

John 17

You have known for a long time that the Jewish people had a high priest. Aaron was the first to bear that high office, and when he died his son, Eleazar followed him as high priest. So it continued for centuries. Whenever the high priest died, another came in his place. You know the names of several high priests. I will just mention a few of them.

Eli the judge was at the same time high priest. During the reign of king Saul lived Ahimelech, who was murdered by Doeg. In the time of David, Abiathar was high priest, and later Zadok. And when the wicked queen Athaliah reigned the high priest was the God-fearing Jehoiada. Now, at the time of which we write, when Jesus was here upon the earth the name of the high priest was Caiaphas.

What did a high priest have to do? ... What was his work? ... O, I do not have to tell you that, for you know, I am sure. He had to offer sacrifices and to pray. He made reconciliation for the whole nation. He REPRESENTED the people.

But all these high priests died, for they were but men. Yet these high priests were examples or types of the Lord Jesus. They pre-figured the Messiah who was to come.

The Lord Jesus is the only, the great High Priest.

A Jewish high priest offered an animal, a lamb, but the Lord Jesus offered Himself upon the cross. Earthly high priests spilt the blood of a beast, but the heavenly High priest shed His own blood upon Golgotha's hill.

As I said just now, the earthly high priest had not only to offer sacrifices but also to pray. He had to pray for the people of Israel. Well now, the heavenly High priest also prayed for His people, for His elect.

We will just return in our thoughts to the upper room, where the Lord Jesus on this Thursday evening, the last evening before His suffering and death, is gathered with His disciples. In the last chapter we told you some of the things that took place there. But, before He left the room, He first offered up a prayer. I will tell you something of that holy, High priest's prayer of the Lord Jesus. But you must listen very carefully, for it is not easily understood.

In this prayer the Lord Jesus prays first for Himself. Nor is that surprising. He stood now at the commencement of His sufferings unto death. In a few hours time He would be carried away as an evildoer. That suffering would be fearful, for He

had to endure the whole of God's wrath against sin. True, the Saviour is the Son of God, but He is also MAN, truly human! That is why He prays to His heavenly Father for strength in the hour of trial.

The Lord Jesus, the Creator of heaven and earth, left heaven and came as a man upon this cursed world. The curse rests upon the world through sin. What did He come to do? ... He ~~came~~ to save sinners. He was burdened with the sins of His people. Their sins were accounted as His.

Sin must be punished, for God is righteous. ALL sin is punished. The wicked must bear that punishment themselves, but for God's people Jesus has endured the punishment. No, God does not let His people's sins pass; God has punished their sins too, but in ANOTHER, in the Lord Jesus. So you see, this also was part of the work of the Messiah here upon earth.

And that is why Jesus prays for strength in the heavy path of suffering.

But after His suffering and death the Lord Jesus shall rise again from the dead. He shall be received up again into heaven and then in the Day of Judgment He shall return in the clouds of heaven, as Judge, to judge the quick and the dead. Then shall He be glorified. First humiliation, then exaltation.

All this must take place that God might be glorified. All must redound to the honour and glory of a ^(triune) three-one God.

But the Lord does not pray only for Himself, but also for His disciples. He asks His heavenly Father to keep them. The Saviour shall, through His death, obtain salvation for His disciples. Very soon Jesus will no longer be upon the ~~earth~~ earth, but His disciples will still be travelling through this world. They shall be hated, despised and persecuted.

Hear how He commits His disciples unto His heavenly Father:

"Holy Father," says the Lord, "keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me ... I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them. I pray ... that thou shouldest keep them from the evil ... That they all may be one...."

No, the Lord Jesus does not ask that His disciples also may die; the Lord Jesus does not ask God to take them out of this world, for on the contrary, they must yet remain on earth, they must go forth and preach. They must go forth and bring the gospel to a world which lieth in wickedness. O, they are permitted to tell sinners who are dead in trespasses and sins that there is even for them a hope of salvation. They may point out to lost sinners the Saviour as being the only way of salvation.

That is why He prays His holy Father to keep them then: "Keep them through thy name." To keep them from the evil - from sin.

Then the Lord Jesus prays also for all those who shall be converted through the preaching of the gospel. That preaching shall be blessed to the souls of many. Dead sinners shall be made alive through the work of God's Spirit. Many shall be given a renewed heart. Many shall learn to know the Lord Jesus, through saving faith, as their Surety and Saviour. No, the preaching of the apostles shall not be in vain.

And when the disciples shall have died; when their King shall have taken them unto Him in eternal glory, then shall others continue that work. God shall call His servants to the ministry and so it shall go on throughout the ages. Now too God's servants, the ministers of His word, still preach that same Gospel. The Word of God never changes. God remains eternally the same. Even nowadays by means of the preaching of God's servants dead sinners are converted unto God. There will always remain children of God upon this earth.

Well now, the heavenly High priest prays also for those people of God.

No, He prays not for all men upon the face of the earth. He prays only for His people. Yes, He is praying here for the whole Church of God.

Perhaps, children, you have a God-fearing father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, brother or sister. Well now, for them also, the Lord Jesus was then praying. Yes, and He still prays for them in heaven above.

God shall keep His people. That prayer of the Lord Jesus is heard and answered by His heavenly Father. Not one of God's children shall be lost. All those who are converted shall go to heaven. Why? ... Because Jesus has suffered for them; because Jesus has died for them. That is why ... and that is the only reason!

Does the Lord Jesus also pray for you? ... What a solemn question that is ... and a difficult question to answer too, is it not?

All those who are lost are outside of this intercessory prayer of the Lord Jesus, for (I repeat this emphatically) He prays only for His elect. Just read it: "I pray not for the world," is what He says.

But who then are they? ... Who are the elect? ...

God has concealed that from us. That is something we do not know. ~~Men~~ Neither does that concern us.

You are still living under the means of grace. You are still under the sound of the gospel. God's servants still cry unto you Sunday after Sunday that you must be

born again. Mercy's door is not yet closed.

O, boys and girls, fall upon your knees often. Pray earnestly that the Lord may discover to you your guilt. Ask the Lord to bless the preaching to your hearts. Beg the Lord to call you from death unto life. Despise not the call of God's voice. You are still living in a day of grace.

This chapter is not easy, indeed it is difficult. Yet I hope that you can grasp something of its meaning, but above all I pray that the Lord might bless it to your soul.