

John 17: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 17. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you, for I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them, and have come to know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them.

I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word. That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you. That they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and love them, even as you love me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

[3 : 0 8] John chapter 17, commonly called the high priestly prayer of Christ, is perhaps one of the most moving and powerful passages in all of scripture. Within it, the son addresses his father, speaking of his relationship with his people, as something that is implicated in his loving bond with the father.

Behind John chapter 17, we might see passages such as the relationship between the son of man and the ancient of days, in Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 to 14. There has already been anticipation of this great prayer earlier in the gospel, in chapter 11, verses 41 to 42, in chapter 12, verses 27 to 28.

It's also reminiscent of the beginning of chapter 13, where Jesus first addresses himself to his disciples in that context. Jesus, realizing that his hour had come, that he was about to go to the father, that everything was about to be fulfilled, took up the cloth and started wiping his disciples' feet.

There we had the beginning of the conversation with his disciples in the farewell discourse. The passage here is introduced with a similar set of statements. Jesus recognizes that his hour has come, and he speaks to his father concerning it. Perhaps we should see something of the twofold aspect of the cross. First of all, there's an action directed to the disciples in washing their feet, laying aside his garments and serving and ministering to them, but also addressing himself to his father.

The event of the cross is an event of glorification. It's an event in which he's going to be lifted up or elevated by the father. He's going to ascend to his father following it. Both aspects of the cross can be seen in chapters 13 to 17. While we saw the first part of that more clearly in chapter 13, now we see in the son's addressing of himself to the father, the lifting up of Jesus to God's presence, coming to the foreground. We might also see this prayer as one that has many parallels with the Lord's prayer. Our Father who art in heaven, Jesus lifts up his eyes to heaven and says, Father, hallowed be your name. Glorify your son so that your son may glorify you. Your kingdom come. [5:12] I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. On earth as it is in heaven. The petition, deliver us from evil, also parallels with Christ's prayer that his disciples would be preserved from the evil one. There are a lot of other parallels that we can see if we look deeper. What's the point of these parallels? I think that through them we can recognize the way that, first of all, our prayers resemble, participate, correspond with, and function within the prayer of Jesus for us. Jesus is here interceding for his flock, and Jesus' relationship with his Father as the Son is one in which we participate in. The love with which the Father loves the Son is the love with which he loves us in his Son. We can speak to the Father in the name of Jesus, and thereby enjoy access that he enjoys. In addition to such participation, we can see the way that Jesus himself is praying for the fulfillment of his own kingdom. As we pray for this, as his people on earth, he's praying for it in heaven. Our prayers are accompanied by Christ's prayers for us and for his kingdom in heaven. When we pursue the kingdom of God, we're not pursuing it alone. We're joined with the prayer of Jesus to the Father. And so when we pray in Jesus' name, it's not just that we're having access in his name. We're joining our prayers with his. Once again, Jesus refers to his coming death, not just to the resurrection and the ascension to follow it, as a glorification that he will be glorified in. He speaks of being given authority over all for the sake of his people. Often when we think of the authority of Jesus, we think about the authority of Jesus with relationship to his people as an authority that he exercises purely over us. Jesus tells us what to do and we obey. However, here Jesus speaks of being given authority over all so that he might give eternal life to all who have been given to him. That authority has been given to him and is exercised for our sake, in order that we might come to participate in eternal life. Jesus describes this life as knowing the true God and Jesus the Christ that he has sent. These two things are directly connected. We know the revealed Father in the revealing Son and knowing God is to know God in the Messiah Jesus. To know the Son is to know the Father, as Jesus had spoken about earlier in his conversation with Thomas. This passage stresses that the disciples are given to him by the Father. The church is a gift of love from the Father to the Son in the Spirit and as such we are implicated in the bond of love of the Trinity itself. The disciples have kept God's word. They have arrived at a true knowledge of Jesus and his mission. They know that he has been sent by God. Throughout the Gospel of John this has been a recurring theme. Where does Jesus come from? From where and from whom has he been sent? The Jewish authorities and most of the people fail to recognize Christ's origins. However, the disciples have seen them and with this knowledge they've arrived at the point where they can move forward. This is a source of joy for Jesus at this time for his glorification has now arrived because his mission has been realized in the fact that these disciples now recognize the truth of his origin. Jesus proceeds to speak of the intimate relationship between his possession and the Father's possession. What's the son's is the father's and what belongs to the father is the son's. There could not be a closer relationship between the two. We need to read this against the background of the Old Testament where God declares forcefully in places like Isaiah that he will not give his glory to another, that his name is above all other names, and that at his name every knee will bow, every tongue will confess.

This however is the name that the Son enjoys. This is the glory that is given to him. And so the way that Jesus speaks of himself here is a claim to deity is very clearly filling out the picture that we found elsewhere in the Gospel, where Jesus is identified with the Father in a way that's closer than

just one that is sent on a very important or central mission. Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus declares here that he is no longer in the world. He is on the way out of the world. He's going to the Father, and yet his disciples will be left in the world. While he was in the world, he protected his disciples, guarding them from the evil one by his teaching and his practice and his presence. Only Judas fell away, but did so in fulfillment of scripture. Note the reference to the son of perdition here. It's found also elsewhere in scripture in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 3. It seems to be an eschatological figure that is anticipated and fulfilled both in Christ's immediate mission, but then also in the events running up to 70 AD. Perhaps what we see here is an example of a pattern played out in history that plays out on a number of occasions. There will be Judas characters later on in the story, later on in the run-up to

AD 70, and there may be also later on in the run-up to the final coming of Christ. The disciples remain in the world, but they're not rooted in the world. That's no longer the site that they find their foundation and their truest belonging. They are hated by the world, like Jesus was, because they are not of it.

They have been sent into the world by him. Jesus sanctifies himself for us by going to the cross, and he does so in order that we might be sanctified by God's truth. He prays not just for his immediate disciples, but for all who will believe through their testimony. This prayer extends not just to the immediate twelve apostles, but extends to us as well, to those who have believed through the apostolic testimony. At later points in John's Gospel, we'll see also that the Gospel writer turns to us and looks us in the eye, telling us that these things were written so that we might believe. Jesus' words here in the Gospel are spoken concerning us. We should recognize ourselves within them. Jesus prayed that his disciples and the ones who believed through their word would be one. This is not primarily about ecumenism and about a unified church and visible institutions. It's primarily about the shared roots of our union with God, and our shared union with and in God is the basis of our union with each other. It's important to get the order right here. We look to God for our union by faith, not primarily to a more visible church union on earth. However, as our union with the Father and the Son and the

[11:40] Spirit and with each other in the triune God is made manifest, people will believe that Jesus was sent by the Father. So the unity of the church is important, but that visible unity must be grounded in the deeper unity, the unity that we have in the triune God. That is the true unity that Christ prays for here. Jesus gives the glory and the love that the Father gives and shares with him to his disciples. It seems to me that this is likely a reference to the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is the gift of the union of love and the glory of the triune God to his people. Through the gift of the Spirit, it is made possible for us to enjoy the glory and the love with which the Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world. A question to consider. In this chapter there are a great many references to the Father and the Son and the way that they secure our redemption through their united work. I believe that we can also hear some allusions to the work of the Spirit, which I have already mentioned. Putting the various parts of this picture together, what are the ways in which each person of the Trinity is involved in a united work constituting the church as the people of God within the witness of this chapter?