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THE TRAINING OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLESHIP IN JOHN 17

John chapter 17 is a much-loved chapter of Scripture and the prayer of Jesus is often referred to, especially in terms of ‘church unity’, but very few have spoken of the deep insights concerning discipleship and the training of the twelve that we learn from the prayer of Jesus. We are going to see that the discipleship that Jesus speaks of will result in the glory of God being revealed in the disciples and that through their ministry of the word, many would come to the knowledge of Jesus the Messiah and receive of the manifestation of His glory, which is the glory of the Father.

In **verse 1**, Jesus is saying it is time for Him to be glorified. The verse is referring to the soon coming suffering and death of Jesus upon the cross and that through His death and resurrection, the Father would glorify the Son and the Son would glorify the Father (**Rom.6:4**).

In **verse 2**, Jesus says three very important things:

- 1) that He has been given authority over all flesh;
- 2) that Jesus is able to give eternal life;
- 3) those who received eternal life through Jesus have been given to Him by the Father.

What is Eternal Life?

In **verse 3** Jesus gives us the answer: Eternal life is to know the only true God and to know Jesus Christ whom God sent.

Colossians 2:2 confirms that, “*The mystery of God*” is “*both of the Father and of Christ*”.

2 John v.9 says, “*He who abides in the doctrine of Christ, has both the Father and the Son.*”

Apostello

This is the first use of the word ‘sent’ in **John 17**, but it is used again in **verse 8** and twice in **verse 18**, as well as **v.23 & v.25**. This is a very special word in the Greek: *apostello*. It is the root word from which the word ‘apostle’ comes, and it means: *to commission, to set apart for a special service, send a message by someone, send out with a mission to fulfil, equip and dispatch one with the full backing and authority of the sender* [Word Wealth John 20:21, SFLB]. Understanding this word *apostello* helps us to understand Jesus as the Apostle.

Apostle and High Priest

Hebrews 3:1 says we are to “*Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus*”. In these days, God is bringing to His church the knowledge and reality of apostleship [see **Acts 1:25; Romans 1:5; 1Corinthians 9:2; Galatians2:8**], and God is restoring apostles as a necessary foundational ministry for the building of the church in the earth. Some have referred to the prayer of Jesus in **John 17** as the ‘High Priestly’ prayer. However, we will see that the prayer in **John 17** is the prayer of Jesus the Apostle. He is praying for His apostles whom He has raised in the will of God. It is through those apostles that eternal

life will be preached and through their word the glory of God will be revealed in all who believe.

The apostolic work

In **verse 4**, Jesus said *“I have glorified You on the earth”*. How did Jesus glorify the Father on the earth? He said, *“I have finished the work which you have given Me to do”*. What work had Jesus finished that would glorify the Father?

When Jesus was dying on the cross in **John 19:30**, He said *“It is finished! And bowing His head He gave up His spirit”*. What was finished? Is this the same work being finished as referred to in **John 17:4**? No! When Jesus died on the cross He completed the ministry work of the **High Priest** on the earth. He had offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for all sin, once and for all (**Heb.9:12; 9:26; Heb.10:12**).

The work referred to in **John 17:4** is the apostolic work that Jesus as the **Apostle** had completed by training the twelve. We find out that they [with the exception of Judas Iscariot] are now ready to be sent [*apostello*] as apostles into the world (**Jn.17:18**).

Revealing the glory

During the time of the training of the twelve, Jesus did many great works, always with the intention that the disciples, especially the twelve, would receive the revelation of the glory of God through Him. This began in Cana of Galilee. After Jesus had turned the water into wine the Scripture says, *“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him”* **John 2:11**. The great works that Jesus did were designed by God to reveal His glory. It was necessary for the disciples to have a growing knowledge and experience of the manifestation of the glory of God in Messiah Jesus and it is the same for us today.

In **John 17:5**, Jesus refers to the *“glory which I had with You before the world was”*. It was time for Jesus to be fully reunited with the Eternal Invisible God. We understand this happened through the awesome resurrection whereby Jesus received from the Father His fully glorified body. [See **John 20:16-23** and many other verses concerning the resurrection].

Discipleship

In **John 17:6**, Jesus refers to *“the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word”*. In this statement Jesus reveals what the work was that He had finished and thereby had glorified God in the earth (**Jn.17:4**). This is confirming that the **John 17** prayer is the prayer of Jesus the Apostle, not specifically the prayer of Jesus the High Priest. Jesus makes it clear that God gave Him the men who became His disciples; and that they were separated *“out of the world, and they have kept Your word”*. Jesus as the Apostle had **manifested God’s name** to the twelve and they had **kept the word** that Jesus had taught them.

This is discipleship in action. Our work today is just the same:

- to make known the revelation of the Name of Jesus the Messiah, and
- to teach His word to the disciples until they are able to teach others.

