

“The Prayer Closet”

October 14, 2012

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

Vance and Carol Johnson: Evangelical Theological college of the Philippines: the Spirit renews their love for the people and their vision for the work; the Lord raises up all the prayer and financial support needed; the protected from disease, discouragement and danger

President Obama: the Lord will enable him to focus on his presidential responsibilities even as he campaigns; the Spirit will guard his tongue so that he only speaks the truth; God draws him to desire the salvation and sanctification of his family above all things

Nominating Committee and the Finance Committee: that they will be united in seeking the Lord’s direction for their areas of ministry as they prepare the budget for next year; that the Lord raises up men and women prepared to lead the congregation into expanded service to our community as well as within the church family

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: SPC Casey Brubaker, National Guard (son of John, grandson of Larry & Wanda): in Afghanistan, please pray for the daily routine on the base, that he can keep his focus on the Lord

Young Adult of the Week: Heather Cardwell, American River College (daughter of Allison): that God grant her clarity on the direction for her life

Please pray for our homebound family members: Harley & Hilda Chapman , Carol Koehler, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Fred & Jean Pauly

(please call the office to request updates to this list)

I spoke with a young man not too long ago and he made this observation about two churches, one that he decided he would not stay in and one that he decided he would stay in. [Regarding] the church that he decided not to stay in he said, “You know Pastor, you could go there week after week and rarely hear the name of Jesus. But in the church that we did decide to stay in they had on the pulpit, ‘We meet here to meet Jesus.’” I hope that is the intention of each one of us.

It is at the heart of the gospel that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to reveal the Father to us. Consequently in every aspect of our spiritual lives there should always be at the forefront of our thought, “I want to focus clearly on Jesus Christ in order that I would be able to see the Father clearly revealed.” We have gathered together in order that we would be those who live according to the truth that God has given to us, anticipating that as we do so, that truth works within us to change us into the image of Jesus, so that we, like Him, reveal the Father to the world around us.

At this point in the Gospel of John, 13:31-38, we come to what is in some sense the critical application step in our faith. That step is summed up in the title, “We are to Love One Another.” That is what Jesus says to His men on the evening of His death and in the anticipation of His departure. He knows that when He leaves the intent and plan is that His disciples will continue what He began. I am [presently] looking at the disciples, and we are the ones who are to continue what Jesus began. I think that is what we heard earlier in the service regarding our support of Wycliffe Ministries’ Bible translations, and it is said to us over and over again in the Word of God.

If you were here last week as a part of the ongoing series I didn’t quite finish the message: as a matter of fact I only got through a third of it! So there are a few more things to say in this particular portion of the Word of God. The question that was in front of us as we looked at John 13:31-35, was “Why would Jesus say when Judas walks out of the Upper Room, and Jesus knows that Judas is going to go and betray Him and thereby initiate the process will be crucified – why would He say, ‘Now is the Son glorified?’” The answer, and I suspect that we in this room know the answer, we understand the unfolding [of the plan of salvation at this point], is that glory is the outward manifestation of excellence. That is why it is called “brilliance” by the Greeks, that is why it is called weight or massiveness or massivity by the Hebrews. Glory is the outward manifestation of excellence, the perfection of whatever qualities are found in that particular form of being. When we consider Jesus, the excellence of the Son of God is in His loving His Father. That is, in fact, the heart of the gospel, that Jesus loved His Father: how much? He satisfied His Father’s justice. That is why He paid for our sin. He confirmed His Father’s righteousness. Jesus knew that the Father would absolutely fulfill every promise and assurance that He gave, so He could trust Himself to die, knowing that Father would not abandon Him even when He became sin and therefore fell under the wrath of God. So Jesus totally honored the holiness of the Father. He loved Him.

With Judas’ betrayal of Jesus, the excellence of the Son would now be manifested. The message that I put together for last week closed with these words: “The Son holds steady, the Father does not falter, the fallen creation is redeemed, the Father’s holiness is confirmed, perfect justice is done and peace is established upon the unshakeable foundations of the incorruptible character of the Father.” That is our assurance. When you look at the peoples who worship various gods and goddesses and all other things across the face of the earth, they indeed live in darkness, because those gods are capricious. You never know for sure where you stand with those gods. But that is not the case with the God that you and I have been called to worship: He is absolutely faithful.

Let us go on: turn with me if you would to John 13:31-38. We are going to add on that little section about Peter and see if we can understand what it is that was intended for us.

