

John 17:1-5
(Psalm 96; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 4:7)
“That the Son May Glorify You”

Introduction

One of the simplest ways to describe what has gone wrong in our relationship with God is that we have sought for ourselves the glory that belongs only to God. So a major theme of Scripture is that God will give his glory to no one who seeks glory for himself, but that those who seek God’s glory will share in his glory.

Paul describes the nature of human rebellion in these words: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:22-23). The author of Hebrews describes our salvation in this way: “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2:10).

“In bringing many sons to glory”! Do we have any conception of what God has prepared for us? Glory describes the weightiness of the reality of God’s presence, the splendor of his holiness shining forth, and his fame, the honor that is due to him alone. The plea for glory is the thread that weaves its way through this prayer and binds all things together in the mercy and grace of God. *There is a kind of seeking after glory that separates us from God and another kind of seeking after glory that binds us to God’s heart, and knowing the difference between the two is crucial.*

This prayer should be studied and understood by everyone interested in Jesus Christ, because in it we hear the cry of his heart to God as he prepared to face the cross. Here is the true Lord’s Prayer. The prayer known by that name is actually the disciples’ prayer, an outline of how we are to approach God and make our requests known. But here we have Jesus’ own prayer, and it is in three parts: First he prays for himself (17:1-5), then he prays for the disciples with him in the upper room (17:6-19), and finally he prays for us – for all of us down through the ages who would believe in Jesus through the testimony of those first disciples there with him on the final night before his arrest and passion (17:20-26).

This morning, we look at the first part of this prayer, Jesus’ prayer for himself. To the degree that we begin to grasp something of the nature of this prayer, we too will learn more deeply how to “pray and not lose heart.” Three things stand out as I read these first five verses: Jesus’ radical and complete submission to his Father, his understanding of the heart of his mission, and his prayer that he might have the means to accomplish his mission and return to his place of honor at his Father’s right hand.

Body

1. Note, first, Jesus' submission to the Father in all things.

With regard to timing: "the hour has come" (17:1).

We Americans are obsessed with time management. We schedule our days, rush our meals, check our watches or our smart phones. Conversations are interrupted by alarms, as we push, in Kipling's words, "to fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run."

Over against this is much of the rest of the world that keeps a pace much closer to that of Jesus in the gospels, who never seemed rushed or hurried, who took time to stop and speak with those whom his disciples considered unworthy of his time. He was on his Father's schedule. He said that he had come, not to do his will, but his Father's will, not to be served, but to serve, and he said throughout his ministry, "my time has not yet come" – until now. Now the moment has arrived, and he submits to it completely.

How different might your life and mine be if we planned our days that prayerfully, that sensitively, realizing always that our lives are not our own, that we have been bought with a price, that we have been entrusted with the family business of reclaiming lost brothers and sisters and the lost world for our heavenly Father? How deeply do we meditate on the prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven"?

With regard to authority: "you have given him authority over all flesh" (17:2).

Jesus had complete confidence whatever and whomever he faced, because his Father had entrusted him with all authority. Note that, in joining himself to us, in becoming fully human, he laid aside his prerogatives, including the authority that was his by right, and lived from the Father's hand, as we are called to do. The one who here says that he has been given "authority over all flesh" is the same one who, in the Great Commission, said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18f).

As we respond to the four challenges of our mission conference to pursue God's mission by praying, going, serving and giving, we may be asked, or ask ourselves, on what basis, by what authority, we declare that Jesus Christ is Lord. The answer is that our authority comes from him. Just as Jesus lived and ministered from the authority given him by the Father, so we are called to live and minister from that same authority. What right do we have to live and declare the gospel of Christ? Just this: the one with all authority has commissioned us.

2. Note, secondly, Jesus' understanding of his mission.

His ministry to his heavenly Father: Giving his father the glory he alone deserves. "That the Son may glorify you" (17:1) and "I glorified you on earth" (17:4).

We should never forget that the mission is, first and foremost, not about us and not even about those who don't yet know the Lord. Just as God made all things to display his glory, so too the gospel reveals the glory of God. Jesus prays, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you."

We should take care in our thinking, teaching, praying, even in the songs we sing, that we don't imply that it's all about us. The mission has, as its first aim, God's glory. And so, also, should our lives. Thus, the Shorter Catechism's first question and answer: "What is man's chief end? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

His ministry to his people: To give us eternal life through the knowledge of God in Christ (17:2-3).

But, thank God, the Son glorifies the Father by saving us and making us sons and daughters of God. The Father loves us and sent his Son to seek and save the lost. And this same task has been entrusted to us. As Jesus said just a bit earlier in John's gospel in the beautiful passage about the importance of abiding in him as the branch abides in the vine, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (15:8).

The gift that Jesus gives is the knowledge of who God is, and therefore also of who were created and are redeemed to be. He does this by giving us knowledge of himself, for to know Jesus is to know the Father, and to know Jesus is also to know the one who alone is truly and fully human, the one who is what humanity created in God's image and likeness is meant to be. "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

And, this gift of life Jesus later describes as containing at its heart the gift of glory: "The glory that you have given me I have given them" (17:22).

3. Note, finally, Jesus' prayer for the means to accomplish the mission.

The request: "glorify me in your own presence" (17:5).

The way that Jesus will draw us to himself, and thus draw us to the Father, is by being glorified. His glory will first be displayed, not in what appears to this world to be power and glory, but in weakness and self-sacrificial death, as the love of God for his rebellious children is displayed for all time – indeed for all eternity – as his Son is lifted up upon the cross to die an agonizing death for the sins of the world, so that death’s power over us might be broken and we might receive eternal life.

But his glory will at last be revealed in all its stunning splendor when he comes in power and glory to make all things new. And he shall reign forever, and his kingdom shall have no end!

The basis of the request: “with the glory I had with you before the world existed” (17:5).

The glory he asks the Father to give him is not in payment for what he has done for us, but is simply the return of what is his by right: “the glory I had with you before the world began.” Yet, that glory must seem all the more spectacular in the light of what his incarnation, death and victory, reveal of the grace, mercy and self-giving love of our great God and king, the one who has become for us our beloved heavenly Father.

Conclusion

The key to understanding these first verses, and all that follows, is that Jesus sought glory for himself so that through his radical obedience and suffering *his Father who alone deserves glory* might get glory, and so that *we who do not deserve glory* might also get glory, the glory due only to God. What wondrous love is this?

The hymns we sing to God’s glory have at their heart this message of the incredible grace of God in giving his best – his Son – to redeem sinners like you and me, and the incredible grace of the Son in laying aside his glory and giving himself as a sin offering in our place, in order to bring us to nothing less than the glory of the sons and daughters of God. We share in his glory.

How should we respond? What shall we do? Paul’s describes our response in this way: “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” (2 Corinthians 3:18). May God work such glory into us, who have been brought by grace from death to life!