

October 29, 2023

“To Whom Do We Pray?”

Matthew 6:9a

FCF: Not knowing who we're praying to

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus calls us to pray.

(magnet) And we are to pray to our heavenly Father.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Knowing who you're talking to can change the conversation. Halloween is this week. Think of all that is associated with that - especially the masks. It's part of the disguise, a hidden identity. We often don't know who we're talking to. How is this person like what I am seeing? Should I be gladdened or frightened? Who is this person? And how should I engage with them?

Knowing who you're talking to can change the conversation. Thankfully, we are not left to guess with God. He has made this clear. Which means everything when it comes to prayer. Prayer is real communication with God. And we can really truly know who we are talking to.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Here in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is addressing three basic religious activities – almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. And He gives warnings for each. On prayer, He warns it is not to be a hypocritical performance or a manipulative posturing but from the heart.

The Lord's Prayer then follows from there. Let me say a few things about this prayer. First, it is not really “the Lord's Prayer” but the “the disciples' prayer” given by the Lord. Second, it's not intended to be a liturgical form set in concrete but a model prayer to be used as a guide. And third, there is the transition. Literally, Jesus says, “You then...” with an emphasis on “you”. It's meant as a contrast. “This is how they pray. But not you. You are to pray like this.”

The prayer begins with an introduction, words perhaps very familiar but something we would do well not to skip over. One ought never skip over the foundation, the most essential fundamentals. Who are we praying to? Knowing who we're praying to changes how and what we pray. Put another way, Jesus calls us to pray. And we are to pray to our heavenly Father.

We are to pray to our heavenly Father. We need to think about this. That alone tells us three things about prayer. First, it is corporate. Second, it is powerful. Third, it is relational.

I. PRAYER IS CORPORATE

First, note the first person pronoun here is plural – “*our* Father”. Prayer is corporate.

A) Not Private

Though no one else can hear your silent prayer, prayer is not merely private.

1. Concern for the one

Yes, God is personally concerned for us as individuals – our struggles, our burdens, our joys.

2. Concern for the many

He cares for each living stone in the building. And the building itself. He cares for each part as well as the whole body. Somehow, each of us and all of us have His full attention all the time.

B) *But Familial*

Prayer is not private. It is not all about us. It is familial. There are others involved.

1. Family ties

There are family ties. When you become a Christian, it's not just your relationship with God that changes. It's your relationship with all Christians that changes. They are now your siblings.

2. Family concerns

So there are these family ties. And, with that, family concerns. Ours is a shared life in Christ. This is why we are told to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep.

“*Our Father*” means we are a family united in Christ. Prayer is corporate.

Application:

Which is to say our ties to one another in Christ demand our concern for one another in prayer. This shared relationship demands things of us. So we have to then argue with Cain. As he was confronted by God over killing Abel, he asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Yes, we are our brother and sister’s keeper. So we seek out ways to help. And ways to pray. Think then. What would the transcript of your prayer life reveal? How concerned are we for one another?

Prayer is corporate. Jesus calls us to pray. And we are to pray to *our* Father in heaven.

II. PRAYER IS POWERFUL

But we see something else here. “*Our Father in heaven.*” Meaning, prayer is powerful.

A) *Not about Cosmology*

Now we need to understand this is not a statement about location or cosmology.

1. Not about God’s heavens

This is not about the stars, the sun, or the sky. This is not about the heavens of God.

2. But about God’s throne

This is about the throne of God. This is not about where He is but who He is.

B) *But about Sovereignty*

“*Our Father in heaven*” is a statement about God’s rule and reign, His sovereignty.

1. His wisdom

It speaks to His wisdom. There is nothing beyond His sight or outside His view. He truly is omniscient. He knows all things and He knows them well. No one can inform Him of anything.

2. His power

So this speaks to His wisdom. And to His power. He knows and does all things well. No one can oppose Him. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all things, the matchless One.

“*Our Father in heaven*” means God is king. Which means prayer is powerful.

Illustration:

Our prayers are not earthbound. The escape velocity of Earth is 25,000 mph. That’s the speed NASA has to figure into equations for a rocket to break the pull of earth’s gravity. Maybe you hadn’t thought of this, but our prayers reach escape velocity. They are not earthbound.

Application:

What does that mean for prayer? If we can glimpse the scope of His wisdom and power, that can give us a sense of expectancy in prayer. We would do well to remind ourselves of that.

Prayer is powerful. Jesus calls us to pray. We are pray to our Father *in heaven*.

III. PRAYER IS RELATIONAL

But there's another vital thing here. "Our *Father* in heaven" – prayer is relational.

