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Teaching #1760 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

"THE PEOPLE WHOM YOU GAVE ME OUT OF THIS WORLD"

John 17:1-9 - "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, [2] since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. [4] I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. [5] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. [6] "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. [7] Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. [8] For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. [9] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours."

"Father, the hour has come...."(17:1). **"I have '....accomplished the work that you gave me to do'"**(17:4). This is the kind of praying Jesus does in the face of His own death in less than twenty-four hours. Think about it. How do you pray facing death? What is there to ask?

There is no desire in Jesus for a **longer life**. That's striking. This is not because of some morbid death wish in Jesus. He's not depressed. He's not terminally ill. There is something deeper going on here. Jesus is **fulfilled** in the best sense. There is no more **reason** for Jesus to remain here. He seems totally accepting that He has properly fulfilled the reason He came in the first place. There is nothing else important for Him to accomplish on this earth. His life need not be prolonged. **"....The hour has come...."**

This in itself tells us a great deal about the **purpose** of Jesus' earthly life in His own understanding. He came from the Father **into** this world, taking on human flesh. He faced trial and temptation of all kinds, so the Scriptures say, and that without any sin. There still stands the unchallenged written historical record of 33 sinless years. In mere hours He would lay that **sinless** life down as the obvious payment for sins **other than** His own. These disciples would soon touch His death defeating resurrected body.

And that, in Jesus' own mind, **completed** what His earthly life was all about. There was no **reason** to add more length to His days. No more sign miracles were needed. No more sermons. No more parables. The record is clear in His own testimony - **"I have 'accomplished the work that you gave me to do'"**(17:4).

Then Jesus prayed the longest recorded prayer of His entire life. We'll study it for several weeks:

1) **WHEN JESUS PRAYED HE WASN'T CONVERSING WITH SOME DIVINE INNER LIGHT INSIDE HIS OWN BEING**

John 17:1 - "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father..."

Let's open up with what is most basic and obvious. Just that much of **verse 1** is full of correction to the mystical notions many have regarding prayer. Jesus wasn't just **meditating** or **contemplating**. Somehow - we're not told how - John recorded the **words** of Jesus' prayer. It is also entirely possible the rest of the disciples **heard** Jesus speak. That's what John is telling us when he says of Jesus, **"When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said...."**(17:1).

We don't always pray with spoken words. Sometimes we pray inwardly. But John wants it noted Jesus **spoke words**. He prayed **out loud**. Imagine what it would have meant for these disciples to hear Jesus intercede specifically for them to the Father. Imagine hearing God the Son pray for **you**. Jesus **told** Peter He had prayed for him when Satan desired to **"sift"** Peter. But **these** disciples actually **heard** Jesus as He worded His prayer on their behalf.

John wants it noted that Jesus looked **upward** rather than **inward**. Believe it or not, John takes the time to belabor the detail that Jesus tilted his head upward as He prayed - **John 17:1** - "When Jesus had spoken these words, he **lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, 'Father'...."**

Does it matter where Jesus **looked** as He prayed? Isn't **"up"** on one side of this planet **"down"** on the other? Who cares where Jesus looked in prayer?

Or is there something else here? Does Jesus **know** He's being watched? Probably. And as these disciples are watching and listening Jesus **looks up** and says (out loud) **"Father."** Jesus is making it **visibly notable** that prayer isn't some kind of spiritual inner self-talk. It isn't releasing the power of inner potential. It isn't about what one television mega-church pastor called, **"tapping into the great power that lies in all of us."** Jesus is both **saying** ("Father") and **showing** (**lifting His eyes**) that prayer

is actually talking **to** someone other than ourselves. Jesus knew prayer wasn't **pretending** there was someone out there listening. Prayer is a powerful, supremely worthwhile venture.

