

John 17

Our readings for today bring us to consider the last recorded prayer of the Master, before his suffering upon the cross. There are many themes and principles contained in this prayer, we shall consider some of them by way of exhortation today.

The prayer commences with giving glory to God:

“glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him ...”

Here, we find that Messiah was to be glorified, in order that God Himself would be glorified. And part of this process of glorification, is the giving of Eternal Life, that his brethren would also share that glory: “... the glory that thou gavest me I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one” (vs. 22). Unity in Glory then, is the overriding purpose of the Almighty in Christ, for the entire earth will ultimately be filled with the glory of Yahweh (Num. 14:21). Then, God will be magnified in the salvation of his servants, who know and believe in Him.

The Master continues this aspect:

“And this is life eternal, that they may **know** thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (Jno. 17:3).

These words echo the words of the prophet:

“But let him that glorieth glory in this, **that he understandeth and knoweth me**, that I am Yahweh which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth for in all these things I delight, saith Yahweh” (Jer. 9:24).

According to Messiah, to know the only True God and his Son “is life eternal”, and these are things that we can glory in. As John further describes: “... we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the True God, and eternal life” (1 Jno. 5:20). We therefore must have “an understanding” of our God, knowing Him that is True.

Sometimes Isaiah 55 is cited against this:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith Yahweh. For as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9).

The suggestion is that God is unknowable, and beyond understanding. But although that is true for the natural men who cannot receive the things of the spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), it ought not be so for Messiah’s brethren. It is true that the human mind cannot comprehend the eternity of our Father, but it is also true that we must understand Him, to the extent that He has Revealed Himself to us, through his Son, and the written Word. Yes, God’s ways are high above those of the natural man, but for the saints all that means is that they must aspire to heavenly things: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2).

To know the only true God is a characteristic of true believers, as Peter expressed in his salutation: "Grace and Peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord ..." (2 Pet. 1:2).

DECLARING THE NAME

The Only True God has a Name and knowing that Name is part of knowing God. Hence, Jesus says: "I have **manifested thy Name** unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world ... " (Jno. 17:6). Elsewhere, the Master states that "I am come in my Father's Name ..." (Jno. 5:43), and in his prayer under consideration, he says of the disciples: "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy Name ..." (vs 12). The declared Name then, is a place of safety that the righteous can be "in". So the Proverbs have it: "The name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous runneth unto it, and is safe" (Prov. 18:10). The believers can enter this strong tower by submitting to baptism, which is into the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mat. 28:19). Being constituent parts thereof, they will share the glory of their Lord and Elder brother – it is essentially a family Name, which denotes the true brethren of Messiah.

Later in his prayer, the Lord said: "... **I have declared unto them thy Name**, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (vs. 26). This reference to Declaring the Name is from Psalm 22: "**I will declare thy name** unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (Psa. 22:22). And this is cited in Hebrews in application to Messiah and his brethren (Heb. 2:11). Like the glory of God positioned upon the Mercy Seat of the Tabernacle in the midst of the two Cherubim, the Lord declared and glorified the Divine Name in the midst of his brethren. But the point in Hebrews chapter 1, is to do with oneness and unity. There is one Name, held by those who "are all of one", like the Mercy Seat and the Cherubim were all one piece of gold (Exo. 37:7).

This theme of Oneness is a major theme in Messiah's prayer:

"... that they may be one as we are ..." (vs 11)

"... that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ... " (Vs 21)

"... that they may be one, even as we are one ..." (vs 22)

" ... I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one ..." (vs 23).

The point is, that the true brethren of Christ have a unity of spirit and mind (Phil. 1:27), which is reflective of that which exists between the Father and His Son.

PRAYERS FOR THE WORLD

Whilst the Lord prayed for his brethren, he does not intercede for, or pray for the world at large. This is something he is specific on: "I pray for them: **I pray not for the world**, but for them which thou hast given me ..." (vs 9). The World, he says elsewhere, is ignorant of the Only True God: "O righteous Father, **the world hath not known thee**; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me" (vs 25). Indeed, it hates the brethren: "... **the world hath hated them**, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (vs 14). Jeremiah was told not to pray for apostate Israel: "... therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee" (Jer. 7:16). Even so, we ought not to pray for those who spurn the ways of the Living God and refuse to diligently seek after him (Heb. 11:6). Apostate

Christendom knows nothing of the Only True God, preferring to believe in a fictitious triune deity instead. The true believer will not pray for them.

