**Jesus in prayer** 4/2/24dkm

Read: John 17, Philippians 2

Text: John 17:1-5

Psalms: 24, 57:1-5, 84:1-9, 19:1-4

Heart to heart talks between a father and his son are not a common occurrence, so it seems. Can you think of any such conversations recorded in the Bible, apart from the one here in John 17? Saul and his son Jonathan, and David and his son Absalom, rarely spoke to one another, and when they did it was not exactly heart to heart talking. These fathers and their sons were not exactly working towards the same goals. If such talks are not common, it is even less common for outsiders to be privy to what is said. This makes the prayer of Jesus in John 17 very special indeed.

Jesus is having, as it were, a heart to heart talk with his Father in heaven, and his disciples, along with you and me, are listening in. His disciples, and we also, are in fact subjects in this talk. Have you ever been in a prayer meeting where you are the subject of the prayers? Or have you heard matters of which you were not aware mentioned in someone’s prayer? Share and prayer sessions can sometimes be prayer and, ‘what was that?’ sessions.

We count it a great privilege, a profound privilege, to listen to Jesus praying. Jesus was regular in prayer of course, but none of his prayers are recorded in the detail we find here. Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the so-called Lord’s Prayer, but here is a prayer Jesus himself prayed. He was in the upper room celebrating the feast of Passover with his disciples. He knew this would be his last Passover meal because he knew that his hour had come (17:1); the next day he would be hanging on the cross. Jesus was concerned for his disciples because they would be scattered, but he wanted them to have peace in their hearts, knowing that the cross was not a tragic end but was the very purpose for which God sent him into the world. The cross would bring glory to God and to Jesus, and bring forgiveness and life to the elect of God.

**1. Glory to the Father**

Jesus was speaking to his disciples in the upper room, as just mentioned, when he turned his eyes to heaven and prayed, ‘Father, the hour has come’ (17:1). We usually bow our heads in reverence and close our eyes so as not to be distracted, but when outside on a starry night I have prayed while looking up to heaven: ‘The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1). We often begin our prayers acknowledging the sovereign power of God in the creation, and rightly so. But we also acknowledge the sovereign power of God in redemption, as Jesus does in this prayer. In the being God created the heavens and the earth, and also in the beginning God planned our redemption through the sacrifice of his only begotten and beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Some two thousand years before the coming of Christ, Abraham was looking forward to this very event: ‘Abraham saw my day and was glad’ said Jesus (John 8:56). His son after him, and his son after him, and so on for generations, looked forward to the coming of Messiah or Christ. Jesus knew of this expectation, and of the great plan of God to redeem his people from their sins. Jesus knew that he, as the Son of God, was at the centre of this plan. His Father sent him into the world not only to show people how to live, but to redeem us from sin and death through the cross.

Every person, apart from Jesus, is born under the wrath of God. We are all condemned to death, all on death row, as it were. The hour of our death is coming soon. This we know and must accept. Jesus actually knew the hour of his death and that this hour had come. He had faced a number of attempts on his life, but the Father had determined the exact time and place and nature of his death from the beginning. Jesus’ death would have a unique purpose of course. He would die as our representative and substitute. His death as the Lamb of God would be to take away the sin of the world, as John the Baptist declared.

So it is most significant that Jesus declares in his prayer, for the benefit of his disciples, that his ‘hour has come’ (17:1). He was saying to his Father that he was ready to fulfil the purpose for which he was sent. Jesus would obey the will of his Father to the very end. Sure he was in agony later that night and cried out, ‘Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from me’ (Luke 22:42), but there was no turning away from the will of his Father. Jesus was focussed on his Father, on knowing his good and perfect will, and doing it until he died.

Jesus prayed that he glorify his Father to the very end (17:1). He glorified his Father on earth by doing what he was sent to do (17:4). Even before the cross, Jesus preached the kingdom of God and performed mighty works as signs of his being sent by God the Father. He chose twelve men to be apostles, men who would continue the work that Jesus was doing. He taught them and prayed for them, and would later send the Holy Spirit upon them.

Jesus was tempted by Satan when he began his ministry, and also here at the end, but calling upon Scripture and upon his Father he resisted every temptation. He was tempted to seek glory for himself in this world, but that would bring no glory to God the Father. As this prayer shows, Jesus was focussed on bringing glory to God the Father at all times, glory to God in both life and death.

