

The Upper Room (John 17.1-12)

Sanctuary: The theme of the Tabernacle runs throughout John's gospel (and Revelation). **John 1.14:** *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us.* Note for example the Gate of the Court (John 10); Brazen Altar (John 1.29); Laver (John 13); Table of Shewbread (John 6); Lampstand (John 8) etc. John 17 brings before us the Golden Altar. This was the place where sweet incense was offered every morning (Exodus 30.7) and thus reminds us of the fragrance of the prayer of God's Son ascending to His Father (cf. Revelation 8.3-4).

Setting: Verse one begins with 'these words spake Jesus' referring back to the discourse of the previous chapters, especially His recent comments concerning *tribulation* in the world during the time of His absence (16.33). Knowing the difficulties of the way, the Lord Jesus prays for His people – this is our Great High Priest (Hebrews 7.25). It is most important to see that though He is physically praying on earth (v.13), in spirit, He is in heaven (v.11) and the work of Calvary is complete (v.4).

Structure: The prayer divides into three sections as noted in the titles below. *First* the Lord Jesus prays in relation to Himself (vv.1-5) and the main theme is glorification. *Secondly*, He prays in relation to His companions (vv.6-19), the disciples, with the theme of sanctification. *Finally*, He prays for the entire church (vv.20-26) emphasising unification.

Prayer Concerning Christ (17.1-5) Father is glorified in the Son, v.1

v.1: The Lord Jesus lifted up His eyes 'into' (*eis*) heaven. Does this prove they were outside the upper room at this point? The Lord gazing *into* heaven reminds us of a contrast with the publican (Luke 18). *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto (eis) heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner (v.13).* The publican knew that sin in his breast offended the holy God of heaven and thus he couldn't lift up his eyes. That could never be the case with Christ! We are reminded that moral suitability is required to pray, both personally (Psalm 66.18) and collectively (1 Timothy 2.8).

The hour of the Son's being glorified in heaven had now come (compare the other hours in John's gospel). 'Glorify thy Son' is a request from the subject Son (note the impersonal language of vv.1-3) for an *acquired* glory and honour in answer to all He had accomplished on earth (v.4). This is a glory which He will *share* with us (v.22). This is not a selfish request! He is the Son whom belongs to the Father – '**thy** Son' (not 'the Son'). His request to be glorified is in order that He might bring glory to the Father. **v.2:** This is accomplished as the Lord Jesus exercises His God-given authority to grant eternal life to all those that believe. 'As many as thou hast given him' refers to individuals that believe. They are given by the Father to the care of the Son that He might grant them eternal life (6.37-40; 1 John 5.11-13). **MacDonald:** *It brings great glory to God when ungodly men and women are converted and manifest the life of the Lord Jesus on this earth. There are two points of particular practical importance. 1. The Lord Jesus ever sought to be glorified **by** the Father (contrast 12.43). 2. The Lord Jesus ever sought to be glorified **for** the Father. So we should seek to bring glory to God.*

v.3: Eternal life is not merely living forever, but a **quality** or **character** of life that finds its source in God. It is the very life of God Himself. Eternal life is here defined as an experiential, intimate and personal 'knowledge' of the only true God and Jesus Christ (sent in grace to *manifest* and *procure* life). This knowledge is progressive leading the individual into a fuller enjoyment of eternal life. God has been fully revealed in the person of His Son, therefore knowing God and enjoying eternal life cannot be divorced from knowing Jesus Christ. How well do we know Him?

v.4: The work of Calvary was a few hours away, and yet the Lord speaks of it as already accomplished. It was as good as done. The Son had fully glorified the Father on earth by declaring Him in all His fullness (John 1.14, 18). This was 'the work' (singular) He had been given to do; a work which was consummated at Calvary and fully displayed the glory and character of God. It was this work that procured eternal life, and thus enabled the Son to bring glory to His Father. **v.5:** His work was finished. Christ therefore requests that He might be glorified 'alongside' (*para*) the Father, i.e. resume the *position* which is fitting to His essential glory. This is different to the acquired glory of v.1. There was a glory which the eternal Son enjoyed alongside the Father before the world was (John 1.1). This is an essential, eternal glory which is His in virtue of who He is. This is not a glory which we can *share* with Him (as in v.22), but a glory we shall **behold** (v.24).

