

John 17:1-11

1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

## PRAYING FOR US BY NAME

Not long ago I spoke at a difficult meeting in another church. Before the meeting we had a time of prayer, and the pastor prayed for me by name.

In his prayer he acknowledged that I was doing this for the good of the church and that this meeting was taking me away from time that I might have spent with my family. He asked God to bless and strengthen me for the task that was before us that night.

I sometimes feel a bit self-conscious when I overhear a prayer that is aimed at me. But, in this case the prayer was welcome. I really needed it. And it reminded me why I was there that night.

Have you ever overheard a prayer aimed at you? Quite often those prayers are given when we find ourselves in a difficult situation. Perhaps we are ill. Perhaps sorrow has visited our family.

When someone prays for us by name we are changed.

That prayer reminds us that our story is connected with God’s story. That prayer reminds us that our life is more than just one thing after another. Our life is a part of the plan and purpose of God.

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There can be glory in the life that we live. It is the glory of humanity transformed by the power of God's salvation.

## CHRIST PRAYS FOR US

After our confession of sin there is an assurance of pardon that I often use. It goes, "Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ. And Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us."

Christ prays for us.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that God cares that much for us? Do you believe that God knows us by name? Do you believe that Jesus prays for us?

The Bible tells us that when we are so upset that we don't know how or what to pray that God's Spirit does it for us. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans,

"...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words." (Romans 8:26)

And so I would say that there is a reason the prayer of Jesus is recorded in such detail in our lesson from John's gospel. Jesus not only wanted the disciples way back then to overhear his prayer. He wanted us to overhear it as well.

Today Jesus prays for us. He intercedes for us in heaven. And this prayer is all about one word, glory. This is a prayer for glory.

## GLORY

What do you think about when you hear the word glory? I think about Friday night lights and the glory of victory on the football field.

Great football players were put on a pedestal in my hometown. Perhaps some of you remember those "glory days" when you were young and strong, and played the role of hero on the playing field.

And of course the older we get the better we used to be! Glory days.

But, that is most certainly not what we're talking about today. Glory has nothing to do with us and what we have done or what we will do for that matter.

Glory is all about God and God's presence.

## OLD TESTAMENT GLORY

In the Old Testament the presence of God is overwhelming.

For example, when Moses beheld the glory of God at the burning bush and on the mountain it changed him. Even the reflected glory of God was too much to bear. The people asked Moses to veil his face so that this reflected glory would not overwhelm them.

Over and over again this lesson is taught in the Hebrew Scriptures.

God is above and beyond us. God is pure light. God is holy. God is totally different from us. The people would not even speak the name of God because the name was holy. The name was too sacred to say out loud.

## NEW TESTAMENT GLORY

But, in the New Testament that vision of holiness changes.

Yes, God is above and beyond us. But, God chooses to come among us. God chooses to reveal Himself to us. Instead of a presence that invokes terror the glory of God becomes something that we can embrace and even enjoy.

We often talk about the first question of the shorter catechism. “What is the chief end of man?” That’s right. “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Human beings were made to glorify God. That is our reason for being. We have a God shaped hole in our heart that only the Divine can fill.

So how do we do that? How do we glorify God? How do we participate in God’s plan for the world? How do we enjoy what God has for us to do? How can we fill our lives with the glory of God?

## JOHN, THE BOOK OF GLORY

The words glory and glorify fill the gospel of John. If you had to summarize John’s gospel in one word, that word would be glory. For example, in John 1:14 we read,

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

In other words if we want to see the glory of God and if we want to understand what it means to glorify God, we look to his only Son, Jesus.

Jesus is the unique revelation of God's glory. Jesus is the Word made flesh. God's name is glorified in Jesus. In fact the name of Jesus means something like "God is salvation."

But, when we begin to study the words and actions of Jesus we soon learn that that this glory is hidden glory. It is a glory that the world does not recognize. In fact, it is a glory that the world rejects. It is glory in human form.

### THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

Notice that in his prayer Jesus says that the "hour has come." What is this mysterious hour? We now know. It is the hour of Jesus' crucifixion.

The glory of God will be seen most clearly on the cross and in the vindication of the resurrection. Through the words and actions of Jesus we see a portrait of God that is quite different from how many view God.

God is not one who condemns the world. God is the One who takes upon Himself the sins of the world. In Jesus God lowers himself and overcomes sin with the power of humility and grace.

And it is the power of grace that enables us to find salvation.

Someone said that the best commentary on this passage is found in Paul's letter to the Philippians. I agree. Let me read a portion of the second chapter. Paul wrote,

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11)

In other words, if we are saved by grace, it stands to reason that we should have a gracious attitude toward others. The life of Jesus is the pattern for our life. As we said a few weeks ago it is a pattern of service, sacrifice and forgiveness.

