

## Father's Day

Matthew 6:9

I never prepare my actual sermon texts too far ahead, since I generally choose texts in order through a particular book of the Bible. So I can take no credit at all for planning a Father's Day sermon on the subject of God as our Father in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer. But in the perfect, eternal plan of God, here we are! As I prepared this week for this sermon, I also noted that the last time I preached through Matthew's gospel ten years ago, I arrived at this text on Father's Day as well.

And how appropriate that is, for while a day to honor earthly fathers isn't necessarily a bad thing, how much better is our focus to consider our heavenly Father. How much better it is to fix our minds upon the glory of God as our Father, and whatever we might learn about being a father here on earth we can learn from him.

Let me begin tonight with the Shorter Catechism, which so clearly explains to us the meaning and importance of this preface to the Lord's Prayer. Keep in mind that our Catechism is a faithful attempt to expound and explain the Word of God. The catechism is not Scripture; it is not infallible nor does it carry the authority of God as its author. It was written by men, but written to be an exposition of Scripture. So Question 100 is this, "What does the preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?" And the answer, "The preface of the Lord's Prayer, which is *Our Father which art in heaven*, teaches us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others."

That answer defines our subject this afternoon. The broader subject is, of course, prayer in general. If you can remember from

a few weeks ago, Jesus is teaching his disciples to avoid the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

v.5-8

So it isn't the words that matter. It isn't the ability to formulate the right words, as if prayer were little more than a magical incantation. The outward show is not what matters. So now Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. Luke tells us that they asked him,

Luke 11:1 "Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

Jesus gives them a form. Not a liturgy or a formula, but a pattern. A list of subjects, as it were. And our catechism is so helpful in explaining each one of the petitions. But first the preface. The introduction. The one to whom prayer is offered. And it is not just God, but much more personally, "Our father."

So to begin a study of prayer, we begin with,

### **I. AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE IDENTITY OF GOD AS OUR FATHER.**

Our God is not simply some higher power, some impersonal force who rules the world. Neither is he an unapproachable dictator who governs from a distance. Rather, he is a Father.

He is not the god of fate. He is not the god of Islam, whose capricious will can never be fully known. He is not the god of deism, a clockmaker who sits back and watches his creation unwind itself. No, he is a father. It is,

#### **A. A most personal relationship.**

Let me tell you just a bit about my father. I don't talk much

about him, mainly because he was not a believer. But being the youngest of six in a very active and high-achieving family, I had the benefit of a very good relationship with my father when I was a child. My father came home from work late in the afternoon and was present every night when we as a family gathered together for dinner. He was always there. Every concert at school. Every special activity. He was there. Every soccer game and every baseball game. Indeed, most of the lessons I learned from my father were actually taught in the context of baseball, as he coached my team for the formative years of my youth. He taught me by his presence, by his example, by his words. And I was, to him, always a son. I grew up secure and happy in that relationship.

I realize that many people didn't have that sort of good experience with their earthly father, and that makes this point all the more difficult to grasp. For many people, the image of a father sends a mixed message, or even, more sadly, an entirely negative message. That makes this hard to understand, but it is, nonetheless, something we must all come to know well. God is our Father. And, therefore, we are his children. There is no greater blessing we could experience.

We see this in Galatians, didn't we?

Gal. 4:4 "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Similarly,

Rom. 8:15 "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage

again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

That personal relationship is so clearly defined by love. John puts it like this,

1 John 3:1 "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"

The very definition of salvation is given in these personal terms as well,

John 1:12 "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

If you have had to struggle in your relationship with your earthly father, then let these words of Scripture be your encouragement. And learn from them, despite the imperfections of your own father. Let the definition of "father" be as it should, the one who provides and protects his family with loving affection that is designed by God. The natural affection of a father to his children.

I certainly still remember when I became a father, and what that meant to the very definition of my life. Even as they are now all young adults in their 20s, I make little attempt to hide the affection I have for them, and as imperfect as I am, I determined to love them as a father ought to love his children. I determined that they would never have reason to be insecure with regard to my love. That's who a father is, and what a father does, even with all the imperfections that we earthly fathers have.

And so, when you pray, pray to your father! It is a most personal relationship. And,

**B. A most glorious identity.**

Because, you see, he is your father in heaven. He is your father, yet he rules the world from his throne on high. He is your father, but is also the creator of the world. He is not just affectionate toward you, but he relates to you with all the power of the eternal godhead. As he declares through the prophet Isaiah,

Is. 45:5 “I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; 7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.”

“Our Father, who is in Heaven.” That’s how prayer begins. He is the one to whom prayer is offered. And there is always a benefit for his children. So as you pray, pray with...

**II. AN APPRECIATION OF THE BENEFITS OF GOD AS OUR FATHER.**

Jesus teaches us pretty plainly, doesn’t he?

Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”

So here am I, an evil, sinful and fallen creature, but I know how to give good gifts to my children. I enjoy giving good gifts to my children. I understand that. I have felt the delight that comes

from the joy of seeking to do my children good. And you who are parents understand that as well. “How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” This Father’s Day, recognize the force of that comment!

**A. God is always good to his children in motive and purpose.**

Always good. Even in difficulty. Even in discipline.

Heb. 12:5 “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives...10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.”

God’s purpose is always good. There is a key application here about prayer. How should you pray? Simple answer, “Ask...” Ask your Father in Heaven for the desires of your heart. Ask. That is what is so refreshing and edifying about the sincere prayers of little children. They just ask, with the simple faith of childhood. They ask their father for whatever they want. They don’t over-analyze the situation. They don’t calculate his reaction. They just ask. In simplicity and sincerity. They ask. And they ask for anything. It never dawns on a little child that God might not be able to provide. And in that way, we are to become like little children.

**B. God always has the power to provide for his children.**

Paul expresses that childlike faith when he writes that glorious doxology at the end of Ephesians 3.

Eph. 3:20 “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus

to all generations, forever and ever.”

That’s what it means to pray to your father in heaven. It means that you come as a little child, knowing that God can do whatever you ask. In fact he do more than you ask. Actually, he can do more than you could even think or imagine. In Paul’s words, he is able to do abundantly more than you could even imagine. And if you look at those words closely, Paul says that God can do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.” “...According to the power that works in us.”

God not only has the good will to provide what is good for his children, he has the power to accomplish that will.

We, of course, as human fathers, do not have that power. The story is told in my family of my oldest sister coming home from school one day with a cat. She was ever the lover of animals, and this poor cat had been hit by a car. The cat had not survived, but my sister brought the cat home in the confidence that mom and dad could fix it. Put it back to together; whatever it took. I think she expected that scotch tape would do the trick. That’s the faith of children, isn’t it? A father, and a mother, can do anything, and the longer a little child is able to preserve that simple worldview, the easier they will understand this nature of God.

Yet, as a man, a mortal human being, I have always been aware that there might be some things I do not have the ability to provide for my children. I still don’t. I’m only a man, a mere mortal man. And ultimately our job as human fathers is to teach our children that their hope and their help is not in us at all. So my job is to teach you to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven...” For God always has the power to provide for his children.

Now, all of that has to be balanced with another thought. Namely, honor. Respect. And so,

### **III. AN EXPERIENCE OF THE REALITY OF GOD AS OUR FATHER...**

...must include both the confidence of little children before their father, and their reverence and honor. So as you pray, “Our Father in heaven,” please recognize those two aspects of your own demeanor. They are not contradictory at all, nor is one to be sacrificed by undue attention to the other. Confidence and assurance on the one hand. He is our Father, after all! And reverence and awe as well. For he is our Father and he is to be honored.

I believe that if you can combine these two things, and keep them happily joined together, your prayers will be most effective. First,

#### **A. Our confidence and assurance in his presence.**

That’s what we see so clearly in the book of Hebrews. It is such a marvelous encouragement.

Heb. 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

Similarly,

Heb. 4:14 “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Confidence and assurance. Boldness. Certainty. Why? Because God is our Father! Because he has lavished his love upon us, that we might be called the children of God. That's the blessing and that's the privilege of children. Even as adults, I want my children to have that confidence of my love as their father. We plan to visit with Ruth up in Pennsylvania in a couple of weeks, and we're planning a big trip out west to see Elizabeth and Gabrielle in August. And whenever they call, they have my attention, and my affection, my interest in their lives. That's what a father is. That's what a father does. And I'm a fallen, sinful, imperfect man. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

How much more will our heavenly Father receive his beloved children!

Ps. 103:13 "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him."

So as you pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," pray with confidence. Little children, as you cry out to God, now that...

Rom. 8:15 "...you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

But also reverence. You see, the image of Father is so appropriate because two things are so perfectly, and so understandably, joined together. Freedom of fatherly affection. Yes, Oh praise the Lord, yes. But never without reverence. Never without honor. Never without respect. So when you pray, "Our Father who is in heaven," what is clearly understood is the need for,

## **B. Our reverence and awe in his presence.**

I read just a moment ago from Hebrews 10, "having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus." But that confidence doesn't imply a lack of respect. That whole passage in the book of Hebrews ends with these words,

Heb. 12:28 "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire."

The writer takes us back to the language of Mt. Sinai, to the impressions of God from the Old Covenant. Our God is a consuming fire. This reverence and awe is the right and proper sense of our heart when we approach God. Consider Isaiah as he approached the presence of God.

Is. 6:3 "And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

There is no contradiction in the experience of these two things. Confidence. Assurance. And, at the same time, fear and reverence. That's what a Father requires. That's what he provides. And that's how we are to pray. We "draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us."

So when you pray, begin with this confidence of addressing your heavenly father. Begin with these words of honor and reverence. "Our Father, who is in heaven."