

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, as it is often referred to, is Jesus' longest recorded prayer in Scripture. All of His other prayers found in the Gospels are very short, and it is interesting to me that this longest of His prayers is also quite short, requiring no more than a couple of minutes to pray. I point this out because it seems that the devil has duped many of us into thinking that if we don't have at least a half hour to pray, we don't have enough time, so we should just skip it. "Praying without ceasing," which is what Paul prescribed (1 Thes. 5:17), necessitates lots of short prayers throughout our day.

It is also interesting that Jesus apparently prayed this special prayer with His eyes open, lifted towards heaven (17:1). There is, of course, nothing wrong and everything appropriate about bowing our heads in humility and closing our eyes to distractions when we pray. Yet there is nothing wrong with lifting our eyes to heaven either.

It is most important to remember that Jesus prayed this prayer a short time before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and thus the evening before His crucifixion. He begins by saying, "Father, the hour has come" (17:1). That is the eighth and final time that John recorded Jesus making reference to His "hour" (or "time"), an obvious reference to the culminating event of His life and ministry, His death on the cross (2:4; 7:8, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1). John has portrayed Jesus' life and ministry as a journey to the cross. The "hour" had finally arrived.

Jesus declared that He would give eternal life to all whom the Father gives to Him (17:2). Notice that Jesus said nothing about how the Father decides whom to give to Jesus. We know from reading hundreds of other verses in Scripture that they can only be those who believe. Jesus was not, of course, contradicting what He Himself said so many other times; nor was He revealing "the real truth" about how people are actually saved in contradiction to the rest of the New Testament. He was not endorsing the Calvinistic idea of unconditional election. John 17:2 must be harmonized with the 31,217 other verses in the Bible.

It is clear from Jesus' prayer that He was supremely interested in bringing glory to His Father, and it is also very obvious that it was important to Him that His disciples know and believe that He had come from the Father. Additionally, He wanted them to be unified, just as He and the Father are unified, and He mentioned it within four verses of His prayer (17:11, 21, 22, 23). Our unity, according to Jesus, has some bearing on the world believing that God sent Him. Jesus said so twice in this prayer (17:21, 23). Obviously, a "church" that demonstrates hypocrisy to the world is not going to influence people to believe in Jesus. It would, in fact, have the opposite effect. Disunity among believers sends a message to the watching world that we are no different than anyone else. Why should they believe in our God when we can't get along with each other?

This truth, so clearly stated by Jesus, is one more indication of the fallacy of the idea that God has sovereignly pre-selected some to be saved and some to be damned. If the world's coming to faith is dependent on our unity, which it is according to Jesus, then obviously God has created people as free moral agents, and He gives them the choice to believe or disbelieve. Otherwise, our actions and influence would have no effect on who believes and is saved.

So much of what Jesus prayed in this prayer is beyond my understanding. I wish I grasped it better! One part of His prayer that I think I do understand fairly well is found in 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me." I'm so glad Jesus wants us in heaven, where we will see Him in His glory. That's easy-to-understand theology!