

THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF JESUS

by Ray C. Stedman

We have reached the climax in our studies of the *Upper Room Discourse* as we look today at the prayer with which our Lord concludes. It is probably one of the most profound passages in all the New Testament. It has been called "the holy of holies of Scripture," and volumes have been written about this one chapter alone. Our Lord and his disciples had left the Upper Room and were making their way down the Tyropoeon Valley, which separated the Temple from the rest of the city, to the edge of the Kidron Valley, where they were about to cross over into the shadows of Gethsemane's garden. It was here that our Lord began his prayer. It is evident that he prayed aloud in order that the disciples might hear what he had to say to the Father. After they had entered the Garden he withdrew from the disciples and went off by himself and prayed in private to the Father. But here his prayer is public, so that we might hear his communion.

The prayer falls into three general divisions, which we will take in three separate messages, as we attempt to get as much as we can from the depths of this prayer, although, as John R. Stott says so eloquently, "The best we can do is but to paddle in its shallows." Our Lord prayed for three things:

- First, he prayed for himself, that he might be glorified (Verses 1-8);
- Then he prayed for his disciples, that they might be sanctified (Verses 9-19); and
- Then he prayed for the whole church down through the ages, including us here this morning, that it might be unified (Verses 20-26).

The introduction to the prayer is given in the first two verses:

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him." {John 17:1-2 RSV}

The first request of Jesus is that he might be glorified.

"Well," you say, "isn't that a selfish request?" If we prayed it, yes, it would be. If we prayed that we'd be exalted or magnified or glorified in order that the world might see how important we were, it would indeed be a selfish request. But you notice that our Lord immediately adds, "that the Son may glorify thee." So the ultimate end of his request for glory is that the Father may be glorified.

This is always the ultimate purpose for all existence: that it might glorify God. Your life has no value except as it glorifies God. As we have seen earlier in this discourse, to glorify someone, means to manifest or display their hidden virtue or wisdom or power or beauty, to bring out that which is hidden away in them. And here our Lord is asking that he be glorified, i.e., that things hidden in him -- resources and wisdom and beauty which were rightfully his -- might now be made manifest, in order that he in turn might manifest the beauty and the glory and the order and the wisdom of the Father. If you read this, you can see that the major work of all three Persons in the Godhead -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- is to display the mutual glory of one another.

Our Lord now tells us why he needs this additional glory. The Father had already glorified him, and would glorify him again in his death. But the Lord, evidently, is looking on beyond the cross. And he needs additional glory for the reason he gives in Verse 2: "since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him." That is why he needs it -- in order to fulfill the additional work which was given him -- that of giving eternal life to all whom God had called.

There is something very significant here. Our Lord is pointing out that, in his resurrection and ascension, he will have, and does have, power over all flesh. That means he is in charge of all things. As he himself said just before he ascended to the Father, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," {Matt 28:18b RSV}. The writer of Hebrews says that the Son upholds the universe by the word of his power {cf, Heb 1:3}. So here it is evident Jesus is aware that he is Lord over all the universe.

Jesus is Lord, whether men know it or not. That means he controls all the events of history -- and all the ordinary events of our circumstances, our everyday lives. I have to believe that he allowed me to slip from a ladder yesterday and injure my foot because of some value he knew the experience would have for me. And I do believe that. I believe that all events are ordered by the Lord. He uses even the animosity and the hatred of Satan against our race in order to accomplish his purposes and his will.

Yesterday Bob Larson and Dick Hillis gave us a very illuminating and helpful study on China -- what China is doing these days, where it is going, so far as anyone can tell, and what China is like today. Some of us were startled a bit when Bob read from Isaiah's prophecy (44:24 - 45:6) the words of God concerning Cyrus, the pagan king of Persia, whom he would raise up. He describes in detail how he would use him to put down nations and overthrow thrones and overpower kingdoms, though Cyrus did not know him personally. Bob drew a very vivid parallel between Cyrus and Mao Tse-Tung, illustrating the fact that God is using Mao in China and in the world to accomplish his purpose.

This is what our Lord means when he says here that he has power over all flesh, over all the nations -- power to regulate their affairs, power to raise them up and put them down, power to shut doors so that a nation can be closed off from hearing the gospel in order to sharpen its desire for it, while other nations are allowed to be open to hear the gospel. All the events of history, all the events reported in our newspapers -- including Watergate -- have been allowed by the Lord as he regulates and runs the affairs of earth, in order, as he says here, to give eternal life to all those whom God has given him.

In other words, the focal point of all human history is right here. Every event finds its significance only as it contributes in one way or another to the great task God has come into the world to do: to give eternal life to men and women. By virtue of the power he has to regulate the affairs of human history, he gives eternal life to those whom the Father calls and brings to the Son. Now, that is the Christian world view, and I think we need continually to bear it in mind these days -- Jesus is Lord. This is not merely looking forward to a day when he will come again and reign as Lord; he already reigns as Lord over all the affairs of earth, and he is bringing them to the culmination which the Scriptures describe. Here he is aware of that fact, and, in order to do this, he says, he needs additional glory.

