Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Paternity of Prayer
Scripture: Matthew 6:9
Code: 2234

Our Father....

Will you take your Bible with me and look at the 6th chapter of Matthew? Earlier in our worship the choir sang what is known to us as the Lord's Prayer, and that is the theme of our study. We're examining Matthew chapter 6 verses 9 through 15 in these days. And looking particularly this morning at verse 9, the first phrase of this prayer. I want however to read the entire prayer through verse 13 so that you'll have it in mind as we approach it this morning. Matthew 6 beginning in verse 9, "After this manner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

There are two spiritual activities which are to be unceasingly part of a believer's life. Two great pillars that hold up the believer in the matter of daily living. One is the study of the Word of God, two, prayer. Thus did the apostles confess in Acts 6:4, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word." Prayer is our speaking to God. Studying the Word is God speaking to us. Those two things are the composite interchange between man and God. And so the Bible speaks that we are unceasingly to be involved in both. Constantly, daily feeding on the Word of God. Constantly, daily responding in communion with God. Clear back in the Pentateuch the affirmation of God's will, recording His law and giving it to man was that man would talk of the law when he sat down, when he stood up, when he was lying down, and when he was walking in the way. Man was through the Psalmist to meditate on the law of God day and night. The law of God then was to be a matter of his thoughts and a matter of his conversation all the time. So with prayer. The Apostle Paul says, "Pray without ceasing." The Apostle Paul says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication." The New Testament tells us that we are in everything by prayer, with thanksgiving to make our requests known unto God. We are to be praying at all times, we are to be studying the Word, taking it in, meditating on it, giving it out at all times. Those two things then become the consuming elements of the life of the believer, hearing God as He speaks in His Word and speaking to God in our own prayers.

Now we've studied much about the taking in of the Word of God in the past and shall again in the future but for this time we're focusing on prayer. Prayer, one of those two constants in the believer's life**.** George Muller, that great man of prayer, was asked how much time he spent in prayer, his reply was, "I live in the spirit of prayer, I pray as I walk, when I lie down, and when I arise, the answers are

always coming." End quote. Prayer for him was a way of life. Our Lord knows that, our Lord knows that prayer is to be a way of life. Our Lord here stops in the midst of His discourse on the Sermon on the Mount which particularly compares the false standard of religion of the Pharisees and the scribes with the true standard of God, and He interjects a word of instruction to all of those who name His name in order that they might know how they are to pray. Prayer is a very important thing. If it is a way of life for us then it's needful for us to understand how to pray. In fact this very same model prayer which He gives here is also given in Luke in response to the question, "Lord, teach us to pray." If prayer is something we are to do unceasingly then best we know how to do it properly, and so our Lord teaches us to pray.

Notice what He doesn't teach us, He doesn't teach us about the posture of prayer because any posture will do, in the Bible people prayed standing, lifting up their hands, sitting, kneeling, lifting up their eyes, bowing down, placing their head between their knees, pounding on their breast, facing a temple, etc, etc. There was no specific posture. Notice He doesn't tell us anything about the place of prayer, people in the Bible prayed in battle, in a cave, in a closet, in a garden, on a mountainside, by a river, by the sea, in the street, in God's house. First Timothy says "Let men pray everywhere." In the Bible people prayed in bed, in a home, in a fish even. On a housetop, in a prison, by the sea, in solitude, in the wilderness, on a cross, and so forth. And He doesn't tell us about the times of prayer. I remember a man preaching a sermon to a bunch of ministers and he preached on why the Bible teaches that mornings are for prayer, and we should pray in the morning. And I examined my Bible and in the Bible I find people praying in the early morning, in the morning, three times a day, in the evening, before meals, after meals, at the ninth hour, at bedtime, at midnight, day and night, today, often, when they're young, when they're old, in trouble, everyday and always. Jesus doesn't tell us a specific time, a specific place, a specific posture.

