

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

"...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end"(John 13:1.)

The Praying Savior – John 17

The Lessons from Jesus' Prayer – John 17:1-26

John 17:1

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..."

Coming to this second Sunday of 2009, still having within us a sense of the year's newness and hopefully still filled with a desire to strive after greater Christlikeness throughout the months ahead, our great God, by His providence and goodness, has brought us to this marvelous text that we have heard already as our Scripture reading. John 17 is a most remarkable and in many ways one of the most sacred of texts in all of Scripture. It marks the end of what we call the Upper Room Discourse...a sermon given by our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples on the eve of His own betrayal, arrest, and eventual crucifixion. Jesus has been preaching, teaching and explaining to His disciples things through which He revealed the extent of His love (John 13:1). As His disciples were slowly grasping Jesus' intent to "leave them" by way of the cross, they became troubled and concerned. How would they continue on without Jesus? [This is always a good question to ask, but praise the Lord for the answer]. Jesus tells them not to be troubled and in John chapters 14-16 explains to them the greatness of the provisions made for them whereby they could have peace, experience joy, stand firm in the face of any trial and ultimately continue to experience a mighty communion; a oneness with the Father and with the Son by means of the promised and coming Holy Spirit. A great summation of this sermon is found in 2 Peter 1:2-3;

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Yes, this truly was a great sermon; and this great sermon of John 13-16 is now followed by a great prayer. It has been said that that the best sermon ever preached (John 13-16) was followed by the best prayer ever offered (John 17).

When was the last time you truly contemplated John 17 as the greatest prayer ever offered? Could this be true? Is it right to say that these words of our Lord Jesus Christ are most or even more sacred than His other words? Of course all of God's word, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 is sacred, inspired by God and the only profitable means for a life of godliness. But there is yet something indeed special, something important about these words before us. Now, I do not believe for a moment that it is by chance or accident that we find ourselves face to face with the greatest recorded prayer of Scripture. I know that I have personally been convicted for some time with the quality of my prayer life as well as the quality of the prayer life of our congregation. I know that many of you have shared similar concerns noting that it could not be said of us that we have prayed too much; but could it be said that we have prayed too little? We have been brought to this text to be encouraged and exhorted; perhaps chastised and challenged in this matter of prayer. Over the next few weeks, we are going to see and apply the principles and truths contained in these 26 verses; some 636 words with only the first 13 are not part of the prayer of Jesus.

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This morning I desire to give to you an overview, a survey as it were of the point and purpose of this prayer. Understand that while this is a prayer; and while it therefore teaches us things about prayer; the key points of this prayer are not limited to the subject of prayer, but include some mighty doctrinal truths concerning God, the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation and man's relationship to God and to Jesus Christ. So then, this morning I would present to you the greatness of this passage by considering with me four important and overall topics gleaned from a study of John 17. As we study John 17 we must...

I. Consider the greatness of this Prayer

How do we know that this is a prayer? I draw your attention to verse 1 where we read:

Jesus spoke these things [discourse of John 13-16]; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You."

Apart from the opening words that explain the circumstance and the manner in which Jesus offers up these words to God, we see Jesus here in prayer, conversing with the Father, who is in heaven.

Now, let me stress again, without sounding somehow demeaning to the rest of Scripture, for that is certainly not my desire or heart, that the prayer before us is so great, it is so valuable, so sacred since it is such a complete expression of our Lord's heart, that some have wondered if it is right to preach this text at all and rather simply read it and let it speak for itself. I share this not because I believe this text ought not to be preached, but somehow to express to you just how momentous a text is before us. I believe we do well to consider not only the prayer life of Jesus as revealed in this text, but then in comparison to consider our own prayer lives. Do we pray like this? Do we dare pray like this? Can we pray like this?

We know of many instances throughout the Gospel accounts where we are told that Jesus went off to pray....alone....and all we know of such prayers is that Jesus spent much time in prayer. And even of other recorded prayers of Jesus, they tend to be short, concise offerings to God. But here is a full prayer, that Jesus spoke before His disciples audibly [this is not typical of what we generally read about Jesus' prayer life], so that they would hear and they would learn; that they would see His own heart and affection for them expressed in words offered to the Father as well as come to realize that even though Jesus was leaving the earth to return to heaven to be with the Father, they were going to be kept secure and in fact accomplish even greater things for the glory of God.

Before us then is what is sometimes referred to as the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. That rather regal title ought not to intimidate us, but rather speaks to us of beautiful intimacy. For the high priest was to intercede for the congregation before God with all care and compassion. This is a prayer of intimacy, of closeness, of acceptance, of the oneness that every follower of Jesus has with both Jesus and the Father. I do believe that this prayer is more rightly to be called, "The Lord's Prayer." In Matthew 6 and Luke 11 we have what we have been taught as the "Lord's Prayer" – that begins with those words, ***"Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name..."*** But that is the disciple's prayer; that is the pattern Jesus gave for His disciples to pray. But here is the Lord's own prayer; a prayer that has in the past so comforted and encouraged the

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saints that history records many who have been on their deathbeds requesting this prayer of John 17 to be read to them. John Knox, who was the great leader of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland, asked His wife to read this prayer to him as he was dying and he did pass from this world into eternity as she uttered these words.

