

The Gospel of John (105): Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer (6)

Introduction:

Today, we will conclude our consideration of our Lord's high priestly prayer, which is recorded in John 17. Last Lord's Day we began to examine the third and final division of this prayer. In verses 20 through 26 Jesus prayed to His Father on behalf of all those who would ever come to saving faith through the apostolic witness (cf. v. 20). As we explain the meaning of these verses, we will also consider the implications of what our Lord said for the people of God, those who have truly believed on Him.

By way of summary, we read in this concluding section of our Lord's prayer that...

III. Jesus prayed for all true believers (17:20-26)

Let us again read these verses, **John 17:20-26**.

²⁰“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

²⁴“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. ²⁶And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

There are two paragraphs in our New King James Version (NKJV). In the first of these two, we read that...

A. Jesus prayed that all believers be one (17: 20-23)

Jesus Christ prayed to His Father on behalf of all those He redeemed through His death upon His cross. Jesus said that He was praying for those “who will believe in Me” through the word, that is, the witness of the apostles. He prayed that true believers would all be one, a prayer that the Father granted Him. All of His people are indeed one as a result of the Father answering this prayer of Jesus. This becoming “one” is not an organizational unity, but a spiritual unity that we enjoy because every true believer is equally in union with Jesus Christ through faith. We are one body of Christ, that is, all who are true believers in Jesus Christ. We are commanded to walk according to this spiritual unity that we enjoy with one another. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1ff

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph. 4:1-5)

We are also one in our mutual desire and commitment to proclaim the message of salvation to the lost world in which we live. As we stated regarding this passage that the major theme of our mission to the world is quite pronounced in this passage. The purpose that our Lord stated for our recognition and life in this unity with Him and God our Father was so that the world might come to know and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Jesus desired that His people be united in their self-identification as His people so that they might proclaim a single message of salvation to the world, As Jesus said to His Father, “so that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) expressed it well:

Although the unity envisioned in this chapter is not institutional, this purpose clause at the end of v. 21 shows beyond possibility of doubt that the unity is meant to be observable. It is not achieved by hunting enthusiastically for the lowest common theological denominator, but by common adherence to the apostolic gospel, by love that is joyfully self-sacrificing, by undaunted commitment to the shared goals of the mission with which Jesus’ followers have been charged, by self-conscious dependence on God Himself for life and fruitfulness. It is a unity necessarily present, at least *in nuce* (Latin: in a nutshell), amongst genuine believers; it is a unity that must be brought to perfection.¹

I appreciated as well the words of **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) in speaking of the spiritual unity that we enjoy with all Christians everywhere:

The unity which our Lord prays about here is that true, substantial, spiritual, internal, heart unity, which undoubtedly exists among all true members of Christ of every Church and denomination. It is this unity which results from one Holy Ghost having made the members of Christ what they are. It is this unity which makes them feel more of one mind with one another than with mere professors of their own party... It is this unity which shakes the world, and obligates it to confess the truth of Christianity. For the continued maintenance of this unity, and an increase of it, our Lord seems to me in this prayer specially to pray.²

Let us now examine the second paragraph of this concluding prayer. Here we read that...

B. Jesus prayed that all believers would be with Him in the presence of His Father (17: 24-26)

²⁴“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. ²⁶And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Let us first consider verse 24. Jesus said, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” Here we read that

1. Jesus prayed that true believers would be with Him and behold His glory (v. 24)

Let us underscore once again, identify and consider...

a. For whom the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father.

¹ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 568.

² J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 229.

Jesus first specified the ones for whom He was praying. He prayed, “**Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me.**” Here Jesus was praying for His elect. These ones are not to be limited to only those who had believed on Jesus Christ through the word of the apostles, as set forth in verse 20, that is, believers of this church age. These ones the Father gave to His Son are all the elect through all of history. All whom He has redeemed and reconciled through His life and death are the subjects of this prayer.

This expression, “whom You gave Me”, is used 5 times in John’s Gospel, once in John 6, three times here in this chapter (17:6, 12, 24), and once in the next chapter (18:9). Here are those statements of Jesus:

John 6:39. “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of **all that He has given Me**, but raise it up on the last day.”

John 17:6. “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.”

John 17:12. “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.”

