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The Lord's Prayer

John 17

Introduction

I've worked at the same company for 35 years now. There are several reasons for that. I enjoy the work I do. I don't like change. But one of the reasons is that I really don't want to have to make a resignation speech. I'm hoping by the time I retire no one will know who I am and I can slip quietly out the back door.

What do we expect when a great leader speaks to their followers for the last time? Perhaps a summary of the great accomplishments they've made. Maybe some advice for them as they carry on. Very often there will be a handing over of the baton to the new leader.

Moses handed over power to Joshua when he went up the mountain within sight of Canaan. David handed over the reigns to Solomon when he was too old to rule. And we can follow the line of Aaron as one high priest took over from the previous one.

This prayer is the last thing John records Jesus saying before he went out to go to the Garden of Gethsemane and ultimately to the cross. It's a bit like a leaving speech. He is going to send the Spirit once he is gone, but there is no successor. He will remain the head of the church. So what will he pray as this time approaches?

Structure

This prayer, often known as the "High Priestly Prayer", takes up the whole of John 17. Jesus and 11 of the disciples are in the upper room (Judas Iscariot has left). The Last Supper is over. Jesus has talked a lot about where he is going and how the disciples should act. But now the cross looms ahead.

Look at how Jesus prays, in verse 1: "*he lifted up his eyes to heaven*". Why do we bow our heads and close our eyes? To show submission. To better concentrate on our connection to the Father. Here is the king of glory, one with the Father, and he looks up to heaven.

We can divide the prayer into 3 parts. In the first 5 verses Jesus prays for himself. Then in verses 6 to 19 he prays for his disciples. And finally in verses 20-26 he prays for those who will come to believe because of the witness of the disciples.

However I'd like to look at three words or concepts that Jesus uses throughout his prayer.

Glory

The first is glory, or glorify. What does that mean? It's a work that maybe we sense its meaning but find hard to explain. Glory is what we get when we do something great. It's a bit like fame, celebrity, greatness. To glorify someone is to lift them up for who they are. Or sometimes despite who they are. Many have been glorified that didn't deserve it.

When we read about glory in the Bible it often describes the greatness of God. And it often crops up in relation to a visible display:

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

[Psalm 19 v 1]

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

[Acts 7 v 55]

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

[Revelation 21 v 23]

The idea of glory appears in all 3 parts of Jesus prayer:

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,

[John 17 v 1]

That might sound a bit selfish at first, Jesus wanting to be glorified. But what he is asking is that all that he does, especially going to the cross, should reveal the greatness of God to those who watch. He wants to be the living embodiment of the Father, so that people can see his greatness.

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.

[John 17 v 4-5]

This is interesting. It tells us that Jesus was with the Father before the world existed, and that he had glory then. He was great in himself. But when he came to earth he shrugged off that personal glory to accomplish what the Father had sent him to do. He could have come as the shining conqueror, and all people would recognise his greatness. Instead he came as the humble servant. All the works that he did while here on earth were to glorify the Father. As he returns he asks for a return of that glory which he certainly deserves. And one day he will come again as that shining conqueror.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

[John 17 v 10]

Now as he prays for his disciples he says that he is glorified in them. Just as he glorified the Father in the words he said and the works he did, so the disciples would glorify the Son, in the words that they said and the works they did. Do you ever think of the responsibility of telling others about Jesus? Our lives should point to him and glorify him. How is that going to happen?

The glory that you have given me I have given to them

[John 17 v 22]

There's the answer. Just as God gave his son the words to speak and the works to do, so he has charged us with speaking his words and doing his deeds.

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.

[John 17 v 24]

What would be a good reward for the faithful Christian? Riches? Power? Status? Maybe the best reward we could hope for would be to see him who we have served in all his glory, and to be with him.

Unity

The second word I want to think about is unity. Jesus talks about this a lot in his prayer: the idea of being "one", and each time he also uses the word "in". We are one in something. Let's have a look:

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

[John 17 v 11]

Here he asks that the disciples are kept "in your name". In what way did the Father give his name to the Son, and how does being in that name make them one?