The way to glorify God is to obey him, and give him thanks and praise in all we do and say. As taught in our Catechism, ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever’. Jesus, who is fully man and fully God, glorified God by obeying him and finishing the work God sent him to do. Is this not what you as a believer are called to do? If you want to glorify God and enjoy him forever you will live each day obeying God’s commands and walking in his will. Stop trying to conform to this world and focus on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, you will know God’s will for you. With such a focus, Jesus endured the pain and shame of the cross (Heb 12:2), and you can endure all the trouble and persecutions you will face as a child of God in this world. Jesus was one with the Father, and his prayer is that we be one with him, ‘that they may be one with Us’ (17:21, 22). Love is at the centre of this glorious oneness we have with God and with one another.

To sum up, Jesus knew that through his death on the cross he would bring glory to God his Father. Despite the pain and the shame, the cross would turn out to be to the glory of God, the fulfilment of his great plan of redemption. When Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God, God kept his word and punished them with death. God is just but he is also loving, not wanting anyone to perish. In the cross of Christ the whole world, and heaven also, sees the love and justice of God in a marvellous and unique way. The cross and the resurrection mark the turning point in human history, the undoing of the curse of Eden. The cross and the resurrection mean life, eternal life for people who were condemned to die eternally; not for all, but for ‘as many as you have given Him’ (17:2).

**2. Glory to the Son**

Jesus knew he was the Son of God and equal with God as the second person of the Trinity. He never denied this truth despite the danger and indeed death this confession brought (Luke 22:70). Jesus knew he was sent by God the Father into this world to fulfil the plan of God for our salvation. Even claiming he was sent by God brought the ire of the Jews, his own people who did not receive him (John 1:11). Coming into this world in the flesh meant diminished glory for Jesus. We beheld his glory but it was not the fullness of his heavenly glory or splendour. Three disciples were given a glimpse of this splendour on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:32).

Paul writes of Jesus humbling himself in becoming a man, yet being obedient unto death on the cross (Phil 2:8). He goes on to describe Jesus being exalted by God to the throne in heaven. The cross was followed by the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. His humiliation gave way to his exaltation and glorification. Jesus returned to his position in heaven and to heavenly glory or splendour.

Jesus prayed to his Father, ‘Glorify your Son’, and then, ‘Glorify Me together with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was’ (17:1,5). This prayer was answered when God raised him from the dead and took him back to heaven. Jesus knew he would be raised on the third day (Mat 20:19). This was the joy set before as he endured the pain and shame of the cross. He returned to heaven to sit down at the right hand of God in heavenly glory (Heb 12:2). He returned to be glorified together with God the Father. And this is the position of Jesus to this day. He will come again of course, but this time he will not put aside his heavenly glory. Are you ready and waiting for him?

**3. Gift of eternal life**

Our third subheading could have been, ‘Glory to adopted sons’. Jesus goes on to pray, ‘I am glorified in them’, and, ‘The glory which you gave me I have given them’ (17:10, 22). Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, ‘That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him’, and speaks of, ‘The obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (2Thess 1:12, 2:14). In 2 Corinthians he speaks of believers being, ‘Transformed into the same image, from glory to glory’ (2Cor 3:10).

We bring glory to God when we obey him and do his will, as Jesus did (17:4). To this extent the glory of God is seen in us. We have no glory of our own, not while we live in this body. But on the last day we will be changed, and with new bodies will be glorified in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What Jesus prays for concerning his disciples is that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father gives him(17:2). Jesus, as the King of glory, is sovereign over all the earth, over all nations and all people. In his God-given authority, and by his death and resurrection, he gives eternal life to God’s chosen ones. Eternal life is the opposite of eternal death and destruction. Eternal life means life that continues into heaven, where we will be glorified in and through Christ.

Eternal life is the gift of the risen Jesus, the gift of salvation in Him and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. This gift enables us as believers to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent (17:3). There is only God, or one true God, and this God is the Father of Jesus Christ, whom God sent into this world to be the propitiation for our sins. If you do not now Jesus you do not know the true God, and the wrath of God remains on you (John 3:36). ‘There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).