This is the way that *“The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of YHWH, as the waters cover the sea”* **Habakkuk 2:14**.

In **John 17:7**, “*Now they have known that all things which you have given Me are from You*”. There comes a time in the teaching and training of disciples when the disciples know the word of God for themselves; that they are “*no longer children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine*” (**Eph.4:14**); that they are no longer children needing “*someone to teach again the first principles of the oracles of God*” (**Heb.5:12**); that they have come to a place of maturity, becoming skilled “*in the word of righteousness*” (**Heb.5:13**) and are able to take the “*solid food*” (**Heb.5:14**), thereby coming to full maturity as fully trained disciples, able to minister the word of God.

Receiving the word through the one God sends

In **John 17:8**, Jesus said He had given to the disciples all the words that God had given Him. Jesus made it clear throughout His ministry that He only did the works of the Father and only taught the doctrine of God (**Jn.5:19-40, Jn.7:16-18**). We are to do the same!

Jesus said, “*They have received them and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me*”. Here is the word ‘sent’ again. When Jesus first sent the apostles out on mission in **Matthew 10:40**, He said “*He who receives You receives Me, and He who receives Me receives Him who sent Me*”. Apostles need to be received, not just referred to as another equipping ministry, but a necessary foundation ministry to bring the revelation of Christ to the whole church and working with the other ministries to bring the whole church to maturity. Without functioning apostles, this can never happen. Jesus said that these first disciples had received Him: “*They have believed that You sent Me*”.

God’s people belong to Him

In **John 17:9**, Jesus prays especially for the twelve. He doesn’t pray for the world, but for those whom God had given Him. He acknowledges that the men God had given Him, still belong to God. All ministers need to note this seriously: all the people of God always belong to God. He purchased them with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**). A lot of church division comes because denominations and individual ministers claim that the people of God belong to them. This is never so.

In **John 17:10**, Jesus states His oneness with the Father: “*All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine*”. Then He says, “*I am glorified in them*”. How is Jesus glorified in His disciples? **Colossians 1:27** says that God “*willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*”. Paul then goes on to describe what the work of the ministry is; it is to “*present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*”. The disciples were at the point of maturity because of the training that they had received from Jesus to carry His glory in them. That glory would be revealed in those who received their word (**Jn.17:20**).

The Name

In **John 17:11**, Jesus refers to His exit from the world; He is leaving His earthly human existence. He is going to be with the Father, but the disciples are to remain in the earth. Jesus asks God “*Keep through Your name these whom You have given Me, that they may be one*”. There is something about the revelation of His name that brings us into oneness, even the

oneness of the Father and the Son. Earlier in **John 17:6**, Jesus said that He had manifested the Father's name to the disciples. Now He is asking the Father to keep the disciples through that same name.

What is the name that is given (Lu.1:31; Matt.1:21)? What is the name above all names (**Phil.2:9-11**)? What is the name that reveals the Eternal Godhead (**Matt.28:19; Col.2:9**)? What is the name that the apostles used for baptism and healing and preaching the gospel in the book of Acts (**Acts 2:38; 3:16; 5:42**)?

Kept in the Name

John 17:12 reveals that we are kept in His name. It is the name that the Father gave the Son. It is the name of Jesus. It is the Hebrew name *Yeshua*. This name means 'He shall save' and even more literally 'Yahweh is salvation' [Word Wealth at Phil.4:23 SFLB].

Jesus admits that one of the disciples had failed to be faithful and did not grow into a mature representative of Jesus, but this was *"that the Scripture might be fulfilled"*.

Joy in making disciples

In **John 17:13** Jesus is speaking as one who has completed His work. He is now to return to the Father. He knows He has fully discipled the apostles and He is now ready to send them into the world. Jesus is prophesying that as the apostles do the work His joy will be fulfilled in them. There is nothing to compare to the joy of serving Jesus in the apostolic mission that He has entrusted to us. He continually opens the door for us to go forth and make disciples of all nations (**Matt.28:19; Rom.1:5**). God's purpose will be accomplished and fulfilled in the earth. Jesus purposefully spoke the word of God in the earth.

But hated by the world

In **John 17:14** Jesus confirms that He has given God's word to the disciples and that will cause them to be hated because *"they are not of the world, just as Jesus is not of the world"* (**James 4:4**). The world will not welcome us, because we are not of the world.

Our ministry is in the world

In **John 17:15** Jesus prays that the Father *"should not take them out of the world, but ... keep them from the evil one"*. Notice that Jesus is not praying for a rapture to rescue His disciples out of the world. Rather He is praying that his disciples will know the victory over the evil one in the world. There is a warning here also that as Christians we are not to live in citadels or monasteries cutting ourselves off from the community of the world. We are to live in the world, witnessing to the reality of Jesus and His kingdom.

