
Glory in Exile – John 17

OPC Women's 2021 Virtual Retreat ~ May 8th ~ Tricia Mathys

Well, as I mentioned last month, I see a connecting of dots that the Lord has me following as I pray and meditate on these various matters we've been considering during these virtual devotions (and written ones too).

First, we considered from Ecclesiastes what it is to have ***eternity in our hearts***, that experience that's somehow both a longing and a rejoicing because it's a reminder of something that came before and, in our case, will come again.

Then last month, we reflected on the stunningly beautiful words in Zephaniah that the Lord our God is "***quiet in His love***" – signaling to us His acceptance and approval, by forever holding His peace.

So, here we are, "soaked with a sense of exile," as JRR Tolkien put it (The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, 110), but also resting in God's love, and therefore we ought to be desiring to redeem the time. **Even as Peter exhorts us in 1 Peter 1:13-19**

"Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

That is exactly how we will find "Glory in Exile," the title of our devotion this morning.

This month I knew that the Lord wanted me to reflect on Jesus's high priestly prayer in John 17 – in which He prays repeatedly about being one...He with the Father, He with the disciples, the disciples with the Father, us with the Father, and us with each other. It's the grand Bible chapter to which we attune our ears to be exhorted to Christian unity. I first heard a preacher exposit this text in my twenties. I was just becoming aware of Reformed theology and our church at that time had the wonderful opportunity an aged pastor to serve as our interim – Dr. Lenox Palin – who so wisely led our church through what he called the mountain top passages of the Bible: John 1 and John 17, Romans 8, Ephesians 1 and 2, Philippians 2....It was a season that changed my life because I can remember those sermons opening my eyes to things I'd never seen before. When John and I would visit with Lenox and his wife Wilma, I would just keep peppering him with theology questions. He so

patiently and clearly answered every single one of them. One day when he was walking us to our car, I turned to him and blurted out, Lenox, are you a Calvinist?!" He smiled, gave us hugs, and headed back to his front door. Those were golden days for my faith.

When Lenox preached on John 17, I remember him saying, "Our unity as Christians verifies the message of the Gospel." What? How can you not be caught off guard by a statement like that? I've wrestled with that idea ever since.

So, let's begin. First of all, John 17 is an absolutely circular maze. As DA Carson says, you can't pull on any one string in this chapter without finding that it is firmly attached to another. Which kept presenting me with a dilemma over how in the world was I going to construct a 20-minute devotion on such an inter-woven chapter? The 20 minute thing was a fail. However, something interesting did click.

I saw in this prayer how our salvation in the past, the present, and the future are all represented: the whole timeline of God's saving work in our lives unfold in the three sections of Jesus prayer.

1. Jesus prays for himself and describes what we know as His finished work on our behalf. That's our Salvation Past.
2. He prays for His disciples and for us (those who would believe in Him through their word), and in so doing, describes our Salvation Present.
3. Finally, He prays for our final homegoing; which is our Salvation Future.

I realized the connection as I was reading through some resources on the OPC website. I'm particularly indebted to Dr. Alan Strange for his writings there, and the Q& A section of the website. (If you have not availed yourself to the OPC website, it offers a WEALTH of edifying material that I highly, highly recommend.)

Specifically, Dr. Strange – how awesome is that name :-) – unpacked **Salvation Past**, **Salvation Present**, and **Salvation Future** as he explained the fullness of God's saving work in our lives, as it pertains to sanctification. That will become all the more pertinent as we go along. I'll also place a link in the manuscript of this devotion to his materials for your reference. https://opc.org/nh.html?article_id=421.

Read John 17 – notice the circular nature and all the references to unity and being one.

Before I go any farther though, let me just say right here, you have NO idea how relieved I was that the Lord was not – as was my fear - leading me to reflect on John 17 from a purely "THIS is how we must be united" springboard. Because all I could keep thinking was, "Lord, have You SEEN the church in this country this past year?" Oooph. It's been a little rough.