What was it about this prayer that John Knox and others pleaded to have it read as they died? Beloved, may I suggest to you that in this prayer, a prayer we will study at length, Jesus reveals not only His heart, but also the great position and possession every believer has in Jesus. And the more we know about our position and possessions in Christ, the more we will desire Christ, the more we will love Christ, the more we will serve Christ. Oh, how we need to know the greatness of this prayer. Everything that is of importance and value to the believer is touched upon in this prayer. Every reason for glorifying God; every cause for rejoicing in so great a salvation; every defense for living a radically demonstrative faith before an unbelieving world is touched upon in this prayer.

D. Martyn Lloyd Jones has said, *"I am more convinced that half our troubles are due to the fact that we fail to realize what exactly is offered us in the Scriptures. All our anxieties and troubles, all our uncertainties and hesitations, and so much of our unhappiness in our spiritual lives, is to be traced simply to the fact that we do not realize what is provided for us."* We do not realize what is provided for us – that in Jesus we have everything we need for life and for godliness; that in Jesus we are complete and lacking nothing. And here in John 17, we find Jesus praying to the Father for His disciples to know of their position in Him; to realize all that they have; a relationship with the Father and the Son; the promise of the Holy Spirit, the provisions and encouragements necessary to live for Him while in the world. Here in John 17 we find the incarnate Christ (God in the Flesh) praying to God the Father, before the disciples, that they might come to realize Jesus to soon become the indwelling Christ. We find Jesus reminding His own, reminding us, that by the Spirit of Christ, both the Father and the Son would abide in the very life of believer.

Why is this important? *Why must these first disciples, as well as ourselves, need to be reminded of the indwelling presence of God in our lives?* For the first disciples, they were devastated at the thought of Jesus leaving them. How could they carry on with Jesus? What could be accomplished without Jesus? How could they experience the love, the care and compassion of Jesus if He leaves? As Jesus prays this prayer before them, He asks the Father in essence that they would come to know that the love and concern He has had for them will continue even when He is out of their sight and that they would come to experience the reality of this love. Look at John 17:11 where we read,

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.

Here we find Jesus doing what? Jesus prayed for unity, communion and fellowship with one another as well as with the Father and the Son. Here Jesus is committing His own to the Father in their hearing so that they will come to know that they are never left to themselves. Good thing! How important is that, to know that we are never left to ourselves and that there is

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nothing that is able to separate us from the love of God, not even Jesus leaving this earth to be with the Father separates us from the love of God, but in fact brings us into oneness with God.

So, then, this is the essence of the Lord's prayer, that the followers of Jesus would constantly know the love, the concern, and the security of God and by these things to always live for God before an unbelieving world. That my friends is the greatness of this prayer. Do you ever feel lost and alone? Do you ever consider yourself in over your head? Lift up your eyes to heaven and pray the prayer of Jesus, to know that you are never left to yourself, but always kept in the safe care of the Father.

II. Consider the Greatness of the Father

The second "greatness" I would have you consider with me from this prayer of Jesus is the greatness of the Father. No less than six times in this prayer does Jesus address the Father (17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). But why is this important? Let me have you consider three truths we glean about "the Father" that ought to bring awe and joy to our hearts.

1. "Intimate" - Father

To begin with, I would have you notice that **"Father..."** is the very first word of the prayer. All of Jesus attention and devotion is directed toward heaven, toward God, toward the Creator. But Jesus does not use any such formal term. Jesus does not say, "Yahweh" – the Hebrew name of God. He does not call Him "Lord" or "Sovereign" which of course He is. Rather Jesus uses "Father" – which is an intimate term. As Jesus prays, it is an intimate time of closeness. And while we will delve into all these things much more later in our studies, this ought to remind us that God wants to be intimate with us and we therefore can pray in like fashion with Jesus, calling God "Father." Remember in John 16:26-27 where Jesus says in effect, "You don't have to ask Me to ask the Father for you, the Father loves you and so you can ask Him directly." What makes the Father so great is while He is the unsearchable and infinite God; He has made it not only possible to know Him, but also to be near Him. May we never grow tired of the words of Hebrews 7:25:

Therefore He [Jesus] is able also to save forever those who draw near to God [intimate; closeness] through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

