

## THE GREATEST CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE-13

### JOHN, CHAPTER 17

#### I. INTRODUCTION.

##### The Prayer of the Overcomer.

- A. Most scholars who have sought to harmonize the accounts in the four Gospels have the Lord Jesus praying the prayer of John 17 in the Upper Room after He had finished His instructions to the disciples. Then He and the disciples sang the traditional Passover psalms, left the Upper Room, and headed for the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus had been accustomed to meet with them and pray (see Mt. 26:30-46 and Mk. 14:26-42).
- B. John 17 is certainly the “holy of holies” of the Gospel record, and we must approach this chapter in a spirit of humility and worship. To think that we are privileged to listen in as God the Son converses with His Father just as He is about to give His life as a ransom for sinners!
- C. The progression of thought in this prayer is not difficult to discover:
  1. Jesus first prayed for Himself and that His work on earth had been finished (17:1-5).
  2. He prayed for His disciples, that the Father would *keep them* and *sanctify them* (17:6-19).
  3. He prayed for the whole church, that we might be *unified* share His glory (17:20-26).

#### II. JESUS PRAYED FOR HIMSELF (Jn. 17:1-5).

##### His Work is finished.

- A. Our Lord began this prayer by praying for Himself, but in praying for Himself, He was also praying for us. “A prayer for self is not by any means necessarily a selfish prayer,” wrote Dr. R.A. Torrey, and an examination of Bible prayers shows that this is true.
- B. “*Father, the hour is come,*” reminds us of the many times in John’s Gospel when “the hour” is mentioned, beginning at Jn. 2:4. Jesus had lived on a “divine timetable” while on earth and He knew He was in the will of the Father. “My times are in Thy hand” (Psa. 31:15).
- C. The important word *glory* is used 5 times in these verses, and we must carefully distinguish the various “glories” that Jesus mentions.
  1. In 17:5, He referred to His pre-incarnate glory with the Father, the glory that He laid aside when He came to earth to be born, to serve, to suffer, and to die.
  2. In 17:4, He reported to the Father that His life and ministry on earth had glorified Him, because He (Jesus) had finished the work the Father gave Him to do.
  3. In 17:1 and 5, our Lord asked that His pre-incarnate glory be given to Him again, so that the Son might glorify the Father in His return to heaven.
- D. The word *glory* is used 8 times in this prayer, so it is an important theme. He glorified the Father in His miracles (Jn. 2:11; 11:40), to be sure; but He brought the greatest glory to the Father through His sufferings and death (see Jn. 12:23-25; 13:31-32). Jesus anticipated His return to heaven when He said, “*I have finished the work which Thou has given Me to do*” (Jn. 17:4). This “work” included His messages and miracles on earth (Jn. 5:17-19), the training of the disciples for future service, and most of all, His sacrifice on the cross (Heb. 9:24-28; 10:11-18).
- F. “Eternal [everlasting] life” is an important theme in John’s Gospel; it is mentioned at least 17 times. Eternal life is God’s free gift to those who believe on His Son (Jn. 3:15-16, 36; 6:47; 10:28). The Father gave His Son the authority to give eternal life to those whom the Father gave to the Son. From the human viewpoint, we receive the gift of eternal life when we believe on Jesus Christ. But from the divine viewpoint, we have already been given to the Son in divine election.

#### III. JESUS PRAYED FOR HIS DISCIPLES (Jn. 17:6-19).

##### Security, sanctity and unity!

That they might...

- A. Stay out of the world (17:6-9).

We have His Word (17:7-8), and His Word reveals to us all that we have in Jesus Christ. The Word gives us faith and assurance.

B. Glorify Christ (17:10).

With all of their failures and faults, the disciples still receive this word of commendation: "I am glorified in them." God has provided the divine resources for us to glorify Him and be faithful. We have the Son of God interceding for us (17:9; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14-16). Since the Father always answers the prayers of His Son (Jn. 11:41-42), this intercessory ministry helps to keep us safe and secure.

