

An Exposition of John 17

God's Glory in God's Son

The Revd Dr Harry Uprichard

Minister of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Ahoghill, N. Ireland

The glory of God as revealed in His Son is a constant New Testament theme. We find it in the synoptic gospels both in the miracles and in the accounts of our Lord's baptism and transfiguration. In the prologue of John's gospel the incarnation particularly emphasises this; "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth", John 1:14. Paul describes God's saving illumination as the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. 4:6. To the author of the epistle to the Hebrews the Son of God is the effulgence of God's glory and the express image of His person, Hebrews 1:3. The apostle Peter encourages Christians to rejoice in their trials, for not only are they sharing in Christ's sufferings but God's glory rests upon them in such a situation, 1 Peter 3:13, 14.

Our Lord's High Priestly prayer in John 17 exhibits the same theme. Here is the hour of dedication to death which is the hour of glory. The prayer has three natural divisions: — (1) He prays for Himself, vv. 1-5, (2) He prays for His disciples, vv. 6-19, (3) He prays for the Church Universal, vv. 20-26. However, the whole prayer finds a unity of theme in the Glory of God and in our exposition we shall observe divisions particularly relevant to this subject.

God's glory as revealed in God's Son in John 17 is indicated:

1. In the Completion of His Mission vv. 1-5

This is the subject matter of our Lord's petition in the first five verses of the chapter. Our Lord prays to His Father to glorify Him, in it we particularly note:

(a) *The Occasion of the petition*, v. 1 "The hour is come." This phrase occurs frequently in the gospel sometimes negatively, sometimes positively. Jesus' initial reluctance to accede to his mother's request at the wedding feast in Cana is attributed to the fact that his hour had not yet come, John 2:4. For the same reason He does not accompany his disciples to the feast of Tabernacles but goes to the feast alone later, John 7:6, 30. His teaching on that occasion in the temple does not precipitate arrest for this very same reason, John 8:20. However, when we come to the period of the upper room discourses Jesus recognizes that his hour had come, John 13:1. Thus he prays to His Father to glorify Him since the time is ripe and His death impending, John 17:1.

(b) *The reason for the petition* v. 2. The reason given for the petition is our Lord's own sovereignty which has been given to Him by the Father expressly for the purpose of granting salvation v. 2. The nature of this eternal life is explained in v. 3 as knowledge of God and of His Son. This is the whole end to which His sovereignty and mission move in the process of glorifying Himself and thus God, v. 1.

(c) *The background of the petition* vv. 4, 5a. V. 4 may include in anticipation our Lord's death and resurrection but more probably indicates the fulfilment of that part of His work up to that point in time. Thus the force of "and now O! Father" of v. 5 is, all having been accomplished and completed, there remains

only the consummation of death and resurrection.

Hence Christ's prayer for self-glorification is specifically in terms of the fulfilment of His ministry in His Death and Resurrection. It is significant that our Lord does not actually mention His own death by name in the prayer. Both the ultimate purpose of His self-glorification, viz. v. 1 "That thy Son may glorify Thee", and the manner in which it is to be accomplished viz. v. 5, "within thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was", emphasise the importance of this final earthly glorification of Jesus. Just as He exhibits the glory of God in incarnation, John 1:14, so here He declares God's glory in the fulfilment of His work, in His death and resurrection. God's glory in God's Son is revealed in Christ's prayer that His mission be fulfilled, that He suffer the glory of the Cross.

2. In our Lord's Pre-existent state vv. 5, 22, 24.

The glory which our Lord had in His pre-existent state with His Father is echoed clearly in Christ's petition in v. 5: "with the glory which I had with thee before the world was," to a lesser degree in v. 22 "the glory which thou gavest me," and quite prominently in v. 24, "that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." These seem to refer to our Lord's pre-existent state and to his relationship with His Father in this state, where he apparently shared His Father's glory. This reminds us of other classic N.T. expressions of this doctrine as, for example, John 1:1 where the Word was with God and where the Word was God, or Hebrews 1:2f where the Son who is the "brightness of his glory and the express image of his person" is both the agent of Creation "by whom also he made the worlds" and of providence "upholding all things by the word of his power."

It is significant that it is this pre-existent glory, in all its intensity of degree and intimacy of relationship, that our Lord prays will be revealed in His death, v. 5, in the unity of the Church, v. 22 and in the consummation of the Church, v. 24. Here in the High Priestly prayer the Son in his state of humiliation reflects on and anticipates again the glorious relationship which He had with the Father from all eternity. We are permitted a sacred glimpse into the very heart of the Godhead.

3. In the Calling, Preservation, Unity and Consummation of the Church vv. 6-24.

(a) *Calling of the Church* vv. 6-10.

V. 6 "I have manifested thy name". *Phaneroo* is the verb used here which might suggest a public display as compared with *Apokalupto* emphasising an inner revelation. It indicates a specific display of the glory of God. God's "name" was what our Lord had displayed i.e. God's character with its perfection of attributes. Thus, our Lord claims to have revealed the glory of God's character.

