

AFTER THE RESURRECTION WHAT?

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

A STUDY IN INTERCESSION (John 17)

JOHN in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel has given us a whole chapter on Christ's prayer. It came after His experience in the Upper Room and the Garden of Gethsemane. He had itemized the will of His inheritance and showed us what He left us, and on the basis of His conquering peace in His heart He went into an intercessory supplication for His disciples.

There are some great prayers recorded in the Bible, but this is the most unique and outstanding prayer of them all.

When you study the background and the foreground there is no other prayer that may be brought into comparison. When you take the One who prayed, and the prayer itself, and the age-long answers to the prayer, it is the only prayer of its kind in all history. It begins; **"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee,"** and the prayer closes with these words: **"I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."**

Now, within the compass of these twenty-six verses the Saviour packed His Gethsemane petition in behalf of His disciples. A devotional study of this wonderful prayer may be fruitful.

THE TRAGIC BACKGROUND

Prayers should not be tested without their environment and their setting.

A look at the setting of this prayer helps us to understand the depths of its petitions. The days and nights immediately before the Saviour came to Gethsemane are filled with tragedies. The many side trials just ahead, the ecclesiastical trial and the political trials, the trial He would have with His disciples, the trial with the betraying Judas and the denying Simon, the unspeakableness of the cross, the darkness of death, the tragedy of the misjudgment of men, the disappointment of His disciples, and all that gave dark color to His intercessory prayer; and yet you cannot judge the prayer without the background to it.

THREEFOLD DIVISION

The prayer falls into a trinity of thoughts.

- In verses 1-8 He prays for *Himself*.
- In verses 9-19 He prays for *His people*.
- In verses 20-26 He prays for *the lost world in all ages*.

Look at the content of His prayer about Himself. It is hardly a prayer for Himself. An analysis of this prayer shows the following:

The petition was that the Father would glorify the Son, that the Son might glorify the Father— a twin glorification. Ever before the Saviour was the Father's will and the Father's glory. He did not wish to violate the one nor soil the other.

The statement that the Father had given Him power over all flesh that He might give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him. He defines the eternal life—**“that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”**

He tells of the glory He has given the Father on earth and the finishing of the task which He, the Father, had assigned to the Son.

He stated that He had manifested the Father's name to those whom the Father had given Him on earth and they had kept His word. They had received His words and had recognized their divine origin and mission.

What are some of the cherished things in this intercessory prayer about Him?

- The fatherhood of God is revealed, and Christ's relationship to Him and our relationship to Christ.
- Christ's eternal purpose in all of His earthly career was to glorify His Father.
- He reveals Christ's own divine origin and mission. He came out from the Father and was sent by the Father.
- He sets out the matchless achievements that He has accomplished in this incarnation, that is, that He had manifested God's name and given His people His words, and that His disciples were God's own and God had given them to Christ, thus explaining the mystical double divine ownership. He said, **“They are thine and mine.”**
- He pays a great compliment to His disciples when He says, **“They have kept thy word.”** It would be great if God could say that of us today, that we have kept the words that the Saviour gave us.

HIS PRAYER FOR HIS DISCIPLES

Jesus records in verses 9-19 His petition in behalf of the disciples whom He had already won. He says in verse nine: **“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”** This prayer contains the following great encouragements:

- An acknowledgement on the part of Christ that His disciples are God's gift and His eternal possession, His authority for our divine ownership.
- A recognition of the dual ownership and partnership. God not only owns us, but He is in business with us and we are His partners.

"I am glorified in them." Here is a holy outlook for all of God's people and the assignment of an imperial task, not only that Christ is in us but that, being in us, we are to glorify Him and make His name known in all the places of the habitat of man.

- His prayer was that God would keep them through His name. He says, **"Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me."** Here is a divine guardianship shown to His people.
- He tells in this sacred supplication the story of the one awful blot and dark place in the discipleship of that day. He says, **"I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition."** The betrayal of Christ by Judas is the number one crime of all ages.

He spoke of His homegoing. **"And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."** Christ was a happy Saviour. God is a happy Father, and He means for joy to be in the hearts of His people evermore.

He tells the Father of the unworldliness of His disciples. He says, **"They are not of the world, as I am not of the world."** He sets up the same standard for us that He Himself had lived up to, separateness from the world and unworldliness in the world.

He asks that the Father should not take them out of the world but that He might keep them from evil. He wanted us to be in the world but not the world in us. I fear that no other prayer of the Saviour is more unanswered than this.

His prayer was for the sanctification of His disciples through the truth, and here He sets out the fact that a study of the Bible, an impartation of its vital truth, is the best means of sanctification in this world. There are many riches hidden away in this prayer for God's people. More and more we ought to help Him answer these prayers.

HIS INTERCESSION FOR THE LOST

He says in verse twenty, **"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."**

How glorious it is that He did not forget the lost in the unfolding womb of the future! He thought of you and me and our children and theirs on to the last coming generation. What an emphasis this is in divine supplication for the missionary program of Christ's people! Now, what did He ask? That there should be spiritual unity among His disciples, and that this spiritual unity is God's missionary polemic—**"that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."**

That they, all His people, may be perfect in one, and this perfection in unity may be a great missionary dynamic. **“That they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.”**

He had told His disciples before that He was going to prepare a place for them and would come back and get them, and now He puts that great thought in His petition to the Father for the lost world who would believe on Him. He wanted His mansions that He was going to build to be filled. He did not wish to lose one believer, and prayed that we might be with Him and behold His glory and the love which the Father had bestowed upon Him and upon us from the foundation of the world.

He announces His great prayer-purpose, that is, to declare God’s name, and His purpose to distribute the Father’s love for Him to all God’s people everywhere. Thus Christ and love, His richest inner possession, are left us for our heart’s possession.

EXALTED TRUTHS

In this prayer there stands out for unsaved men some gracious realizations and promises. Christ’s love and prayers are for sinners.

- His concern for a united Christianity as a mighty dynamic for world evangelization.
- His plan to share His glory with His redeemed.
- His proof that His Father’s love for us is modeled after His love for Christ.
- His purpose to have us live with Him forever.
- That the center of hope for His people is the indwelling Christ in the secret throne of our souls. The love God has for Christ is also in us.

The Father has not yet answered all this prayer. He is answering it. This intercession of our Saviour reveals the wonderful love and nature of Christ and the Father, and their great, engirdling compassion for us and lost men everywhere, and God’s eternal purpose to bring us home and make us everlasting companions of Christ.

John tells us that when Jesus had spoken these words **“he went forth to his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples,”** and there followed His Gethsemane experiences, where He took the bitter cup, the distilled sorrow of the world, and drank it all, and from there He went to betrayal and crucifixion and resurrection, and on.

How glorious it is in our spiritual history to claim this prayer as ours! God will be answering it in us for the ages yet to come.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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