John 17:16 confirms that we are not of the world, but we belong to a different kingdom.

Sanctified by the truth

John 17:17 reveals to us probably the most powerful means of sanctification: *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."* We are to continue in the word (**Jn.8:31-32**). *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (**Jn.1:14**). The glory of God was revealed in Him, manifest in grace and truth. **Hebrews 4:12** shows us the power of that word that is able to divide between *"soul and spirit"*, thus enabling us to serve God in the gospel with our spirit (**Rom.1:9**).

The disciples are sent

In **John 17:18** Jesus is now sending [*apostello*] the disciples He has trained as apostles. They are to go into the world. The training of the twelve is complete. They are ready to go out in apostolic mission. They are trained to the point where people will see Jesus in them and receive the knowledge and glory of Jesus through them. This is what Jesus explains further in **verses 20-23**.

In **John 17:19** Jesus is committing Himself to be sanctified, to be fully set apart for the predetermined purpose of God to be fulfilled in Him (**Acts 2:23**). This is referring to the willingness of Jesus to suffer and die.

The fruit and the effect of trained disciples

From **John 17:20** onwards Jesus prophesies the fruit and the effect of the disciples going out in apostolic ministry.

v.20 people will **believe in Jesus through their word**

v.21 because the apostles have been fully trained, the **knowledge of the Father and the Son will be revealed through them**, to those who receive the word. As a result, **the disciples will be one** with the Father and the Son, and **“the world may believe that You [Father] sent Me [Jesus]”**.

v.22 as people believe the preaching and teaching of the trained disciples, they will **receive the glory of Jesus**, the glory that the Father gave Him, and revealed through Him (**Jn.1:14**). This revelation of the glory of God is not given to individuals, but it is given to the body of believers to bring them into true oneness, the oneness of the Father and the Son.

The glory will make us perfect in one

v.23 Jesus explained the oneness in this way, **“I in them, and You in Me; that they may be perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as you have loved Me”**. God has such an exalted purpose for His church; for the ones who receive the teaching of the apostles and come into that transforming knowledge and experience of the glory of the Eternal One fully manifest in Jesus the Christ. When this happens, the world will see a perfect body of brethren manifesting the oneness of the Eternal Godhead, in Messiah Jesus.

This word ‘perfect’ is the Greek *teleioo*, and it means *complete*. It means *consummate in character*, it can mean *consecrated, finished, fulfilled, accomplished*. What a wonderful word to describe the mature body of Christ in the earth, through whom the world will come to know that God sent Jesus. This is the fifth use of the word *apostello* in the prayer of Jesus. It truly is the prayer of the Apostle Jesus.

It is in the oneness of the Father and the Son, that the revelation of Jesus Christ is made known to us. This then enables all of the church [disciples] to **grow into that perfection and completeness**. When such a church exists in the earth, the world will know that Jesus of Nazareth, the One who was crucified, is truly the Son of God (**Matt.14:33**); is truly God manifest in the flesh (**1Tim.3:16**); is truly the only way, the only truth and the very life of the Father (**Jn.14:6**).

Seeing the glory now

In **John 17:24** Jesus prays that the apostles that God had given Him, but also all those who would believe in Him, may be *“with Me [Jesus] where I am, and they might behold My glory which you have given Me”*. It is God’s intention to bring *“many sons to glory”* (**Heb.2:10**), and that has been made possible through the suffering and death of Jesus. Jesus is not referring to His disciples leaving the earth to join Him in heaven; He is referring to **the revelation of the glory that will bring His disciples into that oneness** and wonder of being, which is the reality of the Eternal existence of the Godhead.

Jesus expects God to do this for Him because God has *“loved Me [Jesus] before the foundation of the world”*.

In **John 17:25-26** Jesus concludes His prayer. He addresses God as *“Righteous Father”*. He states that the world has not known the Father, but Jesus came into the world knowing the Father and Jesus was sent [again the word *apostello*] to make the Father known to those who would receive His word. Jesus said, *“And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them”*.

Jesus began the prayer speaking of the time of His glorification. Jesus completes the prayer speaking of God’s love fully expressed in the oneness of the disciples because Jesus is living in them.

The goal of discipleship is for the disciples to be walking in the knowledge of the glory of God, growing in the experiential knowledge of *“Christ in us the hope of glory”* (**Col.1:27**). True discipleship leads to the glory; the glory brings us into a living oneness in Christ and thereby in the Father.

It is time for Jesus to be glorified in His last days church. Committed discipleship enables the necessary work to be done. The goal is to bring many sons to glory (**Heb.2:10**) and to make all to know the mystery of Christ (**Eph.3:2-11**), the mystery of godliness (**1Tim3:16**), and to be walking in that knowledge by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (**Eph.1:17**).

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