

THE REQUESTS AND BEQUESTS OF OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST - JOHN 17

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John 13-17 is arguably one of the most sublime passages in the entire NT. It is that portion of Scripture that contains the Upper Room discourse of the Lord Jesus—a discourse found in no other Gospel account. It is the tender farewell of a loving Savior as He prepares to return to His Father in Heaven. Directed toward His eleven disciples, it reveals a growing intimacy to those He now calls “friends” (15:15) as He unfolds many of the great truths of the Christian faith later developed in the NT epistles. The scene marks the conclusion of His earthly ministry that would eventually culminate the following day when He would lay down His life as a sacrifice for sin, validated by His resurrection three days later. Truly, having loved His own that were in the world He would love them to the fullest extent—unto the end. (13:1)

The Upper Room Discourse

The farewell ministry of the Savior commences in John 13. There He exemplifies the pattern that should characterize all believers when He humbly kneels and washes His disciple’s feet. It is the display before the discourse. Through this symbolic action, our Lord emphasizes not only to His disciples but to us the need for daily cleansing from sin and the self-abasing attitude that should characterize our service to others. What gracious teaching and what a great example! Then in chapter 14, He highlights what He would also do for us—prepare a place (v. 3), answer prayer (v. 14), and send a Paraclete—the Holy Spirit (v. 16) to comfort and guide us during His absence. All these things emphasize what *He* would do for us. But in Chapter 15, He underscores what *we* should do for Him, namely to be a witness in the world and to bear fruit—much fruit—so that the Father is glorified (15:8). The discourse crescendos in Chapter 16 as the Lord enlarges upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in particular His work toward the world (16:7-11) and toward His own (16:12-15). His teaching has become a deepening and widening channel of truth. But nowhere are the depths of these truths more keenly sensed than with the words contained in chapter 17, commonly known as our Lord’s High Priestly prayer.

The Intercession of Our Great High Priest

Undoubtedly, John 17 is the apogee of the Lord’s personal ministry to His own occurring on the night before His crucifixion. On this unique occasion, they would have the inestimable privilege of hearing Him passionately pray to the Father on their behalf. Embodied in that prayer are some of the richest themes in the NT; themes such as election, sanctification, and glorification. Typically, this chapter depicts the final step in the order of approach to God as portrayed in the service of the OT Tabernacle. Having had His death pictured through His anointing in John 12, and having washed His disciple’s feet in John 13, the Lord then instructs them on a number of profound truths in John 14-16. Respectively, these actions represent the altar, the laver, and the Holy Place in the order of their placement in the Tabernacle. Now in John 17, He takes them figuratively into the Holiest of All, the very presence of God where as our Great High Priest He intercedes exclusively for the heirs of salvation. It is yet another example of the many offices of our wonderful Savior and accentuates the focus and faithful execution of that office in intercessory ministry.

The Requests of Our Great High Priest

As our Intercessor, the Lord presents seven petitions to the Father: two for Himself (vv. 1-5); two for the disciples (vv. 6-19); and three are for those who would afterwards believe on His Name (vv. 20-26). His initial request is for the Father to glorify Him so that He would consequently glorify the Father (v. 1). Indeed that is what transpired at Calvary when He went submissively with the Father to

the place of sacrifice just as Isaac did with his father in Gen. 22. To cry out “Forgive them, they know not what they do...” undoubtedly brought glory to the Father and an immediate answer to His first request. The second one, that the Father would restore Him to His pre-incarnate glory (v. 5) was also be answered soon, just over forty days later when He ascended from Mount Olivet. (Acts 1) These two requests--for His *glorification* at the Cross and for His *restoration* to His pre-existent glory--were both answered in short order!

The next two requests dealt with the disciple’s *preservation* (v. 11) and *sanctification* (v. 17). Repeatedly, the Lord referred all believers as having being given to Him (vv. 6, 9, 11, 12, 24). Each believer is in fact, a gift from the Father to the Son. In v. 11, He entreats: “Keep through Thine own Name those whom Thou hast given Me”. What greater assurance could any of us have in knowing that the security of our salvation does not depend upon our own abilities to “keep the faith”, but rather in being kept as both the object of the Lord’s prayer and the Father’s power (1 Peter 1:5)? Further, knowing the deceptive and destructive wiles of the devil, the Lord adds to our assurance by including a plea for our spiritual protection from the evil one (v. 15). In the same way as He prayed for Peter, He prays for us that our faith fail not (Luke 22:32). Likewise, He also prays for our sanctification. His petition is: “Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is Truth (v. 17). It is both the substance and source of our walk with Him—separation from the world and direction from the Word. It comes about as we diligently study the Scriptures and apply them practically in our daily lives. Positionally, these two requests will always be answered since every believer is sanctified by God and preserved in Jesus Christ. (Jude 1) Practically, we will sense the reality of these truths as we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word.

The final set of petitions is recorded in vv. 20-26. Their focus is upon our *unification* (v. 21), *evangelization* (v. 22), and *consummation* (v. 24). His prayer is that we would be one, just as the Father and the Son are One. Congregations by the scores and individual Christians everywhere need to be reminded of this significant request of our Savior! Doctrinal integrity is a must, but so is the putting away of petty disagreements and personality differences if unity is to occur. The apostolic Church was known both for their steadfastness in the truth *and* their love for each other. There was a cohesion then that desperately needs to be exhibited today. When that occurs, we can be sure the difficult task of world evangelization will be helped in some measure. Never mind the assessment of the church growth “gurus”, the Savior’s assessment is that unification among believers has to happen if ever the world is going to respond positively to the truth of the Gospel (vv. 21, 23). The Lord beautifully concludes this masterpiece of prayer by stating His ultimate desire that they would be with Him where He is, so that they would behold His glory—a prayer that is answered every time a believer in Christ leaves this world and called Home to heaven.

The Bequests of Our Great High Priest

Not only does this chapter contain the requests of our Great High Priest, but it also cites a number of His bequests—those things that He has left us as part of our spiritual inheritance. Eternal life based on the proper understanding of the true God and His Son is the first item identified as the gift of the Savior to us (v. 3). Another is the manifestation of the Father’s name (v. 6, 26). This is the clear conception of the true God that He transmitted to us through His ministry on earth (2 Cor. 4:6). Just before this He stated to Philip, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9) Further, He has given us the words of the Father (v. 8, 14), conveying eternal truths from the throne room of heaven which contradicted the doctrines of men. And lastly from this passage, He has bequeathed to us His joy (v. 13) and His glory (v. 22); the joy of fellowship with the Father and His glory that radiates through us when we are abiding in Him.

The High Priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus is a spiritual treasure trove of incalculable worth. To mediate upon these glorious requests of our loving Savior and what He has provided for us through His intercessory work will not only lift our hearts in grateful adoration, but strengthen our resolve to live whole-heartedly for the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.