There aresome people who when they pray they feel they have to have their prayer shawl on. The Jewish people today, when they pray they have to dress for their prayer, but as you find in the Bible people prayed in all kinds of circumstances and attitudes, sometimes wearing sackcloth, sometimes sitting in ashes, sometimes shaving their heads, smiting their breast, crying out, applying dust to their head, tearing their garments, fasting, sighing, groaning, crying loud, sweating blood, agonizing with broken hearts, broken spirits, pouring our their hearts, rending their hearts the Bible says, making an oath, offering a sacrifice, offering praise, singing songs, etc. Those aren't the issues. In any posture, in anytime, in anyplace, under any circumstance and in any attire prayer is fitting. Because prayer is a total way of life, prayer is an open communion with God that goes on at all times. Sometimes it becomes more concentrated and intense than other times, but prayer is a way of life. And if it is a way of life then we need to understand how to pray and that is precisely why Jesus teaches us here. This is not a prayer to be prayed so much as it is a model for all prayers. I really think the most important message that I will preach to you on this entire series I gave you last Sunday if you didn't get it you need to listen to the tape, because it sets for you the whole purview of this entire concept in this, the Disciple's Prayer.

Notice how the prayer begins or the model prayer begins verse 9, "After this manner, therefore, pray ye: "Houtsounin the Greek, which literally says, thus, therefore. Or maybe we could translate it, along these lines pray. It is not saying in these exact words pray. Sometimes in the Book of Acts, I looked up a few times where this occurred the same phrase houtsounis used, it'll say, along these lines the Old Testament says, and then it'll paraphrase the Old Testament. The point being that the phrase houtsoundoes not necessarily mean in these exact words, it can mean that, but in many cases it has reference to the general content, along these lines, in this manner pray, does not necessarily mean in these exact words. And I think people who have just taken this and in its own exactness recited it again and again have lost its meaning, which is to be for us a skeleton outline for a definition for all prayer. All praying is to follow the pattern and the model given here.

Now in our last study we noted that the major thrust of this prayer is that it focuses on the glory of God, and that is fitting because that is what all prayer is to do. Prayer is not trying to get God to agree with me, prayer is not trying to line God up with what I need, prayer is myself affirming the sovereignty and majesty of God and taking my will and making it submissive to His, that's true prayer. We know that in John 14:13 and 14 our dear Lord says, "That when we ask anything in his name, he hears us, in order that the Father may be glorified." Prayer is not for you to get what you want or me to get what I want; prayer is to put the majesty of God on display. It is that God may be glorified. All prayer focuses then on God, and this prayer is no different.

In studying the prayers of the Old Testament which I've been doing the last couple of weeks to get a feeling for how the Jewish people approached prayer, I was amazed to find that even in the deepest mostsevere circumstance, even in a pit of despair that we couldn't even imagine before a true saint of God would enter in to a prayer most frequently he would worship God. For example, I was reading in Jonah, Jonah was in the belly of a great fish in an unbelievable circumstance that no one could even relate to, talk about fear, talk about misery, there he is in the belly of a great fish, and in chapter 2 of Jonah he begins a prayer and you would think that he would dispense with all of the amenities and just get down to, get me out of here, God. But Jonah begins with a marvelous anthem of worship and praise, because no man can really ask God for something unless he affirms that God has the sovereign right to say yes or no. That's the basis, our will to be brought into submission to Him. And I read Daniel chapter 9 and Daniel is on the precipice of disaster all the time because of the strategic place that he stands in the midst of a pagan Babylonian society, and in the perplexity that was gripping him at that time he bowed to pray, and in the midst of a terrible situation he utters his prayer and the whole prayer opens up almost ignoring the situation with an affirmation of the majesty and the glory and the dignity and the holiness and the almighty character of sovereign God. I got a little further in my study and I came to Jeremiah 32 and dear Jeremiah who spent most of his life in frustration, confusion and perplexity, who spent most of his times weeping because of his broken heart over his people begins to pour out a prayer to God in the midst of his perplexity and it turns out to be nothing but a recitation of God's majesty, attribute after attribute as it begins. Why do they do

that? And why does this begin, "Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done," and why does it end, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever."? Because God is the focus of all prayer.

