May 1, 2016

“To Whom Do We Pray?”

Matthew 6:9

**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. One day in elementary school, we had a substitute teacher. Her name was Mrs. Johnston. For whatever reason, I was particularly unruly that particular day. At least that’s what I was told. Anyway, by day’s end, Mrs. Johnston and I had had our fill of one another. And I was relieved I wouldn’t see her again.

That Sunday at church, I was introduced to a couple of kids who would be in my class, Chris and Carol Johnston. Wait. What was that name? Sure enough, the next introduction was to Mr. and Mrs. Johnston. Oh my. Fortunately, she just gave me a knowing smile. I behaved.

Knowing who you’re talking to can change the conversation. Prayer is something of a conversation with God. Do we know who we’re talking to? Do we know who God really is?

**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 has made clear that it is not to be a hypocritical performance or a manipulative posturing but from the heart. In fact, we could go so far as to say that the heart of prayer is prayer of 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 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. Because 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. And, third, it is personal.

1. **PRAYER IS CORPORATE**

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

1. *Not Private*

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

1. Personally concerned

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

1. But not indulgent

But He is not indulgent. He is not going to spoil us as permissive parents would.

1. *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.

1. 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 brings with it shared burdens and obligations. There are times when the only thing we can do is pray. But at all times the first thing we should do is pray.

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

1. **PRAYER IS POWERFUL**

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

1. *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.

1. But about God’s throne

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

1. *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.

1. 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.

*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.

*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.

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

1. **PRAYER IS PERSONAL**

But there’s another vital thing here. “Our *Father* in heaven” – prayer is personal.

1. *God is Not Abstract*

God is not abstract. He is not an idea, a theory, the great other, or a force.

1. Star Wars has lessons

Star Wars has its place in our modern mythology and has its lessons – tales of heroism, stories of sacrifice, the reality of good and evil, the temptation of control and power. It’s all there.

1. But it is theologically off

It has its lessons. But it’s theologically off, owing more to Eastern religions than biblical truth.

1. *God is Our Father*

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

1. Reflections on a text

(READ Psalm 103:6-14) Oh, He knows us. He knows our needs and comes alongside to provide and protect. He knows our frailties – our sinful rebellious hearts, our willful stubborn streaks. There is relational knowledge here. And deep overflowing paternal compassion for us.

1. Revolutionary approach

But what Jesus was saying was revolutionary. It was common for God to be described as being like a Father. But He was rarely addressed as Father. Yet this is 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 personal.

*Application:*

Such compassion on His part. That is our confidence as we pray. Think with me. We ask, “*Is He listening?*” Yes, He is. But “*Why is He listening?*” It has nothing to do with how short or long, simple or complex, plain or expansive our prayers may be. Why then does He hear us? Because He loves us. That is all. And that ensures, it guarantees, that He hears us.

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

**CONCLUSION:**

In Jerram Barrs’ wonderful book, The Heart of Prayer, he tells this story (READ quote):

One of my daughters-in-law is French, and her children call me “Papy” – the French word for “Grandfather.” I remember that when one of them was three, I would sometimes answer the phone to this beloved little voice: “Papy, I love you! I want you to come and have dinner with us.” I would say, “Yes! Thank you! Mamy and I will come. I love you, too”…My grandson would say these few words and then put the phone down. I was delighted, of course! He did not need to say anything else. His brief words, his simple and straightforward expression of love, his request – these were enough for me.

Wow! That’s it? You mean I could just call Jerram Barrs and he’d drop everything and come?

Well, not exactly. Jerram is a man in demand. He worked with Francis Schaeffer at L’Abri, has headed the Francis Schaeffer Institute and taught at Covenant Seminary for years, written quite a bit, and speaks at conferences all over the world. Add to that it’s been 20 years since I was his student. So, yes, I can call. But it will take several months for him to come. He’ll drop anything for his grandson. Not so much for me. And that’s the way it should be.

What does this have to do with prayer? Everything. We are children of our heavenly Father. We can go to Him anytime with anything. Our words need not be sophisticated or thought out. The heart of prayer is prayer of the heart – a heart humbled, encouraged, and emboldened by the assurance we have the heart of the Father. And He delights to hear ours.

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