

The Fatherhood Of God In The Old Testament

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[0 : 00] Now, you're going to need tonight your copy of God's Word, the Bible, either in print form or if you have it on your app or a device. You're going to need to be referring to that quite often because we're going to be dotting about the Old and New Testaments.

Before we begin, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your Word be our rule, your Spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Winston Churchill was one of the greatest of British leaders. He was an extremely intelligent man and constantly tried to improve himself.

Every morning, by reading the dictionary, he would learn the meaning of a new word. And he would ensure that he used that word that day.

Whatever the word was, he would drop it into one of his speeches. It led to Churchill being known for his amazing ability to inspire the hearts of British people with words we didn't really understand, but when we needed it most.

[1 : 18] I've been a Christian now for 35 years. And during these years, I've read the Bible many times and preached thousands of sermons from it.

But for all that, there was one word which, although I gave it lip service, I did not know truly by experience. I suspect that being brought up in our tradition, it's a word that many of us know by repute, but not necessarily by experience.

It's the word father. Father. One of the first we learned as children. But when it comes to our relationship with God, father is often the last word we experience.

We readily call him Lord, but even if we should use that word father in our prayers, we know so little by experience what it really means.

The fatherhood of God has not been a major element in our preaching, in our discipleship, or our experience. For that reason, we've missed out on many of the blessings that our heavenly father has for us.

[2 : 37] Christ Jesus has died to earn for us, and the Holy Spirit wants to apply to us. Not the least of which is sometimes a lack of his awareness of his love for us.

Now, we may freely admit that the fatherhood of God is a significant theme in the New Testament. But what about the Old Testament?

Doesn't the Old Testament present a picture of God as being filled with wrath? Yes, we may freely admit that the fatherhood of God is a significant theme in the New Testament, but perhaps not in the Old.

But is that the whole story? By faith in him, God is our loving father, and we are his beloved children.

And that's true whether we're in Genesis or John, Malachi or Matthew. In fact, the doctrine of the fatherhood of God is basic to a deeper understanding of the whole Bible, and perhaps more importantly, a deeper experience of the joy of our relationship with God.

[3 : 55] Where is your joy today, Christian? I look at myself in the mirror, and I ask myself, where is your joy? Could it be that the neglect of the foundational biblical doctrine of the fatherhood of God, taught in both Old and New Testaments, could be a contributory factor to our lack of joy in the Lord?

The Old Testament presentation of God as our father follows a familiar pattern. Drawing from the whole of the Old Testament, I want to make the following three statements this evening.

First, God made us to call him father. God made us to call him father. Second, we refused to call him father.

We refused to call him father. And thirdly, God redeemed us to call him father. God redeemed us to call him father.

Just like Winston Churchill's discovery of new words, Let's make the fatherhood of God our common speech. It may just keep your heart strong when you did it most.

[5 : 17] First of all then, God made us to call him father. God made us to call him father. It sounds so simple, doesn't it?

But the Bible begins with the story of God's creation of all things in Genesis chapter 1. He created the heavens and the earth, the seas and the stars, the planets and the plants.

And in Genesis 1.26, we're introduced to God's creation of humanity. But all too much focus has been placed on his creation of humanity, and not enough on his relation to humanity.

This leads to endless arguments about how God created us, rather than the deeper reading, which leads to endless assurance about why he created us.

Let me read you that text from Genesis 1.26. Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness.

[6 : 21] The Hebrew words, Selim demut. Let us make man in our image after our likeness. These are important words. Image and likeness.

We can argue what it means to be made in the image of God, and according to his likeness. Does it mean our physical appearance? I don't think so. Our ethical conscience? Perhaps somewhat.

Or our need for relationship as human beings, and our need for relationship with him. These are interesting discussions, but they rather miss the deeper point, which is not to describe God's creation of humanity, but God's relation to humanity.

Notice these words. Image. Likeness. In Genesis chapter 5, we read the genealogy of Adam. Adam's family tree, not through Cain, his rebellious son, but through Seth, his youngest son. And we read, when Adam had lived for 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, demut, after his image, Selim, and named him Seth.