“When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you,

“Where I am going you cannot come.” A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.’ Peter said to him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’ Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.’” [3b]

Taking up our thoughts from where we ended last week we rightly draw the conclusion that the work of the Son in revealing the character of God [the Father] makes it clear that the world we live in, the universe of which we are a part, is not primarily built upon divine power, but upon divine goodness, that the creation is built and sustained by God’s goodness. In other words, we live in a moral universe. It is not, you see, the glory of majesty and the glory of power which Jesus demonstrates in His death. It is instead the glory of goodness that Jesus speaks of in John 13:31-32, “*Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.*” What glorified the Father? It was not the majesty and power of Jesus: He had already set that aside. It was instead Jesus’ profound humility and absolute and total dedication to the holiness and goodness of God. Amen!

I ask a question (see questions at end of text) for us to reflect on this matter: Question I, “If God’s defining attribute was power, how might he have “solved” the problem of human sin and the fall of creation?” The Son of Man is glorified and God the Father was glorified in Him because of the surpassing goodness of the Son. No other religious teaching, no other set of spiritual insights or philosophical speculations has ever been able to convincingly confirm the justice and goodness, the moral goodness, of creation. That is a significant issue. The Word God reveals what God the Father and God the Son have done to confirm and openly display an answer to the disorder, oppression and pervasive wickedness of humanity as well as the tragedies and sorrows resulting from natural disasters in the world. This disorder and injustice remain regardless of the increase of wealth and the increase of knowledge and the increase of the understanding and the laws of governmental power. There is not less poverty and misery today than there was a hundred years ago, and yet [humanity] has created an incredibly increased amount of wealth. No matter what humanity does, it is incapable of solving its own problems. Indeed, gradually the hope, idealism and even good faith of the nations of the world erode, falling away from their noble aspirations and great dreams. You and I hold a very critical perspective on communism: well we should. But do not ever forget it was born out of the passion to bring justice upon the face of the earth. It was born out of the passion to eliminate poverty from the face of the earth. But it took less than a full generation for the people who [strove] with fiery intensity of idealism to become cynics, and to simply feed off the people that they once were supposed to save. Despairing of justice they gradually sank into hardness of heart and selfishness, hardening their hearts in the face of what finally appears as the irremediable disparities and disabilities of life. I believe that our government is falling into this kind of cynicism.

As Christians, hope and thanksgiving with joy are the hallmarks of the lives that we live. We should ask the question: is that joy our portion? Do we sense that gladness [in ourselves]?

There is however something more to be found in the record of glory revealed by the Son and the Father. If you listen again to what Jesus said, He said, “The Son is glorified by the Father.” But remember what God said in Isaiah [42:8]? God said of Himself, “*I am the lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other. . .*” That statement, which has the long history of Israel’s disastrous failures with idolatry in view, touches on the essence of God as One God, One true God, and yet multiple persons. Every day a faithful Jew would rise up in the morning and would say the great “Shema” of the Hebrew faith: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord you God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.*” So if the Lord God is one, and the

Lord gives His glory to no other, but the Father gives His glory to the Son, what must we conclude? [We must conclude] that the Son and the Father are One God, not two. The Father gives His glory to the Son, the Son indeed is God. This is at the heart of the Trinitarian belief that is ours. I have commented on this before. I suspect that probably eighty percent of people who call themselves Christians today have no comprehension of the Trinity at all, and they don't because they do not think it is important. It is important. We need to study hard, think clearly, go to the Word of God and ask that God would reveal Himself clearly to us so that we understand that God the Father is revealed to us by God the Son and God the Holy Spirit works within us to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ. We want to know the dynamic of the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

At issue before us in the passage here, John 13:31-32, is the recognition that the glory of which the Father gives to the Son, the full weight of His glory and excellence, is first of all the manifestation of His goodness. Jesus reveals the goodness of God the Father, and God the Father commends and honors the goodness of His Son and our Savior and Lord. Goodness has to do with character traits, or in the case of God, with His attributes. What attributes? It has to do with His kindness, His gentleness, His patience, and His generosity. I had a brief conversation with Steve Ross (the Bumble Bee!), and he was chatting about his son Reid. I asked him about how Reid was doing, and he said the Reid didn't make the last cut [in gymnastics competition] recently. With my knowledge of Reid I instantly said, “That's OK, because Reid is persevering, he is resilient. A momentary discouragement will not throw him off-track.” That is a character trait. That is an attribute of his character. That is a part of Reid's goodness – a reflection, by the way, of his parents. How important is that to us? How important is it to us that the God we worship is a God of excellent character, that God is good? Why do I take the time to emphasize this sort of thing?

What do you think it was like to be in the presence of Jesus? If we follow [the implications of scripture], to be in the presence of Jesus was to be in the presence of pure goodness incarnate as a man.