The occasion recorded in John 18 was in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus had asked those who came to arrest Him to let His disciples go free. In verse 9 we read, “This was to fulfill the word that He had spoken: ‘Of those **whom You gave Me** I have lost not one.’” This is a reference to the earlier statements of our Lord Jesus recorded in John 6:39, 17:6 and 12.

What was it that Jesus prayed for the elect? First, that all of the people He redeemed in history would be **with Him**. Jesus said, “Father, **I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am...**” Now there is a sense in which the Lord Jesus is always with His people. He has declared to them, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). And we read His words in Hebrews 13:5, “will never leave you nor forsake you.” Jesus Christ is always with His people. He also, of course, indwells every Christian through the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote, “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27). But His presence with us now is a spiritual presence, a spiritual knowledge that He is with us, even within us. But we are not, of course, enjoying His physical presence. After having been raised bodily from the grave, He ascended to the throne of His Father in heaven and has been there in His resurrection body these past 2,000 years. It is to bring all of the elect to be with Him in His physical body, in His glorified state, that Jesus prayed His Father bring to pass. He prayed, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me **may be with Me where I am.**” When we pass from this life, true believers immediately pass into the presence of the Lord Jesus in heaven. As Paul wrote:

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.
⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. (2 Cor. 5:6-8)

We may be assured, therefore, that one day we will be ushered into His presence. We may confess as did Job long ago.

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
²⁶And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27)

b. To what end Jesus prayed for His people.

Jesus prayed, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me *may be with Me where I am*” (v. 24). Jesus was leaving them, returning to His Father. But their physical separation from Him would only be temporary. They will rejoin Him at His second coming. When Jesus Christ returns, He will be coming for us, we who believe on Him as our Lord and Savior, and then we shall forever be with the Lord. This has been the great promise of God and the great hope of the believer since the beginning of time.

Coming into His presence results in bring to us the fullness of His blessing upon us. The Holy Scriptures teach us that a life of true peace, joy, and security can only be experienced in the presence of God. For in Him is life and that life emanates from Him to all that is near Him. Happiness is not in the things that God gives, but ultimately it is in Him who gives us all things to enjoy. But when we take what He intended for us to use in the manner He prescribed and use it for something other than what He intended, it rots and spoils and fails to give enjoyment and satisfaction.

Life in the presence of God may be illustrated by Adam and Eve in the Garden of God--Eden--in which was the paradise of God, containing everything that was needful and beneficial for the lives of Adam and Eve. This is because God was there and because He dwelt with His people. The Garden of Eden was an earthly temple, in which God met and interacted with mankind. But when sin entered their lives, it resulted in separation from the Garden, which was separation from the presence of God Himself. Thereafter Adam and Eve encountered a cursed earth rather than an earth that yielded readily its fruit to them. But once living in this fallen world, a place of blessing and security could be found and enjoyed when God met and manifested His presence among His people. This played out through history with the theme of God’s temple and His kingdom. The Garden of Eden was the first temple in which God met and had fellowship with His people. The Promised Land was set forth as a new Garden of Eden in which God and His people would dwell. And the tabernacle and later physical temple built by Solomon were similarly locations in which God would meet with His people from which He would manifest His saving and life-giving presence. But we have seen in John’s Gospel that Jesus Himself is set forth as not only the replacement for God’s people, He being the true Israel, but Jesus is the new spiritual temple through which God dwells and gives life to His people. In this glorious realization of what the people of God enjoy in Jesus Christ, they are formed into a living, spiritual temple, in which God dwells with His people in His Son through the Holy Spirit.

There is a wonderful book written by **Greg Beale** on this biblical theme. It is entitled, ***The Temple and the Church’s Mission; A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God***. After considering the final vision of the temple in the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, Beale set forth how this was the culmination and realization of all of biblical history, which was God dwelling with His people whereby they experienced fulness of life before Him. He wrote of this book:

This book has been the most exciting research project on which I have ever worked. It has opened my eyes to themes that I had seen only dimly before. In particular, I have seen more clearly than ever that themes of Eden, the temple, God’s glorious presence, new creation and the mission of the church are ultimately facets of all the same reality! It is my hope that the biblical-theological perspective of this book will provide greater fuel to fire the church’s motivation to fulfill its mission to the world.³

