

Sunday, September 11, 2022

This is the seventeenth in a series of sermons on John 13-17 (“The Farewell Discourse”).

1. [Jesus Loves His own \(13:1\)](#) [7/5/2020]
2. [Foot Washing \(13:2-17\)](#) [8/30/2020]
3. [Identifying the Traitor \(13:18-30\)](#) [10/18/2020]
4. [Christ’s Glory and How We Are To Live In His Temporary Absence \(13:31-38\)](#) [12/6/2020]
5. [Preparing a Place \(14:1-4\)](#) [1/31/2021]
6. [The Only Way to the Father \(14:5-7\)](#) [3/21/2021]
7. [Seeing God \(14:8-14\)](#) [5/9/2021]
8. [Peace and Comfort \(14:15-27\)](#) [6/27/2021]
9. [Loving God \(14:28-31\)](#) [8/15/2021]
10. [Abiding in Christ, the True Vine \(15:1-11\)](#) [10/3/2021]
11. [Friends of Christ \(15:12-17\)](#) [11/21/2021]
12. [The Hatred of the World \(15:18- 16:4a\)](#) [1/9/2022]
13. [The Work of the Holy Spirit \(16:4b-15\)](#) [2/27/2022]
14. [Your Sorrow Shall Be Turned into Joy \(16:16-24\)](#) [4/17/2022]
15. [Direct Access to the Father \(16:25-32\)](#) [6/12/2022]
16. [He’s Spoken That You Might Have Peace \(16:33\)](#) [7/24/2022]
The High Priestly Prayer (Intercessory Prayer)
17. [Jesus Prays for Himself \(17:1-5\)](#)
18. Jesus Prays for His Present People (17:6-19)
19. Jesus Prays for His Future People (17:20-26)

We are now into chapter 17 of John, which for many centuries has been commonly referred to as the “High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus because of its intercessory nature (although there’s more to the prayer than just intercession on our behalf) as He prepares to offer Himself to make atonement for us (see the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16). Jesus is probably at or near the brook Cedron (or, Kidron) as He offers up this prayer, because “When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.” (John 18:1).

As you read through the four gospel accounts, you’ll see that Jesus is frequently said to be praying, but we very rarely get to hear what He’s actually saying. There are a few relatively short snippets here and there. But this prayer is singular in its extent and its content. It is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus, and it is chock-full of gems. Lord willing, I will give a cursory treatment of it in my next three sermons, but this is one of those parts of the Bible where you feel like you could spend decades on it and never run out of things to talk about.

First, some general comments on the entire prayer:

- The prayer is delivered audibly. This would have been for the benefit of His eleven disciples who were with Him, and for all His disciples down through the ages. There’s a time to pray quietly alone, and there’s a time to pray out loud for the benefit of others.
- You can often learn a lot more about a person by listening to them pray than by speaking to them face-to-face. People pray about the things that are burdening their hearts and those things that are most important to them. We learn things about Jesus here that we couldn’t learn any other way.
- Things don’t just happen. God has ordained that things should happen through means, and one of the means is prayer. Jesus may be the last person that we would ever expect

to need to pray, and yet He was always involved in prayer. It is how He maintained communion with His Father, opening His heart to Him and offering up thanksgiving and petitions. It is through His prayer that God brought things to pass. How much more ought we to go to the Father in prayer?

- The veil, as it were, is being pulled back, and we are able to see a sample of the intra-Trinitarian communion that goes on between the Father and the Son. We can imagine that this is the type of communion that goes on even at this moment, as Jesus ever lives to intercede for us. It's very comforting to know that a loved one is praying for us – how much more when we know that Jesus is praying for us?
- The sovereignty of God in salvation, and particularly the doctrine of election, pervades this prayer. Some form of “them which thou hast given me” appears 7 times in this prayer. If any Arminians are listening to this sermon, a very effective antidote to that nonsense would be to read John 17 (and 6 and 10 while you’re at it). We get a glimpse in this prayer of the whole plan of salvation, from eternity past to eternity future.

So, I’m calling the first five verses of this chapter “Jesus Prays For Himself.” And I need to immediately qualify what I mean by this. When we pray for ourselves, we invariably do not have pure motives. There will always be sin and selfishness mingled in. That isn’t the case here. Jesus is praying for Himself to the end that His Father will be glorified in the matter of His people receiving eternal life. It is, in fact, a very selfless prayer.

