

August 30th, 2015 - Samir Massouh

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Preacher: Samir Massouh

[0:00] Well, good morning. We are in a series on prayers, and we started this series by looking at Jesus' prayer in the Gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 11.

I was the one who preached on that passage then, but I want to tell you that there's a very important verse in that passage that we shouldn't just look at lightly, that that verse itself deserves to be read and reflected on and considered seriously.

And so let me ask you to turn to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11, and let me point out this verse that we're going to be thinking about this morning.

It is Luke 11, 13. Luke 11, 13. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

So we're going to think and reflect on what it means for God to give us the Holy Spirit because we are His children.

[1:27] And so that is the basic thrust of the sermon this morning. We're going to look at two halves, the problem and the solution. And so let's begin with the problem.

The problem shows up as early as Genesis chapter 3, which is the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the fall. As God comes walking in the garden, they hide themselves.

And Adam says, we are afraid. So I want us to think about prayer in relationship to the Father giving us the Holy Spirit in relationship to being afraid.

That's where I'm hoping we will look at this morning. So, they were afraid. I want you to understand a couple of things. Most of us, I think, can relate to the doctrine of sin better than anything else because we are expert at sinning.

At least I know I'm expert at sinning. I went to a university, University of California, Santa Barbara, where the student housing was called Sin City.

[2:49] I mean, we were competing with UCLA and Berkeley and other schools. We took pride in the fact that we could sin better than any other campus in the University of California system.

So I'm a product of that environment. So, first of all, sinning is a lot more complicated than we think. Just in Hebrew alone, there are 13 different words for sinning.

So sinning just covers one of 13 different things. But my purpose this morning is not to go through all 13 kinds.

My purpose is to try to help us understand God giving us the Holy Spirit in relationship to fear. There are all kinds of fears.

So just as there are many words for sinning, there are many kinds of fears. And some of them are good kinds, and some of them are terrible kinds.

[3:54] Let me just mention a couple good fears. If you're at all familiar with wisdom literature, that is to say Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, you will notice that Proverbs begins with the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

It also says the beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord. In Ecclesiastes, it says, now that we have considered everything, let's arrive at a conclusion.

The conclusion is this, fear God and keep his commandments because this applies to everyone. So there we are encouraged to fear, but it is to fear God.

So we want to fear God because that is the beginning of wisdom, that is beginning of knowledge, that's what it's all about. So that would be a healthy kind of fear.

But there is another kind of fear. We wouldn't continue to use the word fear in our culture, but it is the verb that meant to fear in older English.

[5:11] When St. Paul's Cathedral in London burnt in 1666, Wren was asked to rebuild it.

It was too destroyed, so he built a brand new one. And all the newspapers, if you read the newspapers from their time, all of them said, this cathedral is awful.

I've been to St. Paul's Cathedral. It's not awful at all. It's the second largest dome in the world. It's a fabulous cathedral.

Well, in 1666, what it meant is that this cathedral is awful means it fills you with awe.

That is, when you go in, you are in this atmosphere, this environment, that you are filled with awe.

So it is awful in that sense, not awful, terrible in our use of English 400 years later.

[6:24] I want to ask you, have you ever experienced an experience that fills you with awe? Maybe you have, maybe you haven't. I don't know.

I don't know you well enough to know. But I'll share with you two of them. I was, 20 years ago, I was visiting Italy, and we were in Venice, and it was Sunday.

So I could have gone to a museum, because after all, I was a tourist visiting Italy, but I thought, this is Sunday, at least I should go and worship God, and I may not get anything out of the sermon, if it's in Italian, or anything from the theology of the setting of that church, but nevertheless, I can still go and talk to the Lord.

At least pray the Lord's Prayer in English, or Arabic. So I went to San Marcos, Cathid Basilica. I don't know what happened, but I was there about one minute, and I had, it was jam-packed, there were no more chairs, I was standing at the very, very back, and this overwhelming feeling came over me.

I want to assure you, I am not a touchy-feely, gushy-mushy kind of a person. I am an analytic philosopher, I am a disciple of David Hume, I doubt everything, I hardly believe anything, I am not even sure that you really exist out there.

[8:06] For all I know, I may be hallucinating in a psychiatric ward, pretending to be a preacher. But I am not a gooey, gushy-mushy, and yet this overpowering feeling came upon me.

I have not experienced it that many times in life. Before you know it, I was on my knees. I felt this need to get on my knees.

A couple seconds later, I was completely flat, prostrate. I know that because I know the Hebrew verb, hishtahwe, and I know that it's used in scriptures, hishtahwe, to prostrate before God.

So I know it's biblical. And as I was there, see, I thought I was going there really, you know, to really tour and see the church and maybe pray on the side.

