

The Hour Of Greatest Significance

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[0 : 00] at the very beginning of the chapter. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

I'd like to begin a study tonight of John 17. In the current pandemic that we're all involved with, as we've been seeing and hearing even tonight, it's important to maintain our prayer connection with God and to pray for that situation and to pray especially that God will help us because there are so many aspects to this, as you well know, that we need God's power and God's wisdom to deliver us out of it.

But along with that, it's also really important for us as believers, as Christians, to know that we are within the intercession of Christ. As we pray, to know that that itself is inside Christ's intercession, which we can call prayer, but there's more to it than prayer, Christ's intercession for us is really so much integral to and essential to our own security, our eternal security indeed, as well as our security going through life in this world.

And John 17 gives us an insight into the intercession of Jesus. This is, as we know, before the cross and ahead of his death and resurrection and ascension and the intercession that is taken up once he takes his place at God's right hand.

But nevertheless, it gives us a wonderful insight into the intercessory activity of the Lord. And that's why it's so often referred to as the high priestly prayer of the Lord, because in it, through the office of this priesthood, this high priesthood, this intercession is constantly maintained before God.

[1 : 54] And I'm not saying these are the words that are used in heaven by God, by Jesus before the Father. But what we're saying is here is an insight. Here is a door. Here's a window open into the intercession of Jesus.

So that as we come to understand that more and more, and I think this is really a vital thing for us as we go on in life, the more we enter into what Christ himself is doing in his intercession, the more we understand what that intercession involves, though we will know everything about it, the more we can have access into it, the more we will have the comfort and assurance that comes from knowing that we are actually inside that and that Christ is constantly interceding for us.

So as we go through the chapter, we're going to take our time. And tonight, we're only just going to do the first few words. And we'll just take our time and see where it takes us as God will guide us.

There's so much in it. There's a lot of theology in it. There's a lot of really deep theology in it.

There's also a lot of practical application as we go through it as well. And there's a lot in it about the church and about the relationships within the church and the church's relation to God the Father and to Jesus himself.

So all of that is really spread throughout and joined together wonderfully in this great chapter. And I want tonight just to confine our thoughts to two things. Well, three things really.

[3 : 19] Firstly, the posture that Jesus adopted. You see, when he had spoken these things, we read, he lifted up his eyes to heaven. So before we actually read anything about what he said, we actually read about what he did in terms of his posture.

He lifted up his eyes to heaven. Secondly, we're going to look at the person that Jesus addressed. As he lifted up his eyes to heaven, he then said, Father, the hour has come.

I'm not going to look at the hour itself tonight and what that means. We'll leave that, God willing, for the next time. But the person that Jesus addresses is the person of the Father, his Father.

And that's going to involve two things. In our understanding of there's an aspect of relation or relationship. There are two persons. There's a special relation between them.

But there's also on the part of Jesus and on the part of the Father, there is affection within that relation. Let's look at that briefly. And then we'll finish with just a word about the privileges of

believers that we can draw from even these opening words of this great chapter.

[4 : 30] So the posture that Jesus adopted, he lifted up his eyes to heaven. Sometimes we may be tempted just to skip over the opening words here as if they're not all that significant or take us very far compared to what's found in the other parts of the chapter.

But all the outward actions of Jesus, wherever you read about them in the Gospels, all the outward actions of Jesus reveal what is at that moment in his soul.

It really brings out what is on his mind, what is in his soul, what his own thoughts are, where his focus is. Now, if you cast your mind back to the previous chapter, you can read there in verses 27 to 28, where he said to them, And then in the final few verses, the final verse indeed he says, And then immediately you're into this reference when Jesus had spoken these words.

In other words, having spoken these words, the next thing that the disciples see Jesus doing as he's finishing that speech with them is lifting up his eyes to heaven and beginning to address the Father.

So they're able to take what he has been saying to them in his teaching of them previously, indeed all the way through the previous three chapters, but especially as he's referred to the Father there, the Father having sent him and then coming back to the Father.

[6 : 21] And now they're seeing him lifting up his eyes to heaven and addressing that Father of whom he spoke. In other words, they're seeing him, knowing that there's a crisis ahead of him, having taught them, although they're not able yet to take it in anything like what they would later, knowing that the crisis means the cross, means that he's going to be taken into custody, that he's going to be mistreated, and he's going to die as he taught them.

In that crisis, they see what he's doing is lifting up his eyes to heaven to his Father. He knows what's waiting for him outside. He's in this upper room with these disciples.

