

John 17:20-26 (part 2)

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That they may with me where I am

Opinions and comments **about death** are not in short supply...

Some people attempt to place a cynical or humorous twist to the fact of death. Like **Woody Allen**: *'I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens.'*

Garrison Keillor: *"They say such nice things about people at their funerals that it makes me sad that I'm going to miss mine by just a few days."*

Others promote self-determination... **Jimi Hendrix**: *"I'm the one that's got to die when it's time for me to die, so let me live my life the way I want to."*

There are those who bury their heads in the sand about life after death... **Mark Twain**: *"I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."*

I even found some thought-provoking observations like... **Terry Pratchett**: *"It is said that your life flashes before your eyes just before you die. That is true, it's called Life."*

Today however in the context of the High Priestly prayer of Jesus, we are given insight into what must be one of **the greatest statements** about the death of every believer.

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the earth.

With God's help it **my intention** to show you something of the glory that the words of Jesus in this verse place on the matter of dying as a Christian (Julius Horne).

To begin I want to consider something **unique** about the prayers of Jesus...

1 The Father always answers the prayers of Jesus

While standing in front of **the tomb of Lazarus**, Jesus said, *John 11:41 ..."Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."*

The Father and the Son are always united in purpose; they are never at cross purposes with each other. The Father always **gives Jesus** what He asks for.

In this prayer before us today Jesus (successfully) asks that *"they whom you have given me"*, that is, those whom the Father has given Him, **may be with Him in heaven**.

Been amongst those 'given to Jesus' is crucial to this blessing.

We have in a previous message considered what it means **to be given** to Christ. It is what the Father did in eternity past.

Remember a few weeks ago while looking at *John 17:6ff* asking about each other's identity as a believer, **we concluded** from what Jesus prayed (*yours they were, and you gave them to me, I manifested your name to the people you gave me, they responded...*) that this is the heritage of every believer.

Leading us to see that **true Christianity** is not rooted in the shallowness of our decisions but in the depth of the character of God.

In order to have further clarity about who the beneficiaries of this prayer are, I want to direct you to **a description** of those given to Christ in *John 6:37* *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*

Here is the point **of application**: If you have come to Christ as a sinner needing salvation, you are providing evidence that you have been given to Him by His Father.

So, we see that Jesus prayer in *v24* **absolutely guarantees** that everyone who comes to Him in salvation, will be with Him in heaven.

If you are not sure of your salvation you need to throw yourself in all of your helplessness on the One who prays this prayer in heaven even today, and you will find that your eternity in Heaven is guaranteed by that prayer.

2 The connection that this prayer has with the death of a believer

There is **a connection** between this prayer and the death of a believer.

Whenever a child of God dies, **God is answering** this prayer of His Son, in respect of that particular Christian.

The death of a Christian is **no mere chance** event; even a tragic “accidental” death is no accident; it is God the Father putting forth His hand and bringing a particular soul home to Himself, in answer to the prayer of His Son.

John Brown: *“The days of every one of His chosen ones, are determined, “the number of their months are with Him – the Prince of life and the Lord of death – He “has appointed them bounds that they cannot pass”. When any one of them has served his purpose on earth, when he has ‘finished his course’, the Saviour presents to his Father the prayer...John 17:24. The appointed providential agency, whether it be decay or disease, accident, violence, moves immediately at the expression of His will, for ‘all are His servants’: the connection between body and the soul is dissolved; the mortal frame, bereft of life, returns to its kindred dust; and the soul, now more than every alive, goes to where the Saviour is, to be with Him there, and to behold His glory...”*

Do you see what that truth means when we gather **at the funeral** of a true believer? It is why Paul saw his own death as a gain and not a loss.

And it is **not only** the death of each individual believer that demonstrates God's answer to the prayer of Jesus...

In the last day, when the graves are opened and the dead in Christ will rise and those who are alive will be caught up to meet Him in the air; it will still be God the Father answering the prayer of His Son.

3 Focus on what it is that Jesus asks for them

Give attention to the words *...may be with me where I am.*

Jesus was still on earth when He prayed these words, but **He prays as if** He is in Heaven already. Remember that *John 17* should be seen as specimen of Jesus' intercession in Heaven today.

To have His own with Him in heaven is **the crowning petition** of His prayer. This is why He came to earth in human nature; this is why He lived and died and rose again and ascended into heaven.