MEN GIVEN TO THE SON

The disciples of Christ are described by him as: "... the men **which thou gavest me** out of the world: thine they were, and **thou gavest them me**; and they have kept thy word" (vs 6, also Heb. 2:13). The allusion here, is to the giving of the Levites to Aaron for the conduction of Divine Service:

"And I have **given** the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel, in the tabernacle of the congregation ..." (Num. 8:19).

But the means by which they were given in service is highly interesting:

"... thou shalt bring the Levites before Yahweh: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites: and Aaron shall offer the Levites before Yahweh **for an offering** of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of Yahweh ... And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them **for an offering** unto Yahweh" (Num. 8:10-13).

Notice that the company of Levites were offered as a single sacrifice/offering to Yahweh. Whereas ordinarily the sacrifices were comprised of slain animals, these were men who were alive, and separated to perform the service expected of them. This would appear to be what Paul alludes to in Romans 12:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that **ye present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your **reasonable service**. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

Just as the Levites were given as an offering to "execute the service of Yahweh," even so the disciples are presented as living sacrifice, devoted to a "reasonable service" of the Lord.

THE TRUTH OF THE WORD OF GOD

In verse 18 of Messiah's prayer, we have a declaration concerning the nature of the Word of God:

"Sanctify them through thy Truth: **thy Word is Truth**" (Jno. 17:18).

In an age where Truth is considered to be subjective, with each individual being at liberty to hold and believe their own "truth", this verse is of fundamental importance. God's Word "is Truth", and this fact is testified many times in Scripture. Hence, a certain woman said to Elijah: "... now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that **the word of Yahweh** in thy mouth **is truth**" (1 Kings 17:24). And again, the Psalmist: "**Thy Word is true from the beginning**: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever" (Psa. 119:160).

Sometimes it is said that we are arrogant to claim to have the Truth. As one of our adversaries put it: "we don't have a monopoly on the truth". But this misstates the case. It is not that we have the Truth, it is rather that the Bible is Truth, and we believe the Bible – as other men and women can also, if they so choose. The Word of God is True in all its aspects, and therefore that which differs from it is not

true. It is not that “we are right” and others are wrong – it is that the Bible is right, yet others choose not to believe it. We choose to believe the Truth of God’s word, and other prefer not to, for whatever reason. Indeed, “let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). The disciple of Christ will implicitly believe the revealed Word, and will eschew the folly of men’s speculation and perceived wisdom.

SANCTIFICATION

The word of Truth is a sanctifying power to those who would believe it. Hence, Christ said: “Sanctify them by thy Truth”. But the Master continues in verse 19 to say: “... and for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth”. The sanctification of Messiah then, must take place first, and then he is able to sanctify his brethren “through the Truth”.

The allusion here, would appear to be back to the sanctification of the Altar in the Tabernacle arrangement of things. Exodus 29 describes this:

“And thou shalt offer every day a bullock for a sin offering for atonement: and thou shalt cleanse the altar, when thou hast made an atonement for it, and thou shalt anoint it, **to sanctify it**. Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the Altar, **and sanctify it**; and it shall be an altar most holy: **whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy**” (Exo. 29:36-37).

These aspects of the Mosaic system of things were “patterns” of things yet to come in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews chapter 9, we read that “almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that **the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these**; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Heb. 9:22-23). It is evident that “the heavenly things themselves” includes Messiah, who is in heaven, who was “purified” by the better sacrifice of himself. This was foreshadowed by the cleansing of the Altar: it was sanctified first, and then it would in turn sanctify, or make holy those who came into contact with it. We have found that those who deny that Messiah had to be sanctified first for himself, in order to then sanctify his brethren, are at a loss to explain the cleansing of the Altar under the Law of Moses.

We must therefore come to the Christ-Altar to receive sanctification and redemption, that we might become part of that immortal throng who will sing the praises of the Lamb in the day of coming glory. We must receive the Word of God for what it is: absolute Truth, and be devoted to our “reasonable service” which it is our honour to engage in. Then, knowing and serving the Only True God, and His Son whom he hath sent, we will be given “life eternal” to serve the Lord throughout the ages to come.

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