He knows very well what's going to happen when he goes out that door. He knows what's waiting him further on as he goes towards the cross itself. And yet you read here that his heart and his thoughts are in heaven.

Before we actually find that his disciples are in his heart, of course they are. That's what the rest of the chapter will bring out by and large. But before that, his eyes are lifted up to heaven.

His thoughts are upon the Father. His attention is given to the Father and to the relation that he has with the Father. And so the posture really reveals that. And there's so much in that for ourselves to draw our assurance and our comfort from.

[7 : 45] When Jesus came to bear the heaviest of his burdens, and the cross itself especially, and what preceded it, this is where his heart was. He wasn't simply merely remembering his people above his own needs at the time, as it were.

He had his mind upon the Father who sent him and the mission that he had given him in the world to complete. And we can draw our example and our comfort from that.

At all times, not least in this time of crisis and COVID restriction that we're facing ourselves.

Because our comfort is not from what we see all around us.

Our comfort is not from what we find in ourselves. Our comfort is not even in the exercise of our own faith or in our prayer activity. Our comfort is always above us.

The source of our comfort is always above us. The source of our comfort is this Father and his relationship to this Jesus and vice versa. That's why you find the likes of Paul in Colossians, chapter 3 of Colossians, where he began saying, If then you have been raised with Christ, and I think if there means, since it is indeed the case that you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

[9 : 11] Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ and God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory.

You see, he's saying that this is where your security is. This is where your life is actually bound up. This is where it's rooted. This is where you are in your persons, as far as God is concerned. You are in Christ, and therefore, in Christ, you are here in his presence, in these eternal heavenly realities.

Similar to what he said to the Ephesians in chapter 1, Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us, or who blessed us with all spiritual blessing, every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus, in the heavenly places.

Where is the location of our blessings? It's not in our own hearts, though we experience blessing there. The location of it, the origin of the root of it, is here in our interceding Savior, in his exaltation, in the Father's relationship with him, and the Father's acceptance of him, and of us in him.

And all of that is built into this posture, where his eyes are lifted up to heaven. It's as if he's saying to the disciples, now, just watch me and watch where I'm looking.

[10:33] And remember, as you go out into the world, that this is where your security lies. It's not in your own abilities. It's not in what you find in the world's abilities. It's not in your ingenuity.

It's not in human wisdom. It's not even in what the church might actually itself be doing. It is in the father-son relationship at the heart of our redemption.

That's the posture that he adopted. That's the posture, the direction, the bias of our lives as Christians too.

That's the first thing then, moving on from there, because there's so much in that. We're just, in a sense, skipping over things, although I hope we're going to go into some depth. That's the posture that he adopted.

But that immediately takes you to the person that he addressed in the word, Father. Lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

[11:34] And in the very word, Father, as Jesus uses it there, in the context in which he is then placed, there is both relation and affection.

You know very well that God is a triune God. That God consists of three persons, the trinity that he is, and that that trinity is essential to God.

If you take any of these three persons away and deny that person's existence, then you really have interrupted the Bible's own teaching of what is essential to God and to our understanding of God.

And we cannot actually understand our redemption properly unless we begin with it as a redemption that's come from God as the triune God.

And here you're getting access to the relation between God the Father and God the Son. Each of these persons is Holy God, as is the Holy Spirit.

[12:40] Each of these persons has their own distinctive as the person they are within the Godhead. There aren't three gods. There is one God and three persons, persons in this relationship.

So their distinctives are that the Father is the Father, the Son is not the Father, He is the Son. And in terms of a redemption, the Father sends the Son, the Son comes and gives obedience in this word to the Father.

Now, it's been historically the case, and here we're going to enter into a little more depth in the theology of this, and it's important we do that because the more we're grounded in the theology of what's here, the more we are then equipped practically to deal with all the things that arise from that in a practical Christian life.

So historically, the Trinity has been referred to as, on the one hand, the ontological Trinity, and on the other hand, the economic Trinity.

What that means is basically the ontological Trinity. Ontology is a study of being. And the ontological Trinity, these three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are together one being.

[14:01] And the ontological Trinity is a way of referring to God as a Trinity and referring to that Trinity in itself without regard to God's work either in creation or redemption.

So the ontological Trinity is God without taking account of what God has done and is doing in creation and also in redemption.

And the economic Trinity takes in the relationship between the three persons, but this time taking account of the activity of God and the roles of these three persons in creation and redemption.

And although there is no change in who they are and in their Godhood, there is no change in them being fully God. There is a change between the Father and the Son, and there's also a relation with the Spirit there, but there's a change in the relation between the Father and the Son because the Son comes to be sent and the Father is the sender.

