

Wednesday, August 19, 2020

SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

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TITLE: Who's Your Daddy? Pt. 1

A small-town preacher decided to call in sick for a Sunday service, so he could do some bear hunting in the woods. After working his way up a steep hill in the woods, he and a bear collided, sending him and his rifle tumbling down the hill. Before he knew it, his rifle went one way, and he went the other, landing on a rock and breaking both legs. He looked up and saw the bear charging down the mountain toward him. But his legs were broken, and he couldn't move! His only hope was to pray! "The preacher prayed, "Dear God, I'm so sorry for skipping services today to come out here and hunt. Please forgive me and grant me just one request - please make a Christian out of that bear!" An odd prayer, but in the moment of panic, I'm not sure I would have done much better. Amazingly enough, that very instant, the bear stopped in his tracks. The preacher couldn't believe it. But then the real answer to prayer came. The bear fell to its knees and began to pray: "Dear God, bless this food I am about to eat. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Well speaking of prayer...

We are looking at what has been called, *The Lord's Prayer*. In the past two days, we've been looking at Matthew, Chapter 6. What we discovered is that prayer is like a key, and it can do amazing things when used properly, but often it leaves us frustrated and confused. We recognize we need help when it comes to prayer. We are focusing on Jesus as our guide on prayer, because He was in *constant* communion with God. And that's exactly how we are defining prayer: it's *communion with God*. It's an *intimate*, private conversation with God.

Why are we looking at this passage in Matthew 6? Why are we looking at the teaching of Jesus? And why prayer? Because we're in a series called *Rewriting Jesus*. I gave it that title because many people today try to make Jesus in our *own* image. In other words, we try to *rewrite* his words and actions to fit *our* beliefs – *our* lifestyles! But as followers of Christ, we are not called to believe "my Jesus" or "their Jesus". No, there is *one Jesus Christ*, so we want to know what He *said*, what He *did*, and we want to follow Him accordingly!

Why prayer? Because prayer is one of the greatest privileges we have. Can you imagine the opportunity we've been given, to have communion and intimacy with God? But prayer is also one of the greatest areas of confusion and frustration today. So that's why we're looking at what has been called "The Lord's Prayer".

This teaching of Jesus is sandwiched between two teachings on hypocritical giving to the poor and hypocritical fasting. Here the format is the same. Let me read to you Matthew 6: 5-8 so we can have the full context of what we're looking at today beginning in verse nine.

Jesus said, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Mat. 6:5-8, NLT

So in verses, 5-8 Jesus is talking about hypocritical prayer. Now, Jesus will teach us an effective and authentic model of prayer. So let’s begin Matthew Chapter 6, verse 9:

Jesus said: ⁹Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Jesus begins verse 9 by saying, “pray like this.” He doesn’t say, “this is *what* you are to pray.” In Luke’s account, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray – in other words, how to pray. This is what Jesus intends to provide the disciples, and us today: Not the words to say, but rather a general form or model for prayer. I think this prayer should probably be called the disciple’s prayer, or the Christian’s model for prayer, instead of the Lord’s Prayer, but that’s not up to me.

There are essentially 2 main sections of this model for prayer. The first, which we’ll study today – verses 9 and 10 - has a focus on God. It’s all about Him. And then the second portion - verses 11 and 12 - are not really a focus on us, but rather on our total dependence upon God.

Jesus begins the model for prayer with “Our Father in heaven.” Only 4 words, but they are packed with theological goodness. Notice that Jesus says, “Our Father”. Jesus is not speaking for Himself. That’s why He doesn’t say “my” Father, which surely God was and is. But Jesus has a wholly unique relationship with God the Father. It’s one that we cannot claim. This is a model for His children – you and me. By Jesus telling His disciples, and us today, to pray to God, our Father, our Daddy, Jesus was tearing down a *major* wall in the relationship between man and God. You see, the Jews would never have referred to God as their Heavenly Father. He and His name were holy and therefore *revered*! There was a wall between them in the relationship.

