

General Comments on John 17

In the preceding chapter, Jesus tells the apostles he will no longer be praying to the Father in their behalf, but they will be praying to the Father themselves in his name (cf. 16:26). Here, Jesus offers the final prayer in behalf of them and all his disciples.

The prayer is a theological explanation of how Jesus will act as intercessor to get others into God's presence. Jesus says he has completed his mission and is returning to the Father (v. 1-5), and explains what that mission was and why he completed it successfully (v. 6-12). He then indicates he has commissioned others on earth with a calling similar to the one the Father gave him, and asks the Father to protect them (v. 13-19) so they may preach the gospel to all who will hear the gospel message (v. 20-23). Jesus then requests of the Father that all those who do believe in him be present with him when he is in the Father's kingdom (v. 24-26). Jesus thus establishes his position as mediator between his disciples and the Father. He has succeeded in meriting the Father's presence, and having done so, he asks the Father if he can bring those who believe in him as well. Note the entire chapter sets up (e.g., the "I pray" of the KJV or "I ask" in the NAS in v. 9, 15, 20) the expression of the desire in v. 24.

Two major themes underlie the theology of the chapter: that of unity and of giving. Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the oneness between himself and the Father, and then says his apostles and disciples are to similarly achieve this kind of unity with himself, and therefore the Father as well (v. 11, 21-23). In doing so, the apostles and disciples will enjoy the kingdom of the Father as does Jesus. This theme is well known and plainly understood among Christendom. The word "one" is used six times in the chapter.

The second major theme is that of giving. This theme is generally overlooked despite the words "given" and "gavest" being used seventeen times in the chapter. The doctrine of giving is the opposite of, but connected to, the doctrine of redemption. In the Atonement the Son redeems the sinner from the Adversary. But, the Father gives the Son His children so they may be brought back to the Father. The thesis of the doctrine of giving is:

thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he

should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him (v. 1) ... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me (v. 24)

The Law of Moses defines regulations of redemption, and they are laid out clearly along family lines (cf. Lev. 25:23-55). Family members should redeem one another in the event they fall into debt. This is the principle Jesus is drawing on. The Father has given the Son all of His children. Jesus has redeemed all of those children, except the son of perdition, so they are back into the family. Jesus then gives all of the children back to the Father.

Overall, the chapter is a lengthy explanation of Moses 1:39.

Aside from doctrinal points of theology, there is considerable pathos in Jesus' appeal to the Father (the New American Standard is used below as the pathos is somewhat obscured by the KJV):

While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them is perished but the son of perdition (v. 12).

I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one (v. 15).

Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am (v. 24).

Jesus is appealing to the Father out of the feelings of his heart. Jesus has struggled through a difficult three year ministry and is about to undergo the trials of the Garden of Gethsemane and the crucifixion, so he is emotionally invested in the outcome. His mission, as described in v. 6-12, is about to be accomplished, so he expresses his desires to the Father that it be accepted, and the outcome be fruitful.

Comments on John 17

1 THESE words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. 4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

v1-5 Jesus asks the Father to honor himself so the Father will be honored as well (v. 1) when he uses the power given him to give eternal life to the Father's children (v. 2). Eternal life is achieved by knowing the Father and His Son (v. 3). Jesus has honored the Father during his mortal ministry by accomplishing the mission given him (v. 4). And, now that the mission is completed, Jesus asks the Father to return to the position of eternal honor he had prior to assuming his mortal ministry (v. 5).

v1 "glorify", this word is used repeatedly in the chapter. The Greek term for "glory" is "doxa" and "glorify" is "doxazo". The term "doxa" would most literally translate to the English "seemly", meaning a highly favorable opinion, or that which is fitting or becoming with respect to propriety or good taste, or that which bestows honor, esteem, respect, and reverence.

In other words, Jesus has done a good job and will therefore be held in high esteem by his Father, and the Father will similarly be honored for commissioning and empowering the Son.

v2 "power over all flesh", cp. D&C 93:15-17.

v3 "know thee", the knowing of the Father is presented as essential for salvation. According to v. 25 Jesus and the disciples know the Father while the world doesn't know him. This idea of knowledge draws on the concept conveyed by the Hebrew term "yada". The idea in "yada" is knowledge not of an academic variety, but rather an experiential knowledge or personal familiarity through close association. Jesus and his disciples know the Father because they do His works.