[7 : 41] Adam and Eve gave birth to a son and called him Seth. Adam related to Seth as father, and Seth related to Adam as son.

Notice how that relationship is described in Genesis 5 verse 3. In his likeness, after his image. Exactly the same words used to describe the relationship between God and Adam, or humanity, in Genesis 1 verse 26.

Adam made in the likeness of God after the image of God. Let me say it straight. God created us to be his children and we to be his father.

Sorry, God created us to be his children and he to be our father. This message is reinforced in the New Testament where in Luke 3, we read the genealogy of Jesus stretching all the way back to Adam.

[8 : 44] And in Luke 3, 38, we get back to the very beginnings. The son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Just as Seth was the son of Adam, so Adam was the son of God. We were created to be the children of God. The fundamental relationship instituted at the very beginning was that of father, child.

We are sons and daughters just as he is our father. That's how Adam was designed by God. It was written into his DNA to call God father.

father. In the Old Testament, the theme of God as creator and the theme of God as father are closely connected. For example, in Malachi 2, verse 10, the prophet asks, Have we not all one father?

Has not one God created us? In Deuteronomy 32, verse 6, we're asked, Is not he your father?

[9 : 59] Who created you? Who made you? Who established you? Creation and fatherhood. When it comes to humanity, these two are inextricably linked.

Who were these two human beings in the Garden of Eden tending to the paradise into which God had placed them? It was God's son and God's daughter, Adam and Eve.

Who were they in the Garden of Eden with whom God loved to walk in the cool of the day? They were his children. When I was a boy, I used to love spending time with my dad and just to be with him whatever he was doing.

And for his part, I suppose, he used to love spending time with me. Sometimes we would go fishing. Sometimes legally, sometimes not so much. And he would show me how to tie knots.

Other times, we'd play golf and he'd show me how to get out of a bunker. Sometimes we'd watch TV together. I didn't really care what we did and I guess he didn't either because our greatest pleasure was to be together as father and son.

[11:15] And I can't help but speculate that God took great pleasure in being with his children in the garden. He took joy in their innocence and their love for him.

God created us to be his children. The primary relationship we as human beings were designed to have with him was not king, subject, lord, steward, master, servant but father, child.

Adam, the son of God. Adam, made in the image and after the likeness of God. This is who you were created to be.

And how you were designed to relate to God as a human being. That's what makes these early chapters of Genesis so important. The depth of God's love for us as father.

That's why he created us. Look at yourself in the mirror and say to yourself, I was made to be God's daughter whom he loves and in whom he takes great pleasure.

[12:25] This is your dignity as a human being. You're not the product of blind chance nor of random interactions. You mean something.

You matter. God relates to sharks and to chimpanzees as creator and sustainer but he relates to you as father. That's how and why he made you.

Let me say it again. In this vast universe you mean something. You matter because God designed you to be his child. God created us to call him father.

Second, we refused to call him father. We refused to call him father. there's a world of difference between the paradise of Eden and the hell of war and death.

How do we account for the difference between who God created us to be and who we are now as human beings? Well, the Old Testament gives us the answer.

[13:36] It's our sin. The sinfulness of our first father, Adam, polluting our nature compounded by our own sinful practices day by day.

Sin is the answer to the question of who we are now. The sinfulness of the nature we inherited from Adam. But what is the nature of that sin and why is it so ugly?

Why is it so serious? In the excellent two ways to live evangelistic course, sin is presented as a failure to live under God's authority as our king and creator.

Sin is our rebellion against our creator, against our king. But is sin just about breaking a set of arbitrary rules set up by a distant God I don't know?

A king who doesn't really know me. Let's take the evidence of the whole Old Testament into account remember our basic relationship with God that which we were created to enjoy is that of father-child.

[14:48] We're made in his image after his likeness. We're his children. In Deuteronomy 32 verse 6 part of which I've already quoted we read Do you thus repay the Lord you foolish and senseless people?