Now the Jews weren't wrong to view God with so much fear and reverence. After all, God really is holy. Let me read to you from Francis Chan's book, *Crazy Love*, because I think he captures a bit of the seriousness of God's holiness. Chan writes, “*God is holy. A lot of people say that whatever you believe about God is fine, so long as you are sincere. But that is comparable to describing your friend in one instance as a 300-pound sumo wrestler and then another as a 5 foot 2, 90-pound gymnast. No matter how sincere you are in your explanations, both descriptions of your friend simply cannot be true. The preposterous part about our doing this to God is that He already has a name and identity. We don't get to decide who God is. According to Exodus 3:14, God said, “I am who I am.” We don't change that. To say that God is holy is to say that He*

is set apart, distinct from us. And because of His set-apartness, there is no way we can ever fathom all of who He is. To the Jews, saying something three times demonstrated its perfection, so to call God “Holy, Holy, Holy” is to say that He is perfectly set apart, with nothing and no one to compare Him to. That is what it means to be “Holy.” Many spirit-filled authors have exhausted the thesaurus in order to describe God with the glory He deserves. His perfect holiness, by definition, assures us that our words cannot contain Him. Isn't it a comfort to worship a God we cannot exaggerate?”

Chans' point is this: God is God, and we are not. Our sincerity frankly doesn't matter. God has an identity, and we have to see Him rightly. Part of that seeing Him rightly, is embracing both His Holiness and His Fatherhood, amongst other attributes.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let's bring in Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole for a little added perspective on God's identity. Right away at the beginning of this prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” So “Father” is a very intimate title, but then “hallowed, or holy, is your name” speaks of an all-powerful, Creator God. Why is it so important to understand *both* sides of His identity as we come to him in prayer?

C: Well, I think true wisdom comes only from understanding who God is: that He's holy, just and righteous. He's also very loving. Too much of one thing, so between the Father and then this holy, righteous God - too much of one way: if the Father, we maybe tend to humanize Him more, right? Too much the other way, is probably going to make us too religious, so like He's unrelatable, like He's this *big eye in the sky*. I think a good, healthy fear of God though is respecting Him, obeying Him and submitting to His discipline, and then worshipping Him with this complete awe. [Right]. But He's also relational, so that's the Father piece. I think you just have to have a healthy balance of that.

N: Right, right.

A: Yeah. I would agree with that, and even, maybe go a step further. I remember as a brand new believer, and I came out of, I mean a late in life conversion - but back in the day, when the Jesus movement, you know, and Jesus is love, and all of that - and as a new believer late in life, you know, I thought, “Yeah, God is just such a loving, awesome God”, which He is, all of that. And I remember, I decided I was going to read through the Bible as a new believer. And so I started reading and I got into, I think it was in Judges, and it was like “Oh”, and even in Genesis, it really started in Genesis, “Man, you do not want to make God mad”. You know? And then I kept reading it. “Whoa, He wiped out those people. Wow”. You know, so yes, He's a God of love, but he's a just God and a powerful God, all powerful.

And so there is this fine balance of He's not just all love. And He's not just this kind of Melba Milquetoast kind of guy that you can just, you know, like a Teddy bear, that you can take

everywhere. You do not want to make Him mad, especially when - it just made a huge impression on me when I read the Old Testament, about people getting wiped out, and it was just, “Whoa”.

N: Yeah, it is difficult to see God, as He is revealed in Scripture, because there are more elements than just this Fatherhood, and there's more than just His holiness. And so I think that takes time to develop. And I think it takes a discipline to pursue that relationship, where you know Him at an even greater level. But I think for us all, it's good of us to remember that intimacy that we have with Him, but also remember that He is in charge, and He is in charge of it all.

As we continue to talk about what's come to be known as “The Lord's Prayer”, I think it's unfortunate that many of us view God in light of our earthly fathers. Some of us default to viewing God in relation to our earthly fathers. So if your father abandoned you, perhaps you view God as One who will likely abandon you as well. Perhaps your Father was a workaholic, who was too busy for you. Perhaps your God is so busy with the universe, He has no time for you as His spiritual child. Perhaps your father was abusive, and so when you hear the command to “fear God”, it automatically brings up the imagery of a god who is ready to whack you and beat you up, for anything, at any time.