2. "Holy" – Father

Not only is the Father implicitly to known intimately; He is also called "Holy" by Jesus in verse 11 where we read, ***"Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are."*** God is great because even being infinitely beyond us, we can know Him but also because He is holy...He is set apart, He is completely unlike anything or anyone else. In this regard, Jesus is keeping the principle of Matthew 6:9 and hallowing, honoring the Father. This reminds me that if Jesus, who is God's beloved Son; if Jesus, who is God in the flesh, approached the Father with such reverence, with such an attitude of honor, *how much more ought we approach God with holy fear and trembling?*

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it well saying, *"Though our Lord was one with the Father, though nothing had ever come between them, though he never needed to ask for forgiveness of*

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His own sins because he had never sinned, he still addressed God as holy Father.” How do you come to God in prayer? Ever thoughtless, careless, or without a proper consideration of how holy, how different from you God really is? Do you approach Him as Holy Father?

3. “Righteous” - Father

We learn from this prayer that God is intimate, that God is holy and finally, what makes the Father so great is that He is righteous. We read in verse 25, **“O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that you sent Me...”** Here the word “righteous” speaks to us of the character of God. As a matter of prayer, it is as if Jesus is saying, “Father, I know what you have promised and I know that You will faithfully and fully bring those promises to pass. You have made promises to Me concerning those You gave Me, for those whom I have accomplished this work of redemption and I know that You will never renege, never fail, never falter in keeping and fulfilling these promises.”

We see this very idea of the righteousness and faithfulness of God expressed to the fulfilling of His plans and purposes for redeeming and restoring the nation of Israel in Jeremiah 31:35-37:

35 Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: 36 “If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.” 37 Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done,” declares the LORD.

What a great comfort and joy to know that the Father is righteous and faithful and that we then declare with Philippians 1:6 that we are confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in us will perfect it and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. Let us consider the greatness of the Father.

III. Consider the Greatness of the Son

It would be a great disservice to the honor of Christ and detrimental to our spiritual benefit if we did not also consider from this prayer the greatness of the Son. Some of this has been alluded to already, but let us consider a couple of the obvious truths about the Son as revealed in this prayer.

1. Jesus is the Eternal Son of God.

The first truth is expressed here at the end of verse 1, namely that Jesus is the Eternal Son of God. We are reminded in this statement that uttering these words is one who is no mere man – this is Jesus, who is God in the flesh, the God-man. In verse 5 Jesus goes on to say, **“Now, Father, glory Me together with Yourself with the glory I had with You before the world was.”** We are at once confronted with the truth of the eternity of the Son. The Son has always existed and existed in glory with the Father before there was even a world. Before the

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animals roamed the earth, indeed before there was earth; before the waters and the sky; and even before light and darkness; the Son of God existed in the glorious presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus utters these words, let us be reminded that God came down to us; that God dwelt among us; that God the Son left the glories of sinless perfection to be surrounded by the grossness of sinful persons. Jesus here reminds us of the wonder of the incarnation; the reality of the virgin birth; the consideration of His humiliation as God lived among us.

And now, this person, who is equal to God, who is God, is doing what? We see Him praying to the Father. It seems almost paradoxical – why is it that He who is God finds Himself needful to pray to the Father? Because, while He is indeed God; Jesus is also indeed man; He is flesh and in the flesh Jesus is utterly dependent upon the Father. Oh how this reminds me that if Jesus found it needful, important and worth giving time to pray just to accomplish the will of the Father, how much more so do I need to pray?

I find it interesting that most of the disciples were certainly religious prior to their call to Christ. These were for the most part good Jewish men who had been brought up with a rich tradition of prayer. I would suspect that most of us here might be overwhelmed at the prayer life of these men. However, as they watched Jesus pray, this one whom they would come to recognize as God with them, they noted the constancy of Jesus' prayer life and they also noted that there was something qualitatively different about the way Jesus prayed, so much so that they pleaded with Jesus, **"LORD, teach us to pray"** (Luke 11:1). These saw that Jesus delighted in prayer, that Jesus was committed to prayer and that Jesus received answers to prayer and they wanted to be like Him. *How about you? Do you consider that Jesus, even though He was God, yet longed to and delighted in prayer, in conversation with His Father, not simply as an example for us, but as a reminder to us that all flesh is dependent upon God and must look to God and may converse with God in prayer?* Again, let me ask you, if Jesus, who is God, found it necessary to pray as often as He did, how much more ought you to pursue prayer?

