

Exegesis

Vs. 1 – “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:” Before the Lord begins his prayer, John tell us he “lifted up his eyes.” This is the same posture as he prayed, standing before Lazarus’ tomb (11:41), and such a pose suggests a close intimacy between Jesus and God.¹ In Exodus 33:11, we’re told that Moses, a prophet of God, spoke “face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” How much more could be said for the *Son* of God? At times, he would bow his head as he prayed (cf. Matt. 26:39). But more often than not, Jesus prayed with his eyes directed *upwards*, not downwards (cf. Ma. 6:42; 7:34). He would lock eyes with the heavens, and speak to God as a child speaks to his father. This is further confirmed by how the Lord prays like an *individual* with a personal and even familial connection to the Creator. Rather than addressing God with a communal phrase like “*Our* Father,” as in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9), he speaks directly to his “Father,” and he will continue to do so another *five* times (vs. 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). The prayer is highly personal, though *always* reverential. As Carson notes, “‘Father’ gives way to ‘Holy Father’ (vs. 11) and ‘Righteous Father’ (vs. 25).”²

The phrase “the hour is come” is, of course, referring to Christ’s crucifixion. As readers, we have been awaiting this moment for some time (cf. 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:4, 21, 25, 32). And though that moment will be characterized by pain and suffering, for Jesus, it was the moment he had *eagerly* anticipated his entire life (cf. Lu. 12:49-50).³ Why? Through the cross, the Father would “glorify [his] Son” so that, in turn, the “Son also may glorify [the Father].” Jesus understood that by being fastened with nails to a throne made of two wooden beams, he had a golden opportunity to exalt God. The *one* petition the Son of God allows for himself in this prayer is that the Father be glorified. In taking humanity’s sin debt, the Son of God knew that God’s love for the world would be forever engrained in the psyche of mankind (cf. 3:16).⁴ We need only look to the cross to answer the question, “Does God love me?”

¹ Coincidentally, we’re told that the Lord “lifted up his eyes” before he fed the five thousand (6:5) and before he spoke the beatitudes (Lu. 6:20), which, at the very least, implies that something extraordinary is about to occur.

² Carson (1991), p. 553.

³ *Ibid.*, “That God’s appointed hour has arrived does not strike Jesus as an excuse for resigned fatalism, but for prayer: precisely *because* [author’s emphasis] the hour has come for the Son to be glorified, he prays that the glorification might take place. This is God’s appointed hour; let God’s will be done—indeed, Jesus prays that his Father will accomplish the purpose of this appointed hour. As so often in Scripture, emphasis on God’s sovereignty functions as an incentive to prayer, not a disincentive.”

⁴ Kruse (2017), p. 393.

Vs. 2 – “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” Once in a vision, Daniel saw a “Son of Man” figure approach the throne of the “Ancient of Days” and, rather than be atomized, this remarkable being was “given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:14). Jesus' claim that he has been given "power over all flesh" is a fulfillment of what the prophet saw over six hundred years prior. The Son of Man is the rightful heir to the throne of David (cf. Isa. 9:6-7). The Son of God has authority over every human being.

Jesus' power means he to "give eternal life to as many as [God] hast given him." Though it may show up in other accounts (cf. Matt. 25:46; Mar. 10:17, 30; Lu. 10:25), "eternal life" is a distinctly Johannine phrase (cf. 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:38; 12:25, 50; 17:2, 3).⁵ More than any other evangelist, John wants us to know that the kind of life the Lord offers is infinite, not finite (cf. 1 Jn. 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20). Those who believe in Christ will have an eternity to search out its limits, an exploration, to be clear, that does not start in the next life but in this one. After all, does not eternal life begin the moment a person believes (cf. 5:24)? Are we not, in a sense, like newborn babes the moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn. 3:3)? Thus, every Christian has two birthdays: one physical and the other spiritual. The former will come to an end, being marked by a death certificate; the latter will continue in perpetuity, being marked by the Spirit's certification (cf. Eph. 1:13). To know Christ is to be born twice but to die only once while to not know Christ is to be born once but to die twice (cf. Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:14).

That Jesus grants eternal life only to those that God "hast given him" should not be overlooked; some people have been given to Christ while others have not. This revelation deals with the doctrine of predestination (cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:5, 11). In the modern era, we perceive a contradiction between God's sovereignty and man's autonomy. However, nowhere in Scripture are the two concepts portrayed as incompatible or illogical. According to the Bible, man is a free agent, culpable for his actions, while, *at the same exact time*, God's dominion is absolute.⁶ Admittedly, I do not know how these two seemingly contradictory ideas are resolved. Wiser

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 487, states that the synoptics use the phrase "kingdom of God" when talking about eternal life.