So, with a massive sigh of relief, I sailed in to the realization that what I really get to reflect on are the ideas of: **1) glorifying God, and 2) the fullness of His salvation represented in this chapter.** Those two focuses are nicely contained in the three contiguous movements of salvation as they're experienced in: freedom from the **penalty** of sin, freedom from the **power** of sin, and freedom from the **presence** of sin. (x2) Each of these freedoms occur in time:

1. **In Salvation Past** – the **penalty of sin** was paid on the cross, granting US *positional sanctification.*
2. **In Salvation Present** – the **power of sin** is being broken in our lives through *progressive and ongoing sanctification.*
3. **In Salvation Future** – our final deliverance from the **presence of sin** will be the culmination of God's saving work.

I. *Salvation Past*

- A. The first 5 verses of John 17 show us Jesus praying that the Father would glorify His Son, so that the Son could glorify the Father. To glorify is to bring honor.
- B. That's accomplished as Jesus affirms the following four things:
 1. That His hour had come
 2. That He was given authority to give eternal life,
 3. That He had accomplished the work the Father had given Him to do, and
 4. That He desired His pre-creation, pre-incarnational glory in the Father's presence. **Glory is the summation of godly attributes and the *display* of those things in manifold ways.**
- C. Two major Gospel facts are revealed in those statements:
 1. Eternal life comes through receiving the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent.
 2. The way Jesus glorified God was through accomplishing the work the Father gave Him to do. Later, in verse 19, Jesus describes this work as having "sanctified" Himself. That is, He exercised the power and freedom ("authority") given Him to accomplish the work that gave to us our salvation.
- D. That's our **salvation past**, or what's referred to as our POSITIONAL sanctification:
 1. Positionally, God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places, and blessed us with every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3, 2:6).
 2. He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13-14)
 3. We used to belong to the world, now we belong to God. We have a new position that can never be changed.
 4. It's finished. In Christ, we have been declared free of guilt and acceptable to God (justification). That's our Salvation accomplished and past.

II. Salvation Present

- A. In verses 6-23 Jesus prays for the disciples and then for US. Which is just... everything, isn't it?
- B. Especially since Jesus continues to pray for us: **Romans 8:34b** "... Christ Jesus... -- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."
- C. **In this Salvation Present, the power of sin is continually being broken.** **Romans 6:6-7** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (7) For one who has died has been set free from sin.
- D. This is the pure and present work of PROGRESSIVE sanctification.
- E. Sanctification, I believe, is the avenue to the unity Jesus prays for.
 - 1. Because it's as we move **from a declaration about us (that we've been justified)...to a work within us: that we're kept, guarded from the world, the flesh, and the devil.**
 - 2. And as we're guarded, the work of renewal and transformation happens just as Jesus prayed in verse 17: **Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.**
- F. The Shorter Catechism question #35 says this: "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are **enabled more and more** to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness."
 - 1. A work of grace that enables us. It's a new power of God at work **in** us: **Philippians 2:13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
 - 2. Commenting on this, Dr. Strange writes: In sanctification, "we have at our disposal a new power against sin's mastery." And in this, "we are not passive....human responsibility and divine sovereignty do not conflict. God is sovereign because grace is conferred...and man is responsible because he must use the means of grace faithfully, both publicly and privately."
- G. Calvin's motto of, "My heart I give to thee, O Lord, promptly and sincerely," is a great reminder that we actively offer up our hearts: which is the wellspring of all our will, emotions, thoughts, and desires.
- H. Personality is not obliterated in sanctification...it is reformed so that we become who we were meant to be before the foundation of the world.
- I. Quail families and flight school
- J. These verses show the active nature of sanctification
 - 1. **Col 3:9b-10** "...seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices (10) and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."
 - 2. **Romans 6:2b** "...How can we who died to sin still live in it?"
 - 3. **1John 3:9** "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God."

