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Gospel of John #35

Sermon Summary #35

The One Prayer God Always Answers John 12:27-36

I'll be the first to admit that prayer can often be quite frustrating. Why is it that sometimes God says "Yes" and at other times "No" and in most cases, "Wait"? It can be frustrating and confusing to watch as one person receives an answer and another does not. There are numerous other unanswered questions about prayer that I could mention, but let me come to my primary point: There is one prayer to which God is always quick to say, "Yes!"

At one of the more crucial moments in his earthly life, Jesus prayed that prayer. At a time of intense inner turmoil and distress, Jesus uttered a prayer that he knew the Father would answer. We're going to look at that prayer today, and we're going to see how we, too, can pray like Jesus did when faced with overwhelming obstacles.

The Hour has Come!

Although it may at first sound a bit confusing, I can say without hesitation that ***at no time was the sovereignty of God more clearly seen than when Jesus was crucified.*** We see this in his declaration in John 12:27 – "for this purpose I have come to this hour." I can't imagine Jesus speaking with any more decisive, authoritative confidence than he does here.

Earlier in his ministry Jesus made it explicitly clear that his hour had not yet come. When his mother, Mary, came to him at the wedding in Cana and complained that the host had run out of wine, Jesus responded by saying: "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). When his disciples tried to persuade him to travel to Jerusalem, he said: "My time has not yet come" (John 7:6-8). When the religious authorities tried to arrest and kill him, "no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come" (John 7:30). Over and over again we read that no one was able to seize him or kill him because his hour had not yet come. But now, it has!

In John 12:23, he declared: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Here in John 12:27 he again makes it clear that it was precisely for "this hour" that he had come into the world. In John 13:1 we are told that "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father." And in John 17:1 he prays to the Father and says, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you."

Up until now the world has stood helpless before Jesus. Now, he will stand helpless before the world. Before now, he has spoken. Now he will stand before his accusers silent. Before, he was strong; now, he appears to be weak. Up until now he roared like a lion. From this point on he will go silently like a lamb to be slaughtered.

The point is that the alarm on heaven's clock has sounded! The single most important hour in human history has come. The turning point, the climactic moment, the hour to which every preceding hour looked forward and from which every subsequent hour issues forth, has come.

In this we see God's sovereignty. I strongly urge you to assess the state of your soul as we stand in the midst of a world that appears to be careening out of control. No! God is in control. Don't ever forget that the cross of Jesus Christ was God's idea. Someone once referred to God as "the world's greatest failure" and to the cross as "the most tragic accident ever to befall the human race." No! The apostle Peter declares that Jesus and the shedding of his blood on the cross were "foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20). On the day of Pentecost Peter spoke again: "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). Again, in Acts 4:27-28, Peter declares:

"for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:27-28).

I once heard a tragic story of a father and his twelve-year-old son who went camping in Florida. The father momentarily turned his back on his son to attend to other tasks and a 12-foot alligator attacked and killed the boy. What a tragedy. The neglect and oversight of this father led to his son's death. But that is not what happened in the case of Jesus. God the Father was not preoccupied with other matters or distracted by some crisis on the other side of the earth while the enemies of Jesus nailed him to a cross. The Father had preordained that the Son would be crucified. The Son had willingly and joyfully offered himself up as a sacrifice for sinners. The cross is a standing, lasting witness to the sovereignty of God over even what appears to be the worst of tragedies.

The Father Glorifies Himself in and through the Son

The "hour" that had finally come was the hour in which the Father would be glorified in the Son. But according to v. 28, the Father has already glorified his name in and through Jesus. How so?

We struggle with this because when we hear the word "glorify" we envision bright lights and pomp and power and overt military victories and massive crowds who sing someone's praise. We tend to think of what happened on the Mt. of Transfiguration when Jesus was revealed in the blinding majesty of his divine nature. But when you look at the life of Jesus it doesn't appear to be all that glorious. Leon Morris has explained it this way:

"What, after all, did he do? He preached to a few people in an outlying province of an ancient, long since vanished empire. Even there he was not often in the capital, the center of affairs, but in a remote country area. He taught a few people, gathered a few disciples, did an uncertain number of miracles, aroused a great number of enemies, was betrayed by one close follower and disowned by another, and died on a cross. Where is the glory" (22-23).