2. The Effective Savior

A second truth to consider about Jesus as revealed in this prayer is that He is truly the Effective Savior. Jesus was sent by the Father; Jesus came to this earth to do something extraordinary. At the end of verse 1 we read the words, **"glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You."** We find here that Jesus was concerned first and foremost about glorifying the Father. Did He do this? Was He effective in glorifying the Father? We say yes, but how did He do it? We read in verse 4, **"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do."** Here again, we find Jesus saying that He effectively, successfully and fully completed a work on earth that brought glory and praise to God. But just what was this work? We read at the end of verse 2 that Jesus would glorify the Father by giving to all who believe in Him, eternal life. And just who are those who receive this gift of eternal life by believing? Our text says something else extraordinary in verse 2, **"to all whom You have given to Him..."** We are faced with the truth, the teaching that sometime back, before there was time, before there was a world, God the Father and God the Son made a covenant, an Intertrinitarian agreement, that out of the mass of fallen, sinful humanity, God the Father would chose some to be delivered from their state of sin and that group of humanity would be given to God the Son to redeem by suffering their penalty on the cross and would send God the Holy

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Spirit to indwell and to empower them to know and to live for God – by this, by salvation, God is glorified. And while all three members of the Trinity were involved, it is God the Son who effectively redeemed those given to Him by His work on the cross. Do you see this in verse 4, that it was the accomplished work of Jesus? Do you rejoice that He did this for you? Do you realize that if Jesus had not done this for you, you would have no hope of eternal life and that your sins, your vile wretchedness would be exposed before God on the day of judgment and you would suffer eternally in hell? Oh that we would truly rejoice in so great a salvation and sing with the words of Toplay:

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing,
Nor fear, with God's righteousness on,
My person and offerings to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.

IV. Consider the Greatness of the Task

Finally then, in addition to seeing in this prayer of Jesus the greatness of the prayer itself, along with the greatness of the Father and of the Son, let me show you how this prayer reveals the greatness of the task for us, for we who have believed. This task is three-fold.

1. We must know the Father and the Son

The first great truth we learn that is our task, both our duty as well as our delight it to know the Father and the Son. We look at this a few weeks ago, but read again John 17:3; ***“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*** Do you ever wonder about eternal life? Do you every wonder if you have eternal life? Do you know the Father? Do you know God as the only true God? Have you come to know Him more and better by knowing Jesus Christ? Do you long for more knowledge of Jesus? Do you long to imitate Jesus more? This is eternal life to know the Father by knowing the Son. This is why Peter says in 2 Peter 3:18, but grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We will talk in the future about how we come to know the Father and the Son better, but let us simply note for now we must be pursuing such a knowledge by means of knowing and apply His word.

2. We must seek to make the Father and the Son known

The second part of the task is to take what we know about the Father and the Son and to make it known. Look with me at John 17:18 where we read, ***“As You sent Me into the world (to explain the Father – John 1:18), I also (in like manner; for a similar purpose) have sent them into the world (to make Me and to make You known).*** This is why Jesus said in the verse before, in John 17:17, ***Sanctify them (set them apart) in the truth; Your word is truth.***

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We come to know the Father and the Son by the truth of the Word and we make the Father and the Son known by means of that same truth.

When we speak of the attributes of God, those characteristics that make God, God, what is one of the first ones mentioned? Somewhere near the top of the list will be, "God is love." And to truly know the love of God is to be intimate, close, unified with Him and with all those whom also are loved by Him and love Him. In John 17:22-23 we see that this task to know God and to make Him known is accomplished in part as we love and are unified, one with one another. We read, ***"The glory which You have given Me I have given them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and you in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that they world may know that You sent Me and loved them, even as You have loved Me."*** Isn't this remarkable? That we are loved by the Father even as the Father loves the Son; and when we live in intimate oneness, perfected in unity, striving together for the gospel, we make God known, we make Jesus known. Is this your heart's desire, to make the Father and the Son known to the world? And how do you do it? First, as we noted is to know God by His truth and the second is to live lives of oneness, togetherness, of true caring fellowship with God's people. That is a great task is it not? Particular as we look at the people God calls us to love – sometimes it is hard; some people make it hard. Like the preacher who said, "Ministry would be a lot easier if not for the people." But ministry, living for Jesus, is loving and serving people, especially God's people. It is Jesus who said, ***"Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to (served) one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."***

So then, let us rejoice in the greatness of this prayer; a prayer that reveals to us the position and possessions we have in Jesus – a prayer that serves for us as a pattern of praying the heart of Jesus. Will you consider this great prayer? And let us rejoice in the greatness of the Father who loves to be intimate with His own and who is holy and righteous. Have you truly prayed to the Father with such thoughts in mind? And let us rejoice in the greatness of the Son, the eternal God who has come to give to those who believe eternal life. The effective Savior who has completed for us everything necessary for eternal life when He said from the cross, "It is finished!" Have you praised God recently for the accomplished work of Jesus on your behalf? And finally, let us rejoice in the greatness of the task – let us long and love to know the Father and the Son and by the power of the indwelling and promised Spirit of Christ, let us make the Father and the Son known by telling people of His word and by living lives of unity and love toward one another. This is the legacy the prayer leaves us. May we long to know more!

Soli Deo Gloria

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