

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

*Passage for weekly reading (week 25):*

*John ch.17*

### The Lord's Prayer

Both the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans and the writer to the Hebrews refer to the intercession of Jesus in His exalted state at the right hand of the Father. It has long seemed to me that the substance of His praying is given to us in this wonderful High Priestly prayer, as written down for us in John ch.17. Jesus prayed this way within the earshot of His then disciples, and He has prayed in similar vein for His Church ever since, for the very remit He has given her is to make disciples. The reason that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church of Jesus (Matthew 16 v.18) is because our Lord has never stopped praying to His Father for her victory, neither will He until that victory is accomplished. The fact that He has already won the victory is guarantee that the Church will accomplish the Father's purposes for her before Jesus returns. The gospel will be fully proclaimed and the elect finally gathered in before then. Nothing can frustrate that. The length of time it takes, however, is a matter that is determined in a major way by the Church's responsiveness to the prayer of her exalted Head.

In promising the outpouring of His Spirit on the people of Israel in Ezekiel 36 v.'s 24 - 38, the Lord says an interesting thing through the prophet at that time (almost 600 years B.C.), that He will **"yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them"** (v.37, K.J.V.). The N.I.V. puts it as follows: **"Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them"** (i.e.- increase Israel's numbers, build up her population again, and bless her with abundance). In other words, the blessing will not come willy-nilly. It will only come as Israel pleads before God for it. Casual, half-hearted prayer will not do. The nation will be so burdened by her need that she will plead before the living God, and that plea will be impassioned and desperate, springing from the desolation of her own apostasy. Does our nation have to sink lower into secularism before we, the church, will plead before the throne of God in an effective way?

The prayer of our Lord divides into 3 sections:

- 1) For Himself
- 2) For the disciples
- 3) For those who will heed the call to discipleship after them.

1) **For Himself**, v.'s 1-5. Jesus is praying here for His present glorification as He faces the agony of the cross, but even this present agony cannot prevent Him from seeing with absolute spiritual clarity into the future of what will become His Church. Jesus will be the One who gives eternal life to all those gifted to Him by His Father, those who, quite simply, will know him. It is just a question of knowing Him. He has brought glory to God by completing His work on earth, and the Father will respond alike by restoring Jesus to his original heavenly glory.

2) **For the disciples**, v.'s 6 -19. Jesus prays here for the ones gifted to him during the course of His own earthly ministry, those who had obeyed God's word by following Him. They had come to a place of understanding as the Lord finished teaching them (ch.16 v.30). They grasped that Jesus was of God, with certainty (v.8). He emphasises again that they belong to His Father – “they are Yours” (v.9). Their very lives bring glory to Jesus (v.10). (In every age of the Church, glory comes to the Son through those whom the Father has given to Him. Paul actually teaches this in Ephesians 3 v.'s 20,21. Jesus is here praying out principles that will govern the life of the Church, however long she is called to fulfil her God-ordained remit.)

The Lord asks for three things of the Father:

a) - **for their protection**, that as they serve in the name of the living God, they may be one in heart and mind, in the same organic unity of being that obtains between Father and Son. It is the name of God, and the power of that name, that is their protective covering, and they are being protected “from the evil one” (v.15).

b) - **for their joy**, which comes as a result of eternal security. The world will hate them, because they do not belong to it anymore, but that can do nothing to affect their joy, for it is not related to worldly circumstances. It is the restored communion of prayer that sustains such joy, as Jesus taught in ch.'s 14-16.

c) - **for their sanctification**. Sanctification is both a position we have as believers, and a process which is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, having come to faith in the Saviour. It is the second meaning that Jesus is using here. To be sanctified is to be set apart in God's service, to be fully consecrated to Him, and to walk consistently the way of holiness (Isaiah 35 v.8). Protection from the evil one is only effective as we learn to live out our lives as set apart to God. If we repeatedly “give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4 v.27), he can wreak spiritual havoc, for we are effectively giving him permission to do it. The Lord prays that they will be sanctified “by the truth; Your word is truth” (v.18). Jesus was that word, made flesh, but His whole life was one of “sanctifying Himself” in order to offer up the perfect sacrifice to His Father and complete His work. This gives us, as his disciples, the opportunity of “sanctifying ourselves” through His word. As we learn to progressively live by that word, so we are the more sanctified, and the more equipped for God to release His purposes through us. It is submission to the “Spirit of truth” (16 v.13) that enables Him (the Holy Spirit) to lead us “into all truth”. The parable of the sower is a good illustration of this, because Jesus speaks

at the end of that parable of the seed that falls on good ground, picturing “those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (Luke 8 v.15). Those who are “truly sanctified” will produce the goods!