### TEMPTED BY WORLDLY GLORY

We know this. We say it each week. But, it is very difficult to live. Each day we are tempted with voices from the world that give us a different "gospel."

Diamonds are forever. Sports cars will make us more desirable to the opposite sex. Our worth is not measured by what we do but by our waistline and our wallet.

The people society lifts up, as role models are often not humble servants but the bombastic, boorish, self-serving elite whose only qualification seems to be their ability to steal someone else's money. Now many of us would not consciously choose such a model.

But, when we are bombarded by such bad roles models in the media on a daily basis, they become a part of our mindset.

What gives us unity in the church? It is a common mission and a common culture. Jesus prayed that God would protect his disciples and make them one.

The great threat to the church lies in adopting the words of our culture instead of adopting the words of Jesus. It is our job in the church to clearly define how we are different from the world.

For example, how is our view of wealth and worth different from that of Donald Trump? Do we really believe that if we have our health we have everything? Is there a salvation greater than good health?

#### A PRAYER FOR PROTECTION

Jesus knew that it would be hard for these disciples to live by his words. The world would always offer a competing word, and often the world would sometimes try to enforce that word with the sword. They needed to be protected.

If we think of protection as the absence of pain and suffering then the prayer of Jesus for his disciples failed. The disciples and those who followed them in the faith were often persecuted for their faith. It was (and sometimes still is) a dangerous thing to truly follow Jesus. It is still tempting to compromise with the ways of the world.

When Jesus prayed for the protection of his disciples, he wasn't praying that Peter and his brothers would be successful in their fishing business. He wasn't praying that Matthew would make even more money and be elected tax collector of the year.

He was praying that the disciples would remain faithful to his way and his word. He was praying that instead of lording it over others they would learn to serve others in his name.

He was praying that the glory of body broken and blood shed might be seen in their manner of life. He was praying that they too would learn to deny themselves, take up a cross and follow the way of Jesus.

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This is glory. This is the Divine witness. But, it is glory born of humility. It is Divinity cloaked in humanity. It is strength found in apparent weakness. It is wisdom found in foolishness.

#### THE TEMPTATION TO RUN AWAY

When Jesus prayed for those first disciples, they had the word of truth, but they did not fully understand it. They had yet to witness the glory of the resurrection and the ascension.

They had not yet received the revelation that one day there would be a new heaven and a new earth. They did not yet know that one day every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

From their perspective things looked pretty grim. From their perspective it looked like they had come to Jerusalem to die, and that would be that, end of story. (cf. John 11:16)

And it was this attitude that was the greatest threat to those first disciples. It was the temptation to avoid the cross. It was the temptation to run away in the face of difficulty and danger. It was the temptation to believe that the world will get its way when all is said and done.

We know more than those first disciples. We know that the cross is empty and so is the tomb. We know the power of the Spirit and the hope of eternal life. We know that God was revealed and glorified in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

We know all this and yet we too are tempted by despair.

We are tempted to believe that in the end the ways of the world will win. We are tempted to believe that death dealing powers that be are stronger than the power of the resurrection. We are tempted to let fear and doubt reign instead of the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.

We too are tempted to deny what we believe in most deeply and run away from the call of Christ. But, in so doing we run away from glory. We run away from hope. We run away from God.

And so Jesus prays for us.

#### THE EYES OF FAITH

The Good News which John spells out in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel is that the Risen Christ continues to pray for us, continues to foresee our unity when all we can see is division and despair.

A minister visited all the patients in the local nursing home whether they were members of his congregation or not. One of those patients was a young man in his thirties who was confined to the nursing home because of an injury to his brain. He lived his life in a coma--like state, unable to respond to anybody or anything.

One day the parents of the young man came to visit and found this minister - this stranger - sitting in a chair by their son's bed. The minister was talking to their son - *as if* the son could understand. Then he read scripture to the son - *as if* the son could hear it. Then he prayed for the son - *as if* the son could know that he was praying.

The father wanted to say to the minister, "You fool, don't you know about our son?"

But then it dawned on him that the minister did know. He knew all along. He cared for their son *as if* the son were whole, because he saw him through the eyes of faith and, therefore, saw him as already healed.

Christ sees the church the way that minister saw the young man, not as the fractured and fragmented fellowship that we so often are, but as the unified body of believers that we by God's grace are yet to become.

And so he continues to pray for us, that some day we will all be one, and not so much one in doctrine, but one in Spirit, one in respect for one another, one in love for one another and for the world.

How does the old campfire song put it?  
"They'll know we are Christians" by our doctrine.

No, that's not how it goes.

"They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christian by our love."

One day the kingdom will come, and we will see that glory. Jesus is praying for us.

Amen.