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” (John 17:1-5)

This is bookended with Christ’s petition to “Glorify Thy Son.” In the middle, He fleshes out the basis for the petition, which can be summarized with the words “I Have Finished The Work.” So today I’d like to talk about those two things – the petition and the basis for the petition.

Glorify Thy Son

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee...And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

(John 17:1,5)

Jesus addresses God as His “Father,” denoting the intimate relationship between the two. He is not a far off, distant unapproachable God, but His Father. And as we are adopted to Him by Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5), He is our Father as well. He begins the prayer by saying “the hour is come.” What hour? The hour that He had planned from eternity past. The hour that all history up to that point had been moving toward. The hour where He would fulfill His part of the covenant of redemption that had been made in the Council Halls of Eternity. There had been many times earlier in His ministry where Jesus said things like, “My time is not yet come.” But now the time has come. Paul puts it like this: “In due time Christ died for the ungodly.” (Romans 5:6). So that’s the hour we’re talking about. It was the perfect hour, planned out in exquisite detail – nothing left to chance, no coincidences, no accidents, no contingencies. And there is another momentous hour coming – also timed perfectly, planned out in exquisite detail, with nothing left to chance – on the horizon, where the angel with the everlasting gospel to preach will say “the hour of His judgment is come.” (Revelation 14:7).

So, the hour has finally come. And the petition is this: “Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” The “glory of God” is a notoriously hard thing to define. We all have an idea of what it is, and we all talk about it, but many of us would be hard pressed to give a definition of it. I dealt with this topic at length in the 4th sermon in this series (12/6/2020), and I’m going to quote part of that here as a working definition: *“the glory of God’ includes at least the proclamation of His name – the manifestation of His attributes – the revealing of His splendor – the making of His presence known – the making clear to us what His intrinsic characteristics are through His works and His word. For one to glorify God would be to give Him honor, declare His majesty, exalt Him, and praise Him for His works and the display of His attributes.”* So, for instance, part of His glory is that He is sovereign and He is merciful, and He is glorified in the fact that He shows mercy on whom He will show mercy (Exodus 33:18-19). When we thank and praise Him for His sovereign mercy, we are glorifying Him.

The question in this passage is, how does this reciprocal “glorifying” work? How is the Father to glorify the Son? And how is the Son, in turn, to glorify the Father? Well, these are deep waters, but let’s stick to the context and remember that Jesus, within hours, is going to die on the cross as our substitute. He will then resurrect and ascend back to heaven. In that context, the Father glorifies Christ by displaying His love, mercy, obedience, faithfulness, sinlessness, selflessness, righteousness, etc. And in that context, Christ glorifies the Father by displaying His love, hatred, mercy, wrath, wisdom, holiness, justice, righteousness, omnipotence, omniscience, forbearance, patience, etc. No event in human history has glorified God like the cross. (To see this fleshed out more, please refer to the 12/6/2020 sermon in this series).

He petitions the Father again in verse 5 to glorify Him, but with a very important distinction: “glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world

was." Now we're talking about Him being glorified in His return to heaven. This shows preexistence. This shows deity. Jesus had dwelled in heaven from eternity past in full glory, face-to-face with God the Father, partaking in the glory of the Godhead. This shows that Jesus had temporarily "laid aside" part of that glory (as God) as He took on the flesh and became a servant (as man) and is now going to return to heaven as the God-Man to have His glory "reinstated," as it were. He never lost His glory...it was just partially veiled for a time. Think of the Mount of Transfiguration. Again, these are deep waters. A review of Philippians 2:5-11 might help, as it is an excellent passage on the incarnation of Jesus.

A main point to see in all of this is that the primary thing that Jesus is interested in here is glorifying the Father. Men being saved is immensely important and is a great mercy to us, but the primary purpose of our salvation is to glorify God. It's not all about you. Do you think of your salvation in that way? You fit into a much larger and eternal plan. It's helpful to remember this. We tend to be so subjective and self-absorbed (especially as we are influenced by this society in which we live), but if you can take a few minutes and stop navel-gazing and instead fix your gaze on the glory of God, it will help your soul. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that you stop being thankful to God for saving you – if anything, we're not thankful enough. What I am suggesting is that in being thankful, sometimes you can get so focused on yourself that you forget that the primary purpose of you being saved is that God would be glorified. "...He might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory..." (Romans 9:23).