4. **Eph 4:21-24** “...assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, (22) to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, (23) and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, (24) and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”
- K. I said that here is where we have the pathway to the unity Jesus prays for, and that He says confirms the message of the Gospel:
1. **John 17:22-23** “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, (23) 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.
 2. “Our unity verifies the message.” That’s how Lenox put it. O, may it be Lord!
- L. So, HOW is living out our salvation present – our sanctification – the pathway to unity? Here are my thoughts...
1. Recall from our first point that Jesus’ “sanctified” **Himself**, by using the authority He was given to accomplish the Father’s will.
 1. Through His Spirit, **we also** have the power and freedom to do the will of the Father: **1 Thessalonians 4:3a** *For this is the will of God, your sanctification...*”
 2. What an immeasurable encouragement that Jesus provided us with the means – His Holy Spirit – to accomplish what we’ve been called to.
- M. **It’s only because Jesus sanctified Himself** that we too may be sanctified.
1. **Hebrews 10:10** “...by that [accomplishing of God’s] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
 2. **John 15:5** And apart from Him we can do no good thing. Boy isn’t **that** true!
 3. Heaven knows that left to our own devices we’d throw all our gold in to the fire to see what pops out.
- N. **But my point here is that when Jesus says, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them...,”** He’s conferring the same glory to **us** that was bestowed on Him in His human nature, it can be shared because that’s our nature too. (Reference: Table Talk Magazine, “The Church as the Glory of God”):
1. John Calvin comments, “...even in His human nature, which He has in common with us, the likeness of the glory of the Father has been engraved, so as to form [us] His members to the resemblance of it.”
 2. The church, then, can be called the glory of God in the sense that God is renewing His image by sharing with us the glory He has given to Christ.
 3. The church reflects divine glory as we grow in Christlikeness through the Word.
 4. As the church fulfills her mission of being sanctified in truth, unbelievers look at the church and say, “God is at work there.”
 5. That work that they see, is **the glory of God’s power** on full display.

- O. Remember in **Exodus 33 (18-19)** when Moses asked God, “*Please show me your glory,*” God answered by saying, “I will make all my GOODNESS pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.'”
1. And as He hid Moses in the cleft of the rock, He did just that.
 2. What we see now, is *that* was a kind of foreshadowing of **our** being hidden and secure in the Rock of our Salvation in His journey to the cross, by which, in His own words He said:
 3. *I have manifested Your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world (v. 6).*” The name of the Lord – all He is in goodness and mercy - was made known on the cross.
 4. **Hebrews 1:3** “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*”
 5. God’s glory found its highest expression on Calvary where Jesus was lifted up to heaven (v.5, 13) by being lifted up on the cross. He displayed all of God’s goodness for us.
 6. So, we fix our eyes on this author and perfecter of our faith in our salvation present.

III. Salvation Future

- A. That brings us to our final part of John 17.
- B. In verses 24-26 Jesus prays that those whom the Father has given Him will be with Him where He is and see His *eternal* glory.
- C. That day when we behold Him as He is, that day will be our final deliverance from the presence of sin. The culmination of God’s saving work in our lives will be complete.
- D. **1 John 3:2** “*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*”
- E. So, again, here’s my conclusion about unity: pursuing and cooperating with God’s work of ongoing sanctification in our lives verifies the message because it glorifies God, and we show forth the joy Jesus desired be fulfilled in us.
 1. As we work out this grand and present salvation with fear and trembling, WE manifest the goodness and mercy of God...to one another and to the watching world.
 2. We glorify Him and begin to enjoy Him **forever**.

IV. Final Exhortations

I want to close with a few exhortations the Lord laid on my heart as we consider living out our salvation.

F. **To my middle age and senior sisters** (you my people) –

1. Even as we pursue this salvation present, it's okay to be a little tired. Take a nap. Rest up, and when you arise, be who you needed when you were younger.
2. The countless tears you've wept and the dark clouds Jesus has seen you through, those are the kindling wood of comfort ready to provide warmth for those near you who now suffer.
3. Share the mistakes you've made in life so that others may be encouraged that it happens to the best of us. Even if the best are post-menopausal clunkers like us. Lol!
4. But, also, don't minimize the wisdom you've garnered. You've lived through some stuff. And your journey through that stuff adorns the Gospel. Share those adornments. Younger women are far more eager to hear from you than you can imagine.
5. And when you don't know what else to say, it's okay to ask another question. That's how they know we care.
6. If you have a great marriage...speak often and openly about it. Christian wives young and old need to know it's possible.
7. For you, my favorite quote on inspiring the next generation is by Antoine de Saint-Expuery: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the workers to gather wood, divide the labor, and give orders. Instead teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

G. **For you 30 and 40-year olds** – these days will go quickly. Now is the time to be praying, "*Lord teach us to number our days that we may present to you a heart of wisdom*" (***Psalm 90:12***).

