

## Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: John Chapter 17: Some Notes

This is John at his powerful best, and a superb insight into what Jesus/God wants for us and in us. It is for us, I guess, a bit like a young woman asked to choose her engagement ring from the dazzling window of a very special jeweller. “Wow, what do we go for!” The John who wrote these words might not have been the John who perhaps heard them; and the John who perhaps heard this conversation between Son and Father was surely not sitting there with a short-hand pad. The certainty is that “John” captures here some of the most important truths about our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us. He also underscores the fact that, above all, Christianity is about relationship.

So, some treasures touched on here, in the certainty that you will find your own treasures.

- 1) The link between “glory” and “the cross”. Glory is about showing the full value and the full splendour, and a degrading and agonising death shows more clearly than anything else the depths/height of God’s love for us. If your starting point was a very tentative hope that God might occasionally deign to notice you, your finishing point is that God loves you to the point of dying for you.
- 2) The link between “glory” and “obedience”. It is easy enough in life to say “I hear you”. What God asks for in his disciples is “hear and obey”. Parents, teachers, doctors, etc, are very used to people sort of listening but then doing very little about what they have heard.
- 3) Crucial to relationship is “knowing”. Knowing God, for us, as compared with Jesus, is not a matter of analysing and understanding, still less of measuring. It is a matter of knowing what God is like (and acting on that knowledge).
- 4) Heaven is basically knowing God and fully enjoying him. William Barclay makes the interesting point that in the Bible “knowing your wife/husband” is a tactful way of describing physical intimacy – but in the context of a much broader joined together love relationship.
- 5) The wording about “the world” has been much misunderstood. Perhaps the best way of putting it is that Jesus is working for a God-directed world, not a God-ignoring world; and Jesus’ disciples can only fulfil their mission if they work for the same thing. If we conclude that the world is past saving, past hope, we are turning our backs on the very salvation that is represented in Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection. We are saying that Jesus got it wrong!
- 6) The “chosen” concept has also caused controversy, and St Paul’s apparently forced conversion has reinforced the difficulty...along with Paul’s own words about “election”. A helpful way of looking at it is that God has a job for everyone (including, as Jean Vanier was always keen to point out, those that the rest of us are

rather inclined to labour as useless!). But, while God can be very persuasive, he doesn't actually determine our response – whether we are, like Saul and C.S. Lewis, very reluctant converts, or born-again enthusiasts who never look back after day one. John's Jesus Prayer embraces not just calling but also equipping: We are up to the task with Divine help, not just with our own resources.

- 7) Called to be "holy".. "Holy" can be a term of abuse – partly because some people are a bit self-righteous, and partly because folk doing the wrong thing often resent being told that this is what they are doing
- 8) That all may be one. Here again, room for debate. There is no doubt that the mission of the Church has been hampered, almost undermined, by the reality that the Church is very visibly divided into sometimes warring factions. Even the mainstream Churches are divided into factions that are almost at war with each other – factions which tend to claim that God is on their side. "Jesus wept!" I doubt that Jesus is bothered by different Christians preferring different sorts of worship, different sorts of organisation, etc. The weeping might come from the lack of respect and mutual love, the arrogance, the emphasis on things that don't matter very much getting in the way of common ground shared responsibility that matters a great deal. One controversial and sensitive point for discussion: Given that Judas "received the sacrament" at the Last Supper, are some Churches right to exclude from the Eucharist other Christians who don't see things entirely as they see them?
- 9) If you are looking for a clear assertion of the divinity of Christ, the assertion that all the Father has is mine.....