This theme of God’s presence, the church’s mission, the final realization of the people of God dwelling with God has been set forth before us in this Gospel of John and in particular this chapter. With the coming of Christ, the spiritual temple foreshadowed by types and prophecies in the Old Testament see their realization. God dwells with His people through His Son Jesus Christ, but their present spiritual relationship will one day give way to a more full and complete realization in the new heavens and new earth.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ²Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of

³ Greg Beale, ***The Temple and the Church’s Mission; A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God***. (InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 11.

heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, *the tabernacle of God* is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:1-4)

And then a little further we read:

But *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.* ²³The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. ²⁴And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. ²⁵Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). ²⁶And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. ²⁷But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. (Rev. 21:22-27)

And it is this to which our Lord Jesus is praying here in John 17:24, “Jesus prayed, ‘Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me *may be with Me where I am.*’”

c. What will impress us most when we are brought into His presence?

And what will impress us most upon seeing our Savior? Again, Jesus prayed, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, *that they may behold My glory which You have given Me.*” This “glory” was conferred upon Jesus by His heavenly Father when He returned to Him and when He received the kingdom from His Father.

This glory will be very much as His three apostles beheld Him on the Mount of Transfiguration. Matthew wrote of this in Matthew 18:1f.

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; ²and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.⁴

Peter later wrote of this event.

“For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹⁸And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.” (2 Pet. 1:17f)

That even was a preview of what our Lord received from the Father when He later rose from the dead and had ascended to heaven.

When Jesus spoke of His people seeing Him in His glory, He was not speaking of merely the manifestation of light radiating from His presence. The glory that is displayed in His appearance reflects the degree of authority, power, and greatness that He possesses. Now every Christian presently sees a degree of that glory that emanates from Jesus. Paul wrote of this in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Here seeing His glory is our comprehension of the degree of authority that our Lord Jesus presently possess and manifests in heaven and in earth. It speaks of the magnificence and extension of His sovereign rule over all things. Paul was writing that to the degree that we see, contemplate, and submit to that royal authority (glory) of Jesus Christ, will be to the degree that we will enjoy and experience the moral transformation of our lives in to ones like Jesus Christ Himself. But one

day each of us will be brought into His very presence, and when that takes place and we will fully see Jesus Christ in all His glory, we will then instantaneously experience a transformation in ourselves. We, too, will become glorified as we behold His glory. This is what John wrote in another place. “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, **because we shall see Him as He is**” (1 John 3:2).

There is a theological name placed upon this biblical event of beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is referred to as the **Beatific Vision**. Now some with a Roman Catholic background may recognize that appellation, for it has been a matter that Rome as well as the Eastern Orthodox have promoted down through the centuries. But the Beatific Vision is not foreign to Protestantism. Calvin wrote of it, as did John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, and many others.

The Scriptures are replete with this idea of “seeing” God and experiencing the fulness of blessing for having done so. We read of David’s words in Psalm 17:15, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” Paul stated, “For now we see in a mirror dimly [or, ‘glass darkly’], **but then face to face**. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). And the last vision of the Bible speaks of this event and the result:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. ⁴**They shall see His face**, and His name shall be on their foreheads. ⁵**There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light.** And they shall reign forever and ever.

Now, although we speak in terms of our physical eyes seeing God and seeing the glory of God, actually this “sight” is of a spiritual nature rather than only a physical experience. **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) wrote of this in his sermon he entitled, “*A Divine and Supernatural Light*.”

Positively what this spiritual and divine light is.

Divine Light Defined

And it may be thus described: a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising. This spiritual light primarily consists in the former of these, *viz.*, a real sense and apprehension of the divine excellency of things revealed in the word of God. A spiritual and saving conviction of the truth and reality of these things, arises from such a sight of their divine excellency and glory; so that this conviction of their truth is an effect and natural consequence of this sight of their divine glory. There is therefore in this spiritual light,