Prayer is to give God the privilege of displaying His majesty. It is to bring my life into harmony with His will. May I illustrate that from Psalm 86? And there are many places where we can go to illustrate it, but I love this, this is so specific. Psalm 86 the Psalmist is about to offer a prayer, he is going to pray to God and he is seeking God's mercy and God's love and God's compassion and God's tenderness in his behalf. Beginning in verse 6, "Give ear, 0 Lord, unto my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplication. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee; for thou wilt answer me." Now the Psalmist is in the midst of trouble, this is a prayer of David. His heart is burdened, there's tremendous anxiousness in his spirit, and he goes to God to pray, but watch this, first of all he says in verse 8, "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, 0 Lord." He doesn't begin with a petition, he begins with an affirmation of the majesty and the character of God as the only God, "neither are there any works like unto thy works." He extols God for who He is and what He's done. "All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, 0 Lord, and glorify thy name." He says the whole world ought to be bowing their knees in front of You. For thou art great, (verse 10) and doest wondrous things; thou art God alone."

Now do you see people this is the typical prayer of the Old Testament saint who knew what prayer was all about, prayer was all about setting God in His rightful place and then bringing my will into submission to His. And that's exactly what he does in verse 11, beautifully, "Teach me thy way, 0 LORD; I will walk in thy truth;" stop there for a minute. Do you notice he doesn't even mention yet the request in his heart? He doesn't even bring that up. He just says first of all I want to acknowledge that You're God and You have a right to do what You want, secondly I want to acknowledge that I submit to Your way and Yourwill, and then this magnificent statement at the end of verse 11, "unite my heart to fear thy name." Make my heart one with Your heart. That's prayer. Prayer is just bending and bowing submissively to the will of God. And then in verse 12 no matter what happens, "I'll praise thee, 0 Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify thy name for evermore." Now that's prayer, that's prayer. And you can't separate it from praise. Setting God in His rightful place as sovereign and bringing our own lives submissively into His will.

Now with that in mind go back to Matthew 6, and that was just a brief look at the theme of the prayer as God's character and person, we covered it in great detail last time. But look again at how I've outlined this prayer, would ya? Very, very simply, this prayer, every facet, every short power packed statement in this prayer focuses on God, every one. "Our Father, who art in heaven," that is God's paternity "Hallowed be thy name." That is God's priority. "Thy kingdom come." That is God's program. "Thy will be done," that is God's purpose. "Give us this day our daily bread." That is God's provision. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." That is God's pardon. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." That is God's protection. "For thine is the kingdom, and the

power, and the glory, forever. Amen." That is God's preeminence. Every phase speaks of God. Prayer then is to put God in His infinite majestic place.

Let's look at the first one, God's paternity. "Our Father, who art in heaven." You know beloved I could spend weeks on this one phrase, it 1iterally opens up to me so much, these are the hardest kinds of sermon's to preach when there is so much that can be said that you don't know what to pick and choose and what to leave out. But just notice that phrase, "Our Father, who art in heaven." That's the invocation that begins the prayer. If you think about it that's probably the most common term we use in our prayers, Father, Father, Father, again and again, rightly so, for this is the pattern that Jesus sets. Prayer begins with a recognition that God is our Father. Tremendous truth, in that thought. God is our Father. Now what does that say to you? Well let me say beginningly that the word our has reference to believing people, and so the negative fact of our Father is that it is a death blow to the liberal teaching of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Liberals for years have taught what is the universal Fatherhood of God, God is everybody's Father, we're all the children of God and we're all brothers. Well, there is only one sense in which that's true, and that's all, just one. And that is in the sense of creation that is in the sense of creation. We are only children of God universally insofar as we have been created by God. Malachi 2:10, "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?" In the sense that God has created us we are one. Acts 17 Paul says, "We are all his offspring." And he says that to the philosophers on Mars Hill. In a sense of creation, yes, God is our Father, in a sense of relation, no He is not. Jesus said in John 8:44 to the Jewish leaders, "You are of your father the devil." In First John chapter 3 John very clearly characterizes two families, the children of God and the children of the devil. The children of God do not continue to commit sin, the children of the devil do, and so he makes the clear distinction between the two families.