Jonathan Edwards: "*His first words are, 'Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.' As this is his first request, we may suppose it to be his supreme request and desire, and what lie ultimately aimed at in all ...On the whole, I think it is pretty manifest, that Jesus Christ sought the glory of God as his highest and last end."*

I Have Finished The Work

"2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. 4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:2-4)

I see verse 3 here to be parenthetical, and verses 2 and 4 to explain each other. And I believe that the basis for His petition for the Father to glorify Him is His finished work of paying the price to secure eternal life for all the elect of God. He was given a work to do, and now the work is done, so it is altogether proper for the Son to be glorified and received back into glory, where He is now preparing to return "with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30) to

consummate His victory and the “redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:14). But let’s go over the passage in a little bit more detail.

The passage says that the Father has given the Son power over all flesh. Now this can cause confusion and has been a “proof text” for a lot of heresy over the years. The heresy goes like this: if the Father gave the Son power, that means the Son didn’t have power to begin with, so therefore Jesus is not God – He is just another creature. This comes from a failure to realize that Jesus is both God and Man. In His office as Mediator between God and man, Jesus is given power over all flesh by the Father. [An early purveyor of this heresy was a 4th century man named Arius. We see it today in Unitarians and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Islam teaches the same thing about Jesus. Trapp, in his typical pithy fashion, has a great quote about this: *“Mahomet speaks very honourably of Christ, except only in two things. First, he denied that he was crucified, but that some other was crucified for him. Secondly, he took up the opinion of the Arians, to deny his Divinity. Arius at Constantinople, sitting upon the close stool, purged out his guts. Mahometism is now there in that place, as it were the excrements of Arius.”*]

We are talking about two of the most mysterious things in the scripture – the Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ. But there is no question that this is the teaching of Scripture, and the bottom line is that Jesus has power over all flesh. And the reason given here in the text for his being given power over all flesh is this: “that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” Amazing! Jesus has power over all flesh – over all creation – so that He might give eternal life to His elect! These are the ones who have been given by the Father as a gift to the Son. The Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and we are held safely in His hand – no place is more secure. We are in the hand of the one who promised never to forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). There is no force in all of creation that can keep us from receiving eternal life from the Lord Jesus Christ, because He has power over all flesh. And He intervenes and directs all things in providence to ensure that we will be given eternal life. It’s an insult to God and His plan of redemption to suggest that you can be saved and then lose your salvation – to say that Jesus can give you eternal life, and then you lose it.

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day...No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

(John 6:37-40, 44)

You'll note that Jesus has power over all flesh, but He only gives eternal life to those whom the Father has given Him. Stated differently, He has power to give eternal life to everyone, but He only gives it to the ones whom the Father has given Him. You see the perfect unity between the Father and the Son – those whom the Father elected are the ones for whom the Son died and to whom the Son has given eternal life (Arminians, on the other hand, put the three Persons of the Trinity at odds with one another, with the Father electing one group of people, the Son dying for another group of people, and the Spirit giving grace to yet another group of people). I don't know how this passage could be any clearer. I don't understand how a person can read this and conclude that Jesus came to die for every human. I don't understand how a person can say that their "free will" is the determining factor on whether they have eternal life. This transaction occurred between the Father and the Son before you even existed – they didn't consult you and ask your permission. You did not "make a decision for Christ." You did not "allow Jesus into your heart." The reason you believe right now is not because of your free will or your good works – it's because the Father gave you to the Son. He had mercy on you. He was gracious towards you. ("...as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" – Acts 13:48). Why you and not another? Because He did it "according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace." (Ephesians 1:5-6). I'll say again – step out of your self-absorption and see where you fit in in the big picture. You're part of a much larger, eternal plan, orchestrated by God. Meditating on that will give you joy and comfort.

Jesus came to do the will of the Father, and in doing so, He glorified Him. Notice that He says here, "I have finished the work." Past tense. He speaks as if it's already done even though He won't actually be crucified until the next day, and He does so because this is a done deal. It's the same reason that Paul said, "Whom He justified, them He also glorified." (Romans 8:30). Again, past tense. The decrees of God are so sure, the faithfulness of Christ is so sure, that He can speak of it as if it's already taken place.