Notice what eternal life is. Have you ever tried to define it? You say you were given eternal life. What do you mean? That you are going to be living in heaven forever? That is a phase of it, but that is not really what it is. What does it mean to have eternal life? Jesus defines it for us:

"And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent." {John 17:3 RSV}

Eternal life is the ability, the right, to know God in an ever-expanding, ever-increasing way, to understand and fellowship with, and be in close contact with this mighty Being who upholds all things by the word of his power, and with Jesus Christ, who is the only way by which men can know God. That is eternal life -- the knowledge of a Person.

This really shouldn't be surprising to us. After all, this is the way many things in life are. For example, many of you are married, some for many years. What is marriage? Is it just two people living together in a house, sharing the same salary, raising children, washing dishes and making beds, and expressing a little sex? Is that all that marriage is? No, no. Marriage is the knowledge of a person. That is what makes marriage rich and full. It isn't just living together; it is knowing each other, and coming more and more to know one another.

That is why many marriages grow stale. This process ceases, and people do not continue learning more and

more of what is in another person. So many couples come to me who think that they have arrived, that they have found out all there is to know about each other, and so their marriage appears to them dull and boring. But they haven't arrived. The knowledge of a person is an infinite undertaking. What makes human life rich is the discovery of what is in one another, who we are, and the sharing of it. And what makes eternal life worth the living is the discovery of God, the knowledge of him.

And this is the great gift which only Jesus Christ can give. Notice how exclusive is his claim. It is Jesus who says, "No man can come to the Father but by me," {cf, John 14:6}. Those of us who are Christians must never give that doctrine up. We must never be willing to put any other approach to God on the level of Jesus Christ. We must never say that any person other than Jesus can lead men to God. For Jesus himself says that this is the case. It is he who points out that, of all men who have ever appeared on earth, only he has the power to give the knowledge of God, and of himself, to human beings. This is what the gift of eternal life consists of.

Notice how God works within the Godhead. There is amazing reciprocity of action here. The Father gives the Son power over all flesh. Then he calls out of humanity those whom he wants. Then he brings them to the Son, and the Son gives them the right to know God and the right to know Himself. There is an interplay of activity back and forth. Did you ever think of yourself as called by the Father? I think many of us are so caught up with our human experience of Christ that we forget God must call us before we even can come to him. As Jesus himself put it in John 6, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," {John 6:44 RSV}. These desires we have to find out what life is all about, this hunger for forgiveness which awakens within us, our longing for fulfillment, the desire to have questions about the future answered, all of these are part of the drawing of the Father, by the Spirit -- bringing us to the place where Jesus alone can give us gifts of eternal life. Have you come to that place?

Now Jesus specifies the nature of the glory which he requires to complete this work:

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do [we will look at that in a moment]; and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made." {John 17:4-5 RSV}

Jesus is praying that he might resume now the full manifestations of deity. He had laid them aside when he came into the world, taking upon himself the limitations of humanity. I think it is so helpful for us to realize that when our Lord was here he did not go around showing people how God behaved; he showed them how man behaved -- man indwelt by God, as God intended man to be. And all that you see in Jesus, during the days of his flesh, is a perfect humanity. His deity was hidden. He didn't give it up -- you can't give up what you are -- but he laid aside the exercise of it. Now he is asking that the Father will restore to him that expression of deity which was properly his before the world was made. By this he is praying for the resurrection and the ascension to follow -- that the Father would raise him from the dead in glory, and then later cause him to ascend to heaven to be with him as he was before the world was made. He needs this in order to perform the work of giving eternal life to all those whom the Father would bring to him out of every succeeding generation. It is as God that he gives us eternal life.

There is a tremendous lesson here about prayer. Was it not already God's program that if the Son were crucified he would be raised from the dead and ascend into the heavens? Yet when the hour comes Jesus asks the Father to do this. He prays for this glory which was already promised to him. This helps us a great deal in understanding prayer.

Many people say to me, "Why should I pray? God has already programmed my life. He knows what I'm going to do and what's going to happen to me, so why should I ask him to do anything? It's all going to happen anyway." That position totally ignores the revelation of the Scriptures that prayer is a part of the process by which God brings to pass what he has already proposed to do. James tells us, "You have not because you ask not," {cf, Jas 4:2b KJV}. If you do not ask, it will not happen, because it breaks the link by which God proposes to bring it about. Therefore prayer is vital, and our Lord gives us this example. He prays for that which was already promised him. Prayer is always based upon the promises of God.

Let us look now at these words, "I glorified thee on earth," for here we see the basis of his request for additional glory. Our Lord says, "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." Having arrived at the cross, he had finished one work; now another is about to begin. And for that additional work he needs this additional glory, this return to his original status as the Son of God. But the reason he can ask for it now is that he had finished the work which God had given him to do.