He had done this to such an extent and in such a manner that it was both an effective and effectual revelation as the succeeding verses show, for it led to saving faith in the calling of this Church. We note two results in this connection particularly:

EXPOSITION

(i) Belief vv. 6, 7, 8. In these verses is stressed the duality of receiving both the words and the person of Christ. Those who believed had recognised that Christ had come from God, v. 7, that what He had was epitomized in His teaching and words concerning himself and His Mission, v. 8. This they had received as authoritative, v.8, and thus had accepted His person as authoritative, commissioned, the Messiah, v. 8. This is that receiving of the Word that leads to believing on the person which the N.T. represents as saving faith.

(ii) Unity vv. 9, 10. This is a unity based on possession. They belong both to Christ, "them which thou hast given me" v. 9 and to God "for they are thine" v. 9, and it is this mutual possession that leads to their unity and to the glorification of our Lord, v. 10.

Our Lord has so effectively displayed the glory of God's character that men have come to believe on God through Him and to be united with God in Him. God's glory in God's Son is exhibited in the calling of the Church.

(b) Preservation of the Church vv. 11-19.

Christ prays to his "holy" Father, v.11. This seems to be a significant form of address. Just as Christ had addressed Him as Father in respect of Himself in vv. 1 & 5, relating to their intimacy of relationship, a Father/Son relationship, so now in respect of the preservation of the Church, Christ directs His prayer to his "holy" Father. He prays to God to do two things for the Church:

(i) To keep it, v. 11b. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me." He wants His Father to preserve them in the state into which He, the Son, has brought them. The reason for his petition is that He had kept them perfectly while He was with them, v. 12, i.e. He prays to God to continue the process of revealing His glory in their preservation.

(ii) To sanctify it, vv. 13-19, i.e. to produce not only a static but a progressive preservation. He petitions His Father negatively, (vv. 13-16), that God will keep them in the world but preserve them from the evil inherent in that situation and positively, (vv. 17-18), that God will advance the work of holiness within them and commission or apostolize them into the world. The reason for this petition is that He, the Son, sanctifies Himself that they might be sanctified, v.19, i.e. He prays to God to continue the process of revealing His glory in their sanctification.

Thus our Lord prays to His Father to continue the process of glorifying the Godhead which, He, the Son has already begun, in both keeping and sanctifying the Church, and God continues to be glorified in the preservation and sanctification of His people.

(c) Unity of the Church, vv. 10, 11, 21-23.

It is important to establish clearly in our minds the nature of the unity for which Christ prays, especially in the light of much present-day ecumenical discussion. The salient features seem to be:

(i) It is a unity which arises out of the believer's calling. This seems to be the emphasis of v. 10 which gives the essence of this unity — "And all mine are thine and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." This arises contextually, logically and only out of the doctrine and experience of election and saving grace implicit in vv. 6-9.

(ii) It is a Unity which is also the result of the believer's preservation, e.g. v. 11 "Keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me that they may be one as we are."

(iii) It is a unity which is not an end in itself but a means not only of glorifying God but also of evangelism. This purpose is expressed in v. 21b, "that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" and further amplified in v. 23b "and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

(iv) It is a Unity which is of the Father and Son, that is a spiritual unity, a vertical unity, a unity of essence and nature. Thus in v. 11 it is described as a oneness "as we are", in v. 21a "as thou, Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one IN US," in v. 23a "I in them and thou in me that they may be made perfect in one." This is why it is a glorious unity as in v. 22, because it is a unity of the nature of the Father and Son, primarily a vertical union and then naturally and inevitably a horizontal one. This is what makes it glorious and so much modern ecumenism inglorious. It is a true spiritual and real unity which glorifies God and Christ.

(d) Consummation of the Church, v. 24.

God's glory in God's Son is revealed in the consummation of the Church. This is the substance of the petition of our Lord in v. 24. We recall His promise to his disciples in John 14 of the comfort of the "many mansions" He had gone to prepare. We compare in our minds v. 24 with John 1:14 where the apostles beheld His glory (past tense). Here our Lord prays about a future situation. Christ prays that they *will* behold His glory, just as He was going to prepare for them, just as they *had* beheld His glory, and that they *will* behold His glory in its full pre-existent and post-incarnate majesty; "that they may 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." What an indescribable privilege for God's people to behold His glory in this intensity!

Vv. 25 & 26 form a summary and a crescendo-like climax of the prayer. They depict the great High Priest interceding before his righteous Father on the background of an alien world. He professes His own knowledge of His Father, He professes a knowledge of His Father by the elect, He professes the completion of His Mission both up to that present point in time and also in the future — His intention to save. He prays that the love of God which is in Him may pass to them. God's glory in God's Son is complete as His love through Christ floods the believer and returns to Him.