

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:9

Lord's Prayer Lenten Series

February 22, 2012

Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

Our Father who art in heaven... Just six well known and simple words. And yet it has been said that if these six words were all that had been given by Jesus that we would have all the words needed for the Lord's Prayer.

The reason for this is because the rest of the words in this prayer are really an explanation of these six. This means that if we would all learn to really pray, believe, and follow this first sentence we would need to go no further. In other words to trust God above all things is what is of most importance.

In teaching us to pray Jesus first of all begins by telling us to address God as our Father. It is to remember that God is our Father and we are his children. And yet in using this image it is obvious that the complete meaning of the word "father" is often misunderstood. The reason, of course, is that all of us fathers in this world are imperfect.

I heard of a pastor who worked with young boys in the poor part of a large city. He said that in this setting he could not refer to God as a father at all. When these boys thought of a father they pictured one who was frequently drunk; who was often vulgar and irrational; often unfaithful and would frequently beat up on their mothers.

For this reason Jesus makes sure that he distinguishes between God the Father and human fathers. Jesus says, "*Our Father who art in heaven.*" He is saying that God is a heavenly father. He is a perfect parent. He is a father and parent in the truest sense of the word. He is a father who is greater than everyone and everything in this world.

Our Father who art in heaven... Now sometimes when people pray this prayer they picture heaven as a faraway place where God lives. This idea has often caused people to imagine God as an old grandfather sitting off in the clouds somewhere listening to our prayers.

But this idea according to Jesus is completely wrong. God, according to Jesus, is as near as the air we breathe. Have you ever noticed at the time of death how people often say that their loved one is finally with God? The message of Jesus, however, is that we do not have to wait until we are dead. Those who believe in Jesus are with him right now.

Who art in heaven, therefore, is not intended to be a description of where God is located but rather describes what kind of God and father he is. It means he is sovereign. He is the creator of heaven and earth. Jesus is saying that when we pray we need to remember to pray to the one who is in charge; to the one who can do something about our prayers; to the Lord of all things.

So Jesus in these first six simple words is first of all teaching us to address God as our father. Secondly he is also teaching us that God is our loving father. In fact the Greek word for father he uses here is “Abba,” which is best translated as “Daddy” or “Dear Daddy.” Jesus is saying that whenever we come to God in prayer we can come with the simple trust like a little child to their loving parent.

Dr. W.A. Smart tells of a father who brought his little girl to the doctor. She had a bad cut which needed stitches. As he began to fix this cut the doctor asked the little girl if she could sit real still. “I can,” she answered, “if my Daddy will hold my hand.”

When we pray “Dear Daddy” we are talking to someone who understands, who has sympathy and love, and who is ready to help in every time of need. He is not tucked away in some far off heaven where contact is by long distance cell phone with possible busy signals or voicemail systems coming on. No he is available. He is here with us, around us, in us.

And yet we need to realize that this intimate personal relationship is not ours automatically. To really pray “Abba” means that we acknowledge that we are completely helpless like children. It means that we allow him to be our father; to trust and believe in him; to allow him to enfold us in his arms of love and forgiveness.

This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said in Romans 8:15, “*When we cry ‘Abba Father’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*” It is only when the Holy Spirit shows us how helpless we are in our sins; only when we cry to our father for help that we can have a warm and intimate relationship with him.

The third thing J teaches us to pray is “Our Father.” Right from the start, from the very first word, Jesus reminds us that we are part of a family—a family which extends among God’s children throughout the whole world. He reminds us that every time we pray we are not just praying for ourselves but for the needs of God’s children everywhere.

So we are not to pray like the man I heard of who prayed, “God bless me, my wife, my son John, his wife, us four, no more.” We are not to pray, “My Father,” as if all that really matters is me and God. Rather we are to remember to pray, “Our Father...”

Someone once asked, “Why do we close our eyes when we pray?” We do this, of course, to shut out the world and give complete attention to God. And yet that does not mean that prayer is to shut us off from others. If fact prayer, if it is really prayer, should actually open up our eyes to the people and needs around us.

A great person once said, Why are you so anxious to see God with your eyes closed? See him with your eyes open—in the form of the poor, the starved, the illiterate, the afflicted, the disenfranchised in our society and world today.

Our Father who art in heaven... How often, my friends, have we said these words in our lives? And yet we need to realize that the power of these words does not come from simply saying

them or reciting them by memory. It comes rather from praying them completely with our whole faith and entire being.

The truth is that to really pray these words is to allow them to change us, to mold us, to make us new. These six words will open our lives up to better understanding God's will. They will lead us to live in the assurance that God loves us and is with us in every circumstance of our lives.

Our Father who art in heaven... My friends—really think about and pray these words each day. For if you do, believe me, you will never be the same again.