I've noticed something being said with increasing frequency on television news broadcasts. I've noticed it because it seems we've had a lot of bad news lately. Disease, war, be-headings, riots - there's no shortage of tragic, heart-wrenching situations. And virtually **all** of those reporting these events will sooner or later say, **"Our thoughts and prayers are with these people and their families."**

I don't want to belittle any expression of compassion. Atheists and Christians can all show concern. Certainly we should all feel the ache of what so many are going through. My concern lies elsewhere.

I frequently find myself wondering, **"Do these people mean to talk about one activity or two? Has thinking lovingly about the hurting become the same thing as praying for them? Do these people mean they think about these needs and then lift their eyes to the heavenly Father and say with real words, "O God, how we need your grace and help in this wicked sinful world! Please intervene and accomplish your divine will. We call upon you, the only wise God, to show your power in these situations!"**

I'm not trying to be hard or judgmental here. My only point is Jesus modeled prayer that was something more than an inner emotional state of caring or empathy. It wasn't just a mental exercise. Not every loving thought is prayer. **Thinking** about someone isn't the same as **praying** for them. **Loving** someone isn't the same as **praying** for them. There was a Father in heaven - only **one** as Jesus described it - and Jesus **talked** with Him in real words.

2) THE FATHER IS GLORIFIED THROUGH THE SAVING WORK OF THE SON

John 17:2-5 - "...since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. [3] **And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.** [4] **I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.** [5] **And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."**

These are very deep verses. There is nothing light or breezy in them. You can't read verses like these without thinking **theologically**. Whoever gave the impression that all of John's gospel is immediately **user friendly** misled you. Jesus **is** the bread of life for sure. But He's not partaken of like **fast food**.

These verses contain that phrase - **"...to give eternal life to all you have given him"** - and phrases like that have divided the church for centuries. They deserve separate treatment under the next point of this teaching. I don't think they say what many Calvinists think they say.

But at the heart of these words from Jesus lies the subject of **eternal life**. It's mentioned twice in these verses. In **verse 2** Jesus tells us the **source** of eternal life. And in **verse 3** He tells us the **nature** of eternal life.

First, regarding the **source**, Jesus tells us clearly that He - God the Son - is the only One through whom eternal life can be had. Strangely, He tells us even God the Father doesn't grant eternal life **in Himself** - **John 17:1b-2** - **"...Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, [2] since you [the Father] have given him [the Son] authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him."**

Here is the unique claim of Christendom. Eternal life comes through God the Son. The redeeming love of the Father is poured out only **through** the Son. The Father doesn't **dispense** eternal life through any other means. The created world reveals the Father's power and wisdom. The law reveals His moral nature. But only the world's Messiah, Jesus Christ, God the Son, gives eternal life.

Second, regarding the **nature** of eternal life, Jesus tells us it is **knowing the "only true God"** - **John 17:3** - **"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."**

Very carefully, Jesus **doesn't** say eternal life is **"knowing God."** He says eternal life is **"knowing the only true God."** Study the world's religions and you find there are **many** gods. People are innately **worshippers**. They crave and they manufacture **deities**. But this provides no eternal life if Jesus is correct. Eternal life is knowing **"the only true God."**

So how shall we recognize Him? With so many options, which is the **true** God? Apparently, according to Jesus, there is only **one**. The all-important answer is found in Jesus' words at the end of this **third verse** - **"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."**

So here's where we are. The only **true** God - the only One whom to know is **eternal life** - is the God related to Jesus, His only Son, as eternal Father. The only **true God**, whom to know is **eternal life**, is the Father in **eternal relationship** with the Son.

Notice I said **eternal relationship** with the Son. That's pretty complicated. And it's more important than you might initially see. Every religious group coming to your door - that meeting place just down the street from our church - and a host of others around the world - are happy to acknowledge that Jesus Christ was, just as He said in our text, "**sent**" by the true God - **John 17:3** - "**And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**"

Of course Jesus was sent by the Father. So was Elijah. So was Moses. Many would say Mohammad was too. And Joseph Smith. And a host of others. Perhaps Jesus was even the **best** one sent thus far. Almost every religious group on the planet will agree Jesus was **sent**..