The Apostle Paul makes a clear distinction between children of light and children of darkness. There is not simply one family of mankind under one universal Fatherhood of God; there are two families in the world, the children of God and the children of the devil. Jesus makes that abundantly clear, there's no way around that. Peter says in Second Peter 1:4 that only those who believe "have been made partakers of the divine nature." Only those of us who have been born again have been born in to the family of God. "Only as many as re-ceived him, have the right to be called the sons of God." John 1:12. There are two families. So the very statement of Jesus, "Our Father," eliminates a world of unbelieving people. There's a positive side to this, not just the elimination of that, but the positive is "Our Father," is an affirmation of an intimacy with God that is wondrous. Because you see for most of the world the gods and/or god they wor-shiped was a very distant remote and fearful being.

Sadly, there was an amazing remoteness even in the Jewish thinking of Jesus' day. The Old Testament Jew, the saint of God in the Old Testament under-stood something of the Fatherhood of God, there's no question about that. He understood that God was a Father; I think they understood it more in a national sense than they did in a personal sense. I think they understood it more in terms of God's sort of overall care of the nation Israel than they ever understood the intimacy of a relationship

with God as a personal Father. I don't think it was till Jesus came that men really understood the intimacy of God. And I think that's illustrated graphically when Philip says to Jesus, "Show us the Father." And Jesus says, "Have you been so long with me, Philip? 'And you don't know if you've seen me you've seen the Father." I think it was Jesus that brought us the intimacy of that. But in the Old Testament, the Old Testament Jew really did under-stand God as a Father, more in a national sense than in a personal sense. And as time went on and you come to the time of Jesus they lost the Father concept of God, God became more and more remote, and I don't think it was God that moved I think they moved, and as they moved away from true religion, as they moved away from true worship and they redefined their system to tolerate sinfulness they cut them-selves off from God's Fatherly care; therefore they assumed that God was remote and they even stopped using God's names, it became a blasphemous thing even to mention the name of God. They had develop-ed a wide gulf; they had lost the sense of God's Fatherhood even in a national way that they had known it in the past. And so when our dear Lord utters the term, "Our Father," it is a shocking thing to them. It awakens to them something lost long ago in the past, it introduces a new kind of intimacy that they had never even understood. "Our Father."

Let me take you back and just show you what the Jews in the Old Testament saw when they thought of that. They knew God was a Father they understood something of what that meant. For example in Isaiah 64 you have a statement by Isaiah regarding the people of God, the people of Israel that they had sinned grossly. In verse 5 he says, "for we have sinned," "for we have sinned," then in verse 6 he describes them in very graphic terms, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Isaiah says, God we're a mess, we are a sinful people, we have drifted way far away from that which is proper behavior. And verse 7 says, "And there's not even any that calls on your name, none that stir up themselves to take hold of you; for you've hidden your face from us, and consumed us, because of our iniquities." God, we feel lost, we feel cut loose, we are so evil, we don't even seek You anymore, we can't even find You anymore. That's a pretty desperate situation and to what does Isaiah then appeal? Verse 8 beautifully he says, "But now, 0 LORD, thou art our father;" stop right there. You see he reaffirms the comforting reality that God is a Father, and Father's take care of their children. You see they understood that, they understood something of the concept of God as a Father; even though we're sinful You're still our Father.

