

“John: The Hour Has Come”

Isaiah 55:3-13 • John 17:1-26

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
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This passage, John 17, is considered perhaps one of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible. During his final illness before he died, the Scottish Reformer John Knox had this chapter read to him every day. Thomas Manton, who was Oliver Cromwell’s chaplain, preached a total of forty-five sermons on this passage. We’re going to try to cover it all in one message.

Let’s set the stage of what’s happening. Jesus and his disciples have shared the Passover meal in the upper room. He has shocked them by washing their feet, a job usually left to the lowest servant. And he’s told them that they should be willing to do the same for others. Judas has left to betray Jesus and everyone is on edge because Jesus keeps telling them he’s going to die.

After instituting the Lord’s Supper, which we will also celebrate in a few minutes, Jesus and the disciples get up and head out across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives where he teaches them one last time. Now he pours out his heart to God the Father in this amazing prayer, often called Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer because he is praying for his disciples and for us.

This prayer has three main sections. Jesus actually begins by praying for himself. He says, “Father, the hour has come.” Throughout his ministry he repeatedly said his hour had not come yet. That’s why the officials didn’t arrest him sooner. But now the time has come for Jesus to go to the cross to accomplish his work of salvation. So Jesus says, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” What was the work God gave Jesus to do? He tells us in verse 2: “you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.”

God the Father sent the Son to be born as a human, yet fully God, to reconcile sinful humans with a holy God. Jesus shows us that by accomplishing that mission he brings glory

to God. Living a sinless life, the life that you and I are supposed to live, Jesus glorifies God. But that’s not the only thing that brings God glory. Jesus makes it clear that giving eternal life to all those God has given him glorifies God. Jesus dying to take away *your* sin and reconcile you to God brings glory.

One day a Sunday School teacher asked the students what has to happen for you to go to heaven. After a long silence, one of the kids says, “you have to be dead.” I suspect many of us think about heaven that way. You’re born, you live your life, you die, and you go off to heaven. Eternal life is off in the future. That’s not really the picture we get from the Bible. Dallas Willard used to say, “If you want to go to heaven, today is the day to do it.” What he meant was what Jesus prays here. Eternal life is not something that starts when your physical body dies. Jesus says, “this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” The more we know God, the more we live the life He wants for us. Eternal life. That’s what Jesus came to give us.

We experience eternal life by drawing close to Christ. We draw close to Him through the Bible, through prayer, through worship, through serving, and through spending time with other believers. When you and I live that kind of life, it brings God glory.

With that accomplished, Jesus prays for another kind of glory. In verse 5 he says, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” Once again Jesus is clear that he is fully God, having shared in the glory of the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity.

In the second part of this prayer, through verse 17, Jesus prays for his disciples. But as we will see in verse 20, he is also praying for everyone who will ever be his disciple. He’s praying for us. This part of John 17 really

shines a light on what we call Reformed Theology. Sometimes people will tell me something like, “I don’t believe in Reformed Theology,” and I think, “well then you don’t believe Jesus.” This is the doctrine of election. God has chosen a people for himself and, as Jesus says here, the Father has given them to the Son. Jesus says, “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me.” Notice that Jesus says he’s not praying for the whole world, only for his own.

I think it’s important, at this point, to say that you aren’t to stress about whether you or anyone else are part of the elect. There’s no way for you to know if anyone else is, but you *can* have assurance for yourself. How do you know? In verse 8 Jesus says, “I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.” If you believe in Jesus as he is presented in the Bible, if you are trying to follow him in your life, however imperfectly, if you have ever experienced God at work, those are signs of God’s election. Let me also say that if you are still struggling with belief, that’s also a good sign that God is at work in you. Let me encourage you to pray earnestly that Jesus would confirm that in your heart so you can experience his joy.

Finally, Jesus prays for his Church in the world. Throughout Christian history there have been groups who have tried to separate from the rest of the world. The monasteries where the monks would be secluded from outside influences. The early 19th Century German Pietist movements that created little colonies in the US, like Harmony, Pennsylvania and the Amana Colonies in Iowa, or the Amish who have large settlements in Pennsylvania and Ohio. But Jesus says, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world.” Christians are to live in the world but we are not to be worldly.

In this part of his prayer, Jesus prays for four things for his Church. He prays for unity, for protection from evil, for joy, and for our mission. He prays, “Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” He’s not talking about institutional unity. Instead, the closer we are to Christ, the closer we will be to other believers. That kind of Christian unity is always supernatural. It’s a gift from God.

Jesus also prays that we will be protected from Satan. When we live the life God wants us to live, it puts us at odds with the world. We talked about this a few weeks ago. If you are following Jesus you will have opposition in this world. But remember that Jesus told us this ahead of time and he also assured us that he has overcome the world. We know how the story ends and that should strengthen us to face the challenges.

Third, Jesus prays that his church would experience his joy. In verse 13 he says, “now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” What is Jesus’ joy? Hebrews 12 says that it was for the joy that was set before him that Jesus endured the cross. We tend to focus on the suffering of the cross and we forget that it brought him joy to redeem his people. When you think about what Jesus has done for you it should bring you great joy as well.

Lastly, Jesus prays for his church’s mission in the world. That means this is *our* mission. Verse 17 says, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” In one sense, sanctify means to become more holy. We talk about sanctification when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. But in another sense it means to be set apart for God. Jesus prays that his church would be dedicated to holiness. Then he continues, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” As Christ’s church, we are now charged with carrying on the work Jesus was sent to do. Of course we can’t save anyone. Jesus has already done that

work. But he says, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, *so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*”

Our mission is to let others know, by both our words and our actions, how much God loves them so that they can begin to experience eternal life. That’s the mission. Jesus sends us to make disciples, teaching them everything he has taught us. When we do that it brings God glory and will bring us joy.

Amen.