Is he not your father who created you who made you and established you? To whom is Moses referring in this verse?

Look back to the previous verse and you have your answer. They that is the children of Israel have dealt corruptly with him God they are a crooked untwisted generation.

In Isaiah 1 verses 2 and 3 we read God's indictment against his people. The Lord has spoken children I have reared and brought up but they have rebelled against me.

The ox knows its owner the donkey its master's crib but Israel does not know my people do not understand. In Malachi 1 verse 6 we have another charge against God's people.

[16:06] A son honours his father and a servant his master if then I am a father where is my honour and if I'm a master where is my fear?

Many of us were brought up with the Westminster Shorter Catechism we've been reciting it on a Sunday evening and we learned the answer to question 14. What is sin? The answer sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

We learned it by memory but perhaps we didn't think deeply enough about what our Reformed Fathers meant by the law of God that law we have not conformed to and transgressed against.

Sin is not about breaking a set of arbitrary rules set up by a distant God by a king who I don't know and doesn't know me. Sin is the fundamental denial of our relationship with God not the God who was distant but the God who created us to be his children.

Sin is the denial of our status as the children of God and the betrayal of our father's love for us. That's what makes sin so ugly and so serious and so serious.

[17 : 25] It's the betrayal of a father. The denial of who we are as human beings as children. In Deuteronomy it's the corruption of the fatherhood of God.

In Isaiah it's our rebellion against our father who loves us. In Malachi it's our refusal to honor God as father. Sin is often called deicide the desire to murder God.

But in light of this doctrine we want to call sin patricide the desire to kill our father. What madness is it to kill one's father?

What has your heavenly father done to deserve patricide? That's what happened in the garden of Eden. The fundamental refusal of Adam and Eve to call him father.

Even in the heart of the paradise with which God had blessed them and his complacency in them they wanted him dead. To use an analogy imagine my children coming to me and saying imagine my dad coming to me and saying you fancy going fishing with me.

[18 : 52] He's inviting me to enjoy and to experience the blessedness of my relationship with him as son. But instead of responding to his gracious invitation I go to the kitchen drawer pull out a sharp knife and try to hurt him.

You not see how ugly and serious of things sin is? It's not about breaking a set of rules made up 3,000 years ago by a distant God who cares nothing for us a king who does not know you.

It is not fundamentally a refusal to live under a king's authority. It is about patricide. The refusal to live as children of God.

The refusal to call him father. Can you see how dehumanizing sin is? It's the denial of who God made us to be.

Can you see how disgusting sin is? It's a refusal to call him father or love him as father. Can you see it? Can you see how serious a thing it is?

[20 : 08] God, we refuse to call him father. Well, thirdly, God created us to call him father. We refuse to call him father. Third, God redeemed us to call him father.

God redeemed us to call him father. The Old Testament is really the story of God's multicolored redemption of his rebellious, defiant, and sinful children.

From saving them from a worldwide flood through Noah, to saving them from a famine through Joseph, saving them from Egypt through Moses, saving them from the surrounding nations through the judges, saving them from the Assyrians through Hezekiah, the Babylonians through Nehemiah. The story of the Old Testament is the story of a father's love for his wayward children. It is the triumph of his grace over their refusal to call him father.

father. In Isaiah 61, verse 3, we read the testimony of Israel. You, O Lord, are our father.

[21 : 19] Our redeemer from of old is your name. Just as earlier we saw how God as father and God as creator are so closely linked, now we see that God as father and God as redeemer are also closely linked.

Hosea was Isaiah's contemporary. And in Hosea 11, verse 1, he reveals God's redeeming heart for his people. Listen to what God says. When Israel was a child, I loved him.

And out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away from me.

They kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

Why did God rescue his people from their slavery in Egypt all those thousands of years ago? people? Why did he break the power of Pharaoh and destroy his army?

[22 : 38] Why did he feed his people for forty years in the desert and bring them into the land of Canaan? he did it because he was their loving father and they were his beloved children.