Let me just tell ya if I can sum it up in a sense that the Jews in the Old Testament saw in the Fatherhood of God five basic things. Now I don't know if this is a comprehensive five, it's just what I saw. Number one, they realized that God was a Father in terms of His begetting. They saw the begetting of God as an act of a Father. In First Chronicles it says of Him that, "He is the God of Israel, our father." That's a title, the God of Israel, our Father. In other words the one who has begotten the nation.

Secondly, in the concept of Father the Jews saw the nearness of God, a father is one who's in a family relationship. A father's not like an uncle or a cousin or a friend or a neighbor, a father is a filial relation. And so they saw in the term Father something of nearness. And you know to get an illustration of this, I'm not going to take time to turn to it, read Psalm 68 it is really amazing.

In Psalm 68 there's this discussion of God and His power, and it talks about God being on a high hill and it talks about God riding the clouds, and it talks about His chariots are 20 thousand and His chariots are angels and God is flying through the sky and ascending great mounts of holiness, and then it's ... comes way off of that and it says, "And he is a father to the fatherless." And He puts us in a family, isn't that great? They knew the majesty of God, they understood something of the remoteness of God, but they also knew that He was a Father to the fatherless, and that God put people in a family. So they saw His nearness.

Thirdly, I believe the Jews in seeing the concept of God as a Father saw His loving grace. A father is forgiving, a father is tenderhearted, a father is merciful, a father is gracious to his children and thus did they say in Psalm 103, "As a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." He is like a merciful Father; He is like a condescending, gracious and gentle kind Father. So thoughtful, so gracious. That's how they saw God.

Fourthly, I believe the Jews of the Old Testament saw the Fatherhood of God in terms of His guidance. A father guides his children, doesn't he? He leads them, shows them the direction to go, gives them wisdom and instruction, that's the way they saw it. In Jeremiah 31:9 it says,"They will come with weeping, they will come with supplications and I will lead them; I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, in which they shall not stumble; (why?) for I am a father to Israel." God says, I'll guide them, I'll lead them by the river, I'll lead them in a straight way, I'll make sure they don't fall, why? I'm their Father and a father guides, and a father loves, and a father stays near, and a father begets, you see. But all of that didn't sentimentalize God to them because there was a fifth thing that they saw.

They had to see that because God was their Father they were required to obey Him, that was their part. God would beget and God would be near, and God would be gracious, and God would also guide them, and they were to respond to Him in obedience. In Deuteronomy chapter 32 there's a simple statement that reiterates this and we could look at other Scriptures but just this. They corrupted themselves, they were sinful, and the word comes, "Do ye thus requite the LORD, 0 foolish people and unwise? Is not he your father who hath bought you?" Can you treat your Father with disobedience, disrespect?

So they understood Him as a Father. Perhaps in a more general way, but nonetheless they understood Him as a Father, begetting, loving; living along side, guiding, and training them in obedience and they knew they were responsible to obey. This is a Jewish concept. You know later on

in the Sermon on the Mount, go back to Matthew, Jesus reiterates this concept, in chapter 7 verse 7, He says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; For every one that asks receives; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Why? Why is God going to do this, why is God going to hear you when you ask, why is God going to open when you knock, why is God going to help you find when you seek, why? Because God is like this, and He goes on in verse 9, "Of what man is there of you whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent? If then, ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your (what?) Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?" They again are introduced to the fact that God is a beneficent, caring, loving, sustaining Father. Just as a father in the world takes care of the needs of his children. But I think they had a remoteness as we go back to what Jesus says in chapter 6, which had caused them to lose this sense of intimacy. I think all they had left was almost the pagan concept.

