by fulfilling His promises in and through Him, thereby showing Him to be His messianic Son-King.

For the Scriptures presented the Messiah as Yahweh's regal son – the “only-begotten” in whom He would establish His kingdom and throne. Installing His Son-King on the throne of His father David, Yahweh was going to give Him “the nations for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession” (Psalm 2). Unlike His earthly father whose dominion extended from the “Euphrates River to the Great Sea to the River of Egypt,” Messiah's kingdom would encompass the whole earth. What Yahweh had promised to Abraham and fulfilled prototypically in David, He was about to fulfill in David's covenant Son (cf. Genesis 15:18; 1 Kings 4:20-21; Daniel 2:31-45, 7:9-27; Luke 1:26-33; cf. also Romans 4:13).

- b. This is the sense in which Jesus connected His glory and His glorification of His Father with the Father giving Him authority over all mankind (17:2a). He wasn't making a generic allusion to His sovereignty as incarnate deity, but was referring to His regal endowment as Yahweh's messianic Son; the promise of Psalm 2 was now being realized in Him. And the fact that He spoke of already having this authority (cf. Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:22-36; Romans 1:1-4; Ephesians 1:18-22; Philippians 2:5-11) highlights His absolute commitment to fully accomplishing the messianic work for which His Father sent Him (cf. 17:4). As the Father was going to glorify Him by His triumph as Israel's King – in the conquering and liberating power of His self-giving death as much as His resurrection and ascension (19:17-20), so Jesus would glorify His Father by fulfilling His will and manifesting His love and covenant faithfulness to the world. And having fulfilled His calling as Yahweh's Servant, He'd take His throne as Lord over all the earth.

Interestingly, though, the issue here in Jesus' lordship isn't His sovereign rule as such, but His life-giving power. His “authority over all flesh” has its goal in the grant of eternal life (17:2b). He has the authority to bestow eternal life, but not arbitrarily or on His own initiative, but in unity with His Father. The Father gives men to the Son and the Son gives them eternal life. This assertion reflects back on Jesus' words in the Capernaum synagogue and must be interpreted with them (ref. 6:22-58). There Jesus associated His Father giving men to Him with His drawing action – not the overwhelming exertion of His power, but His *instruction*: All who are taught by God come to the Son (6:44-45). Moreover, Jesus' citation from Isaiah shows that this instruction pertains to the messianic person and work. Those who've been taught by God – “drawn” by Him – have not seen the Father (6:46), but He has enabled them to see Jesus – the One who *has* seen the Father and came from Him to accomplish His purpose for the world. In that way, these taught ones actually beheld the Father *in the Son* (ref. 1:18, 10:22-38, 14:1-11).

As with His teaching in Capernaum, Jesus' point in His prayer wasn't God's sovereignty in individual salvation. He was praying to His Father regarding the work He was about to complete and how it would glorify Him and His Father by fulfilling the divine will which sent Him into the world (v. 4). In Him, the Father was showing Himself faithful to His promises; in Him, the Father was giving life to the world toward His goal of summing up all things in Him (cf. Ephesians 1:9-10; Colossians 1:19-20). The Son's gift of life to men is the Father's gift to Him.

It is also notable how Jesus described this “eternal life.” For many Christians, eternal life refers to unending life in heaven. So this everlasting heavenly existence is typically construed as a perfect version of the present life – the best of all possible worlds as defined by one’s own sensibilities. But Jesus defined eternal life, not in terms of a place, quality or duration, but in terms of *knowledge*. Eternal life consists in knowing the true God and Jesus the Messiah (17:3). But such knowing goes beyond cognitive understanding and acknowledgment; it is living knowledge that is *relational intimacy* – knowing a person, not information.

Moreover, Jesus wasn’t talking about separate, distinct knowledge of God and Himself, but the relational knowing of the one true God which consists in knowing *Him* as God’s Messiah. Jesus was pointing out that one only knows the living God in truth when He knows Jesus in truth, which means knowing Him as the Messiah sent by God (with all that entails and implies). In effect, Jesus was saying what John has emphasized throughout his gospel account: Jesus the Messiah is the embodiment and full exegesis of the one true God, so that experiencing Him is experiencing God and knowing Him is knowing God (ref. 1:1, 14-18, 5:17-23, 7:14-17, 8:31-58, 10:22-38, 12:44-45, 14:1-11, 15:18-24).

