

# Remembering Our Great High Priest (Jn 17.1-26)

## Part 1

*The Foundation Laying Work of Christ Our Priest (Jn 17.1)*

*WestminsterReformedChurch.org*

*Pastor Ostella*

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### Introduction

The Lord's Supper is a time to remember the Lord Jesus in a way that is distinct from how we remember Him every time we gather for worship on the Lord's Day. The distinctiveness in view is a matter of emphasis and peculiar focus. In other words, Jesus is the center of every doctrine and the foundation of every sermon, but He is not the subject of every doctrine or the subject of every sermon. The subject of a sermon might be the fifth commandment (honor your father and your mother), and we do not preach the fifth commandment properly if we do not ground it in Christ. We might say that Jesus is the central reference point and foundation of every sermon, but at the Table, He is the subject because He said, come and partake of a symbolic feast "in remembrance of me." Because we remember Him all the time, there must be some distinct and special remembering in view in the command to remember Him in communion. Again, communion remembering is a matter of emphasis and peculiar focus.

Therefore, we preach communion remembrances by giving special priority to the gospel remembrances, the Gospels of the NT. For good reason, the early church fathers called the Gospels the remembrances. The Gospels record the life of Christ, His birth, actions, reactions, preaching, teaching, healing, His death, and His resurrection. Thus, we can go to the record, sometimes here and sometimes there, to focus our attention in a concentrated way on Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In this light, today, I am beginning a series of communion messages on the view of Jesus that John gives us in chapter 17 of his Gospel. This chapter contains the high priestly prayer of Christ, and this morning we will aim at an introductory overview of the prayer. The title of the series is "Remembering Our Great High Priest" and the focus of this introductory message is the foundation laying work of our priest. Two things are important to cover: Jesus is preparing the disciples for His departure, and He is doing so in the shadow of the cross.

### 1A. Jesus is preparing the disciples for His departure

The prayer is part of a context in which Jesus is laying the foundation for the time between His departure and His second coming. This context shows us that He is the builder of the church because of how He prepares the disciples for what lies ahead (cf. v. 14, it is as if we are in the time between already, looking back on the preaching of the disciples and the hatred of the world toward them).

In 17.1, we read that "after Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed." What He "said" refers to the words of 16.31-33 and, by the linkage, it refers all the way back to 13.1. He knew that His work on earth was coming to a close, so He gathered the disciples in the upper room where He instituted the Lord's Supper: **Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper...** (Jn 13.1). John's record of the events of the upper room is much fuller than what we have in the other Gospels. Although John does not give us the words of institution of the Supper (**do this in remembrance of me**), he does narrate what went on *at the Table* beginning with short dialogues (13) that lead more and more to monologue (14-16) until in chapter 17 all dialogue disappears. If you have a red letter edition of the NT (where red indicates the words of Christ), then you can readily see that in 15-17 there are only five verses not in red, and three of them are comments of the narrator (thus, only two are part of the events of 15-17). In the upper room discourse, we have an extensive record of the final words of our Lord as He prepares the disciples for His departure. His purpose is to keep them from stumbling and to lay the foundation of the church as the prayer shows us: He does not just pray for the disciples, but for all that will

believe on Him through their word (17.20). The apostle-disciples represent all disciples; they are the nucleus of the coming church; hence, the foundation laying aim is here.

The idea of foundation laying for the time between surfaces throughout the upper room discourse. There are many passages that show this (and they show us loving concern).

**Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (13.1)**

**What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand (13.7)**

**I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he (13.19)**

**<sup>33</sup> Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' <sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13.33-35).**

**"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (14.1-3).**

**"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (14.12)**

**<sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me (14.18-19).**

**<sup>29</sup> And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. <sup>30</sup> I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming (14.29).**

**<sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours (15.20).**

**"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. <sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning (15.26-27).**

**I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. <sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you (16.1-4).**

**<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you (16.7).**

**<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you (16.12-14).**

**<sup>16</sup> "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me" (16.16)**

**I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father (16.28).**

Thus, there are foundational principles laced throughout these chapters (13-16; we could cover the upper room discourse, the dialogues section, in a series for PCR). This foundation laying shows His love for you and me in the time between. Foundation laying also takes place in the prayer, and this fact leads to the second main point.

## 2A. Jesus is preparing the disciples for His departure in the shadow of the cross

At some point, Jesus and the disciples left the upper room enroute to the garden (18:1) where Judas betrayed him (18:3). I say, “at *some point*” they left the upper room because it is difficult to follow the place to place movement from 14.31b and 18.1a:

**Rise, let us go from here [clearly, from the upper room], 14.31b**

**When Jesus had spoken these words [the words of John 17], he went out [is this from the upper room?] with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered, 18.1**

It may very well be that all of chapters 13-17 took place in the upper room, with 18.1 recording the actual departure from the upper room, and 13.31b recording the point in the upper room discourse when Jesus indicated that the time was near to leave (This is like saying, to your grandchild, “it is time to go home now, get prepared”; thus, “time to go” merges with “prepare to go.” It is time to prepare to go.). What Jesus said, then, was in effect, “Let’s get ready to go” and while the thought of departing was settling in, and the preparations to leave were made, more things were said (i.e., the contents of chapters 14-17; literal reading out loud takes about five minutes per chapter, thus, there is really no significant problem with 14.31b and 18.1a). Then, having spoken the words of John 17, the Lord left the upper room and went out to the garden where Judas betrayed Him, and the soldiers arrested Him (18.1-12). After His arrest, final events happened in quick succession: trials before the high priests (in 18.13-40), interrogation before Pilate (18.28-19.1-17), and crucifixion (19.18). Thus, the time from the upper room and the high priestly prayer to the crucifixion is hours not days.