You know the Greeks called Zeus, father Zeus, and in connection with father Zeus the term came to Mean lord or ruler, it lost all of its intimacy. It didn't have any intimacy left, andby the way Zeus was a pretty rotten god, just want you to know that. There was a nice god named Prometheus, and Prometheus looked down on the world according to the Greek legend and Prometheus said that there was no fire in the world. And men were cold at night, and fires are not only good for keeping warm they're good for lots of things, popcorn and marshmallows and fellowship and stuff, and Prometheus looked down on the world and he said it's not good that man doesn't have fire, so Prometheus gave the world fire. And father Zeus got so mad at Prometheus that he took Prometheus in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, found a rock sticking out of the water and he chained Prometheus to that rock an left him there through all of the terrible heat of the day and the thirst of the day and the cold of the night, and constantly tore ... I think it was he sent a, a some kind of a bird with claws that ripped his liver out, and Prometheus according to the legend would always grow a new liver and so always he was having that done to him. And the Greeks said, that's what father Zeus thinks about doing something good for people. Now that's the context of this day. Father didn't mean anything; it had lost its meaning. And to the Pharisees and the scribes to think of God as a Father was a very empty thought, meant no more than a lord or a god, or a ruler or a king.

Well Jesus uses it in a new fashion, Jesus injects into it something rich, something special, something intimate. Not just in the word that He says as we shall see but in the way He brought God to men, right? Jesus made that intimacy possible. By the way when Jesus prayed He always used the word Father, over 70 times, the word Father, He always used it, only one prayer did He ever pray and not use the word Father, you know what prayer that was? "My God, my God, why hast thou (what?) forsaken me?" Only in sin bearing was He separated from the Father, and only then did He not say Father. All other times the intimacy of that relationship was expressed, and only in that one temporary moment when it was broken by sin bearing did He ever address God in any other term.

Listen when you go to God and say, Father, you're not talking about father goose or father anybody else. Some beneficent person who wants to drop golden eggs or mother goose or whatever else. And you're not talking about some deity who is totally unconcerned and is a father only in a sense that is leadership or headship, you're talking about somebody beneficently loving, somebody personally involved, somebody absolutely intimate. Let me take it a step further. I studied a little bit this week about the philosophies of that day and I found out some interesting things. There were two major philosophies existing at the time of Christ, in the Greek and Roman world, they are known as the Stoics and the Epicureans, you've read about them, right? The Stoics had one essential attribute for gods, they said the major attribute of a god is apathea; we get the word apathetic from it. Now apatheato the Greek is the essential inability to experience any feeling. Now, the Greeks said this, if a person can feel love he can be hurt, if a, if a person can feel joy he can feel sadness, if a person can feel happy he can feel unhappy, and so therefore the gods do not feel anything or they could be hurt so they choose then to be totally passionless, emotionless, incapable of any feeling they are apathetic and indifferent. That's the Stoic view of gods. Totally emotionless, passionless, indifferent. The Epicureans had a little different idea, they said the supreme quality of the the deities is ataroxia, ataroxiais a term which means complete serenity, complete calm, perfect peace. Now they said, if the gods get involved in human affairs they'll lose their calm, right? They'll lose their cool. If they get the mess in the world they will never be able to maintain their serenity, therefore the gods are detached. And they had what we call today a deistic view that there is a, a power up there that gets it all going and then walks away because it doesn't want to get involved. And so the Stoics said, god is absolutely apathetic and indifferent, and the Epicureans said god is absolutely detached, totally uninterested and isolated from every human condit-ion. Now that's how they thought of their gods, even though they used the term father.

Now what about modern day? It's a little different. James Stewart quoted two lines from a poem of Thomas Hardy, Thomas Hardy said this, he said, prayer is useless because there's no one to pray to except, and here's the quote, "That dreaming, dark, dumb thing that turns the handle of this idle show." To Thomas Hardy God was that dreaming, dumb, dark thing. Voltaire said, "Life is a bad joke, ring down the curtain the farce is done." H.G. Wells in one of his novels painted a picture of a man defeated by the stress and strain and tension of modern life, and the man was dying and he was told by somebody who was a very saintly man that his only hope was fellowship in God, and he said, what? That up there having fellowship with me, I would just as soon think of cooling my throat with the Milky Way or shaking hands with a star. The Stoic sees his emotionless god, the Epicurean sees his utterly detached god, the modern philosopher sees God as the dark, dreaming, dumb thing that turns the handle of the idle show, and even the Jew of Jesus' time sees God as a Father only in a remote, distance, faded past sense with little meaning. To all of that confusion Jesus simply utters without explanation two words, "Our Father," "Our Father," and in so doing cracks open a shell that empties upon us marvelous new dimensions of meaning.