1. Those littles you're raising now will thank you. And when you find yourself with the unspeakable honor of caring for your own aging parents, may the Lord bless you with eyes to see and a heart to perceive the wisdom they stored up for you in their lifetimes.
2. Be patient as God shapes and fashions you on difficult days. One day you will see with Charles Spurgeon that you "owe more to the fire, and the hammer, and the file, than to anything else in your Lord's workshop."
3. It's true, you have a lot coming at you from all sides. Heaven knows that most days you're holding on by a thread. Ask for help.
4. And know that crisis of faith will come. But remember that sometimes they happen because our false gods have been tried...and failed. When that happens, pivot and redirect your gaze.
5. On the hardest days, close your eyes and see that Jesus is near you. You're yoked to one whose strength will not fail you.
6. On the best days, open your eyes and see that it's the Lord who has blessed you with every good and perfect gift.

7. Finally, relationships seem to be especially tricky in this season of life. So for you, I share Hanlon's Razor: never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained as carelessness.
8. Those are very different motivations, and love believes the best.
9. Accordingly, believe the best about who God says **you** are.

H. **To you my young friends in your teens and 20's** – {you're my favorite :-)}

The reality is I may not live to see you reach the age I am now. You know what though, I have today to share these few things with you...

1. There's something the Bible talks about called "the spacious place." It's a land flowing with milk and honey...and the presence of the Lord. That place, it's your inheritance in Christ. It's the kingdom of God in your midst, with more yet to come.
2. Live in the spacious place won't you. Flourish in it. Know that it's your home. And it overflows with wonder and glory.
3. Don't let Egypt tempt you. Don't let the wilderness call you back to a place of being a captive. *For **freedom** Christ has set you free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)*
4. When the world tries to speak louder than Jesus to tell you who you are or should be, when anxieties, depression, and confusion nip at your heels – look to people who will point you to the spacious place and to your Shepherd.
 - a. People who can remind you who you are to HIM.
 - b. Who HE is to you.
 - c. People who will lovingly ask if you've taken your eyes off Him.
 - d. People who will help you remember where you REALLY live – in the spacious place, seated in heavenly realms with Christ.
5. Yes, some days are harder than others. But my darlings, you can do hard things.
6. It's okay that you can't control everything. And if you haven't learned that lesson yet, someday the hair on your head will teach you it.
7. You really are my favorite and I'll be praying for you, that you never wander far from Home. But more importantly, **Jesus** is praying for you...that your faith would not fail (Luke 22:32), that you would be kept secure in the name above all names, that you would be sanctified, and that the love of the Father would be in you.
8. For you, I have these words from C.S. Lewis: "Child,' said the Lion, 'I am telling you your story, not hers. No one is told any story but their own.'"
 - So while you keep your ears attuned to your story, and the life God has called YOU to, don't get caught up in comparing it to anyone else's. **You** are God's own glorious workmanship, celebrate that.

I. **And for all of us, while the time remains**, let us be moved in mercy, motivated by love, and mobilized in faith:

1. To be those who proclaim the words that bring salvation.
2. To declare the goodness of God in Christ to our lost friends and neighbors.
3. May Jesus' highly priestly prayer become the prayer for those who will believe in Him through **our** faithful sharing of the Good News that salvation past, present, and future has come in Christ Jesus.
4. This Savior who is our High Priest, is continually interceding for us. He's Our Prophet who is building His church. He's our King who is reigning over all things.
5. For His is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen