

Reading sermon
by Rev. Rodney Kleyn

“Jesus’ Prayer for Us to be with Him”

- 1.The Confidence of this Prayer
- 2.The Content of this Prayer
- 3.The Consummation of this Prayer

Reading: John 17
Text: John 17:24-26
Psalms: 35, 27, 203, 32

The text for our sermon is John 17:24-26 where Jesus prays, “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. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 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.”

Beloved congregation, What a beautiful prayer this is. Jesus says, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory.”

Have you ever stood at the deathbed or the grave of a loved one, whom you know is a child of God? That is a very difficult thing to do. It is the end of our earthly ties. Death has come and taken one away from us. A sadness and a loneliness overwhelms us. Dear child of God, as you go through that, you should think of these words of Jesus, this prayer: “That they may be with me where I am.” In the death of a believer, this prayer of Jesus is answered. Psalm 116 says, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” Why? Because in death God brings His people to be with Him in glory.

We should not be afraid of death but should see it as the doorway to heaven, as God’s servant, to bring us to glory. When you see your loved one dying, when you have to bring a child to the grave, when you are left behind as a widow, then remember, God is answering this prayer of Jesus to bring all His own to be with Him in heaven. And someday, all of God’s people, all of us, will be with Him, too.

What a beautiful prayer! There is great triumph in these words of Jesus. “They all will be with Me in glory!” As believers, we should have that kind of triumph in the face of death. Like Job, in chapter 19:25-27: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” That is

triumph in death.

Or, like Paul in I Corinthians 15:51-57: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.... O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?... Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Or, again, you hear this confidence of Paul in II Corinthians 5:1: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven.”

Or, again, in Philippians 1, he says: “I have a desire to depart and to be with the Lord, which is far better; for to me to live is Christ, but to die is gain.” There is a confidence, a certainty, a comfort that we should have as we think about death. And this prayer of Jesus, “that they may be with Me,” breathes with this certainty.

Let’s look, today, at these verses under the theme, “Jesus Prayer for Us to be with Him”

We will notice three things.

First: The Confidence of this Prayer

Second: The Content of this Prayer

Third: The Consummation of this Prayer

First, we consider the Confidence of this Prayer, and by that we mean that Jesus is confident, he is absolutely sure and certain, as he makes this prayer, that God will answer it just as he asks.

In these verses, Jesus not only finishes His high priestly prayer of chapter 17, but He also brings to a conclusion an extended discourse of comfort to His disciples that began in chapter 14:1. The disciples were troubled that Jesus was leaving them. And so He begins in chapter 14: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions:...I go to prepare a place for you,... I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” And now, four chapters later, He finishes on that same note: “Father, that they may be with me where I am.”

Let us remember that Jesus prayed these words out loud in the presence of His disciples. He did it for them to hear, for us to hear. And we should be impressed with the certainty and the assurance with which He spoke.

Jesus here does not simply wish or hope or even simply request something. No, it is much more certain and sure than that. He addresses God with confidence. “Father,” He says. “Father.”

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He taught them to approach God with a childlike confidence. “Our Father, which art in heaven.” And now He uses the same address to God Himself. But there is a difference. This is the difference. Jesus prays, not as an adopted child of God, but as the eternal Son of God, equal Himself in power and glory to the Father. He speaks in the verses of the eternal glory and love that He shared with the Father. He does not come to God as a beggar. He does not come uncertain. He is saying, “Father, let us bring them to glory.” That is the force of what Jesus says.

That confidence comes out in the words that He uses in this petition. He says, “I will that they be with me.” That is a rather strange way to make a petition. It is closer to a demand than a request. If our children would come to us and say, “I will that you give me my supper,” we would say to them, “That’s not the way to ask for things.” And, in fact, nowhere in the Bible will you find God’s people praying that way. We are taught to make our requests to God with humility and reverence, in the form of a petition, not a demand. But when it comes to Jesus, it is quite appropriate that He put it this way, because He is expressing, as the Son, the will of the triune God—the unchanging, eternal will of God. Jesus is expressing the heart and mind of God, the will of God which cannot be changed. All that the Father has given to Christ will come to Him and will be with Him in glory eternally.

