

Sermon – 16/07/2006 pm

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Study Text: John 17:6-11a

Jesus lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed to his Father. His first concern was for his own glory and the glory of the Father. *O Father, glorify me together with yourself* (17:5). It was not selfish for Jesus to pray in this manner for he is the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Moreover, he was finishing the work the Father had sent him into the world to do.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God the Father would be glorified. *Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it in heaven*. This is the first petition in the so called ‘Lord’s Prayer’. It is nothing less than a prayer for God to be glorified.

Solomon, Nehemiah and Daniel, all praised God for his greatness, grace and glory as they began to pray (I Kings 8, Nehemiah 1, Daniel 9). Believers in the early church, and Stephen also, focussed upon the Lord and his sovereign glory when they began to pray (Acts 4:24, 7:56). We also should focus upon God and his glory, the Sovereign Lord upon his heavenly throne, when we begin our prayers.

Jesus went on to pray for his disciples, and for all believers, in the remainder of his prayer. He was still with the eleven in the upper room as he prayed. How amazing it must have been to be present when Jesus was praying to his Father, and praying about them! Do you ever wonder at what Jesus prays for you? He is at the Right Hand of God interceding for you now if you are saved (Hebrews 7:25).

As Jesus came before the throne of God in heaven, the place to which he would soon return, so his disciples must have been lifted up with him and greatly blessed to witness this communion within the holy Trinity. Jesus does not introduce any new doctrine in his prayer, but affirms what he had already taught his disciples. Prayer is for communing with God not for teaching doctrine – nor for spreading gossip.

Do you feel blessed when you hear others pray for you? ‘It depends what they say’ you might answer. Jesus was very positive in what he said about his disciples, though not in any way meant to flatter. They were very weak in the faith but Jesus acknowledged even their weak faith. We need to be more open in praying for one another. We have taken on the individualism of the world to our detriment in our corporate prayer. Surely we will be blessed if we share our joys and sorrows, and hear others pray for us (*cf.* Hebrews 10: 25).

In the passage before us Jesus established the ground for his petitions regarding his disciples. He does not simply ask the Father to bless them. He reminds the Father who these men are, and where they are at spiritually. He is quite specific, not only in whom he is praying for, but in what he is praying for them.

You will remember how Moses (Exodus 32:13), Solomon and Daniel reminded the Lord of his promises when they prayed. They came before the Lord on the basis of what he had revealed unto them, and so should we. Do you remember the covenant promises of God when you pray – for your children for instance?

Given by the Father

Jesus refers to his disciples as men given to him by the Father (17:6, 9 – verse 12 makes it clear that it is the disciples he is referring to). They had followed Jesus because they were drawn to him by the Father, as is the case with any disciple (6:44). Jesus spent the night in prayer to God prior to choosing the twelve whom he named apostles (Luke 6:12, 13).

God revealed unto Jesus who his chosen ones were, and Jesus then revealed unto them the name of God the Father (17:6). Jesus spent a lot of time with these men teaching them all that the Father had told him (15:5). Here in the upper room he told them all that was happening to him, the Cross, the resurrection and the ascension, and assured them of his continuing presence with them by the Spirit he would send.

I have manifested/revealed your name to the men. What did he mean by your name? A name carries a lot of information about a person and especially so with God. The name he revealed to Moses was ‘I AM’; a simple name but full of truth about God. When Jesus took this name the Jews tried to stone him (8:58). ‘Name’ refers to the nature and attributes of God.

How did Jesus reveal God? All the works he did and the words he spoke were from God. Moreover, Jesus could say to Philip, *believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. He who has seen me has seen the Father* (14:11, 9). ‘The Son is the radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of his being’ (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus clearly revealed the Father to his disciples.

The outcome of Jesus’ ministry to his disciples was that they accepted that Jesus was sent by God the Father. They were disciples not only of Jesus, but of the Father also. *All mine are yours and yours are mine* (17:10). This was important because Jesus was leaving this world and leaving his disciples behind in this world. They needed to know they truly belonged to God, and that he would keep them after Jesus went away. This prayer, remember, was spoken in the presence of the disciples.

What great truths we find in this prayer of our Lord. Divine election stands out above all. *They were yours and you gave them to me* (17:6). Jesus was talking about the disciples, about men who from their perspective chose to follow Jesus. But here we see God’s perspective.

We also learn about the Trinity in this prayer. We learn about the unity in the Godhead. There is not even a hint of any difference in words or works. This prayer is often seen as a prayer about unity, unity between believers and between churches. But note that such unity stems from the unity in the Godhead, not upon the efforts of men to organise anything.

I am glorified in them said Jesus (17:10). Jesus began his prayer on the note of glory, his glory and the Father’s glory. He sought the glory of heaven from where he came. But he also delighted in the glory accorded him by his disciples. Jesus is glorified on earth and in heaven when men and women turn from sin and believe in him. *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power, and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!* (Revelation 5:12).

Jesus went to the Cross out of obedience to the Father, and also out of love for the lost. When the lost acknowledge his death for them, he is glorified. For the joy that was before him he endured the Cross (Hebrews 12:2). You who believe are that joy and that glory of which Jesus speaks – *I am glorified in them.*

Disciples Believed

While the emphasis of the prayer is on divine election, the response of these men to the word of God is not overlooked. When Jesus revealed unto them the name of the Father, when they heard the word they **kept** that word (17:6). They **received** the words which Jesus gave them from the Father (17:8). They **have known** and **believed** that Jesus was sent by the Father (17:8).

In the previous chapter the disciples told Jesus *we believe you came forth from God* (16:30). Jesus was not overly thrilled at the depth of their belief. They did not at this time believe that Jesus would die, rise again and ascend into heaven. Yet here in his prayer he praises them before his Father for the little faith they did have.

It was a small seed of faith, and Jesus saw potential for it to grow and mature to the glory of God. We should encourage every indication of faith we see in others. What use is there in sowing the seed if we do not take care of that which germinates and starts to grow?

They kept your word said Jesus, meaning they received and believed the message of the gospel which Jesus gave them. They believed and knew that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (6:69). Multitudes rejected the word which Jesus brought from the Father. *He came unto his own but his own did not receive him. But as many as received him to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name* (1:11, 12).

I Do Not Pray For the World

Jesus was very specific in his prayer. He was praying for his disciples, not for the world in general. He would later pray for all who would believe (17:20). Jesus made the fundamental distinction between those who believed in him and those who did not – and so should we. The world hated Jesus and it will hate you when you make such a distinction. The world wants you treat everyone the same – all races, all languages, all ages – yes, but all religions – no. Jesus saw two types of people – those who believe in him and those who don't.

Jesus did not pray the same for believers and unbelievers. Jesus does not intercede for unbelievers. It is true of course that God made all people and desires none to perish. And he is bringing people out of darkness into the light all the time. But still there is darkness and there is light.

'God bless Bill, God bless Sue, and God bless Molly'. Is this what your prayers are like? What if Bill is a believer and the others unbelievers – are your prayers still the same? Jesus called the Jews who rejected his word children of the devil! You might find yourself before a magistrate if you said such a thing today, but it is true nevertheless. Only Jesus gives the right to be called children of God (12).

Let us be discerning in our prayers and pray for people with the understanding of which kingdom they belong to – the kingdom of God or the kingdom of this world. Jesus was praying for his disciples because they would continue living in this fallen world. Jesus continues to intercede for his people before the Father even today.

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