

Series: The Upper Room Discourse

John 17:1-19

The heart of Jesus

by Scott Grant

Listen to his heart

We can all think of dozens of conversations that we would have loved to listen in on. We may have been seated at one end of a table and craned our necks to hear the conversation at the other end. Or we may have longed to be "a fly on the wall" to absorb a conversation in which we could have no part.

Could there be a conversation that we would want to hear more than one between our Savior and his Father? In John 17, the Apostle John brings us into the prayer closet of Jesus, who pours out his heart to his Father.

In John 13 through 16, Jesus talked with his disciples. In John 17, he stops talking with his disciples and starts talking with his Father. Given what we know about Jesus, what we hear is not surprising. We hear his love for his disciples, his friends. In the first 19 verses, Jesus makes reference to the disciples an astounding 33 times, usually with the pronoun "they" or "them." His heart is for his friends, and his heart concerns their relationship with God. His heart is that they know God.

Here we also hear Jesus' heart for us, who are also his disciples. So Jesus' conversation with the Father is especially compelling: It's about us! And the heart of our Savior is that we know God. John invites us to pull up a chair and listen.

Jesus' heart to die for us

John 17:1-5:

(1) These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your son, that the Son may glorify you, (2) even as you gave him authority over all mankind, that to all whom you have given him, he may give eternal life. (3) And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (4) I glorified you on the earth, having accomplished the work that you have given me to do. (5) And now, glorify me together with yourself, Father, with the glory that I had with you before the world was."

Jesus spoke "these things," a reference to all that he has shared with them in the Upper Room Discourse, John 13-16. But sharing truth with his disciples isn't enough for Jesus. He has to share his heart for his disciples with the Father.

He knows that "the hour has come" for him to return to the Father (John 13:1). This departure involves his glorification. In the gospel of John, this means the cross (John 12:23-33). Jesus asks for the Father to glorify the Son for the purpose of glorifying the Father. Jesus is seeking his own glory only insofar as it glorifies the Father.

There is a connection between the glorification of the Son and eternal life, for verse 1, which concerns the glorification of the Son, and verse 2, which concerns eternal life, are connected by the words "even as" (*kathos*) at the beginning of verse 2 (NIV - "for"). The glorification of Jesus Christ on the cross, in fact, is what leads to eternal life for the one who puts his faith in Jesus. Apart from the glorification of Christ on the cross, there is no eternal life.

The Father has delegated authority over all humanity to the Son, as anticipated in Isaiah 9:6-7 and Daniel 7:13-14, in order that the Son might dispense eternal life. The Father's purpose in sending the Son and giving him such authority was to give us the opportunity for eternal life. This eternal life is first granted by Jesus to those whom the Father has given him, a reference to the disciples (17:6). It is Jesus himself who gives eternal life. Only God can give eternal life. Jesus understands himself to be God.

What, then, is eternal life? Obviously, the phrase contains a chronological element: Eternal life lasts forever. On this level alone, however, eternal life is not very compelling. It conjures up images of eternal boredom. But eternal life not only contains a chronological element but a qualitative element as well, which Jesus propounds in verse 3. Eternal life can be defined in two words: knowing God. Eternal life is an eternal relationship with God. And this eternal relationship with God is ours simply on the basis of faith in Jesus (John 20:31). The joy of the next stage of eternal life, when we see Jesus face to face, is not that all our problems are behind us; the joy of eternal life is knowing God. And if this is the thing that lasts, and this is the thing we will be doing forever, this is the thing we should build our lives around now: knowing God.

It is a relationship with "the only true God." Any other god is a false god. The true God is knowable in that he sent Jesus Christ. Jesus places knowing the only true God on the same plane with knowing himself, again equating himself with God - the only true God.

In verse 1, Jesus asked that he be glorified so that he might glorify the Father. In verse 4, Jesus says he has already glorified the Father "on earth." The glorification that Jesus is asking for is not one "on earth." It involves the cross. Therefore, there is a heavenly aspect to the crucifixion. Jesus was lifted up off the earth when he was crucified, thereby becoming the bridge between heaven and earth. Earlier in the gospel of John, Jesus is in fact depicted as a ladder between heaven and earth (John 1:51).

The work that Jesus accomplished is his work on behalf of the disciples, as recorded in the rest of the prayer: He manifested God's name to them (verse 6), he gave them God's words (verse 8), he kept and guarded them (verse 12), he gave them God's word (verse 14), he sent them (verse 18) and he sanctified himself for them (verse 19). Each aspect of this "work" is an expression of Jesus' love for his disciples. This glorifies the Father in that it reveals something of who he is: He is a Father who loves.