None of these scenarios describe God as He truly is. None of us should *rewrite* God, based on *our* father's or our parent's behaviors or choices. But unfortunately, we still do it. This is why we go back to the Bible. This is why we turn back to God's Word daily – to renew our minds, so we see God rightly. And when we see God rightly, we remember God is holy. Therefore, He *does* deserve our fear, which means to rightly see Him as God. He is the one who created everything. He is the one who holds everything in place. He is all-powerful. He is all-knowing. He is eternal. And guess what? None of us are! So, that is why it is right that we fear Him. The other side of this is that we also respect Him. We recognize His greatness, His care, His compassion, His mercy, His love, and His grace, and because of these things, we respect Him.

So, turning back to Matthew 6, His name *was* and *is* still holy. But thanks to Jesus, we were, and we *are*, welcomed into a fellowship, a communion with God, as adopted sons and daughters of God. That adoption is the beautiful result of Salvation in Jesus. So if that is our status after Salvation, what was our status before Salvation? In [Ephesians 2:3](#), Paul says, “By nature we are children of wrath.” Why? Because Jesus Himself said *that in our natural state, we are children of the devil* (John 8:44). Until we become followers of Jesus Christ, our Father is Satan, and our mission is to carry out his desires.

But here's the good news: Paul writes this in [Galatians 4:4-7](#) “But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has

sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” Prior to saving faith in Christ, we are slaves to sin and children of wrath. But now, if you are a born-again Christian, you are now sons and daughters of the King. We can cry out to God in prayer, and call Him, Abba! Father! Daddy! **There is no greater privilege than to be sons and daughters of the God of the Universe.**

For me as an earthly father, there is nothing sweeter than the sound of my children saying “Daddy!” It doesn’t matter if it’s my 7-year-old or my 12-year-old. It is sweet music to my ears. If my kids were to say “Hey, Nat” or “Hey, Mr. Crawford,” I wouldn’t like it much. Those are my titles, but it would feel distant and restricted. I want them to call me as I am, their father – their daddy. This is exactly what God desires for us as well.

Now, so often this brings up the question of, but who are God’s children? Aren’t we all God’s children? Well, in the sense that God is the Father of Creation, yes. But that is where it ends. God’s true children are His *spiritual* children: Those who come to Him through Jesus Christ. To call God “Father” is a *privilege*. And that privilege is reserved *only* for those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ – those who are born again!

This brings up the other question that comes when talking about prayer. The question is often asked, **“Does God hear the prayers of unbelievers – people who are far from God – or does God only hear the prayers of His spiritual children?”**

I think this is a fair question, and I think the answer to that question is, *yes*. Why? Because He is God. He is set apart. He is omnipotent – He is everywhere. He is omniscient. He knows everything. So does God hear all prayers? Yes, I think He does.

Perhaps the real question is does He answer the prayers of unbelievers. This is harder to answer. Here’s some of what we can find in Scripture about unanswered prayers:

- 1) James tells us that when we ask with wrong motives, God won’t answer. (James 4:3)
- 2) Psalms tell us that if you harbor wickedness in your heart, God won’t answer. (Psalm 66:18)
- 3) The Prophet Isaiah said this **“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His* face from you so that He does not hear”** (Is. 59:2).
- 4) Jesus said something quite similar: **“We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does *His* will, He hears him”** (John 9:31). Verses like these probably provided the strongest answer to this question.
- 5) King Solomon told us if you reject hearing the law – God’s Word - your prayers are offensive to God. (Prov. 28:9).
- 6) The Prophet Micah, said that those who hate good and love evil, they may cry out to God, but He will not answer them (Micah 3:4).

So does God answer the prayers of the unbelievers? I think there is a strong case to say, generally, “no.” However, He is sovereign and can do what is consistent with His good and perfect nature. So generally, *no*, but possibly and sometimes, *yes*. Yet the previous passages, and

others in the Bible, share many reasons why God does not answer prayers, not just for unbelievers, but believers as well.

N: Let's bring Arnie and Cara in once again. Cara, you came to Christ a little bit later in life than others. When you first became a believer, what was the biggest surprise? And maybe the greatest thing you learned about prayer?