A) God is Not Abstract

Why is this important? God is not abstract. He is not an idea, a theory, or a vague force.

1. Not just knowing about God

We need to be clear. The Christian faith is more than knowing about God. It is more than study or theological precision. Those things are vital. That said, they are the start and not the finish.

2. But actually knowing God

In fact, the more you do study, the more you do know, the more you should see that God is to be known. However dangerous and unsafe that may sound, we were made to actually know Him.

B) God is Our Father

For the true and living God is not abstract. He is personal and He is our Father.

1. A potential barrier

That said, we have to talk about a potential barrier. For many, to speak of God as "father" is not encouraging. For failure is common to human fathers. That's true for all of us but for some, it is true to a distressing degree. There are many examples of this in the Bible. The favoritism shown by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The inattentiveness and permissiveness of David. Such is the reason for the commands and guidance given to fathers. We desperately need it. Such ancient records and ongoing experience point us to our need for the one truly good father - God Himself.

2. A revolutionary approach

But what Jesus was saying was revolutionary for reasons far beyond even this. All through the Old Testament era and up to Jesus' day, it was common for God to be described as being like a Father. But He was rarely addressed as Father. Yet this is precisely what Jesus routinely does. And how He teaches us. "Abba" – the Aramaic word used in love for a father, even by a child.

"Our *Father* in heaven" can be as revolutionary for us. Prayer, you see, is relational.

Illustration:

I'm not an expert in child development. But I am a father and grandfather. So I've lived and seen a few things. There are stages of development, marks and thresholds, that indicate healthy growth and development. That includes speech and language, the association of certain words with objects and people. Let me just speak from my own experience. It's a wondrous and beautiful thing when a child knows their colors and shapes. When they know that's a cat and that's a dog. When they know what to call the parts of their body. And who to call "Daddy."

Think of prayer. It's a wondrous and beautiful thing when we know who to call "Abba."

Application:

If God is our Father, what does that mean? Where do we start? Where do we stop? It tells us some things about Him and how He relates to us. He is our great Provider - meeting our needs how they most need to be met. He is our great Protector - watching over us, guarding us from all eternal harm. He is a great Presence - for us, with us. Rightly understood, this is an image of strength and warmth, of intimacy and approachability. That's who God is as our Father. Which means He forever engages us with patience, kindness,, firmness, and great affection.

If God is our Father, it tells us some things about Him and how He relates to us. It also tells us some things about us and how we can pray. We are His, His children. We need not come to Him with hesitancy, timidity, or fear. But rather with humility, devotion, and bold confidence. We can come to Him with things certain and uncertain. With things that fill us with joy and with sorrow. With things great and small. With matters spiritual, physical, emotional, or relational. With our questions and our doubts. With the things that get us up in the morning and the things that keep us up at night. At any time, any place, in whatever the state of our minds and hearts may be. Such is who He is and how we can come to Him in prayer. Which is revolutionary.

Why? This is personal. Jesus calls us to pray. And we are pray to our *Father* in heaven.

CONCLUSION:

And this changes absolutely everything. Let me take you behind the scenes to the filming of one of my favorite movies, *The Empire Strikes Back*. There was a big secret to the story that had to be guarded at all costs. It's one of the most famous lines in cinematic history, "I am your father." Darth Vader, this terrifying villain from the first film, was Luke Skywalker's father. No one was expecting this. It made a dark film even darker. Adding a layer of mystery to the story.

But here's the thing. That line was never actually delivered by the man behind Vader's mask, David Prowse. On the set, he told Luke, "Obi-Wan killed your father." To maintain the secrecy, the only people who knew the real line to be dubbed in later were the producers and the actor playing Luke Skywalker, Mark Hamill. And Hamill was told only moments before the cameras rolled in for his close up. And why? It was a huge moment, a massive plot shift.

And you have to go back to the first time people were seeing this, sitting in the theater in 1980 and hearing this line. No one saw it coming. "No way!" It changed the trajectory of the whole series - not just for the viewers but the characters. For Luke Skywalker, knowing who his father was changed everything. It changed how he saw this figure, how he engaged with him.

Now I know this sounds like a strange direction for me to go at this point, to be equating the shift that comes in how Luke thinks of Darth Vader to how we should think of God. But it's that dramatic. The shift we in how need to think of God is that severe, that foundational, that vital. Knowing who our Father is changes everything - not the least of which is in how we pray.

Jesus calls us to pray. And we are to pray to the God who is our heavenly Father.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus calls us to pray.

(magnet) And we are to pray to our heavenly Father.