Three implications emerge from the timing of these events.

1) First, and significantly, Jesus spoke the prayer of John 17 in the shadow of the cross. It is the only extensive prayer of our Lord on record. In the Gospel of John, it is the last extended word He spoke. It is a passage of such profound significance that it merits treatment all its own. Like the entire upper room discourse, it too is forward looking. Jesus is laying the foundation for the church, for the disciples then and now, for all of us in the time between (17.20). Notably, one distinct plank in the foundation for the church is the inseparability of the death of Christ and His high priestly intercession.

In this prayer, Jesus tells us how He intercedes for us before the cross, which shows us how intercedes for us on the the cross, and in turn, this shows us how He intercedes for us after the cross in the time between His first and His second coming.

2) Second, this prayer anticipates the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross in the time of His dying as crucified Lord. This passage helps us understand the seven saying better, and the seven sayings help us understand this passage better.

3) Third, the prayer of John 17 gives foundation to Paul’s doxology-like appeal to the intercessory work of Christ. His work as intercessor is like a capstone in this great redemptive building. Paul gives the beautiful a fortiori argument in Romans 8.32, namely, that if the Father gave Christ in death for us then it is inconceivable to think that He will fail to give us the things that we need for our salvation. He gave the greatest gift in giving His Son, so how will He not also with Christ give us all lesser things that we need for salvation such as justification and triumph over all opposing forces? In the middle of this argument (8.32-39), Paul assures us that our justification, forgiveness, and eternal glory rests soundly in the death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ for us as our great high priest, now at the right hand of God (v. 34).

John 17 unpacks the intercessory work of Christ on our behalf in such a way that Paul must be summarizing it and building on it. When we put these passages back to back, we can see how each passage helps us understand the other better. Thus, per Paul, we understand that in the high priestly prayer of John 17 Jesus gives us insight into how He, as enthroned Sabbath king, appeals to His death and resurrection for us as the basis upon which the Father will give us all things, whatever we need to arrive safely in heaven with an inheritance of eternal glory (Rom 8.34 with 8.32).

My sins, o the bliss of this glorious thought  
My sins, not in part but the whole

Were nailed to the cross  
 And I bear them no more  
 Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Conclusion: Jesus is the giver of good news clearly defined

From John 17, we learn that the nature of the priestly offering of Christ is equivalent to the nature of the atonement. This is a key passage on the subject of the cross. It forces us to think of our high priest as accomplishing a work assigned to him in the eternal purposes of God (17.1-4). Therefore, the blood he offered on the altar as high priest was the blood of the eternal covenant (Heb. 13.20).

Because the prayer takes place in the shadow of the cross, it helps us understand what the cross means. We cannot separate this prayer and the crucifixion if we want to understand the death of death that took place in the death of Christ. He guides us in a foundational way to something essential about the message we are to preach to the nations in the time between. Part of that message is the fact that He does not pray for the world but for those the Father gave Him (17.9, 20, 24). In other words, particular redemption is part of the good news clearly defined by the Lord Jesus as our great high priest.

Here, in this outstanding moment in the holy of holies, Jesus invites us to ponder His eternal Sonship, the eternal covenant of redemption, and the particular objects of His petitions. Here we learn that particular redemption is good news! Our high priest is telling us that He came to secure our salvation once and for all, and that He did in accomplishing the work the Father gave Him to do. The good news that Jesus secured and that He announces is the good news that His death is the death of death for His covenant people. Hence, it is not at all rooted in us, in anything we are or do. That is good news. Our high priest is announcing marvelous good news for our sin-weary ears.

What then shall we say to these things?

1) I need Him

I need this great, marvelous, wonderful, and loving high priest. In the shadow of the cross on which He suffered beyond measure, He paved the way ahead for His disciples then and now. Before the cross, on the cross, and now beyond the cross, He is the great high priest of our souls. So, we pray, O Lord Jesus, beyond and above everything, I need you.

2) I own Him as my very own

I cling to Him. I do not just look back in these memories and say, "that is something great." I say, "that is for me, He is for me, He is mine." I appropriate Him as my life and my all. As the song puts, "loving me, seeking me, finding me, keeping me, He is mine." Furthermore, as my high priest, He points me to knowledge and obedience because His truth is sanctifying truth (Jn 17.17). O Lord Jesus, I submit myself to you not only as my priest, but as my prophet and king as well.

3) I own His disciples as my co-disciples, as my family of given ones

I can say in a derivative sense what He said, "Father, yours are mine, and mine are yours" (Jn 17.10). "Lord Jesus, your brothers and sisters are my brothers and sisters" (Rom 8.29). I remember that you said you revealed the Father to us with love as the goal (Jn 17.26). As always, the Lord Jesus takes us by the hand, and leads us to one another saying, "this is your brother and this is your sister, if you love me, then love them." O Lord Jesus, in submission to you, in love for you with gratitude, willingness, and self-denial, I commit myself to love your disciples as my co-disciples and as my family of given ones.

These are the things we say in the symbolic partaking, and these are the things that we should say in our hearts as we take and eat to the glory of Christ, amen.