But this is clearly **not** what Jesus had in mind. Look carefully at **verse 5** - "**And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**" The issue isn't just that Jesus was **sent**. The issue is **sent from where**. Jesus was with the Father "**before the world existed.**" He wasn't sent like Elijah was sent, or Moses, or Mohammad, or anyone else whose existence began at physical birth.

So back to our question: **Who is the only true God?** Now we're ready to answer it. The only true God is the God who existed eternally as Father to the eternal Son, Jesus Christ. Any other god - and there are plenty - **isn't** the true God and can never be the source of eternal life.

All of this is bound up with Jesus' words about the Son glorifying the Father and the Father glorifying the Son. The Son glorifies the Father by satisfying the demands of holy love and holy justice in the Father's heart. The Father glorifies the Son by revealing Him as the only revelation of grace and eternal life, and by restoring to the Son the eternal glory He had before coming into this fallen world. He places all things under the Son's feet.

3) **WHO ARE THE ONES THE FATHER HAD GIVEN TO THE SON?**

John 17:6-9, 20 - "**I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. [7] Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. [8] For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. [9] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours....[20]....I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...."**

I close with the most contested and difficult point of our text. There are those **given to the Son by the Father**. They are mentioned six times - **verses 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 20**. And one very common understanding among Calvinists is Jesus is referring to a pre-selected group of people - the **elect** - whom the Father, from eternity past, picked for redemption. These are the only ones for whom Christ died. Father God selected a group and gave these to the Son for redemption. No one else can possibly be saved. Not ever. Not under any circumstances.

I think most of you know I reject that interpretation. I included **verse twenty** because to me it is crucial to a proper understanding of the other five references. Jesus clearly makes a **distinction** in **verse 20** between those who were given to Him up to that point and **another** group that hadn't **yet** been given to Him - "**I do not ask for these only** [that is, the ones to whom He had been referring up to that point], **but also for those who will believe through their word** [that is, the word of those who had been pronounced given to Him in the previous references]."

So who are the ones given to the Son by the Father in the previous references? And I think the best evidence is they are the original twelve disciples. That's why Jesus makes the distinction He makes in **verse 20** between those given to Him **thus far** by the Father and those who have yet to **come to believe through the word** [the gospel] **proclaimed by those first disciples** - **John 17:20** - "**I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word...."**

I think this interpretation also best fits Jesus' words in **verses 11-12** - "**And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. [12] While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them,**

and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

So Jesus tells us clearly He was **with** those the Father had given to Him. And obviously He is referring to a **physical** with-ness. This is not His presence by His Spirit in the church throughout the age. No. Jesus is talking about a people given to Him by the Father with whom He was physically present, but will not be so for much longer.

From **verse 20 on** Jesus prays for a much different - a much **broader** group - than the original twelve. But the references in our text today are best taken, I believe, as references to the original twelve disciples. And they were the Father's initially in the sense that they were Jews - members of God's chosen people.

4) **IS THERE A PRACTICAL WAY TO WRAP UP THIS INVOLVED TEXT?**

There is.

John 17:7-9, 18 - "Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. [8] For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. [9] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours....[18]....As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Why doesn't Jesus just take them all out of this world with Him. He's leaving. Why can't they? And the reason is the very same reason He's left you and me here as well. There's a reason we take time to study and learn the truths of God's Word. To receive and learn is to be sent. There are fifty thousand people in Newmarket who don't know all the stuff we've been studying this morning. There are fifty thousand people in Newmarket who think they're going to heaven because they're trying to be good people. Or because they believe in God. Or because they've gone to some church.

And just as Jesus came with **bold words of revealed truth** He sends us out with those same words. This world needs our **words** just as much as it needs our **love**. In fact, in every reference in our text about going out into the world Jesus only refers to **His words** and **His truth** as the thing we need to know and proclaim.

Look at it again and test your readiness to reach this lost world - **John 17:20 - "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."**