What I had no idea was that that was going to be an experience of encountering God. I was flat on my face on the floor and I couldn't get up.

[9:26] One of the ministers came to me and said, are you okay? They thought maybe I fainted or, you know, had a heart attack or something. I said, no, no, I'm fine. But that was an overwhelming sense of awe, fear, yare in Hebrew.

Nine years later, not nine years later, but nine years ago, I was in Washington, D.C. and I was at a church because it was Easter and I was with my family.

And as we were sitting there, I found myself sobbing, crying so strongly. And that's just not me, you know, I mean.

And I had this overwhelming sense of the presence of God. God was doing work in my life and I had not planned on it. I would have asked him to do it at this church.

After all, this is my home church and I would feel like it's at home. But it was in Washington, D.C. Can anything good come out of Washington? Well, some religious experiences can.

[10:42] But that is a good fear of the Lord. A sense of awe, a sense of respect. But there are other kinds of fears.

If you really want to torture me, promise me not to do it because here I'm being vulnerable to you. I'm giving you a chance to torture me if you really want to.

The way to torture me is to take me to Willis Tower and make me go to the top and step on the extension where the floor is glass.

I would have the worst anxiety reaction you'll see in your life. I'd probably have a heart attack and die right there and then. Something tells me that the minute I step on that, it's going to open up and I'm going to fall down and kill myself against the pavement.

Now, I've studied enough physics. I mean, I am well educated. I have gone to college. I know something about physics. I know walls don't open up and swallow. But that would give me, you know, you couldn't pay me to go through that experience.

[12:05] That would be a horrible sense of fear. I remember as a kid, I don't know why. I mean, I must have been stupid.

But I went and saw the movie Dracula and I was seven years old. I went with my cousin and he was going to go and I wasn't going to look like a coward. So I thought, I'll go with him.

And so several of us, my cousin, my best cousin and several of us friends went to see the movie Dracula and it was terrifying for a seven-year-old. I came back home.

I went to sleep, had a nightmare. And in my great fear, I woke up and I thought I saw Dracula coming at me.

So I stretched my hand to grab the cross to stop him and there was no cross. And I gave a scream that scared half of my family.

[13:04] They all rushed to see what's going on. That is fear. There are movie slashers that focus on fear. Alien, if you've seen the first one.

But there is a special kind of fear that I want us to think about this morning. A very important kind of a fear.

that's going to be to do it. So, please turn in your Bibles to Hebrews, the epistle to the Hebrews after the Paul's, after the Pauline epistles, then we have Hebrews.

If you get to James, you've got too far. If you get to Peter, you've got to, first, second Peter, you've got too far. It's Hebrews. Hebrews. And Hebrews is asking a simple question.

Was it necessary for Jesus to be born? Why didn't God just open the heavens and announce, vocally, you are forgiven and forgive us?

[14:09] Why didn't he do it like that? Why did he send Jesus? Couldn't he have come up with other ways of saving us?

And the answer is that, of course, he could have, but he chose this one for this reason. So, the author of Hebrews is trying to answer the question, was it necessary for Jesus to be born?

And of course, it was necessary. So, let's look at Hebrews chapter 2, verse 14 to see why it was necessary for Jesus and then we'll look at verse 15.

So, Hebrews 2, 14 and 15. Since the children have flesh and blood, he, Jesus, too, shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death.

Jesus became human in order to destroy death. That in his dying and in his resurrection he would do that. He couldn't have done that by simply announcing you are forgiven.

[15:21] And so, in order to destroy him who holds the power of death. And in case you don't know who that is, that is the devil. But look at verse 15 carefully.

And not only to destroy him who had the power of death, and to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Satan uses fear to run his kingdom. fear and Satan's primary tool is fear and the ultimate fear is death.

But I'm sure there are other fears between now and death. So, Satan uses fear to terrify us and to hold us as slaves.

Fear results, fear of death results in slavery. Okay. So, if you're hungry, how would you solve that problem?

[16:32] Well, you eat. If you're naked, how would you solve that problem? You get dressed. If you are cold, how would you solve that problem? Put on a sweater.

If you can't see very well, how do you solve that problem? Well, you buy eyeglasses. So, there are solutions to problems. What is the solution to the problem of the, of fear of death that results in slavery?

If I am feeling afraid, what is God going to do to deliver me from that fear? Maybe give me four green berets, you know, as bodyguard.

and then I'll think, well, you know, they can't take me out, they'll have to go through them. Or, you know, give me a car with, you know, made out of iron and thick glass. Not like the one convertible in which Kennedy was shot. The Lincoln. Maybe give me that kind of a car, a tank. Or, maybe live in a castle that can't be conquered.