This prayer, I say, breathes with certainty. What a comfort for the believer in death.

That certainty comes out again in the grounds or the reasons that Jesus gives for why God should answer this prayer.

In verse 24, Jesus speaks of the fact that the Father has given them to Him and of the Father’s eternal love for Him as the Son. “For thou hast loved me from before the foundation of the world.” This is what He means, that if God would not bring His elect, those given Him, to glory, if one of them should perish, that would be the same as God breaking His love, His eternal love, to His Son. “Father,” He says, “You’ve given them to Me and You love Me with an eternal unchanging love, and so, You must bring them to glory.” The reason is God’s eternal election of them which cannot be changed. In eternity, the Father loved the Son, and chose him to be the head of his elect people. Ephesians 1:4 puts it this way, “According as he hath chosen us in him (that is, in Christ), before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love.” Because God has chosen his elect people in Christ, and loved them in Christ, that love can never be reversed or changed. And because of this, none of his elect will perish. Jesus prayer will be answered. All of them will be taken to glory.

And then, in verse 25, Jesus gives two more reasons for God to hear this prayer. First, God is a righteous Father. “O righteous Father,” He says. Jesus means, “I have finished the work that I had to do for them. I have kept them. I have taught them. I have done everything necessary for their salvation.” He speaks here before the cross as though it is accomplished. He says, “I have laid down my life for them. O righteous

Father, their sins have been paid. Bring them to glory. Be righteous.” You see, the cross is the demonstration of the righteousness of God. On Christ, God pours out all the wrath and judgement which is against the sins of his elect people. Christ pays the price for their sins. And because God is righteous, he cannot and will not send a single one of those for whom Christ died to hell. He cannot do that. He is a righteous God.

And then at the end of verse 25, you have the other reason Jesus gives for Father to hear his prayer. He appeals to the faith of His people. He says, “These have known thee, and have known that Thou hast sent Me. Father,” He is saying, “they believe. Their trust is in Me. They find all their salvation in what I have done for them. Father, bring them to glory.” Not one of those who believe and trust in Christ can perish.

And so, this is a prayer that rings with certainty. It is closer to a pronouncement than a petition. We could rephrase it this way, “All that the Father has given me shall be with me where I am, to behold my glory.” Believing in Jesus, we can have assurance and confidence of a place in Father’s house of many mansions. We do not have to be afraid of death or hell.

That brings us, second, to the Content of this prayer.

There are two parts to Jesus’ petition here. First, “that they may be with me where I am,” and then, second, “that they may behold my glory.”

You will notice that when Jesus says, “that they may be with me where I am,” He speaks in the present tense: where I am. And, again, there is confidence in the petition. At the moment He speaks these words, He is in Judea, about to be arrested and crucified. But He has in view where He will be beyond His death and resurrection—in His eternal state of glory. He means in heaven—that they may be with Me where I am. He has heaven and bringing His people to heaven with Him before Him as the goal and the purpose of His going to the cross.

Now, what is heaven? There are many different ideas that people have about what heaven is. Most of them are very earthly. Many people describe heaven in terms of what they like here on the earth. If a person likes golf, that is what he hopes heaven will be. If he likes shopping or horseback riding, that is what heaven will be for him. And so heaven is viewed by most as the best of what you enjoy in this life. Maybe a slight improvement because some of the difficulties of life will be gone.

Is that a proper view of heaven? No, it is not. And thank God that it is not. Heaven is portrayed in Scripture as the indescribable. It is something beyond our experience. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither has anyone ever been able even to imagine the things that God has in store for those who love Him. The essence, the heart, the joy, the pleasure of heaven is described by Jesus here in the words “that they may be with me.” That is what heaven will be: to be with Jesus. Heaven is not, first, deliverance from suffering. It is not the pearly gates and the streets of gold. But, that

they may be with Me. That's heaven—to be with Jesus, to enjoy covenant life and communion with Him in perfection.