"Jesus Christ", note Jesus is speaking about himself in the third person. He does so for two reasons. First, as stated in 16:23-26 the disciples will be praying to the Father in Jesus' name, thus Jesus shows them by example how to do so. Second, in v. 11 Jesus states plainly that he is leaving the world, so that mortal aspect of himself is ending and he is returning to the Father as the glorified Son, as referenced in v. 5, which position he enjoyed before his mortal ministry and will be shortly returning to.

Additional meaning can be derived from the meaning of the name. Jesus could be using his proper name as a name-title. "Jesus Christ" in Hebrew would be "yehoshua messiah", which literally translates to "anointed help of the Lord". Jesus could therefore be saying "eternal life is knowing the Father and His anointed helper".

6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. 7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. 8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received [them], and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. 9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. 10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. 11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we [are]. 12 while I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

v6-12 Jesus has taught the apostles, the sons of God, all things which the Father has taught him, and they have believed and kept those teachings (v. 6-8). As Jesus will be leaving shortly (v. 11), he prays to the Father (v. 9) that those whom He has given him (v. 10) will be kept and protected so they will be united with Him as Jesus was (v. 11). Jesus then indicates that while he was with them he kept and protected them, with only the willfully rebellious Judas Iscariot being lost, as predicted (v. 12).

Jesus reviews his earthly mission and indicates he has accomplished what he was tasked with. And, at the end of the mission, he is concerned for the well-being of the apostles. While he was with them he kept them on the straight and narrow,

but now that he is leaving he is concerned about them.

13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

v13-19 Jesus more specifically prays that the apostles be protected from those in the world that hate them. Jesus indicates he is praying for them so they might have joy through him (v. 13), despite the antagonism of the world. The apostles have accepted Jesus' teachings where the world has rejected them, and so the world hates them (v. 14). Jesus prays the Father will protect them from the adversary while they are in the world (v. 15), because they are like Jesus and not of the world (v. 16). Jesus asks the Father to sanctify them by keeping them in the truth (v. 17), protecting them from the lies of the world. Just as the Father has commissioned the Son, so has the Son commissioned the apostles (v. 18), and the Son has sanctified himself so they may be sanctified as well (v. 19).

v15 This verse highlights the antagonism between Jesus and Satan when it comes to earthly followers, cp. 8:25 and 8:44.

v17 The Son is the personification of the word and of truth, in that he lived and exemplified it. Just as the Son is sanctified by living the truth, so may the disciples be sanctified, cp. 1 John 2:4-6.

v19 "I sanctify myself", cp. 6:69, 10:36.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

v20-23 Jesus expands the preceding request from the apostles in specific (v. 13-19) to all disciples in general. As Jesus has commissioned the apostles to spread the Gospel (v. 18) there will be those who believe on their words (v. 20). Jesus asks the Father to unite all believers in him, so those in the world can accept and believe in him (v. 21). The honor the Father gave the Son, the Son has given to all believers, so that all of them may be united (v. 22) and perfected in love (v. 23)

v21 See Philip. 3:9 for a definition of what it means to "be...in him".

v22-23 "one", much is made out of the "oneness" of God according to monotheism. Here, "oneness" is defined plainly as an issue of unity and not one of numerical counting. This same idea of unity is well attested to, cf. Acts 4:32, 1 Cor. 6:17, Hebr. 2:11.

v22 The glory, or honor, referenced here is that same glory spoken of in v. 5 and 10.

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 26 And 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.

v24-26 Having set up the context of the question by identifying who in specific (v. 13-19) and who in general (v. 20-23) he is making the request for, and why he is making the request (v. 1-12), Jesus now asks the Father to allow him to bring in all those whom the Father has given him into the Father's kingdom along with himself so they may be witnesses of the Son's honor and the Father's love (v. 24). The world does not want to know the Father, but the Son does (v. 25), and he tells his disciples about Father so they may be filled with His love as the Son is (v. 26).

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