C. Be united and protected (17:11,12).

God will keep His own. We also have the fellowship of the church: "that they may be one, as we are" (17:11). The NT knows nothing of isolated believers; wherever you find saints, you find them in fellowship. Why? Because God's people need each other.

D. Have joy in the midst of the world (17:13,14).

1. The believer does not find his joy in the world but in the Word. Like John the Baptist, we should rejoice greatly when we hear the Bridegroom's voice! (Jn. 3:29).
2. "I have given them Thy Word" (17:14, and see 17:8). The Word of God is the gift of God to us. The Father gave the words to His Son (17:8), and the Son gave them to His disciples who, in turn, have passed them along to us as they were inspired by the Spirit (2Tim. 3:16; 2Pet. 1:20-21). The Word is divine in origin, a precious gift from heaven. We must never take God's Word for granted, for those who are overcomers know the Word and how to use it in daily life.
3. We must never picture Jesus going around with a long face and a melancholy disposition. He was a man of joy and He revealed that joy to others. His joy was not the fleeting levity of a sinful world but the abiding enjoyment of the Father and the Word. He did not depend on outward circumstances but on inward spiritual resources that were hidden from the world. This is the kind of joy He wants us to have, and we can have it through His Word.

E. Power for holy living (17:15-17).

1. The Word of God not only brings us God's joy and love, but it also imparts God's power for holy living (17:15-17). The burden of our Lord's Prayer in 17:6-12 was *security*, but here it is *sanctity*, practical holy living to the glory of God. We are *in* the world but not *of* the world, and we must not live *like* the world.
2. True sanctification (being set apart for God) comes through the ministry of the Word of God. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (Jn. 15:3).

F. Be strong witnesses to the world (17:18,19).

It also gives us what we need to serve Him as witnesses in this world (17:18-19). Sanctification is not for the purpose of selfish enjoyment or boasting; it is so that we might represent Christ in this world and win others to Him. Jesus set Himself apart for us, and now He has set us apart for Him. The Father sent Him into the world, and now He sends us into the world. We are people "under orders" and we had better obey! Jesus is now "set apart" in heaven, praying for us, that our witness will bear fruit as many repent of their sins and turn to the Lord.

**IV. JESUS PRAYED FOR THE CHURCH (Jn. 17:20-26).**

- A. Here our Lord focuses our attention on the future. He begins to pray for us who live today, for the whole church throughout all ages. He has already prayed about security and sanctity; now the burden of His prayer is *unity*. He is concerned that His people experience a spiritual unity that is like the oneness of the Father and the Son. Christians belong to the Lord and to each other.

B. Unity of all believers (17:20-22).

What is the *basis* for true Christian unity? The person and work of Jesus Christ and His glory (17:2-5). He has already given His glory to us, and He promises that we will further experience that glory when we get to heaven! All true believers have God's glory within, no matter what they may look like on the outside. Christian harmony is not based on the externals of the flesh but the internals and eternals of

the Spirit in the inner person. We must look beyond the elements of our first birth—race, color, abilities, etc.—and build our fellowship on the essentials of our new birth.

- C. Unity will convince the world of Jesus' deity (17:23).
- D. Unity with Christ means unity with the Father (17:24).
- E. Unity means love (17:25,26).

**V. CONCLUSIONS.**

- A. As you review this prayer, you see the spiritual priorities that were in the Savior's heart: the glory of God; the sanctity of God's people; the unity of the church; the ministry of sharing the Gospel with a lost world. We today would be wise to focus on these same priorities.
- B. One day, each of us will have to give an account of his or her ministry. It is a solemn thought that we shall stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give our "final report." I trust that we will be able to say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou has given me to do" (17:4).

**VI. NEXT WEEK.**

- A. Acts, Chapter 2.  
The Church Begins!
  - 1. A promised miracle (Ac. 2:1-13).
  - 2. A powerful sermon (Ac. 2:14-36).
  - 3. A pointed command (Ac. 2:37-41).
  - 5. A praiseworthy people (Ac. 2:42-47).