A Sense of the Divinity and Excellency of the Things of Faith

A true sense of the divine and superlative excellency of the things of religion; a real sense of the excellency of God and Jesus Christ, and of the work of redemption, and the ways and works of God revealed in the gospel. There is a divine and superlative glory in these things; an excellency that is of a vastly higher kind, and more sublime nature than in other things; a glory greatly distinguishing them from all that is earthly and temporal. He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it. He does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God’s holiness. There is not only a speculatively

judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is upon that account, or a sense of the beauty of this divine attribute.⁵

This final and full vision of God which is in the face of Jesus Christ is the end or goal of our salvation. It is the experience and enjoyment of the essence and meaning of life. Here is one description of this matter:

The beatific vision is understood as the ultimate end of human nature. It is why we exist. It relates to human nature the way the destination functions for those in a race. It is the ultimate and final human experience, resulting in a perfect and permanent happiness. (Perhaps one reason that the beatific vision has dropped out somewhat in the modern era is that we have lost *any* sense of teleology and purpose to the material world. Thus, Boersma treats the beatific vision especially in relation to the sacramental ontology that he sees as its “plausibility structure.”)

Theologians have therefore spoken of the beatific vision with alluring and vivid language. Isaac Watson called it “the heaven of heaven” and “the quintessence of happiness.” (Jonathan) Edwards writes that “the pleasure of seeing God is so great and so strong that it takes the full possession of the heart; it fills it brimful, so that there shall be no room for any sorrow, no room in any corner for anything of an adverse nature from joy. There is no darkness can bear such powerful light” (quoted in Boersma, 366). At the same time, and in contrast to criticisms that beatific vision implies a static and overly intellectual view of heavenly experience, theologians often speak of the beatific vision in dynamic terms as an infinitely progressive, expanding reality (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa’s concept of “eternal progress” in the being of God). This is something of the paradox of the joy of heaven: it is perfect, yet always increasing.⁶

Here is a summary of what **Jonathan Edwards** declared in a sermon on this subject based on Romans 2:10.⁷

Edwards preached on Romans 2:10 in 1735, claiming ‘[t]o give a description of the consummate and eternal glory and blessedness of the saints’, showing first, its nature and wherein it consists, and second, its circumstances. Edwards provides six major points under his first emphasis: first, heaven is more glorious than any other aspect of created reality (God is the builder, and there is ‘no want of skill in this architect’); second, as glorious as the heavenly realms are, they pale in comparison to the glorified bodies of the saints; third, as glorious as the saints’ bodies will be, those will be overshadowed by the glory of the saints’ souls; fourth, the saints in heaven will commune in perfect harmony and union with one another; and fifth, the saints will converse and see Christ in a twofold sense. Before moving on to the sixth point, we must pause to look at Edwards’ twofold delineation of conversing *with* and *seeing* Christ. First, the saints ‘shall see him as appearing in his glorified human nature with their bodily eyes’; and second, ‘[t]hey shall see him with the eye of the soul’. In this sight of Christ, glorified humanity will come to understand Christ’s mediatorial role, the eternal covenant of redemption, Christ’s love to them before the foundation of the world, the mystery of the incarnation, the glorious way of salvation by Christ, and a full understanding of the infinite wisdom of God in contriving the way of salvation. There, the heart will no longer be ‘dull’ concerning these things, but will be fully enlightened. Everything in the work of redemption, Edwards claims, will appear in its true glory, ‘like the clear hemisphere with the sun in the meridian, and there shall never come even one cloud to darken the mind’. Christ’s exalted and glorified human state will, furthermore, appear without a veil, and the saints will have full access to

⁵ In Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine.” [Preached at Northampton, and published at the desire of some of the hearers, in the year 1734.]

⁶ From an article by Gavin Ortlund, “Why We Misunderstand the Beatific Vision.” Ortlund is a Baptist pastor in California and a member of the Gospel Coalition.