And the Son comes to be the servant and the Father is the one to whom he is responsible as the servant fulfilling the task he's come to do. Jesus has always been and always was the eternal Son.

[15:21] Remember that great text in Hebrews 5, verse 8, where you find the writer to the Hebrews saying, though he was a son or were a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which

he suffered.

Though son, that's where you begin, he always was the Son of God, the eternal Son, fully God, yet he learned obedience. He became the Son as a servant.

You're entering in from the ontological trinity into the economic trinity when you think of that he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

And as fully God as he ever was, he became what he was not until he took our nature to himself and became a servant.

So here's the relation between the Son here and the Father that he refers to. and it's taking us into this economic trinity or the trinity looked at in terms of the working out of redemption and the relation between these two persons in the working out of a redemption and that is absolutely basic to our understanding of what redemption consists of and how it has come about.

[16:40] Now that is, as we said, it's important to tie in other references and other verses in scripture not just in the New Testament in the Old as well because one of the beauties of doing this kind of study is that you're taking account of where scripture elsewhere refers to these same concepts and these same truths.

And you know, the more you do it, like I mentioned in a minute from the Psalms and on to Acts and then into Romans, and the more you do that, the more you become absolutely convinced if you needed to be convinced that this Bible has to be the word of God.

You could not possibly have taken in human wisdom and human ability something that was prophesied of in the time of David and then came to be fulfilled through such remarkable events as the incarnation of the Son of God and his death and resurrection and ascension to glory in order to fulfill that verse in the Psalms.

And yes, that's what you find that that is one of the ways in which scripture is so wonderfully threaded together as a divine book. And you can see from that the features of its divine origin and indeed its nature as coming from the mouth and the mind of God.

So within the economic trinity, the Son comes to take our human nature to himself by incarnation.

And again, just in passing, it's important when Jesus is here addressing the Father, he is still the eternal Son and the Father has not changed in his essence or in his Godhood, but he's addressing now as the incarnate Son, the Son in our nature, he is addressing the Father in that context.

[18:32] The nature he took to himself in which he appears here before the disciples is fully human and yet it is not fallen humanity.

It is complete humanity. It is fully human. There is nothing lacking of a complete human being in the being, in the humanity of Jesus.

And if people say, well, but he doesn't have any sin, you have to remember that, well, sin did not form part of our humanity as created. We were fully human as created in Adam.

There was no sin. Sin came in by our own volition, by our will, by choosing that which was evil. But you don't need to have sin present in a human being in order for that human to be fully human.

And there's one of the wonders of the incarnation that the Son of God came into the world by taking full humanity to himself and yet without sin and without fallenness in his humanity.

[19:40] So he is, in relation to the Father, by incarnation, he's addressing him here as Father. But he's also, he knows his Father as the head of his people, of the family that he came to save.

Let me take you to Hebrews chapter 2. We're going to flit around from a number of texts that are important just to refer to them. Hebrews chapter 2 speaks of Jesus in this way.

Chapter 2, verses 10 to 14. And it begins with a reference to God the Father. It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory.

That is God the Father. Because he should go on to say that he should make the founder of their salvation, that's the Son, perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin.

That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation, I will sing your praise. And again, I will put my trust in him.

[20:52] And again, behold I and the children God has given me. Since therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, that's the sons that God the Father is to bring to glory.

Since they share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same. That through death, he might destroy the one who has the power of death and so on.

He's talking there about the incarnation, the Son of God, eternal Son, taking our human nature, real, full human nature, and doing that as the representative of the family of the saved, if you like. He appears before God as the incarnate Son, but he's there also as the head of this saved people. And as he speaks here, Father, the elders come, is representing them. He stands there for their benefit, on their behalf. He's going to later, shortly after this, appear in their place, graphically on the cross.

[21 : 58] But here, he is the Son, speaking to the Father, in the economic trinity, and working out of our redemption, by incarnation, by representation.

Now, in passing, I'm going to mention how that's also in the Bible, this relation between the Son and the Father, and the economic trinity, includes his resurrection.

Remarkable version, Psalm 2, where in Psalm 2, you have, as it were, again, God in conversation, where he's saying here, as for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill, God speaking, I will tell of the decree the Lord said to me, there's another person introduced there, you are my son, today, I have begotten you, and there's, ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage.

And it finishes, remarkably, for the Old Testament, in verse 12, kiss the son, lest he be angry and he perish in the way. Because it's only in the New Testament that the sonship of Jesus is really disclosed to us fully in a way that is here in John 17.