[17:42] What is God's solution to slavery that comes from the fear of death?

You are going to be surprised. Where you're taking notes, jot what you think you answer and we'll check. The answer to that is a very, very important verse.

The answer to that is in Romans 8. Look at Romans 8 verse 15.

If we are saved, when we are saved at that time, Romans 8 15. Please look at Romans 8 15. You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.

Do you notice that he's using the same vocabulary as in Hebrews? Slavery, fear. But he's saying we aren't like that.

[19:07] you did you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship or the spirit of adoption and by him we cry out Abba Father.

God's solution to our fear of death and the slavery that comes with it is to assure us that we are adopted by God and if we are adopted by God then it is the Holy Spirit who cries within us Abba Father.

I'll get back to Abba Father in just a second but I want to focus on something else before we get to Abba Father. So we are adopted by God.

You did not receive a spirit that makes you slave again to fear but you received the spirit of sonship or the spirit of adoption. Well of all the things that we have in archaeology we happen to have a lot of material about adoption.

Some of the most fascinating things to read in archaeology of the Old Testament is Nuzu material or Nuzi material. Please don't misunderstand me.

[20:29] I didn't say Nazi. Nazi are bad Germans in World War II. This is not Germans. This is much earlier. At least 2,400 years before Germans. This is Nuzi material.

Nuzi material. And all of that material deals with adoption and inheritance. It raises some interesting question. If I don't have a son and I am rich and I want to leave this wealth to somebody, who do I leave it to?

And the answer is to your adopted son. Have you read that anywhere in the Old Testament? Like Genesis 15, Abraham wanting to adopt Eliezer? But it raises another issue.

Suppose I adopt a son and then my daughter marries a guy, her husband, is my adopted son and my son-in-law the same?

who would inherit me? My adopted son or my son-in-law? Adopted son.

[21:53] There are other issues. If I adopt a son because if I adopt a son because I don't have a son and I want somebody to take care of me in my old age etc.

etc. And then as happened to my own very best friend who for 10 years couldn't have any children and then they adopted a son and a year later she became pregnant and they ended up with two sons.

One adopted one natural born. Of those two who is more important legally? And the answer is the natural son does not nullify the adopted son.

They are equal. We know a lot about adoption customs in Paul's own age. So when we read the news material, when I read it I think oh I'm reading just Genesis.

Everything I see in Genesis I see in news material. But we also know something about adoption laws in Roman empire.

[23:07] There are two stages. The first stage is to cut off completely your relationship with the past. You are completely set free from your past.

So even if you had debts you're free from your debts. You don't have to pay because now you have been adopted and you're a different person.

You're not that same person. You may have the same name. You can even change your name if you want to. But you are completely set free from that and then you become a new person completely.

So suppose a master adopts a son in a Roman culture but the master also has a daughter. The son and the daughter are not in any way related blood wise. one is adopted completely from a different family altogether and one is his daughter. Can the brother and the sister marry because they don't have any blood ties whatsoever?

[24:15] The answer is no. They are brothers and sisters. But you say, but we are not. We don't have the same parents. You have now become a part of the new family.

You are adopted. And what is happening now is that adopted by God. And that's why we can say so our past is cut off.

It's finished. It's over. It can't hold itself against us anymore. So we are cut off from the past and this is a brand new relationship and we are heirs.

Co-heirs with Christ as he says. But a couple things I want you to notice in relationship to this adoption has ramifications.

Look at verse in Romans 8. Look at Romans 8. 34. Look at Romans 8. 34. And now you can see how this is all tied up to prayer.

[25:20] So in 8. 34 Paul asks the question who is he that condemns?

more than that who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died more than that who was raised to life is at the right hand of God and he is also interceding for us.

So Jesus intercedes for us at the right hand of the father. Jesus is praying for us. So whatever else my prayer life is like Jesus at least I know Jesus is praying for me.

Jesus is interceding for me. I would have thought that's a great answer. I got even better answer than that. I mean this is not just the icing.

This is the cherry on top of the icing. Look at Romans 8 26. In the same way 8 26 in the same way the spirit helps us in our weakness we don't know what we ought to pray for but the spirit himself intercedes for us.

[26:49] So who is interceding for us? Jesus and as if that is not enough and the holy spirit Jesus at the right hand of the father the holy spirit now.

That's a good team. Great team. Two aces. The holy spirit intercedes for us and one of the things he does is that he enables us to say Abba father.

He enables us to understand that we are now in a new family with no ties to the past that this is brand new and we belong to God and his family.

So that is one thing. The other thing I wanted you to notice is look at verse 26 again. Romans 8 26 In the same way the spirit helps us in our weaknesses we do not know what we ought to pray but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groans with groans too deep for words.