There is an easy application at this point. How passionately do you desire to be good? Jesus Christ is given to us as the model of perfected humanity. What has happened to our culture? Remember the day when a good sportsman was a man who knew how to lose with grace, and equally how to win with humility? But, let me ask, when you observe our professional sportsmen as they crow and prance and leap and shout and make gigantic big things of themselves, do you think, “O, that's really cool!” Or is your passion to be like Jesus such that when you see such egotistical pride on display that you [cringe] and think, “That's a bit painful.” Why do I say this? I say it for this reason. You and I live in a world in which there is no protection against the winds of our secular culture. Our culture meets us and shapes us at every single level of our lives. If we are not, therefore, conscientious about the way in which the values of the world are being pressed upon us and reshaping us away from what is given to us as the model of Jesus Christ and into the model of whatever it is that the world thinks is most saleable, we will find ourselves moved far away from the model of Jesus. We will ask ourselves, “Why is it that the testimony of the faith is so powerless in this culture?” Perhaps it is because the testimony of the culture is so powerful in the church!

What is the glory, therefore, of Jesus? Let's go back and look at it from a slightly different perspective. Jesus says when Judas leaves, now is the Son of Man glorified. Jesus will glorify the Father in what He is about to do. What He is about to do is to lay down His life to save the world from judgment, the world the Father made through the Son. This is not the glory of majesty and power. No, no, this is a very different kind of glory. This is the glory of perfect submission to the Father's will. This is, as we mentioned before, the glory of complete faith in the Father's righteousness. This is the glory demonstrated in sacrificial love for His Father, and love for the world that He created. Jesus then affirms the Father will fully restore the glory which the Son had before. He will restore His majesty and His power. The Father will do that as the immediate consequence of Jesus' faithfulness, the faithfulness to endure what Christians have traditionally called the Lord's Passion. What we have been looking at is the Lord's

path to glory. In John 17:4-5, Jesus says this speaking to His Father, “*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.*” You and I should be able to pray that prayer as well: “Lord, I have glorified You through my obedience on the face of the earth in fulfilling the work you asked me to do.”

Earlier in the message I said that our study of the revelation of the Father accomplished by the Son indicates that we live in a moral universe. The essential step in the renewing of the creation was the affirmation of God’s justice and the upholding of God’s law and the triumph of good over evil as the basis of life over death. This is in contrast to the popular conception that the universe is somehow first of all a manifestation of God’s power. To be sure, the universe is certainly a manifestation of the power of God, and we are rightly in awe when we read in Genesis chapter 1, God spoke and all things came into being. But it is not just God’s power that we encounter when we turn our gaze to the creation. How many of you saw the slides that were on the screen earlier before the service began. They were absolutely glorious, the great orb I think of the moon with the sun coming out around it. On the internet this week I had the opportunity to click on one of those science [windows] – I think it was on the weather [web site], and they had something called “Sun Ballet”. Somebody had figured out how to take a video of a sun storm or some kind of eruption and it showed this shower of crimson color leaping off the sun’s surface, spinning around in a gorgeous shape and then falling back down to the surface of the sun. Beloved, it was not the sense of power which held my eyes and filled my mind: it was beauty. When I look out in the night and look up at the skies and see the silvery path of the Milky Way stretched from one end of the horizon to the other, it is not power that overwhelms me, it is beauty. When I see the sunlight pour through the trees in its golden hues and dress the silver grass that grow in the fields in front of my house, it is not God’s power that captures me, it is beauty. We live in a moral universe that is full of beauty. Did you ever wonder why God asked the Israelites to build Him a tent of such incredible beauty, or a temple? So, in the values that drive us on, in the things that call out to us, the things for which we are willing to lay down the substance of our lives: goodness, beauty, or power? Which forms of excellence resonate within us such that they are shaping the desires of our hearts, so that we manifest the character displayed to us in Christ?

The subject of Jesus’ words shifts at John 13:33. Jesus knows He is returning to the Father and so He says in verse 3 of this chapter: “*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God...*” Now He says to His disciples, “You cannot come with me.” Jesus wants us to shift from thinking about Him to thinking about the disciples – that’s us! – and where we stand relative to Him in this process. The disciples follow a different path [to glory] than Jesus at this point and this is critically important.