3) **For future disciples**, v.’s 20-26, i.e. – us. Again, the Lord focuses on unity, which alone can make the gospel credible to a watching world. Jesus has given to His first followers His glory, and He asks that this glory will in turn sustain that “complete unity” (v.23). Only this can witness to those not yet in the family of believers that the same love the Father has for the Son is in those who follow the Son. There are two “levels” of glory referred to here:

- a) the glory that is in the Church, united in the love of God, and
- b) the glory that is in heaven, the original glory of Jesus, in the place He is preparing for all who know and love Him.

Jesus bestows glory on earth to His disciples, but His heart’s desire is that they witness His heavenly glory (John 14 v.’s 1-3). Meanwhile, may the self-same love that continually filled Him be also in those who follow Him, that unconditional love that causes them to lay down their lives. (see 2 Corinthians 5 v.’s 14&15).

It is this prayer that Jesus continually prays before the Father’s throne. It is for the church of every generation to live in the good of it (Ephesians 3 v.’s14-19). Everything that happened in the growing church at Ephesus happened because there was a response in the hearts of many of the believers to the prayer of Paul in these verses. Ministry gifts were released, the believers were free to speak the truth in love, minds were renewed in God’s word, sin was marginalised, life and light were poured in, people served one another, family life flourished, and relations in the work place had never been better – all because that church was “rooted and established in love”, the limitless love of Christ, and they were filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph.3 v.’s 17-19). This is revival. Will we live to experience it? We will need to pray like Jesus to do so!

### ***Food for thought / discussion / prayer***

1) Surely this prayer needs to be the very heart of our own individual and corporate prayer life if we are to realise its goodness in our own generation. Let us read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it, along with Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians in 3 v.’s 14-21 of his letter. Have you meditated much on the fact that the love which God the Father has for us is exactly the same love that was in Christ Jesus, no more, no less? (v.’s 23&26). Let’s dwell on it this week, and pray these wonderful prayers with a freshness that can impart new faith – “**the only thing that counts is faith working through love**”(Galatians 5 v.6).

2) Jesus equates glory in the Church with unity which only the Spirit of God can give. Perhaps you have known times in church life when there has been disunity. What was the effect of that, especially if it persisted over time? You may also have experienced times when there was a good measure of unity. What was the effect of that over time? Can you summarise some of the conditions essential to congregational unity in the local situation? Are you prepared to be a person committed to spiritual oneness in your own fellowship?

3(a) Jesus “sanctified Himself” to the Father in order to complete His work, the work of bearing mankind’s sin on the cross. Without that sanctification, He could not have made intercession for us (Isaiah 53 v.12). Likewise, the Church of Jesus must also be sanctified to the Father (set apart to Him), in order to make her intercession in each generation for a lost and dying world. The part that I play in this is making sure I am so sanctified (1 Peter 3 v.15). Am I? Are you? If I am not, my prayer life is seriously hindered.

(b) John Wesley once said that “God does nothing but in answer to prayer”, and He creates the conditions in which that effective, prevailing prayer is offered up. It is not to be taken for granted, because of Jesus’ victory on the cross, that the Church must succeed in fulfilling the Great Commission. The Great Commission will only be fulfilled through ongoing and concentrated prayer, for that is the way that God is preparing us to reign with Him forever, the way in which He is transforming us. The need for prayer cannot be understood in any other way. Jesus therefore never assumes that those the Father has given Him will succeed in their mission and in their calling; rather, He ever lives to make intercession that they will. If He is doing that, how much more should we! Can we reassess our own commitment to urgent intercessory prayer in the light of this? We have a role to play in “speeding” the end of this age! (2 Peter 3 v.12).

**Next week’s passage:** John 18 -21