⁷ Romans 2:10, “but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

converse with Christ. These conversations will be, first, most free and intimate, and second, they will be with the greatest endearments and love from Christ to his spouse: ‘the soul shall, as it were, all dissolve in love in the arms of the glorious Son of God and breath itself wholly in ecstasies of divine love into his bosom’.⁸

Our Lord had prayed earlier that the Father restore to Him the glory that He had shared with the Father before His incarnation (17:5). And here, “glory”, speaks of His regal, sovereign authority as the eternal Son of God. He here prays that His people will one day see this glory that has been conferred upon Him in His glorification. He is praying, therefore, that His people will behold the manifestation of His divine nature in the form of unapproachable glory in His (glorified) human body. We might say that John Himself had experienced the realization of this prayer in His vision of Jesus Christ on the island of Patmos. Perhaps not too long after He had written this Gospel, he was in exile on Patmos. We read in Revelation 1 of what He first heard and then saw.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,” and, “What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

¹²Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. ¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; ¹⁵His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; ¹⁶He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. (Rev. 1:10-18)

One day we will see the same glory of Jesus Christ that John saw. We will not only be overwhelmed with the wonder of what we will be seeing, but it will transform us as well. He will fashion us into glorious creatures, in that seeing His glory will enable us to share in a degree that glory.

d. Why the Father so readily and wonderfully bestowed the glory upon Jesus Christ that He had requested of Him.

Again, we read in **verse 24**, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; *for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*” The Son of God had surrendered the manifestation of His glory when He left His place beside His Father and assumed our human nature. His glory was not removed, for that is not possible, rather, it was “veiled” or hidden by His “flesh”, which is His human soul and body. But the Father loved Him still though His glory was not manifested during His earthly sojourn. We will not say that the Father loved His Son more for what He did in His incarnation, for it is not possible for God who loves in an infinite degree to love any more or any less than He has loved for eternity. The Father loved His Son with an everlasting love. But the Father was infinitely pleased and proud of His Son, if we can speak in these terms, to glorify His Son for the life He lived in His incarnation while on earth. But the glory that our Father restored to His Son upon His resurrection was not just conferred upon the divine nature of Jesus, but due to His incarnation this glory of God from eternity was conferred upon His human nature. Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of Man, received from His Father all glory in heaven and earth. And that glory, or sovereign and royal authority was manifest in the brightness of His person being brighter than the sun.

⁸ Kyle Strobel, **Jonathan Edwards’ Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision**. A PDF article downloaded from https://www.academia.edu/1499800/Jonathan_Edwards_Reformed_Doctrine_of_the_Beatific_Vision

This was the glory that Paul saw when Jesus Christ appeared to him while he was on his way to Damascus. We read of this in Acts 26 when Paul was recounting his conversion to King Agrippa.

“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, ¹³at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’” (Acts 26:12-15)

The Father gave His Son upon His return to heaven infinite kingly authority over “all things” (Matt. 28:19). The reason the Father did so was because He loved His Son with an everlasting love. And one day the Father will give you and me glory as well, granted, it will be glory of varying degrees based upon our stewardship of time and resources in this life. And why will He do so? Jesus declared that God the Father will glorify us because He has also loved us with the same everlasting love with which He loved His Son.

Let us now consider **verse 25**, which reads, ***“O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.”***

2. Here Jesus relates to His Father the content of the faith that was His disciples’.

Jesus first addressed His Father, ***“O righteous Father.”*** When Jesus had prayed earlier that His Father would protect and preserve His apostles for their ministry of the word, Jesus called out, “Holy Father” (17:11). But here He requests that His Father would glorify them He calls out, “Righteous Father.” God the Father is righteous to bestow upon us honor and glory. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote:

The title He gives to God: *O righteous Father*. When He prayed that they might be sanctified, He called Him *holy Father*; when He prays that they may be glorified, He calls him *righteous Father*; for it is a *crown of righteousness which the righteous Judge shall give*. God’s righteousness was engaged for the giving out of all that good which the Father had promised and the Son had purchased.⁹

Jesus first described the fallen world as ignorant of the true identity and nature of His Father. He said, ***“The world has not known You.”*** Before we were converted, we were as all others in the world. We did not know the Father. We were incapable of knowing the Father. We had read this declaration back in John 1:10, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.” And Paul described himself and all Christians of being equally lost and incapable of knowing God.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. (Eph. 2:1-3)

But then the Lord Jesus could say, “The world has not known You, ***but I have known You.***” Jesus Christ is the only human being that knows the Father. This is, of course, because He is also the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

The plea He insists upon for Himself: *But I have known Thee*. Christ knew the Father as no one else ever did; knew upon what grounds He went in His undertaking, knew His Father’s mind in every thing, and therefore, in this prayer, came to Him with confidence, as we do to one we know. Christ is