This love was supremely demonstrated when he granted his Son's request to be glorified on the cross. The glory that Jesus has had for all eternity, "before the world was," is best understood by surveying the cross. The Son glorified the Father, showing him to be a God of supreme love, willing to give up his Son for those he loved. The Father glorified the Son, showing him likewise to be a God of supreme love, willing to give up us life for those he loved. "Together," as Jesus says, the Father and the Son are glorified on the cross.

In asking to be glorified, Jesus is asking for the cross. He not only goes to the cross out of obedience to the Father, he asks for it. And he's asking for the cross in our behalf, so that we might have eternal life, so that we might know God.

It's impossible to compare the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to anything, but something of sacrificial love can be seen in Charles Dickens' Sydney Carton. In "A Tale of Two Cities," Carton is in love with Lucie Manette, but she marries another man, Charles Darnay. During the French Revolution, Darnay is arrested and sentenced to the guillotine. But Carton, who bears Darnay's resemblance, enables Darnay's escape and takes his place in the bastille. Sydney Carton takes Charles Darnay's place so that Darnay might live. Carton is beheaded in his place.

In 17:1-5, we see Jesus' heart to die for us. Next we will see Jesus' heart to share truth with us.

Jesus' heart to share truth with us

John 17:6-8:

(6) *"I manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; yours they were, and you*

gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (7) Now they have come to know that everything you have given me is from you; (8) for the words that you gave me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from you, and they believed that you sent me."

In this section, we hear echoes of Moses. Like Moses, Jesus makes known the name of God (Exodus 3:13-15) and reveals the word of God (Exodus 20:1-17).

In Hebrew thought, a person's name said something about that person. In that Jesus manifested the name of God, he revealed his attributes. When God revealed something of himself to Moses, the name of God was linked to his goodness (Exodus 33:19).

As he did in verse 2, Jesus says in verse 6 that the Father gave the disciples to him. As disciples of Jesus, we are the precious possessions of the Father. The Father carefully entrusts us to the only one whom he dare trust us with: his Son.

Jesus says his disciples "kept" the Father's word, a phrase that he expounds on in verses 7 and 8. The disciples, he says, now know that everything the Father has given him is from the Father, which speaks of his intimate and unique relationship with the Father. The disciples recognize this unique relationship because they recognize that the words of Jesus emanate from the Father. They received these words; they accepted them as from the Father and therefore Jesus as from the Father. In recognizing Jesus' unique relationship with the Father, they "truly understood" that Jesus came from the Father and "believed" that the Father sent him. The disciples "kept" God's word, then, by receiving the words of Jesus and believing in his divine origin.

Keeping the word of God, then, is equated with receiving the words of Jesus, which prove his divine origin, and therefore believing in his divine origin. In other words, keeping the word of God means believing the gospel.

In these three verses, we see Jesus' heart to share the truth of the gospel with us. He "manifested" the name of God to us (verse 6) and he gave the words of God to us (verse 7) so that we might believe the gospel and know God. Earlier, Jesus told the disciples that "I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Because Jesus considers us his friends, he has shared with us the truth of the gospel.

Jesus is the possessor of this special treasure: the gospel. And he has shared it with us.

In the next verses, we see Jesus' heart to pray for us.

Jesus' heart to intercede for us

John 17:9-11a:

(9) "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom you have given me; for they are yours. (10) And all things that are mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. (11a) And I am no more in the world, and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to you."

Jesus prays for the disciples, but not for the world, because he's sending the disciples into the world to reach it (17:20). Just as God chose Israel to be a kingdom of priests to mediate between God and the world (Exodus 19:6), Jesus chooses the disciples - and us - to do the same. God's choice is exclusive only for the sake of being inclusive.

Jesus then gives seven reasons for praying on behalf of the disciples, which follow the word "for" in verse 9 and are separated by the words "and" in verses 9 through 11. As our high priest, Jesus continues to intercede for us before the Father, though what is involved in that we can't know for sure (Hebrews 7:25). The seven reasons can actually be seen as four reasons:

- They are yours (verse 9). Jesus is appealing to the Father on behalf of the disciples based on the Father's own care for the disciples. If we belong to the Father, he is predisposed to acting on our behalf. Jesus knows this and appeals to the Father based on it.

- "All things that are mine are yours, and yours are mine" (verse 10). Jesus has used identical words before in the discourse to indicate his unique and equal relationship with the Father (16:15, 17:7). Jesus' appeal here is based on his authority to appear before the Father and make requests for his disciples. Jesus has the authority to ask the Father in our behalf.