Look at those words carefully and ask yourself, “Have I seen those words before: ‘where I am going, you cannot come’? Oh, indeed you have seen those words before. If you go back to John 7:34 and 8:21 you have seen that Jesus says those words to the unbelieving Jews. He says it to them indicating that their destiny is death! They will die in their sins. So no Jesus uses the same exact phrase in speaking to His own disciples: “You cannot come where I am going.” How would that ring in your ears? At this point do we not step right on to one of the ongoing struggles and dilemmas that we have, because we say to ourselves, and we say to one another and we say before God, “I am saved. What difference has it made? My crops are destroyed. My sons and daughters fall away from the faith. My business struggles. What happened? Why can we not be with Jesus where He goes?” It is extremely important that we understand the plan of God. You know the plan as well as I do. Though the disciples are in the same situation as everybody else on the face of the earth, they are not in the same condition. You and I have a Savior. I hope that is true of everybody in the room. I don’t assume it. But if you have a Savior, then indeed you will live and not die. Secondly, the disciples will have fullness of joy because they have God’s forgiveness and love. So if you have a Savior, you know the forgiving love of God. Your neighbor does not. As we saw in the film, and even if they don’t live in Africa or Papua New Guinea but they live in Oroville, they live in darkness and they are hopeless. You and I

have an enduring hope, and that hope is sufficient to carry us through every adversity. These things are true, but they may or may not be vital in our lives. They are available for us to lay hold of.

There is a fourth thing, you will notice, which Jesus says they have. That is the commandment to love one another. “*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you are to love one another.*” Was the commandment to love one another new? Absolutely not! What is new in the commandment is not that they would love, but that they would love like Jesus did. “I have given you an example: love one another.” If you recognize what that means, it means that we are absolutely required to have a clear view and a consistent view of Jesus to know how He loved so that we will love in the same way. It is amazing to me, absolutely stunning to me that we have millions of Christians who don’t read the Bible! We have millions of Christians who are incapable of speaking of what God has said in His Word. And yet they say, “It is all right with me; I know Jesus.” What do you know about Him? “Well, not much.” Do you know that He died for you? “Yes.” How many people are you willing to die for? “Huh?” “I know that Jesus died for my sins and so it doesn’t make a lot of difference what I do from now on, because Jesus died for my sins.” Jesus died so that you would develop the same excellence of character in the revelation of the character of the Father as He did! Jesus will say in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.” We have to ask that question. I have asked this question before in this congregation and I have given an answer to it. I ask you to take a moment and ask yourself this: how many people in this congregation am I willing to entrust all that I own so they can take care of it in the event that I can’t: my bank accounts, my investments, my personal property in every aspect, and the people that I love? Who do you love that way? Who do you trust that way?

Dying is abstract. For most of us, dying most of the time [is a vague possibility]: we know we are not going to die, but it is not going to happen for a while anyway. So when we talk about dying like that it is just something abstract. So what I am saying is, will you please tell me to whom would you give all that you have, trusting that they will take care of it? Are they in this room? Are they believers in Jesus Christ? Or are we engaged in the normal American game of “Hello. It has been nice to be with you.” Then we go home, lock our doors, check out our accounts and make sure we have piled up enough stuff so that we know we OK with ourselves. That is the American way, and it is the way we are in the church. So we have to ask ourselves the question if we indeed we have gotten serious about replicating the model of Jesus Christ.

We will finish this next week by looking at Peter and asking ourselves, “Why would John insert these observations, this conversation between Jesus and Peter, right after he talks about a commandment to love one another?”

Please pray with me: Father, it is essential that we bring ourselves together in a place where the voice of the world can be silenced and Your voice become the one voice that we hear. We long, our Father, to be men and women who are good, who delight in the beauties of the world that You have made, and who in all things would display the excellence of the character of Christ. But it is hard. Sometimes the wind of the world seems to blow every certainty out of our souls and we, Father, are left empty. We thank You that we can come together and be filled up again with the marvelous truth that You have given to us, with the wonderful Spirit Who indwells us. Indeed, Father, may we in all that we do show forth the excellence of Jesus. It is in His name that we pray. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. If God’s defining attribute was power, how might He have “solved” the problem of human sin and the fall of creation?
2. What in your experience most challenges the idea that we live in a moral universe?
3. Are you a joyful and thankful person? If not, what stands in the way of being so?
4. What most captures your admiration regarding Jesus as an example to follow?
5. Do you see beauty as a divine attribute? Is it important that the universe is filled with beauty?
6. Would you say that salvation (forgiven for sin and hope in a new life empowered by the Spirit) is an emotionally significant reality in your life? Do you know hopeless or despairing people? Do you struggle with despair?
7. What are the difficulties with commanding someone to love? What is most striking in the model or example of Jesus’ love as seen in His love for the disciples?
8. Have you ever worked at serving others to the point of exhaustion? Have you ever faced hostility when trying to serve others?
9. Why do you think John put Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial immediately after the commandment that the disciples were to love one another as He had loved them?
10. In the following description of the disciple’s path to glory – sacrificial love; dedicated service; submission under the sovereign hand of God; hope fixed on the return of Christ; joy for love and forgiveness received; and contentment in the fellowship of the Spirit (see 2 Peter 1:6-7) – what seems real, what seems unreal?