Prayer Concerning His Companions (17.6-19) Christ is glorified in the saints, v.10

This section divides into two parts. **vv.6-11a** concern two provisions the Lord made for His disciples. He had manifested the Father's *name* (v.6) and given them the Father's *words* (v.8). **vv.11b-19** concern two petitions the Lord made concerning His disciples. He prayed that the Father might *keep* them (v.11b, 15) and *sanctify* them (v.17).

v.6: As far as the *nation* of Israel was concerned, the 'name' (person and character) of Jehovah was manifested in the Tabernacle and Temple. But now the Father has been fully revealed to *individuals* in the person of God's Son – the substance of the shadows. The individuals in view are the disciples, who belonged to the Father and had now been given to the Son 'out of the world'. Given the close context (v.2) it is likely that these individuals belonged to God in the sense that had already responded in faith to divine revelation through the preaching of John the Baptist. They already expected the coming Messiah, and having been thus prepared, they received Christ as such when He came. It must be noted that others see divine election here. **JG Bellett:** *They were the Father's by election before the world was, and became Christ's by the gift of the Father, and by purchase of blood.* **Leckie:** *The disciples were the Father's in divine and eternal counsel, and now He has given them as a love gift to the Son.* The revelation of the Father through the works and words of the Lord Jesus was 'kept', i.e. *accepted* and *persistently obeyed* by the disciples. Was this always true? No! After all, the disciples had just been arguing over who was the greatest (Luke 22.24). This then, is the overall, divine assessment. It is not based on isolated acts, but on the whole tenor of one's life. Although they had failed at times, generally speaking they had 'kept' the Father's word. What an encouragement this should be in the light of the imminent Judgment Seat of Christ. **1 Peter 4.8:** *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins (i.e. personal failings and faults, not immorality).*

vv.7-8: The disciples had come to an appreciation of the mission and message of Christ (16.30). They believed that the Father was the source of all His works (John 5.36; 10.32; 14.10) and words (14.24) and demonstrated their faith by persistently obeying the revelation from Him. **v.8:** As part of the revelation ('all things'), Christ had given the disciples the 'words' (*rhema* = sayings, communications) that His Father had given Him. This is speaking of the daily communications that the Lord Jesus received of His Father. **Isaiah 50.4:** *He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed (JND).* Again, these communications were passed on to the disciples who 'received them', i.e. accepted them as true and used them as guiding principles in life. What were the daily communications that we received of our Father this morning? **Leckie:** *It is necessary to know the whole word of God and be instructed in its truth. But that's not all! I must see to it that I receive daily communications from God. I may know the Bible inside out, but not be in touch with Heaven.*

vv.9-11a: These verses form the basis and reasoning for the petitions of vv.11b-19. The Lord Jesus is not praying concerning ('for' = *peri*) the world, but the disciples. **MacDonald:** *He prays as One who represented believers before the throne of God. Therefore His prayer can only be for His own.* He prays (lit. 'demands') as one who is on an equal standing and status with the Father (the word *erotao* is employed). The disciples for whom He was praying belonged to the Father ('they are thine'), and yet, hadn't they been given to the Son (v.6)? **v.10** explains. What belongs to the Son (all things) belongs to the Father, and what belongs to the Father belongs to the Son. **Luther:** *Any one might justly say to God 'all that is mine is thine', but no created being could say 'and all that is thine is mine'. This is a word for Christ alone.* In addition, Christ 'has been' glorified in them. Here is another general, divine assessment – these disciples are His pride and joy and had sought to honour Christ in their association with Him. **v.11a:** The Lord is also praying *for* them because He will not be much longer *with* them. He was 'coming' to the Father, yet the disciples would remain in the world.

vv.11b-12: Christ prays that the 'Holy Father' (the request is related to preservation in a wicked world) would 'keep' the disciples in the *sanctuary* of the Father's own name. The Lord Jesus is praying that the disciples might be *protected* in the *enjoyment* of all that the Father is (His name). Whilst He was here, Christ had kept them¹ in the enjoyment of knowing God as Father (v.12) through His teaching and example as the perfect Son. But soon He will be absent. They must therefore be 'preserved' by the Father that they may be 'one, as we are'. This is a prayer for apostolic oneness. That the disciples might be one in aim, purpose and objective – a prayer that was gloriously answered in the book of the Acts (1.14; 2.1, 14, 41-42). This oneness is only maintained through being kept in the enjoyment of knowing God as Father as revealed in Christ.

¹ All except Judas. 'But the son of perdition', the construction 'but' suggesting that Judas was outside and never part of those given by the Father to the Son. Judas was a professing believer, but had no genuine faith. He was therefore a son of perdition; one who was worthy of, and destined for, destruction. The Scriptures were thus fulfilled according to the foreknowledge of God (Psalm 41.9; 109.8).