The term in the Greek is patr. Jesus didn't use that term. Jesus spoke Aramaic when He talked, though the Bible was written in Greek. There's little doubt in my mind that He used the term Abba, for Abba was the familiar term, Abba was the endearing term used by a little child for its father. In fact uhm, the Talmud says that the first thing a child ever learned was to say, Abba and Ema. That sounds like a little children, doesn't it? I don't know what your kids first started calling you but they came up with some real winners in our house. Just, they almost unstructured meaningless, utterance that a little child gives its parents. In Mark 14:36 it says, "Jesus said, Abba, Father. Take away this cup from me." In the beginning and the end of His ministry and all the way through I think Abba was His term, it means daddy. In Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 the Bible says that we can cry, Abba, Father, we don't come to God like father in terms of the way the Jews used to think, just some deity responsible for the whole nation, we don't come to God as some indifferent, detached deal, we come to God as an intimate Father, we use the term Abba. This is an answer to modern skepticism, this is the answer to the confusion of the Pharisees, this is the answer to the philosophers.

Let me close our thoughts this morning by summing all this up. What does it mean that God is our Father? What does it mean that we can go to Him as Father? Listen to this, number one, it means the end of fear; it means the end of fear. Missionaries tell us that one of the greatest gifts that Christianity brings to heathen society is the certainty that God is a loving, caring Father because heathen people live under the fear of their gods. If you've read the book "The Lords of the Earth" you know the incredible, unbelievable fear that those people lived under, before they were released by faith in Christ. This has been repeated a, a thousand, thousand times around the world as false religions have lived under absolute fear until coming to know the loving Father through the loving Son. They believe in gods their worlds literally are jammed full of gods that are jealous, hostile, grudging, vengeance prone gods, and whom they live in absolute fear. And that's why it's so wonderful when Jesus says, "0ur Father." It puts the end to fear, you don't have to fear God, He's your Father through Christ.

Secondly, I believe God as a Father settles the matter of hope, hope. You know the world is hostile? There are iron laws in this world and when you break those laws you do it at your own peril. You sin and consequences come, and the wages of sin is death. And no wonder Voltaire said that life is a bad joke, no wonder he said men are fools drowning in a sea of mud. He had no hope, it was all crashing down. That's because he didn't have a loving Father. I remember as a little boy one time my dad set me on a corner and he said, wait for me I'll come back and get you. And he didn't come, and he didn't come and it got dark and it got darker and darker and I was alone on the corner and finally he'd had car trouble and he came back hours and hours after the stores were closed and I was standing in the dark. And of course he hugged me and wondered if I'd been upset and I don't remember all these details, he just told me I said, no I'm not upset because you told me you'd come back and I was just waiting for you. That's the love of a child for a father, that's the hope, that in the midst of a hostile world that's falling apart God is our Father, and He'll take care of it.

Thirdly, I think it settles the matter of loneliness. If God is a Father then that's, that's something lonely people need to know about, right? The heart knows loneliness, the heart knows bitterness, the loss of self worth, an unworthiness, self-despair, we all suffer pity, self pity, we desperately need respect. Where are we going to get that? Is there anybody who knows us for what we are and loves us for that, is there anybody who can lift us up and give us value, is there anybody who can make us feel like we have a friend? God can, He's our Father, He's our Father He said, "Lo, I am with you always." I'm a friend that sticketh closer than brother. The Fatherhood of God settles the matter of loneliness.