⁹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the* (Fleming H. Revell Company), vol. 6.

here suing out blessings for those that were His; pursuing this petition, when He had said, *The world has not known Thee*, one would expect it should follow, *but they have known Thee*; no, their knowledge was not to be boasted of, *but I have known Thee*, which intimates that there is nothing in us to recommend us to God's favour, but all our interest in Him, and intercourse with Him, result from, and depend upon, Christ's interest and intercourse. We are unworthy, but He is worthy.¹⁰

We had not known, nor could we have known, God the Father. This was not only because we were sinful, but also because we were finite human beings. The finite cannot truly know or relate to the infinite. The Scriptures declares, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). And our Lord Himself had declared, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Luke 10:22). Only the Son of God knows the Father, for He is the eternally begotten Son of God, one in essence with the Father. Only the Son of God, therefore, reveal the Father to people, for He is not only God, but He is a man also.

Jesus declared this and John recorded this so that we may be reaffirmed in the truth that all that we enjoy from God is due to His sovereign grace, for we are without ability or merit. He also spoke in these terms in order to reaffirm to His disciples that if they are to go forth with this mission of the Gospel to the world, they are in need of divine assistance.

To show that these disciples need the aids of special grace, both because of the necessity of their work—they were to bring a world that knew not God to the knowledge of Him; and also, because of the difficulty of their work—they must bring light to those that rebelled against the light; therefore keep them. (Matthew Henry)

Nevertheless, Jesus could say of His people that they knew that He had come from the Father in order to reveal the Father to them and to bring them to know the Father through Him. Jesus prayed, "O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; *and these have known that You sent Me.*" We have come to know that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, God who took upon Himself our human nature, having been sent into this world by His Father for this purpose, to bring poor, lost, and ignorant sinners into an everlasting relationship with the Father through faith in His Son.

The knowledge and faith that the elect have in the person of Jesus Christ set them apart from the world that is hopelessly lost and in darkness. God the Father sent Christ into the world, but the world knew Him not. The world not only *could not know* Him or believe in Him, those of the world *would not believe in Him*. And it is in this second inability that their greatest culpability lies. But here Jesus commends His people, all those who would believe through the word and witness of the apostles. Believers everywhere and believers of every time are distinct from the fallen world.

Hereby they are distinguished from the unbelieving world. When multitudes to whom Christ was sent, and His grace offered, would not *believe that God had sent Him*, these knew it, and believed it, and were not ashamed to own it. Note, to know and believe in Jesus Christ, in the midst of a world that persists in ignorance and infidelity, is highly pleasing to God, and shall certainly be crowned with distinguishing glory. Singular faith qualifies for singular favours... Knowing Christ as sent of God, they have, in Him, known the Father, and are introduced to an acquaintance with Him; therefore, "Father, look after them for my sake." (Matthew Henry)

3. Jesus has been faithful to His people to declare and reveal the Father to them and He commits Himself to continue to do so.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry

Our Lord then concluded His prayer with the words of **verse 26**: “*And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it...*” Jesus always brought forward His Father before His disciples to give Him the glory in all that He had taught them and in all of the works that He had performed in their presence. This is a recurring claim of Jesus that we have read repeatedly. But here He also commits that He will continue to do so. This may refer specifically to His post-resurrection appearances to His disciples, or it may refer to His ongoing work as the Prophet to His people throughout this church age. Jesus Christ promotes His Father, even while His Father promotes His Son.

Note, *first*, we are indebted to Christ for all the knowledge we have of the Father’s name; He declares it, and He opens the understanding to receive that revelation. *Secondly*, those whom Christ recommends to the favour of God He first leads into an acquaintance with God. (Matthew Henry)

But then He gives the purpose for which He would continue to instruct them concerning the Father. Jesus said, “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, *that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*” Knowledge of God the Father by and through Jesus Christ brings them (us) us and enables them to receive, experience, and enjoy the love of God that He has for them. And this love is not just *for* them, but this love of God will be “in them.” And accompanying this love of God is the manifestation Jesus Christ’s own presence within His people.

Next week, Lord willing, we will begin to examine John’s Passion narrative.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith,
praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God,
looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.
(Jude 20, 21)