Death, all by itself, is a very lonely state. Cemeteries are very lonely places. Hell is even more lonely. But in heaven, the covenant Christ will bring us to be with Him. Revelation 21: "God himself shall be with them and be their God, and they shall be his people." That is heaven—to be with Jesus.

That is why heaven can only be for believers. I suspect that there are people, many of them, who will say, "If that's all heaven is, to be with Jesus, then I'm not interested. I have a lot more fun without Jesus." It is only if you believe in Jesus today and love Him in this life, that you will be with Him in heaven. And if you do not believe, and you do not love Him, you will spend eternity without Him in the suffering of hell.

As we sing in Psalter 203, "To live apart from God is death."

And, this needs to be emphasized, because today there is a crazy notion about, one that has become quite popular, that everyone is going to be in heaven in the end, that hell will be empty because God's love wins. God's love is supposed to be so strong that no one will be in hell. You know what that message is? It is a crafty lie of the devil that comes from hell itself. Satan does not want us to think that hell is real. It is a message that tells people that they do not need to believe the gospel and they do not need to trust in Jesus for salvation. It is a lie that tells people that they are OK where they are at—that they do not need to repent of their sins, that they do not need to put their faith in Christ. And it denies the whole gospel of the cross and the death and the suffering of Christ for sin. You do not need the Savior. You are OK, because God's love will win in the end and everybody will be in heaven.

No, Jesus says that heaven is to be with Him. If you do not want Him in your life today, you will not have Him in life eternal. Heaven is for all those whom the Father has given to Jesus (v. 24). Heaven is for all those who heard and believed on the Son. Heaven is reserved for believers only. Heaven is secured by Jesus' death for God's elect alone. And hell, the Bible tells us, the lake of fire, the place of eternal suffering, is reserved, it is prepared by a just God, for all who refuse to obey the gospel and will not repent of their sins and believe and trust in Jesus alone for salvation. Hell is real. And if you are not a believer, you ought to be terrified of death because it will bring you before God the Judge and lead you to the eternal lake of fire.

And so Jesus' prayer for believers is "that they may be with me."

Then the second part of His request is: "that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me."

What is that glory? Jesus does not mean His inherent glory as the eternal Son of God. Only God can see that glory and live. He does not mean, either, the glory that

He displayed on earth during His ministry, which the disciples beheld in his miracles and teaching. Nor does He mean His glory that He shows in and through us by our godly living. Rather, He refers to the glory of His exaltation: "which thou hast given me." The idea of "given" is rewarded. This is the glory that the apostle Paul saw on the Damascus road, and that John saw by vision in Revelation 1. The glory spoken of in Philippians 2: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."

When Jesus says, "that they may behold my glory," He means that His people will not only see but partake in and reflect His glory in themselves perfectly. It will not be simply that we will see Him. But when we see Him, we shall be like Him. This is the hope of the children of God - we will be like him.

Jesus' desire and prayer for His people is: "Father, that they may be with me, and that they may be like me."

And that brings us to the third point of our sermon, "The consummation of this prayer," that is, the answer, the fulfillment of this prayer. This prayer is answered not only in the death of the believer, but in all the joy and privilege that is ours to eternity beyond death.

That privilege is, first, to be with Christ. That will be the enjoyment of heaven.

In a little while, when Jesus is dying, a dying thief alongside of him makes a request. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom?" How does Jesus answer? "Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise." That was an answer to this prayer of Jesus, "That they may be with me, to behold my glory."

What was the experience of that thief who died with a confession on his lips? Words fail to say it, do they not? We know a little of what it is to be with Christ. We have a taste of that in our lives already now; happy moments of rest in Christ, amidst the ongoing and weary battle. Sometimes Christ comes very close to us; in a time of meditation, in a time of reprieve from pain or trial, in a sermon in which he speaks especially to me, in a passage of Scripture, through prayer. There's nothing sweeter for the child of God than those moments of rich fellowship with the Lord. Paul had a moment like that, when, he says, he was caught up into the third heaven. The Psalmist had moments like that, "In sweet communion, Lord, with thee, I constantly abide." Solomon knew this from his experience. He writes, "A bundle of Myrrh is my beloved unto me, he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts."