The implication, then, is that “eternal life” consists in a living relationship with the true and living God in and through living union with Jesus. Eternal life isn’t a future condition people obtain after their death, but the life that characterizes God Himself; it is the new – and true – human existence God intended for His image-bearers and which one enters by sharing in the life of the True Man. “You in Me and I in you” is the basis of a living knowledge of Jesus the Messiah and this knowledge amounts to knowing the one true God. *This* is eternal life and all who possess this life have been taught by God in truth – the truth as it is in Jesus (ref. 6:41-58; cf. 3:1-15, 5:24-26, 39-40, 6:25-40, 12:44-50).

- c. Jesus went on to declare that He’d glorified His Father by accomplishing the work He’d sent Him to do (17:4). This “work” was going to culminate with Calvary, but it began with the incarnation itself. From the moment of His birth Jesus had lived out His Father’s will, not only by speaking the Father’s words and doing His works, but by embodying in Himself Yahweh’s return to Israel. In all things He’d proven to be a faithful Son in whom men beheld His Father.

Now the hour of completion was at hand and it was time to return to the Father. Jesus had glorified His Father by His faithfulness and His Father had glorified Him by affirming and upholding Him as His beloved Son (1:14, 5:37-44, 11:4; cf. Luke 3:21-22, 9:28-35, 20:1-18). But there was another dimension or degree of glory which Jesus prayed to have restored to Him – the glory that was His together with the Father before the world existed (17:5). From the standpoint of His messianic accomplishment, Jesus’ latter glory was actually going to transcend His former glory. For He was returning to His Father as the triumphal King who’d conquered the subjugating powers, liberated the creation and established His reign over the earth (ref. vv. 1-2; cf. Isaiah 59:16-60:3; Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 2).

But it seems that Jesus was speaking about the glory of His previous intimacy with His Father when they communed in one another's presence (1:1, 6:46, 8:38). As true man and God's only-begotten Son, Jesus had enjoyed uncompromised intimacy with His Father while on the earth. But this intimacy was different from before because Jesus inhabited human "space" while His Father dwelt in divine "space." His presence in the world as God's true sanctuary meant that the merging of heavenly and earthly space had begun, but the consummation of this union awaited the new heavens and new earth. As long as Jesus remained on the earth His intimacy with His Father lacked perfect immediacy. But when He returned to the Father that immediacy would be restored; He'd again enjoy the full glory of their intimate communion. Even so, that recovered glory was to have a new dimension, for Jesus was returning as the Last Adam – the true Image-Son.

God's eternal purpose was to render His creation "sacred space" – to fill the creation with His glory such that His sanctuary would encompass the whole earth. Again, this would entail the merging of the divine and natural realms; in the imagery of John's vision, it involved the heavenly Jerusalem descending to earth such that God's dwelling would be among men. This conjoining of heaven and earth began with the incarnation and the realization of Yahweh's true sanctuary in Jesus of Nazareth (1:14, 2:13-19, 4:19-24). So Jesus would, as it were, carry earth back to heaven by His return as True Man – the beginning of God's new creation. John's vision was fulfilled in substance with the Messiah: In and through Him, God's dwelling is indeed among men. But the vision awaits its consummate realization in the new heavens and new earth (Romans 8:9-25; 2 Peter 3:1-13).

Jesus opened His prayer with petitions focused on Himself, His work and His relationship with His Father. Even so, the prayer in its entirety was personal and intimate as the communing of Son and Father. He prayed as alone with His Father, yet intentionally in the hearing of His apostles; His prayer was as much for their sake as for His. And this was just as true for His personal petitions as His intercessory ones: Jesus didn't need to tell His Father of the perfect agreement between them and their shared intent of mutual glorification in accomplishing the cosmic restorative work which brought Him into the world. *His Father didn't need to hear these things, but His apostles did.* They needed to discern the oneness between Israel's God and this man they embraced as Israel's Messiah. There was no distance or discontinuity between them and their will and work; in every respect, experiencing Jesus was experiencing Yahweh Himself. However much these men struggled to reconcile Jesus' words and works with the promises laid out in the Scripture, they could be assured that what lay ahead for Him, them, and the world was in perfect accord with the will and word of the One they confessed as their covenant God. Jesus had repeatedly stressed these things to them and they'd come to the conviction that they understood and believed Him. But their insight and faith were germinal; they still didn't fully grasp what it meant that Jesus was Israel's Messiah, sent by their God to fulfill all of His promises to Israel and, through Israel, to the world. There was much they still needed to understand for the sake of their faith and calling and bringing them into His prayer provided a fitting and profound capstone to His testimony to them.