Again, where is the glory? Morris goes on to suggest, rightly so in my opinion, that "real glory is to be seen in lowly service" (23). He explains:

"Where people needed help, he helped them. Where there were sick, he healed them. Where there were ignorant folk, he taught them. Where there were hungry people, he fed them. All the time he was seeking the needy. He did not haunt the palaces of kings and governors. He was not found in the high places of the earth. . . . All his life he was among God's little people, those who in one way or another felt their need. And wherever there was need, he was found doing lowly service. That is what Christ came to do. And that is glory" (23-24).

To put it simply, the glory of God as seen in Jesus was in his touching of lepers, his dining with social outcasts, his talking in public with an immoral Samaritan woman, and his forgiving the sins of a prostitute. In each and every act that we consider undignified and unsophisticated and lacking decorum the glory of God in Christ Jesus shines forth.

But there is yet more glory to come. When the Father's voice boomed from heaven, he not only declared that he has already glorified his name through the Son but that he "will glorify it again" (v. 28). He is talking, of course, about the impending crucifixion of Jesus.

How can that be? After all, the cross was the most revolting, ugly, disgusting, obscene instrument in the ancient world. It was the emblem of shame. It was the instrument of execution reserved for non-Roman citizens, outcasts, slaves, and the dregs of society. It was aesthetically repugnant in every sense of the term. And yet it was simultaneously the primary way in which the Father would be glorified through the Son. How so?

The cross of Jesus glorified the Father because it revealed the Father's commitment to justice. Sin must be punished. God will not overlook human idolatry and immorality. The Father's holiness is seen in the cross. But so too is his mercy and grace and love displayed. For it was on the cross that Jesus died for those who deserved only eternal death and damnation. He undertook on the cross the task of sacrificing himself as a substitute in the place of hell-deserving men and women. In doing so he vindicated the honor of the Father and simultaneously delivered his people from the judgment they otherwise should have suffered.

Knowing that this “hour” for his crucifixion has come, we see the reaction of Jesus. Look at vv. 27-28. As Jesus contemplated what was about to happen, his “soul” was “troubled” (v. 27). The word speaks of emotional turmoil, anguish, and agitation. But why? If Jesus knew that this was precisely why he came into this world, why would he be “troubled” when that hour finally arrived?

He was troubled for the same reason we see when later he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36). The impending reality of enduring the Father’s holy wrath against sin was finally sinking into the soul of the man Christ Jesus. Here we see his true humanity. He knows what is coming and the inescapable reality and pain of what he is about to endure strikes home. And yet he does not back down from the “hour” that had come. He submits himself to the will of his Father.

And what does he pray? “Father, glorify your name” (v. 28). That is the prayer, the request, the desire that God will always answer in the affirmative. How does one glorify the Father? Simply by doing what he has commanded, no matter the cost, no matter how inconvenient it may be, no matter how distasteful it is. This is not mere acquiescence, but passionate commitment to do what most honors and glorifies God.

In the most agonizing moments of life, when all is a fog and there is great agitation of spirit and soul and mind and heart, when uncertainty and distress are overwhelming, there is only one prayer, one petition that is always appropriate and guaranteed of receiving a “yes” from the Father. It is this: ***“Father, please glorify your name in and through my life right now.”***

When you are confused by the job you hate or are lacking in money to cover your expenses or your spouse is making life difficult for you, simply pray: “Father, glorify your name in my life, right now.” On those occasions when you are tempted to ask God for a reprieve, as was Jesus, when you want a way out but know you must continue to move forward because it is clearly God’s will for you at that precise moment, simply pray, “Father, glorify your name.” Your prayer at that moment won’t ever be as dramatic or demanding as death on a cross, but it is still critically important to the display of God’s glory through your life.

If you pray this prayer you will never have to close it by saying, “If it be your will.” It is *always* God’s will to glorify his name through his people.

The Audible Voice of Affirmation

I wish it were the case that when we submit to the Father’s purpose and will, as Jesus did here, that we would hear the audible voice of God! But that probably won’t happen. There are only three times in the NT that the Father speaks audibly from heaven: (1) at the baptism of Jesus; (2) at the transfiguration of Jesus; and (3) here, as the Son submits to the Father’s will to proclaim the Father’s glory.