And I they grumbled against him and they defied him and they made a golden calf and they worshipped it instead of God, but still he loved them and saved them from their enemies.

If an earthly father would follow his child into the drug dens to save him from the misery of addiction today, don't you think our heavenly father would go even further to save his beloved children from their misery?

King David knew and experienced the fatherhood of God. Psalm 103 verse 13 in words very precious to us. He writes, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows

compassion to those who fear him.

The Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. We'll look at this in a few weeks when we examine the prodigal son. The word compassion David uses describes a mother's love for her crying child.

[24 : 06] The Puritans would have called it bowels of mercies, gut-wrenching pity, and compassion. This is the God of the Old Testament, the God whose fundamental position to his people is that of father-child.

Going back to Hosea, Isaiah's contemporary, God's people always had that promise of being his children. Looking forward to better days, days of messianic blessing where faith in Christ and not genetic identity became the basis for God's fatherhood, God says to them, the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured, unnumbered. And in the place where it was said to them, you are not my people, it shall be said to them, children of the living God.

What a title we have this evening. What a status. Children of the living God. What a blessed dignity this is to bestow upon rebellious and defiant people.

God. And why did God do such a thing as to repeatedly rescue his people from their deserved self-sinful misery? Why?

[25 : 35] He did it because of the glorious joy he had and they had in that relationship of father-child. He did it for the complacency he had in his children.

He did it because he wants to pour out his children all the blessings, treasures, and the joys of the experience of his fatherhood.

if you're a Christian today, don't you know who you are? You are a child of the living God.

Live your status. Live your privilege. Young man or young woman, do not envy the world that's passing joys. Don't think that your ultimate destiny is to be found in being well thought of by the world around you or by becoming just like the world around you in your lifestyle.

and your attitudes to its wealth and its pleasures. If you're a young Christian, you have deeper joys to experience than the world can offer you.

[26 : 42] Take it from an older Christian. There is no greater joy in life than being who God made you to be and who in Christ he has redeemed you to be his child.

Live holy because he's your father. And you're his daughter. Well as we close, I want to reflect on two other things.

The first is this. As we go through the Old Testament, we meet a rather mysterious figure called this son. Not a son, but this son. We find him in places such as Psalm 2, Psalm 110, although there are many other references to him in other places also.

This son seems to be a reference to a figure who, unlike Adam, never denied his father, who was always the perfect loving son to a perfect loving father.

And as you read more about him in the Old Testament, you learn that though he is a glorious son, he also becomes a suffering servant. and he becomes victorious through his suffering and achieves redemption for his people.

[28 : 00] It almost seems like the Old Testament tantalizingly says to us, keep your eyes glued on this figure that I'm calling the son, because he is most important.

And as we pass into the New Testament, we shall see why, for this is Jesus Christ. And the second thing I want to reflect on is something St. Augustine famously said.

He said, Lord, thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee. Our hearts are restless. Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.

In other words, God has made us for himself, and our lives will only ever be complete when God is front and centre of who we are.

Let me, in the tradition of St. Augustine, go even further. Your whole life through, you've been looking for the perfect father, but you've never found him.

[29 : 10] Your whole life through, you've been looking for the perfect father, but you've never found him. I didn't have a perfect father, and I'm not a perfect father.

There is only one perfect father. He made us to be his children, and you, as a human being, and as a Christian, will only ever find security, assurance, and meaning in his love.

You've maybe never heard words presented like I have this evening, but like Churchill, there's space to learn something new every day.

The invitation of the gospel preached here, Lord's Day by Lord's Day, is to return to the father who created you for himself, who knows and loves you most passionately, and who sent this son, Jesus Christ, to the cross to die for you.

God is the father you've always been looking for, but have never had, and he invites you today to be his child, to be his precious son, his beloved daughter.

[30 : 24] What do you say? Will you repeat Adam and Eve's sin? Will you refuse to call him father? Or by faith in Christ, will you run to heaven?

Amen. Amen.