But you would see there, there's a reference there to God making the son. He refers to him as fulfilling in himself the decree, you are my son, today I have begotten you.

[23 : 27] Now keep that in mind as you come forward to Acts chapter 13. And in Acts chapter 13, we read as follows at verse 33, where you find that the reference there is through the preaching of Paul and Barnabas who had gone to Antioch in Pisidia.

And I'll say, well, through that, you come to verse 33. Well, we can read from verse 29. When he had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, the cross, laid him in a tomb.

But God raised him from the dead. And for many days, he appeared to those who had come with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. And now, we are his witnesses to the people.

And we bring you the good news, the gospel, that what God promised to the fathers, he has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus.

As also it is written in the second psalm, you are my son, today I have begotten you. You see how the resurrection of Jesus there is keyed into his relation as the son to the father within the working out of redemption.

[24 : 43] And so all of that is built into, as we take these scriptures into account, into this magnificent and wonderful interaction between the father and the son in this particular context.

There is the relation of the son to the father, not now, merely in terms of what he always wants, but of what he is in the working of redemption as the father's sent servant as the head of his people and also as it will be through his resurrection from the dead.

But there's also affection as well. I know the times really pass and pass, so let's just say this in passage. There's also affection. When he says father, that is really essentially for the son and for the father, an expression of love, an expression of eternal, divine love.

And that too is essential to our understanding of God. God is love. There is nothing more definitive in the Bible in describing God and the very being of God than that.

and that follows through into this relationship in the economic trinity between the father and the son. That love has not gone away. That love will not go away even when it comes to Jesus laying down his life.

[26 : 04] Because you remember John, in that other great reference in John chapter 10 and at verse 17, Jesus saying that for this reason, the father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it again.

No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my father.

Not the slightest evidence of a lack of love on the part of the father to him or him to the father.

Indeed, it's the opposite. There's a specific reference to the father in an outcropping or outflowing of his love precisely on account of the fact that the son is laying down his life.

It's a reciprocal love. And despite the fact that this hour as we'll see next time, there's an hour that's filled with judgment against sin and with a penalty of sin, it is still father and the son that together

face that critical moment and that love is never affected nor is it diverted even at the point of the depth of the agony of the cross in the mystery of that moment of these hours.

There is the father's love in action for his people but also including for his son. And there is the son's action in love fulfilling the father's requirement.

[27 : 41] So where does that take us? Well, tonight let's finish with this. The privileges that we have as believers. We've mentioned already the fact that lifting up his eyes shows us that that is the pattern that we can emulate, that we can seek to follow for ourselves.

That our consciousness of where our prayers are addressed to is to the most high God but who is our father to. And that's the wondrous thing, isn't it? that by our adoption think of this by our adoption by the grace of God through which we are adopted Christ the son's father is our father too. Becomes our father also. As surely as God the father is the father of God the son so God the father is the father of the adopted sons that the father is pleased to take to glory through the making of the salvation, the captain of their salvation perfects these sufferings.

Now tonight you derive your comfort from this father and the relation that he has with the son and vice versa because you derive comfort from the fact that not only do you have a father in heaven, the father in heaven, the same father as Jesus has but you also know that that father has authority that it's that father who is tonight on the throne of the universe along with the son and you take comfort from the fact that because of who that father is and what the son has done and what together they have accomplished in the economic trinity working out our redemption our status is no less than sons and his care as a father is assured for us in the relation that we have to him as sons based upon the relation that his son has to him as the eternal son and the son who became the servant and that also includes our affection our love because it's a relation of love between us as sons and the father as it was between the eternal son and the father and in all our difficulties our trials our challenges our pains our afflictions remember this one word father and all that's built into it even in this context let alone all the rest of the information we have in the bible about what it means for God to be our father but whenever you use this word father here is what

Thomas Manton said in his commentary on John therefore he said say to Christ he's talking about the afflictions the difficulties of God's people and he's been talking about the need for patience and submission just the way that Christ himself did but he says therefore say as Christ in John 18 verse 11 the cup which my father has given me shall I not drink of it it is a bitter cup but it comes from the hand of the father our father gave it to us and our elder brother began it for us we should love the cup the better ever since Christ's lips touched and I really cannot improve on those words at all these last few words that last sentence that struck me when I read it earlier today we should love this is the cup of affliction I know it's difficult but what he's saying is we should love the cup better ever since

[31 : 36] Christ's lips touched this he's done for you for me may bless these thoughts honest words to us tonight we're going to conclude by singing in