And notice one more thing: the work that Jesus did was "given" to Him by the Father. That means that the work itself was a gift. Not only did the Father give Him the people, He gave Him the work that He needed to do to save the people. And it should be self-evident that the work was necessary – otherwise, Jesus wouldn't have done it. You can't understand why the work was necessary unless you have a good, solid understanding of the doctrine of the fall of mankind into sin, and of the doctrine of the holiness of God. There are people who think, "Well, if I just feel bad about what I did and tell God I'm sorry and ask Him to forgive me, then He'll do that and pretend that the sins never happened, because God is love." But God won't just forgive sins willy-nilly because by His very nature, He's holy – He is not going to act contrary to His nature. The sin must be dealt with. Justice is required! Someone must be punished! "The wages of sin is death." The issue is, how can God remain just while also forgiving sinners? And the answer is in the work that Jesus came to do. If God could have

simply said, “You’re forgiven,” Jesus never would have had to come. The cross was not all about love and forgiveness; it was just as much about the wrath and vengeance of God regarding sin, and woe to you who don’t have Him as your Substitute because you will have to face the unmixed wrath of God in payment for your sins.

Further, Jesus was the one who did the work, to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. It required God Himself to become incarnate. It required Him to step in on our behalf. We aren’t the ones who do that work. He came to do the work to save us – not to tell us the work that we need to do to save ourselves.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

I hope you see that any “good works” that we do are the result, not the cause, of us being saved. Your good works do not contribute one iota to your salvation. When it comes to the work required to save us, Jesus finished that work. There’s no more work that we need to add on top of it. And in fact, if you do think that you need to add more work on top of it, you have introduced a deadly poison into the gospel. Paul calls that “another gospel” and says if you do that, you have “pervert[ed] the gospel of Christ,” and most terrifyingly, he says that if anyone preaches that, “let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6-8). It’s a thing that we can easily, quickly, and imperceptibly drift into, where we start to think there’s something that we need to add to the work of Christ. To put this in practical terms, if you ever find yourself saying or thinking something like, “I am saved because I _____” or even “I am saved because Jesus died for me and I _____,” you have completely left the gospel of Christ. Remove yourself from the equation – you have no merit. It’s insulting to suggest that what Jesus did wasn’t good enough, and you have to add some more to it. Your trust should be 100% in Christ and His faithful, finished work. If you’re relying on yourself in any way (e.g., how strongly you love Christ, how tightly you’re holding on to Him, how faithful you are, or any other of your thoughts, feelings, actions, decisions, desires, etc.), then you’re standing on a shifting, uncertain, deadly foundation.

And let me add the obvious, which is that this work of Christ is a historical reality. This isn’t some abstract thought or notion, or some warm feeling that we have in our hearts, or a myth or legend or fairy tale, or a blind faith where we hope that everything will somehow work itself out in the end for our benefit. Jesus actually came into the world and dwelled among men, He was actually crucified, He actually resurrected, and He actually ascended back to heaven. And He’s actually going to return in judgment. Sometimes when you hear about something so

often, you grow numb to how amazing it really is. He came and He did a work in this world, and that work was to give us eternal life, even us whom the Father gave to Him from eternity past. That is where my standing before God rests – it doesn't rest on my fickle love for God, or my waxing and waning faith – it rests on that work that Christ did.

Finally, Jesus gives us a definition of “eternal life” here. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Eternal life is not simply a quantity – it is a quality. And the quality of it is found in the fact that we get to know God. This is what Jesus has given to us – we started off as dead men walking (Ephesians 2:1), and now we get eternal life; now we get to know Him – the only true God, as opposed to all false gods. To “know” Him means to know Him intimately – it doesn't just mean that you're aware of Him. It means to love Him. To adore His attributes. To see Him clearly as He is portrayed in the Bible. To know Him as your Father. To know Him as the One who has loved us for eternity. To know Him as the One who gave us to His Son. And to likewise know Jesus. To know Him as our Savior. To know Him as the One who has given us this eternal life. To know Him as the One who finished the work that the Father sent Him to do. You can't know the Father without knowing the Son, and you can't know the Son without knowing the Father. Now, lest we get puffed up with our knowledge, remember this:

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

To know God does not mean that you know everything there is to know about God. It doesn't mean you're never going to have confusion. It doesn't mean that you're never going to misunderstand anything. It would be good to remember your frame. You are finite, while God is infinite. You have limited ability to reason and understand things, not to mention the fact that you're a sinner. So whatever knowledge of God the Lord Jesus has been pleased to give you so far in your walk, it should be cherished, and you should be patient with others who might not have attained what you've attained. Remember that this is not a static thing. It is a thing you grow in – “increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10). We're to give diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge (2 Peter 1:5). Paul's greatest desire was to know Christ (Philippians 3:10), and if Paul needed to know more about Christ, we need to know more about Christ. That knowledge will continue to grow from now through eternity.

“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18)