- "I have been glorified in them" (verse 10). The Father is pleased when his Son is glorified. The disciples had a part in that glorification. Jesus recognizes the Father as acting on behalf of those through whom the Son is glorified. It gives the Father pleasure to act on our behalf, because doing so brings glory to his Son.

- "I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to you" (verse 11). His appeal here is based on need. The disciples need the Father to act because Jesus, who came from the Father, is leaving them and returning to the Father. Jesus won't be present physically to act on their behalf. Jesus intercedes for us because we need it.

This is a petition on behalf of the disciples. Here we see the reasons for the petition, and there are at least four of them. Jesus has no difficulty coming up with reasons to approach the Father on our behalf. His heart is for us.

Many of us, I'm sure, can recall times growing up when we approached our parents with certain requests and had eager and endless supplies of reasons why such requests should be granted. Jesus is eager to the point of childhood exuberance to approach the Father on our behalf.

As we have seen, and will continue to see, the content of the petition concerns the disciples' relationship with God. Singularly, Jesus is concerned with our relationship with God, for everything in life is based on this and returns to this. Next we will see his heart to protect us.

Jesus' heart to protect us

John 17:11b-16:

(11b) Holy Father, keep them in your name, the name that you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are. (12) While I was with them, I was keeping them in your name, which you have given me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of destruction, that the scripture might be fulfilled. (13) But now I come to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves. (14) I have given them your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (15) I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. (16) They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

In addressing the Father here, Jesus does so as "Holy Father." The adjective "holy" (*hagios*) is related to the verb "sanctify" (*hagiazō*). In this section Jesus asks that the Father would keep and guard the disciples, leading into verse 17, where he will ask that the Father sanctify them. So in addressing God as "Holy Father," Jesus likely has in mind the sanctification of the disciples. The Father, who is holy, is able to and desires to make us holy as well.

The key word in verses 11b through 15 is "keep," which occurs in verses 11, 12 and 15. A synonym, the verb "guard," appears in verse 12. Jesus wants the Father to protect the disciples' relationship with God.

First, he asks that the Father would "keep them in your name." In appealing to the Father's name, he's appealing to the Father's attributes. He's therefore appealing to something that the Father himself wants. Jesus' desire that the disciples' relationship with God be protected is consistent with the Father's desires. The Father's name, in fact, has been given to Jesus, so Jesus acts on behalf of the Father. The name

"Jesus" includes God's personal name Yahweh. "Jesus" means "Yahweh saves." The name "Yahweh saves" is certainly consistent with protection.

The goal of this protection is that the disciples "may be one, even as we are one." God never intended for a person's relationship with him to exist in isolation. A community of believers nurtures individual relationships with God, and individual relationships with God are not ends in themselves but for the sake of contributing to a community. The community of believers plays a crucial role in protecting individuals' relationships with God.

In verse 11, Jesus is asking the Father to simply do what Jesus himself has done, as recorded in verse 12. Jesus himself kept the disciples in the Father's name, and he himself guarded them. He protected their relationship with God.

One of them, however, rejected his offer of protection, Judas, whom Jesus calls "the son of destruction" (NASB - "perdition"). The word for "perished" (*apollumi*) is related to the word for "destruction" (*apoleia*). Because the two words are related, the title "son of destruction" is related to Judas' perishing. So the title is evidently a reference to Judas' own destruction, based on his rejection of Jesus. Lest anyone think this took Jesus by surprise, or that anything is outside the realm of God's sovereignty, the Lord says that long ago the scriptures foretold that one would betray him (Psalm 41:9, John 13:18). Nevertheless, the emphasis is not on the one who perished but on the 11 who accepted Jesus' protection.

Jesus is speaking "these things" in the world, another reference to the things he has spoken to the disciples that concern their relationship with God (17:1). The purpose for speaking to them about God is so that "they may have my joy made full in themselves." We've seen joy spoken of before in the discourse, and each time it concerned a relational joy, the joy associated with knowing God (15:11, 16:24). The joy of knowing God has a protective influence. If we find true joy in knowing God, we're less likely to look elsewhere for false joy.

Verse 14 depicts the threat to their relationship with God: the world. Jesus has given the disciples God's word, which is the gospel that they believed (17:6), thereby attracting the world's hatred. Anyone who believes the gospel poses a threat to the world, because the gospel confronts the world's sin. The world's hatred, therefore, may draw us away from God, where it appears safer.