It is not exaggeration to say that the whole course of **human history** is governed by this petition of Christ. God arranges all human affairs (*Romans 8:28*) to facilitate the taking out of a people from mankind, so that this people may be with Christ in heaven.

He is asking for what he **had promised** His disciples when they were troubled about His leaving *John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, 3 I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

Jesus knows **the longing** of His own peoples' hearts; He knows that just to be with Him will be heaven for them.

Which does **prompt the question**; is this your and my idea of heaven. This is a searching question – will it be heaven for us, just to be with Jesus?

We may tell from an honest answer to this, whether we really are Christians.

Heaven is not just a place of rest and peace; not just an escape from a weary journey through a tiresome life. **The heaven of the Bible** is to be with Christ; the true Christian hope is to be with Christ.

No matter how weary the body may be – for the true believer, the spirit leaps in anticipation of being with Jesus.

Would you find **overflowing delight** in this kind of heaven?

We must **remember** that Jesus longs to have His people with Him, not simply for their own joy, but for His delight of having them with Him.

Heaven will not be heaven for Him, **unless** His people are with Him. The Body must be with the Head.

4 The final ingredient of His peoples' joy in heaven

In Jesus **estimation** the cherry on top, for the happiness (joy / delight) of His peoples' happiness in heaven is... *to see my glory that you have given me...*

We **long for the moment** when we can look beyond the veil and gaze directly upon the purity of God's splendour. We long to realize what Jesus pronounced as His blessing on the *pure at heart* - that they would see God.

That **will finally happen** in heaven. *Revelation 22:4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*

Ancient theologians called this the "**beatific vision**". The term comes from 3 Latin words that together mean "a happy-making sight".

To see God's face is the highest and grandest of all aspirations. To see God's face carries with it the **ultimate blessedness** of the human soul. Every other attempt to be satisfied is pitiful and meaningless.

John promises us that though mystery surrounds so much of what lies before us in heaven, **of this much we can be sure**: that there "*we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*". (1 John 3:2). Sanctification will be complete and we will indeed be those who are *pure in heart...*

This promise of seeing God's face assures us that in heaven **God will show** Himself to us in a way that goes beyond a theophany (an external manifestation of God's glory such as the burning bush).

The vision **will transcend** that of a burning bush or a pillar of cloud. We will see more than an outward representation or a reflected image. We will see Him "*as He is*". We will peer, somehow, into His very essence.

To see God will be **our greatest joy** and this is the wonder of our redemption – to be welcomed into the very presence of our Lord and see Him face to face.

Now we struggle on. We seek the face of God in prayer, meditation on the word but then we will know full and final satisfaction.

In this life, we **catch glimpses** of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ and it is wonderful. It spurs us on to a closer and deeper seeking after Him.

But in Heaven, when **the limitations** of the flesh have gone, and the Son of Righteousness has gone up over us, and we stand in the undimmed glory of His presence, we shall look on His face, and the deepest longings of our hearts will be filled to overflowing for ever and ever.

5 The job will be completed

In the final verse of this prayer **Jesus promises** that in this age He will keep make the Father known.

John 17:25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Jesus had been making **the Father known** and will continue to so down through the ages

We need to see that in making the Father known "they" experience **the love of God**.

It is love like the love the Father has for the Son; once again pointing to the **supernatural nature** of conversion to Christ; the believer then having the capacity to love in a way that is so different to what the world is used to.

It is the kind of love essential for the gathering of God's people into **united groups**; being the visual aid to the world that Jesus and the gospel is of God and not of man.

And ultimately the work of gathering all who are His will be done and Jesus will draw this age as we know it to a close.

Conclusion

Is death something you fear? It is true that most of us hold on to what we know and are familiar with. We know this life and we love the people God has given us.

That said, shouldn't we as those who know and love God **pray that the** eyes of our hearts be enlightened to see and know more of the riches of His glorious inheritance...?

Shouldn't we **join Paul** in declaring *1 Corinthians 15:55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*

Are you ready to die? Have you come to Jesus and received the gift of eternal life; forgiveness and the blessing of knowing and being known by God?

It would so sad if anyone among us turns away the offer of salvation and joins the ranks of **Jimi Hendrix**: *"I'm the one that's got to die when it's time for me to die, so let me live my life the way I want to."*

God forbid that you die in your sins as one helpless and hopeless and separated from God for all eternity.