I have to say it’s somewhat encouraging to know that there were skeptics about the supernatural back in the day of our Lord and not just in our day. Some were evidently so shut off to the presence and power of God or were so spiritually dull that they couldn’t recognize God’s booming voice when it came from heaven. There were three reactions to this incident. Some knew immediately that it was God and they listened attentively and in awe. Others insisted that it was nothing more than thunder. And then there were those who acknowledged the spiritual realm but mistook God’s voice for that of an angel.

But if most in the crowd don’t understand what the voice from heaven said, why did Jesus say that “this voice has come for your sake, not mine” (v. 30)? Several things may be said to answer this question.

First, if they only had ears to hear, that is to say, if their hearts were desperate to hear the voice of God, they would have not only heard it but would have understood it as well. They simply didn’t take advantage of what had the potential to be a great encouragement to them.

Second, after his resurrection the followers of Jesus would remember what he had told them about the voice and what was said. It would be for them a confirmation that indeed the cross was his way of glorifying the Father.

Third, even though the crowd didn't understand the voice, the very fact that a voice from heaven spoke should have alerted them to the fact that a significant event in redemptive history was at hand.

Fourth, the voice would have benefited them greatly if they had only realized that it was a confirmation of the kind of prayer God always answers.

No, in case you are wondering, I have never heard the audible voice of God. I have on several occasions heard what I would call the "internal audible" voice of God. That happens when he speaks with such clarity and undeniable power in your head or heart that you know it is God who is communicating with you. I'm not talking about an impression or an inclination or a sense that God is revealing something. I'm not talking about a vision when you "see" in your mind's eye something written or some image. I'm talking about actually hearing in your head the voice of God. You can detect its tone and cadence as much as you can detect mine right now as I speak. Let me share with you briefly a couple of occasions when this happened to me.

Summer of 1961 when I "heard" God's Spirit call me into full time Christian ministry . . .
Two incidents in 1994 while in Kansas City: "Phil" and "Martha" . . .

Three Things the Cross of Christ Achieves

As the reality of his death on the cross is pressing in on the mind and heart of Jesus, he briefly mentions four things that his crucifixion will accomplish.

First, he declares in v. 31, "now is the judgment of this world."

For believers, the cross of Jesus is judgment in a good and glorious way, for it bears witness to the fact that God's wrath against our sin has been poured out on him so that we need never fear it again. This is the "judgment" that we should have endured but now don't have to because Jesus has endured it in our place.

But for the world, by which he means the world of unbelievers, the judgment is entirely negative. It is negative and personally devastating because there is no hope for those who reject God's provision for the forgiveness of sins. If you reject the cross of Christ as mankind's only hope for forgiveness and salvation, the only outcome for you is eternal judgment. Furthermore, when Jesus died on the cross it seemed as if the world had won. Jesus appeared to suffer defeat. But by means of the very act which they thought was their victory over him they brought condemnation upon themselves.

Second, he also says in v. 31 that "now will the ruler of this world be cast out."

Again, at first glance the cross appears to be Satan's triumph, when in fact it is his defeat. This was Paul's point in Colossians 2:13-15,

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him [or, in it, that is, the cross]" (Colossians 2:13-15).

Precisely how was Satan defeated at the cross? Why did it "disarm" demonic authorities and "put them to open shame" and "triumph" over them? How did this happen? I think there are three answers to this.

(1) We read this in Romans 3:23-26.

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-26).

Satan is the slanderer not only of you and me but of God. He has slandered God's character by saying he was weak and wicked and worthless and devoid of holiness or justice because of his "failure" to do anything about the on-going sin and idolatry of Israel throughout the OT. Hear what Paul says: it was God's "divine forbearance" that led him to "pass over former sin" without exacting from sinners their full due. Satan would ask, "How can God be just and holy and worthy if he does nothing to those who repeatedly defame and defy his name and will?" Well, the cross of Christ is the answer to that accusation. It defeated Satan and his lies by vindicating the holiness and justice of God. It demonstrated or showed God's righteousness in the face of Satan's accusations.