In the next few verses we have a wonderful look at Jesus' own evaluation of what he had accomplished. What was this work which God gave him to do, which he had now finished, and finished with satisfaction, so that he could ask for more glory to accomplish the further work which lay before him? He tells us what it is:

"I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word." {John 17:6 RSV}

That is one part of it. Now he gives another, in Verse 7:

"Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me." {John 17:7-8 RSV}

The work he came to do was two-fold: "I manifested thy name to the men whom thou gave me," and "I have given them thy words." And in saying that he says, "I have accomplished the work which you gave me to do." There have been many books written about the life of Christ, and they are filled with commentary on the amazing things Jesus did -- the multitudes which followed him, the miracles he performed, the crowds to which he witnessed, the healings, the compassionate words he uttered. But Jesus is saying here that all of that was designed to reach eleven men. And having reached them he says, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." Isn't that amazing?

He says, first, "I manifested thy name to them." What does that mean? A name always stands for resources. Your name stands for everything that you are and have.

When Elaine Smith, of Great Falls, Montana, became my wife, she took my name, and she literally took me for all I had! It wasn't much. I had saved up \$100 for our honeymoon. We spent it within the first three days -- and we had to cash her bonds to get home! Even today when I sign a check, the entire Stedman fortune -- all \$200 of it -- is laid on the line!

When Jesus said he had manifested the name of the Father, he was saying that he had revealed to these men the resources in God by which he lived. His attitude and his actions told the story. The way he reacted, the serenity of spirit he displayed, the calmness with which he faced crises, the compassion with which he dealt with the weak, the tenderness, the love in everything he did and said -- they saw at last that the secret was that he was drawing on the Father. "As I live by means of the Father, so you shall live by means of me." They learned that great secret.

And the result was, as Jesus said, "They have kept thy word."

Doesn't that reveal something about us? Why is it that though we have the Word of God so abundantly, yet we often find ourselves not keeping it? The only answer is that we become victims of a paralysis of the will. We lose our motivation. We become listless and lethargic and dull. Why? Because we have failed to grasp the resources available to us. The way to keep the Word of God is to draw upon the life of God, now made available to us in the Son, as the Father's life was available to him, and by which he lived. The first great task he came to accomplish was to show these men how he lived, by what means he acted.

The second was: "I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me."

These convincing words are what he came to give these disciples. He came to teach eleven men a wholly

different way of life, a totally, radically different approach to living. Read the words of Jesus and you can see this. Take the words of the *Sermon on the Mount*. Those opening words reveal an entirely different approach to life than anything the world knows: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed, blessed are the persecuted. Blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the merciful, and the peacemakers -- for theirs is a resource which the world knows nothing about. The kingdom of God, and all its resources, are available to them," {cf, Matt 5:3-10}.

So he had described all this, and these disciples had caught on -- finally! The amazing thing is that they had just barely caught on -- just before these words were uttered. If you look at Chapter 16, Verse 29, you can see this:

His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure! Now we know that you know all things, and need none to question you; by this we believe that you came from God." {John 16:29-30 RSV}

And Jesus heaved a big sigh of relief and said, "Now I've finished the work which you gave me to do. Now they know. My words at last have convinced them!"

Isn't this amazing? This was the work he came to do -- to convince eleven men. He wasn't worried about the multitudes who left him and went back. He didn't care how many he had healed who would no longer acknowledge his name. He was interested only in these eleven Galilean peasants. This was all he had to show for his work. But he said, "That's enough. They know two great things:

1. "They know how I live, and
2. "They've heard my words.

"They have described what that life is like, and that is all they need to know. When the Spirit comes and makes all this real to them, that will change the world!"

And he is satisfied now to go back, in order that he might work through these men as the Father worked through him. So here is the great program of God. Jesus now says, "Father, I've finished that work. Now give me the glory I had with you before the world was -- so that, as God the Son, upholding all things by the word of my power, running every event of human life and working out the entire program from beginning to end, I might work through these to whom I have given eternal life, and through all who shall later believe on me through their word, in order that the great work which you have designed for men -- that a great company of people from all ages and tribes and generations and tongues, shall receive the knowledge of you: the gift of eternal life."

And God granted that request. Jesus was raised from the dead, and he ascended into the heavens in order that he might fulfill this work. I believe this is what is meant in Hebrews 5:7:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. {Heb 5:7 RSV}

Thus we have the great work of redemption going on throughout the world since that day. Isn't this an amazing program that God has? He works through incarnation -- life implanted into people. And that life, lived by them, in their circumstances, is what will change the world.

I hope we never forget this, as we see it manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we count it a great privilege to bow the knee to you and proclaim you as Lord, to the glory of God the Father, even in this day of rejection, when much of the earth scorns your claims and men turn their backs upon your righteous law and refuse to heed your gracious

word of invitation. Yet we thank you, Lord Jesus, that as we gather here this morning, we've been drawn by the Father, drawn by the Spirit to you. You have given to us the gift of eternal life -- "that we may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." We thank you for this, Father, and ask your blessing upon us. May we be faithful to that word and to that life which is within us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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