Fourthly I think this phrase here settles the matter of selfishness, would you look at it again, it says, "Our Father." Not my Father, "Our Father," and Jesus teaches us what I told you last week and I'll just hint at it cause we covered it last week, that prayer is something which isn't selfish; it embraces the community of faith, always. In fact there's no singular personal pronoun in this entire prayer. When you pray don't pray centered on yourself. Pray with your arms around everybody else. Ephesians 6:18 says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication (listen to this) for all saints." Pray for everybody. You know if you just focus on yourself you've missed the point. He's not your Father, He's not my Father; He's our Father. The very use of the word our ends all claims to exclusiveness.

Fifthly, God as a Father settles the matter of resources because it says, "Our Father, who art (where? where?) in heaven." Listen, when you go to your Father for resources you don't say, oh Lord, I know there's not much to draw from in the world. Listen, He's not drawing from the world, He's drawing from heaven. I believe that this adds a dimension that just carries us out of our trouble, "Our Father, who art in heaven," He has all of the supernatural domain at His disposal. All that heaven is, all that it means in Ephesians to be blessed in the heavenlies with all spiritual blessing is available in Him; He is a loving Father who has all the resources of heaven. Arthur Pink says, If God is in heaven then prayer needs to be a thing of the heart and not the lips, for no physical voice on earth can rend the skies. If God is in heaven then our souls must be detached from the earth, if we pray to God in heaven then faith must wing our petitions. You want satisfaction? God has it at His disposal, if you want fairness God has it in the heavenlies, peace, fellowship, knowledge, victory, boldness? It's all there. I pray to a Father who has absolutely eternal resources. Oh what a great thought.

Sixthly, seeing God as a Father settles the matter of obedience. There used to be a, a commitment to obey your father and I don't know if it's around anymore. It was so important that in the Old Testament God said if you find a disobedient child stone him, because I want the world to know that you're to obey your father because that's a mirror picture of how you're to respond to God your Father. It settles the matter of obedience. My children are to obey me, and I'm an unworthy father. We are to obey Him and He is an infinitely worthy Father. The whole point of the Fatherhood of god comes down to the fact that we are to obey. Jesus, obeyed the Father, He said, "I didn't come to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." He said, "My meat is to do the Father's will." "Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done." If He can assign Himself a place of subserviency and

perfection, certainly we can be subservient in our imperfection.

Finally, it settles the matter of wisdom. If God is a Father then He is infinitely wiser than we are. Do you remember the old television program, Father Knows Best? That'll never play again, that'll never play again, but Father does. And we're right back where we started, submissive to His will because it is the best.

Now listen to me, what happens when you know God is your Father? First, it removes fear; secondly, it provides hope; thirdly, it ends loneliness; fourthly, it does away with selfishness because He's our Father. Fifthly, it provides infinite heavenly resources, because He's our Father in heaven. Sixthly it demands obedience, and seventhly it declares wisdom. So to begin a prayer, "Our Father, which art in heaven," is to indicate my eagerness to come as a child beloved to a loving Father, to receive all that His love can possibly give me.

Now when you pray, will you pray in this matter? Let's bow together.

Lord every time I say, our Father I know I'm not lost in the crowd. Every time I say that I know You're there, I know You're there removing my fear, providing hope, taking away loneliness, doing away with selfishness, providing vast and infinite heavenly resources, calling for my obedience and affirming Your absolute wisdom, oh what a thing it is to have You as a Father. In all our prayers dear Lord, may we come with a deep sense of gratitude that Your are a Father to whom we can say daddy, papa, Abba in intimacy, because You care. You didn't just make us subjects of Your Kingdom, You didn't just make us servants to Your will, You didn't just call us friends, You made us sons and daughters, Your children and told us to call You Father, than You. And may we be obedient children, may we who are Your children live and walk as Your children should. For Your glory in Christ's name; Amen.

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