⁶ Carson (1991), p. 555, "Everything and everyone in the universe is subject to this kingdom, whether the point is acknowledged or not."

men than I left the issue unresolved, trusting that it'll make sense in eternity, and I'm inclined to follow their lead.⁷

You see, part of the perplexing nature of this topic is that the extremes are clearly untenable. Emphasizing free will, to the detriment of the divine will, leads to indeterminism—i.e., choices are made autonomously, regardless of any input. Emphasizing the divine will, to the detriment of free will, leads to fatalism—i.e., the ability to choose is an illusion. Both conclusions are unbiblical. Paul affirmed that "it is God which worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13), yet Peter challenged believers to "give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10) and so the answer must lie somewhere between the two extremes.

However, we mustn't be so distracted by this debate that we miss the *explicit* assertion that believers have been given to Christ by God the Father. Jesus will make this point three other times in this prayer (vs. 6, 9, 24).⁸ And because the disciple's place in Christ is by *divine* appointment and not the result of their own effort, their salvation is eternally *secure*. As the Lord aptly put it, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (cf. 10:27-29).

Vs. 3 – "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Through creation, God can, to a certain extent, be known (cf. Rom. 1:8-25). But to know only that there is a creator is not to have "life eternal." Only when a person knows the "only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [he] has sent" can someone say they possess eternal "life eternal" (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6). To be sure, this knowledge is not just mental, but relational (cf. Jn. 14:8-10). It is the sort which distinguishes an acquaintance from a friend, the kind that is not just a theory but an actual lifestyle, and one that acknowledges him with both heart and soul and not mere lip service (cf. Isa. 29:14; par. Mat. 15:7-9). Believers are not like astrologers

⁷ While preaching on Romans 10:20-21, Spurgeon said, "I am taught in one book to believe that what I sow I shall reap: I am taught in another place, that "it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." I see in one place, God presiding over all in providence; and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions to his own will, in a great measure.... These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring."

⁸ Kruse (2017), p. 394.

who study distant stars but never feel their warmth. They are children who bask in the warmth of their Father's embrace, knowing him through his Son, the Word incarnate.⁹

Vs. 4-5 – “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” There was not even one day in which Jesus failed to glorify God. To say that he has “glorified [his Father] on the earth” is to say that he has done everything expected of him. Jesus went to the cross, knowing that he had “finished the work which [God] gavest [him] to do.” Jesus was sent with a mission; it is the thing that drove him (cf. 4:34). Thus, proleptically, the Lord said, “Mission accomplished,” even though, chronologically, the Calvary still looms on the horizon.¹⁰

Now that he had fulfilled his purpose, Jesus had a request: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” John, more than any other gospel writer, highlights Jesus' preexistence. It is the melody of the prelude (1:1-2) and the refrain heard throughout his account (cf. 3:13; 6:62; 8:58; 16:28). Because Jesus is God, he existed long before Bethlehem. God the Son, God the Father, and God the Spirit were in the time (if it even can be called that) before the beginning. And now that the Lord's task has been completed, he wants the state of glory he “had with [God] before the world was.” This is not a *reward* for dying on the cross but a *return* to “the glory bound to the identity of God that the Father and Son share.”¹¹ Though veiled by human flesh, Jesus never once relinquished his glory; he did not have a *lesser* glory while on earth. The Lord could conceal it (cf. Phil. 2:7) and reveal it at will (cf. Lu. 9:29), but make no mistake, he fully displayed it while on the cross.

⁹ Carson (1991), p. 556, “Eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God. Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One.”

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 557.

¹¹ Klink (2016), p. 715; Carson (1991), p. 554, “The petition asks the Father to reverse the self-emptying entailed in his (sic) incarnation and to restore him to the splendour that he shared with the Father before the world began. The cross and Jesus' ascension/exaltation are thus inseparable. The hideous profanity of Golgotha means nothing less than the Son's glorification... God is clothed in splendour as he brings about this death/exaltation of his Son.”

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 70 | John 17:1-5

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Jesus' Parting Prayer begins with the Lord addressing his "Father." And unlike how our prayers are often filled with personal requests that focus on some need, the Son of God had but one petition: *glorify me that I may glorify thee*. To be clear, when the Lord requested that he be glorified, he was requesting that he be exalted on the cross. In taking humanity's sin debt, the Son of God knew that God's love for the world would be forever engrained in the psyche of mankind (cf. 3:16). We need only look to the cross to answer the question, "Does God love me?"

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