We too have those times of sweet communion with the Lord, when we know what it is to be with him and to be like him. But while they give us a taste of heaven to come, that's all they are, just a taste. Always, there is still a great distance. Those moments are short-lived. There are interferences. There is the guilt of sin. Now, this fellowship is but through a glass, darkly. It is just a sip from the well of life. A small

beginning. A few days of fresh water at Elim, before we go on with our pilgrimage through the desert.

But, you see, the heavenly Canaan awaits us. In Christ's presence *is* fulness of joy; at his right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11). It will be our privilege and joy to serve before the king like the servants of Solomon, of whom the Queen of Sheba says, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee and hear thy wisdom" (1 Kings 10:8). And, we won't merely be servants. Jesus says, Revelation 3:21, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." That will be our eternal privilege. What Joy.

And then, there's a second thing. Not only our enjoyment, but also our employment. What will we do in heaven? We will behold, or look on, his glory. The word "Behold" has the idea of "gazing." To gaze is to be a spectator who witnesses some extraordinary, amazing, spectacular sight. If you've climbed a mountain, you've stood at the top, stricken with astonishment.

So it will be, when we see Christ, as he is. His glory is unique. Revelation 4:10-11 describes that day this way, "The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." At the moment of death we will see him. Job says, "For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth: And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25-26).

What makes his glory especially unique is that it is a transforming glory. No man will see that glory and remain a sinful man. It's a glory that, when we see it, will change us. There's a sense in which that is already true as we see the glory of Christ in the gospel. 2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord." The gospel transforms us to be children of light, to be sanctified and holy as he is holy. But there will be something much more powerful about that eternal view of Christ. John says, in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." He means, it is not exactly clear to us what our glory will be in heaven. But, he continues, "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." As believers, we look forward not only to being with him and seeing him, but also being changed to be like him. That will mean we are free from sin. That will mean that we will be perfect in our heart, and in our love and in our knowledge of God.

Don't you long for that day? What a blessed day. Not only when Christ shall come. But blessed day, when I shall go to be with Him.

Let's conclude with two implications from the text for ourselves.

First, the confidence of Jesus in this prayer, should also be ours. Heaven, for the believer, is not simply a maybe. Christ does not want us to live and to die, not knowing whether we will go to be with him in glory. No, this prayer, which breaths with certainty, is a public prayer, for his disciples and for us, to hear. And notice, in this prayer, that he quite specifically identifies those to whom these blessings will come. In verse 24, "I will that those whom thou hast given me..." This is not a prayer for all men. Christ is not saying he wants everyone to come to heaven to be with him. That would go against the Father's will in election, and against his own dying for his sheep. This prayer is very specifically for the elect.

But, how do you know then, that it's for you? How can I be so sure that Christ prays for me? The answer to that is here in the text too. Don't tell me your name - no, you won't find that in the text - but do show me your faith. That's in the text. In verse 25, "these have known that thou hast sent me" and earlier in the chapter in verses 6-8, these have "kept, received and believed" my word. And Jesus is saying, this is how you can know that you are one of the elect, who will, for sure, be in heaven; you will know it by the infallible proofs of election, faith and obedience.

So, that's the first implication here. As you hear this prayer of Jesus, and believe in him, and hope for what he prays, desiring to be with him, don't be troubled by doubt and uncertainty. Believe! In the face of the great enemy death, which he is about to experience, Jesus speaks most authoritatively, most positively, and most comfortingly.

And then, the other implication for us is this, expressed by John in 1 John 3:2-3. "But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

If you have this hope today, then you will be filled with love for Christ today, and that will make you want to be like him, as much as possible, already in this life. You will purify yourself. And that is an expression of your desire to be with him and to be like him.

Beloved, when you die, you will be with Christ. You will see Christ. You will be like Christ. Remember that today. You are bought with a price. Sanctify the Lord God in your heart. Let the love of Christ dwell in you richly to make you like Him already today.

Let us pray.

Lord, give us to see Thy glory and the glory of Thy Son Jesus Christ so that we may persevere in hope and holiness till the day when we shall be with Him and become like Him. Lord Jesus, come, come quickly. Amen.