



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, Part I

John 17:1-5

June 25, 2006

BACKGROUND / REVIEW

- ⇒ This is the third prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The others are: (1) at the tomb of Lazarus (11:41-42); and (2) after the Greeks seek Jesus in John 12:27-28.
- ⇒ This third and final prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John is often referred to, appropriately, as the “High Priestly Prayer.” The reason for this is that Jesus performs to role of a mediator, the primary priestly task, praying for Himself and those He came to save.
- ⇒ This prayer can be broken up into three primary sections:
 - ✱ Jesus prays for Himself (verses 1-5)
 - ✱ Jesus prays for His disciples (verses 6-19)
 - ✱ Jesus prays for the Church (verses 20-26)

Verses 1 – 2

- Notice, in these verses, the steadfastness of Jesus as He faces the shame and horror of the Cross.
- He is not some helpless victim in the wrong place at the wrong time, caught up in a set of events that are beyond His control. Rather, He is the One sent by the Father, in perfect obedience to His Father's will.
- We see this resolute focus [on the Father's will] in the Synoptics:
 - In Luke 9:51, it states, “When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem...”
 - Also, in all three Synoptic accounts when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, He proclaims, ‘not as I will, but as you will’ (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).

- Also, in the second Suffering Servant passage in the Book of Isaiah, the prophet, speaking from the Messiah’s perspective, writes, ‘For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.’ (Isaiah 50:7)
- It is in passages like this one, in John 17:1, where our affirmation of the **FULL Humanity** of Jesus Christ is so crucial. We can simply say, “He was able to face His fears of the Cross with such resolve because He was fully God”; yet, this misses one of the greatest benefits of this passage to us today. In this passage, **Jesus is setting an example for us to follow.**
- John states that Jesus, “lifting up His eyes to heaven...”
 - This very posture reveals the humility of Jesus Christ, as it was the acceptable manner in which to pray – a sign of humble unworthiness (John 11:41; Psalm 123:1; Mark 7:34).
- Then, Jesus states, “Father, *the hour* has come;”
 - Recall, that in the Gospel of John, the ‘hour’ represents the hour Jesus is crucified on the cross. Therefore, Jesus is **well aware** that the time for His crucifixion is at hand.
 - Once again, this scene gives us, the modern day reader, a rare insight into the perspective and countenance of Jesus in light of His imminent suffering.
 - Even though Jesus is in the ‘shadow of the cross,’ this is not a depressed prayer. Rather, it comes immediately after Jesus claim of victory in 16:33: ‘I have overcome the world!’
- Then, He says, “glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,”
 - In other words, in this context, **the glorification of the Son is directly linked to the glorification of the Father...**But how?
 - As is mostly the case in the Gospel of John, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the point of ultimate glorification of the Son. The reasons for this are many:
 1. The Cross demonstrates the Son’s perfect obedience to the will of the Father, even to the point of death.
 2. The cross is the path back to the glory the Son shared with the Father before the world began (John 17:5).
 3. It is the place where the Son is ‘lifted up’ or exalted so that all who look to Him will live (John 3:14-15).
 4. The Cross is the place where the penalty for our sins is paid, where the wrath of God the Father is appeased (**propitiation**) and our sins are removed from us (**expiation**).

5. The Cross is the place where the Father is glorified in the Son – that is the glorification of the Son glorifies the Father. The reason for this is that on the Cross of Calvary, the Father displays His supreme hatred toward sin and the zeal He has for His own glory (through His **wrath**). But it also the Father's **love** for His people that compels Him to pour out His wrath on His Son. [Certainly it is the Son's love for the Father AND His sheep that compels Him to perfectly obey the will of the Father to the point of death on a cross]. Further, only the Son, fully God and fully man, could bear the wrath of the Father. Any being less than fully God would never be able to accomplish this; no being less than fully man would be able to be our representative.

Therefore, it is through the glorification of the Son by His 'lifting up' on the cross [in perfect obedience] that the Father is also glorified through the demonstration of His love [for His people] and His wrath [toward their sin].

✧ John Calvin writes, **'If it be objected, that never was there any thing less glorious than the death of Christ, which was then at hand, I reply, that in that death we behold a magnificent triumph which is concealed from wicked men; for there we perceive that, atonement having been made for sins, the world has been reconciled to God, the curse has been blotted out, and Satan has been vanquished.'**

✧ **This is one of the greatest biblical paradoxes: the instrument which the world views with horror and shame, that is the cross, is presented in this Gospel as the place of ultimate glorification of the Son – God has truly turned weeping into joy!**

- Notice, as well, that Jesus does not simply pray for Himself, for His own sake ... He is always concerned about the glorification of the Father through obedience to His will.
- This is a perfect example that Jesus never sought the praise of men, but the praise of His Father.

⇒ Then, Jesus says, 'just as You gave Him [the Son] authority over all flesh...'

- Jesus, as the obedient Son of the Father, has been given authority [as a King] over all 'flesh' – this truth is attested to as well in John 5:27; Matthew 11:27 and Matthew 28:18.

Note: the word 'flesh' is equivalent to 'humanity'; however, it represents humanity in its weak, temporary, physical state, compared to God, who is Spirit and eternal.

- This is also significant because Jesus assumed human flesh (John 1:14) in order to save it.

- Jesus makes this point clear, by stating, “even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, **he may give eternal life.**”
- **In other words, the reason for Christ’s authority is that He may give eternal life** [to those given to Him by the Father];

Just as the reason for Christ’s request for His own glorification is that he may glorify the Father.