C: That God cares about the details of my life, so things aren't that insignificant to God at all - pray about everything. And that's probably the biggest thing I learned: that He cares about the details.

N: I'm just curious, what did that change for you? Like how did that impact your life?

C: Well, it sounds crazy, but I'm one of those ladies that prays for parking spaces, but He shows up every time. It just changes it - it makes me talk to Him more, because He cares about it. And I'm not talking about, you know, like parking - like I don't want to park in the dark corner over there, where it's unsafe, "Lord, just give me a good space where there's a lot of lighting", if you know, I'm downtown or something. So I don't know. It just changed everything. It made Him more personable to me, that He's, reliable; He's relatable. So because He cares about the little things, not just the big things.

N: That's a good perspective. Well, Arnie, I know you've done some research on prayer. What can you tell us about nonbelievers and their attitudes about prayer?

A: You know, I think if I were a young person, I would do what I'm doing now. And I would spend an equal amount of time on prayer. We've done research on prayer all over the world. I remember being in Japan - it was during their New Year - when, I forget ; it's half the population prays to an idol - and we started surveying some of those people, and they say, "Oh yeah, my god answers prayer". They're praying to a rock statue, and "God answered prayer: last year I didn't have a job; this year I do". And there's this big phenomenon of nonbelievers praying, and they're really talking to themselves, and I guess it can even be carried further. I've seen in some countries, where there's demon worship, and evil spirits, and praying to them. It's just crazy, crazy kind of stuff. So prayer is very, very powerful for believers, and it's very, very confusing for non-believers, and distracting, and may even lead them to a path of eternal damnation.

N: I think that's a sobering reality and I think you've nailed it right on the head. So here's something I'd like for all of us to discuss and consider. We know that we should be praying for the lost by name. We've talked about that quite a bit, but do you think there's any benefit to letting them know that we're praying for them, at least in regards to their Salvation?

C: I would say that it depends on the situation, just like Arnie said. Sometimes, you know, you pray for them regardless, but you don't really want to let them know. Because what if it doesn't

look like what they want? And then it's not going to go over well, because they don't understand something that complicated. I mean, we're seasoned believers, and look at how we sometimes struggle with prayer. So I think it just depends on the situation. There are people who are at their wit's end, and you say, "I'm praying for you". And they appreciate it because they have nothing left. But I would say there's other people, they get ticked off about it, or to them it doesn't mean any different than when someone says, "Sending positive vibes". I mean, you see that and you're like, "Okay, whatever". But I would say, it just depends on the situation.

N: Yup. Agreed.

A: I think Cara is a hundred percent right. Especially with non-believers. And then for me in ministry, oftentimes we'll say to one another, "I'll be praying for you today". Or you have this going on. And the big thing is to tell somebody you're going to pray for him, and not do it. That right there I'm sure is not so hot.

C: Well, I think the Bible even says, that's no different than a nonbeliever that says it.

N: Yeah. You know, what I've started to do, and encourage other people to do - and I don't do it perfectly - but hey, just instead of saying, "I'm going to pray for you", just give them the ten second prayer. When they say, "Here's the issue", don't say, "I'm going to pray for you". Just say, "Hey, can I pray for you right now? Heavenly father, I pray that, you know, whatever the situation is, da-da-da, Amen." And I often keep my eyes open again, so it doesn't make it awkward and weird for the other person, if that's where they're at. I just try to be intentional then and there in the moment. But I think also back to the question: I think so often it's important for us to - as you said - consider the situation, and even the relationship itself, like I've got some friends who they're nonbelievers, and they know I'm praying for them. And so they'll even just say, "Hey, are you still praying for my Salvation? Ha ha ha". "Well, yeah, I am. I am." Because if I really believe what I say I believe, then I'm going to pray for them. And again, if the relationship is there, I'll just let them know, "Hey, I am praying for you. And I do pray that you'll get saved". Some of them, they find it as a joke. That's okay. But if the ground isn't ready, like if I did this with some family members, then I'd know that that would be a game ending comment right there. So I think we just need to take it situation by situation, and relationship by relationship.