(2) Satan's hold on people is their unforgiven sin. The only legal claim that he could ever make over you was your guilt. But when guilt is gone and sin is forgiven, Satan has lost all authority and all power to undermine your life or destroy your hope. This is Paul's point in Romans 8:31-34,

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Rom. 8:31-34).

Satan may continue to hurl his accusations at us, but they carry no weight. They fall helpless and lifeless to the ground. They are immediately dismissed by the high court of heaven. God speaks a definitive, "Objection overruled!" Why, and on what basis? On the basis that whatever judgment or condemnation those sins deserved has been endured by Jesus. He is the one who died in our place to satisfy God's wrath. He is the one who was raised and is now interceding for us at God's right hand. That is how Satan was "cast out" by the cross of Christ!

(3) The third way the cross "cast out" or defeated Satan is that because of it Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father and from that place of absolute authority he has sent to us his Holy Spirit (John 16:7). It is through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit who lives in us that we have authority over Satan and his demons (see Luke 10:17-20).

Third, he said in v. 32, "and I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself."

The word "people" is not required by the text. It is enough that we translate this simply as "all". But who does Jesus have in mind? There are two ways of understanding the word "all."

Many argue that this is the "all whom the Father has given him," that is, all of his sheep (see John 6:37; 17:2). Thus, in and through what was accomplished on the cross Jesus secures the salvation of people like you and me. He "draws" all people to himself as the crucified and exalted Savior of sinners.

The other option argues that "all" means *all without distinction as to race or tongue or nation or heritage*. The words "all men" don't mean that everyone will be saved. We have to read this in context. Remember in the story of Jesus cleansing and judging the Temple he declared that his Father's house would be called a house of prayer "for all nations," not just the Jewish people but people from every tongue and tribe and nation. Again, back in vv. 20-22 we are told that several Gentiles or Greeks came to Jesus.

The point is that the word "all" here means that people from every race and tongue and nation will be redeemed by Christ and drawn by him to saving faith. In John 10:16 Jesus said, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold [i.e., the fold of Israel]. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd." So the point is that all humanity without distinction as to race or national heritage will be drawn to the Son. He is not saying that all without exception will be saved.

The people who heard this were perplexed. We see this in v. 34. They thought that when the Messiah would finally come, he would remain alive and with them on earth forever (see Psalms 72:17 and 89:35-37). They thought only in terms of a triumphant, conquering, eternal Messiah, not a crucified carpenter! It is as if they ask, "What kind of Son of Man are you claiming to be if you are to be crucified?"

Fourth, and finally, through his death and resurrection he brings the light of life to all who believe in him (vv. 35-36).

These final two verses are somewhat enigmatic. Nowhere does Jesus give us an explanation of what it means to be “sons of light.” But I think I have an idea of what it entails.

Everywhere in John’s writings, both here in his Gospel (see John 1:4-13) and also in his three epistles, living in the “light” means living in conformity with the truth that God has revealed to us. As much as our secular world wishes to believe that it is enlightened, Jesus would insist they remain in spiritual and theological darkness. Yes, God *can* be known! Yes, we *can* understand what ultimate truth and absolute good really are. That isn’t an arrogant claim when we realize that the only reason we can know anything at all is because God has graciously revealed it to us by his Spirit.

But being “sons of light” means more than simply that we have had “the eyes” of our “hearts enlightened” (to use Paul’s language in Ephesians 1:18). It means we walk and talk and live daily in close intimate fellowship with Jesus himself and with one another. Here is how John described it in 1 John 1,

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7).

You don’t have to live in darkness another day. Through faith in Jesus you *can* experience the light of true enlightenment. You *can* understand why God created the universe. You *can* understand your purpose for existence. You *can* understand what God is really like. You *can* understand and enjoy who Jesus is and what he has done for you through his death and resurrection. You *can* live each day in the glorious light of knowing you are a son or a daughter of the most high God! You *can* live in the fullness of joy and experience pleasures that never end (Ps. 16:11). You *can* understand what the future holds and have the assurance that you will spend eternity with our great Triune God in the new heaven and new earth.

So, I urge you to come to the light. Come to Jesus and put your trust and hope in him. Make him the preeminent center of your soul. Enjoy him as the immeasurable treasure that he is.