- Observe, here, the clear statement that, although Christ has authority over ‘all flesh’, the expressed reason that the Father gave Christ this authority was so that He might give eternal life to all that the Father has given Him.
- ⇒ **This is why it is essential for Jesus to have two natures: for God is Spirit, and the Spirit cannot be seen with eyes of flesh; therefore, Jesus took on human flesh, becoming fully man [while remaining fully God], in order to lead us to the Father through that which can be seen [that is flesh].**
- This echoes John 6:37, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”
- This also demonstrates the functional subordination of the Son to the Father, that the Son would give eternal life only to those given to Him by the Father.
- It also demonstrates the peculiar nature of God’s love towards His people [This is not to say that God does not love the entire world without exception. However, it appears in Scripture that He does not love each individual in the whole world in the same manner:].

Verse 3

- Here, Jesus defines eternal life in a manner that is, possibly, the clearest in all of the New Testament.
- Jesus states: “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
- ‘In important ways it [Verse 3] is similar to the confession we find in 1 Corinthians 8:6 where God the Father is confessed along with yet distinguished from the Lord Jesus Christ. This confession reflects the expansion of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)...’
Ben Witherington
- **‘yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.’**
1 Corinthians 8:6
- In other words, eternal life is, in short, **knowing God.**

- Tenney “the definition of eternal life is important because Jesus differentiated it from the current concept of endless existence.”
- God can be known, in part, through creation (Romans 1:18-25); however, this the difference between knowledge **about** God and **intimate knowledge of** God. [Read once again the prophecy of the new covenant in **Jeremiah 31:31-34.**] Also, Hosea, speaking of the apostasy of God’s covenant people, ‘My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge’ (Hosea 4:6). Also, Isaiah and Habakkuk prophesy of a day when ‘the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea’ (Isaiah 11:9, Habakkuk 2:14).
- **Therefore, the greatest benefit of salvation is the knowledge of the eternal God. This further underscores John’s emphasis on eternal life beginning now. It also gives us a glimpse into heaven, which is not simply endless life of eternal bliss; but, rather, it is an eternal state of intimacy with Almighty God.**
- Once again, too many Christians today view heaven as an Eden-like paradise with little or no reference to the triune God. Eternal life is NOT just escape from Hell.
- “If I have been enabled to see this, and in mind and heart to go to Calvary and lay hold of the Calvary solution, then I can know that I truly worship the true God, and that I am even now enjoying eternal life, according to our Lord’s own definition, ‘Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.’” (John 17:3) *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer
- Lastly, it is absolutely essential to note that there is **only true God – revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ.** To know Him is to have eternal life; to reject Him is eternal perdition.

Verses 4 – 5

- In these last two Verses, Jesus prays that the Father will glorify Him on the basis of His [the Son’s] obedience.
- Notice the parallels between Verses 1-5 and Philippians 2:5-11.
- Now, in light of His imminent suffering and crucifixion, Jesus speaks of the His finished work.
- The Greek root for the word ‘accomplished’ is the same as the words of Jesus on the cross – ‘It is finished.’
- When Jesus prays, ‘having accomplished the work which you have given Me to do,’ He is looking, not only backwards at His work during His life, but forward to the crucifixion.
- When speaking of the atonement, most Christians think exclusively of the Cross. However, the atonement was accomplished in the **entire work of Christ** – His

incarnation, life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. He had to accomplish **all the work the Father had given Him**.

- Jesus concludes this section of His high priestly prayer by beginning Verse 5 with ‘Now.’ In other words, ‘Now [that I have obeyed your will], Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.’
 - This Verse reveals that Jesus and the Father are both pre-existent, and that the Son Himself possesses eternal divine glory.
 - ‘the Divine majesty, which he had always possessed, may now be illustriously displayed in the person of the Mediator, and in the human flesh with which he was clothed. This is a remarkable passage, which teaches us that Christ is not a God who has been newly contrived, or who has existed only for a time; for if his glory was eternal, Himself also has always been.
 - These first 5 verses of the High Priestly prayer of Jesus are beautifully summed up in Hebrews 12:1-3:

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

- The Apostle Paul reveals that this Verse was perfectly fulfilled in that:

“God highly exalted Him [Jesus Christ], and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9-11

⇒ Therefore, from these first five Verses of Jesus’ High Priestly prayer, we observe the following:

1. Jesus has been given, by the Father, authority over all flesh (Verse 2).
2. Jesus has fulfilled, in all that He has done (i.e., His condescension through the Incarnation, His life, ministry, and His imminent crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension), the work [of salvation] given to Him by the Father (Verse 4).
3. And now, the hour of Jesus glorification, that is His crucifixion, has come (Verse 1).

4. Therefore, Jesus prays that the Father will now glorify Him [the Son] [through the cross] so that He [the Son] may glorify the Father (Verse 1).
5. As the Son is 'lifted up' on the Cross, the Father's wrath is appeased (Verse 1).
6. In this glorification, Jesus finishes the work of salvation for 'all whom [the Father has] given Him.' (Verse 2)
7. As a result, therefore, of the Son's obedience to the will of the Father, two primary things occur:
 - We, God's people, have eternal life, that is **intimate knowledge of Almighty God** [through the Son]. (Verse 3)
 - The Son returns to the glory He had with the Father before the world began (Verse 5).