The Greek is too deep for words. So the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that are too deep for words. Take a look at verse 23.

[28:23] Take a look at verse 23. Not only so but we ourselves who have the first foot of the spirit groan inwardly.

So who is groaning? We are groaning but who else? The Holy Spirit is groaning with us. So when we don't know how to pray the Holy Spirit prays for us in things that are too deep for words.

It's difficult to know what he really means by too deep for words. It could mean that he is groaning to us in something other than verbal language.

So he's not using words. He may be using sounds like oh or whatever. or he is saying that he is groaning for us with deep words but we're not sure.

We don't know whether to pray this way or this way. We don't know whether to ask for this or that. But he knows and he prays for us with words that are too deep for us but not too deep for him.

[29:26] so the spirit intercedes for us the spirit assures us that we are God's children the spirit prays for us with groaning that are too deep for words.

But that's not all. Just one more thing I want you to notice. Look at verse 15 again. By him we cry out it is not chairman Mao it's not captain America it's not you know manager of this company we

cry out with Abba father.

Why is that important? This turns out to be extremely important perhaps the most important thing of everything I'm saying this morning. The reason for that is that there is a scholar by the name of Joachim Yermias who is an expert on Aramaic.

I wish he laid hands on me before he passed away and passed all the Aramaic to me. No he didn't so now I have to learn it rather than just inherit it.

Yermias studied every written prayer between Malachi and Matthew.

[30:56] Every prayer that was recorded anybody who wrote down a prayer he studied it and those prayers were in Aramaic and to his amazement he discovered two things number one all the prayers without a single not even one single exception all the prayers began formally and collectively so they all began with our not my not your not his they all began with our and they all began with the word father formally our father let me ask you a question so you can feel good about yourself where have you seen that before give yourself a good mark our father all the prayers 400 years of prayers all of them begin with our father plural formal then comes

Jesus and he decides to do something else he and I are going to have to talk about grammar here look at John chapter 20 verse 17 in the gospel of John chapter 20 verse 17 after the resurrection Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb sees Jesus and she is so excited she is clinging to him and he says to her don't cling to me or don't hold on to me I have not yet returned to the father go instead to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my father and to your father to my God and to your God for those who teach English what would be a simpler way of saying that I am going to our father and our

God but he doesn't say that he says my father and your father my God and your God he does not include himself in the same group as the disciples why is that because the father is his father in a different way than he is our father we are adopted Jesus is not adopted so Jesus doesn't put himself he's not just one of us he's not just one of us and he wants to make it clear that they don't think he's just a member of the team he is not he's the lord of the team Jesus in the gospels starts to pray Abba singular not our father but my father and the other interesting thing is that rather than praying our father he starts to pray my dad not father but dad if one of my students call me dad or daddy you know couple slaps

I'm not anybody's dad certainly not my students but Jesus calls the father dad whom do I allow to call me dad my children and that's all because there's an intimate relationship between me and my children that doesn't exist between me and any of you you're my brothers and sisters in Christ yes you are and I don't mean that likely you really are but it's my son and my daughter who call me dad my son teaches at one of the public schools here and he still calls me dad he never calls me Samir he always calls me dad my daughter never calls me Samir she always calls me dad because there is an intimate relationship between me and them so

Jesus Jesus calls the father my dad if you look at Romans 8 the spirit calls into you know we go and we cry out Abba not Avino the formal but the informal Abba what the Holy Spirit does is to allow us to have the same kind of intimate relationship to some extent that exists between Jesus and the father and now between us and the father so I can call my heavenly father dad that is the advantage of the father giving us the Holy Spirit if you human fathers who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your heavenly father give the

[36:39] Holy Spirit and why does he want to give the Holy Spirit well for lots of things but one of them to enable us to pray with intimacy to enable us to know that we are adopted by God to enable us to know we're not on our own even when I'm blundering with my prayer I have the Holy Spirit interceding for me and I have Jesus interceding for me and so don't worry if you just can't articulate the right word don't say well I don't have enough good enough vocabulary God can the Lord the Holy Spirit can intercede with us with groanings too deep forward so what I do what I do and that really does happen to me I know in the morning

I usually spend five minutes praying father just saying father because I want to talk to my father but I don't know what to talk about or what's important and things like that so I start praying Abba Abba

and then after a while I feel that I am in his presence not that I go by feelings you know I don't go by feelings and I understand that the father is listening to the intercessions of Jesus and to the intercessions of the Holy Spirit and that the father hears my prayers I wanted to share this with you as we reflect on prayer I hope this will be helpful so you don't feel like you have to articulate just the exact right words to get with
God Amen