One of the names of the Father is Jehovah, and that name is part of the name Jesus: Jehovah saves. That is our identity, isn't it? We are those who are saved.

Another name of God is Elohim, and Jesus was called Emmanuel, or God with us. Those who can say that God is with them are united, we have the same Father.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

[John 17 v 17]

Another way the disciples are made one is by being sanctified in the word of God. As they hear that word, obey it and live by it, they can't help but live in harmony, and in unity.

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.

[John 17 v 20-21]

This is about us. Jesus is praying for us! And what he prays is that we should be as one. We see the intimate connection between the Father and the Son: you in me and I in you. And we are part of that too, we are in the Father and in the Son. This unity, with each other and with almighty God and the Lord Jesus are our witness. This is what convinces others that Jesus is really from God.

And Jesus doubles down on the prayer:

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 loved them even as you loved me.

[John 17 v 22-23]

It's the other way round this time. In verse 21 we are in him. Now he is in us. So that we can be perfectly one. How does that work? Surely if one thing is in another, the other can't be in the first. If you want the answer to that, go find out about grafting. The farmer takes a strong root, and a branch which will bear sweet fruit. He makes a diagonal cut in each of them and then he slides them into each other, so that the branch is in the root and the root is in the branch. He binds them together and they grow into each other. The branch bears the fruit but it is the root that gives life. The Father sent the Son to be the life giver to the believers. Because he loves them and he wants them to bear fruit.

And finally:

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.

[John 17 v 26]

Jesus wants the love of God to be in us, and he himself dwells in us, telling us more and more about his name.

The World

The third thing that Jesus mentions a lot in this prayer is the world. In contrast to the people that God has given him, the world is those who are on the outside, who are opposed to him.

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.

[John 17 v 6-9]

Jesus is very clear that the disciples which God has given him have come out of the world. They recognised that Jesus was sent by the Father, as the words he spoke were full of truth and authority, and they believed in him. And he very specifically says he is praying for them, not the world in general.

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.

[John 17 v 11]

Jesus is concerned for his disciples. He knows that he is going away and they will still be here. They may have been called out of the world but they still physically inhabit it. So they are

going to need the protection of the Father. And so he prays that the Father may keep them in his name.

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.

[John 17 v 13-16]

The disciples are not of the world, because they are now of Jesus. And the world hates them because it hates Jesus. He could have asked for God to take them out of the world, but he has a work for them to do in this world. And so he asks for their protection from the evil one.

How often do you fear the evil one? I've heard Christians scoff at the Devil, as if he is ineffectual. Well Jesus prayed that his disciples would be kept from him. Maybe we should pray this too.

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

[John 17 v 18]

What is our great commission? We are sent into the world to win disciples for Christ, baptising them in his name.

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.

[John 17 v 20-21]

As Jesus turns to pray for Christians down the ages, we have already seen that he wants us to be one, to be in him as he is in the Father. But here also we see the reason for that: that the world might believe that the Father sent him. That's what he said about the disciples, wasn't it? That they recognised and believed that the Father sent him.

He reinforces that thought in verse 23:

I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

[John 17 v 23]

How often is that the main point of our witness: that God sent his son? Jesus puts such an emphasis on it. Maybe it's the starting point of belief. It's the defining point of the Christians' belief in verse 25:

O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.

[John 17 v 25]

Application

What can we gain from this prayer. Jesus spoke it to his Father, but he spoke it out loud so his disciples could hear. His prayer for them was also an encouragement to them.

What is our aim in life? It sounds like it should be to glorify Jesus. That's what he asks his father to do and to help us do. Any glory that we give out should be the glory of Jesus, not of ourselves.

Secondly he is greatly concerned about our unity. It is so important that we are one together, and we can really be one if we recognise that we are all in him, in the truth, in the word, in his love. When we recognise these things our differences melt away.

And we also need to recognise that we have been brought out of the world. We are still here, but we are here for a purpose, that the world might recognise Jesus in us, and that he was sent by the Father.

And the end of all this? One day we will see him in his glory. What a reward that will be.