A solution that might occur to us is that the Father take us out of the world. Such a solution makes sense to us, especially when we are experiencing pressure of living in a fallen world. But it doesn't occur to Jesus, because he wants to love the world through us. Instead, Jesus asks the Father to keep his disciples "from the evil one." Grammatically, it could mean that Jesus is asking that they be kept not from the evil one, meaning Satan, but from evil in general. But John seems to be referring to "the evil one" with identical constructions in 1 John 2:13, 3:12 and 5:18. The enemy is not the world but Satan, who inspires the world. As Paul says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

In verses 14 and 16, Jesus says the disciples are not of the world, just as he is not of the world. Because this is so, the world will hate us, because it wants undisturbed wickedness. So Jesus asks the Father that we might be protected from the influence of the world, whose hatred, as inspired by Satan, might cause us to wander from God.

In verses 11b through 16, then, we see Jesus' heart to protect us. One of King David's mighty men, Shammah, illustrates such a heart to protect: "And the Philistines were gathered into a troop, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the people fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the midst of the plot, defended it and struck the Philistines; and the Lord brought about a great victory" (2 Samuel 23:11-12). While everyone else fled, Shammah stood his ground out of his love for the people of God, defending the food on which the people depended. We see in Shammah a heart similar to that of Jesus - a heart to protect the people of God.

Finally, in the next verses, we see Jesus' heart to set us apart for God.

Jesus' heart to set us apart

John 17:17-19:

(17) "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (18) As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. (19) And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."

The verb "sanctify" means "to set apart." When something is sanctified, it is set apart for a special purpose. Instruments involved in the service of the temple were "sanctified." Jesus prays that the disciples would be set apart. The special purpose we are set apart for is to know God, for we belong to him (17:6, 9).

The instrument of sanctification is "the truth," which Jesus defines as the Father's "word." John in his gospel uses each of these terms in reference to Jesus (John 1:1, 14:6). The Holy Spirit would lead them into all the truth - meaning all the truth about Jesus (John 16:13-15). Jesus has twice previously in John 17 referred to the Father's word (17:6, 14). In each case he seemed to be referring to the gospel. But he himself is the gospel. In John's mind, the entire word of God concerns Jesus (John 5:39). So when Jesus is asking the Father to set apart the disciples in the truth, which is the word, he's asking that they be set apart in himself. Israel was set apart by the law, God's word (Leviticus 11:44-45); we are set apart by the Word made flesh.

We are set apart in Christ to know God so that Jesus might send us into the world, just as the Father sent him into the world. Jesus carried his relationship with the Father into the world, which he loved. Likewise, we carry our relationship with the Father into the world, which we love. We are set apart first of all to know God and second of all to be sent into the world. If we are going to be sent into the world, we had better be set apart to know God.

For the purpose of the disciples' being set apart, Jesus is setting himself apart. He is not setting himself apart in the truth, for he is the truth. Nevertheless he is setting himself apart, as a priest preparing to offer up a sacrifice (Exodus 28:41). The sacrifice that he is preparing to offer up, of course, is his own body (Hebrews 10:5). The Truth offers himself up as a sacrifice so that we might be set apart in the Truth. Being in him, we are set apart for the glorious privilege of knowing God and entering the world as his lights.

The purpose of Christ's sacrifice is so that the disciples might be set apart. Once the sacrifice is complete, the setting apart is complete. Hebrews 10:10: "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." In Christ we have been sanctified; we have been set apart to know God and serve him.

As we listen to Jesus pray to the Father, we see his heart to set us apart for this special purpose. He asks the Father that we be sanctified, and he himself does the sanctifying work on the cross. It is Jesus' heart to set us apart for something special.

I live behind a house with five children. Making five children feel special is quite a task, but their parents are very good at this. From time to time they give a special gift to each child. Not long ago, they gave one of the girls a bunny. It was neither her birthday nor Christmas. She was "set apart" for this special gift. The little girl cradled the bunny adoringly. If she doesn't know now, she will know later that such gifts are signs that her parents think she's special. Similarly, our heavenly Father through his Son Jesus Christ has set us apart for something special: knowing him and carrying him with us into the world.

The answer is yes

We don't have to do much guessing to know how the Father has answered - and will answer - Jesus. Jesus is the beloved Son of the Father. The answer in each case is yes. All the things Jesus asked for have come to pass and will continue to come to pass.

see his heart to die for us, his heart to share truth with us, his heart to intercede for us, his heart to protect us and his heart to set us apart.

- SCG, 1995

[Back to the Scott Grant Library Index page](#)
[To the PBC Home Page](#)
