

The Fatherhood Of God (2) In The Sermon On The Mount

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[0 : 00] have you ever had someone wrong? When I say that, have you ever spent your life thinking that someone was one thing, only to find out actually he's another? For example, I grew up admiring a certain minister. I thought he could do no wrong. But then I got to know him a bit better, and I found out painfully that he's very different from who I thought he was. By the same token, I grew up suspicious of another minister. I was very dubious of anything he would say, but then I got to know him, and I found out happily he's very different from whom I thought he was.

I want to make a confession to you. I've been a Christian for over 35 years, and for all those years, I've had God wrong.

I've learned that he's very different from who I thought he was. Perhaps it was just me, perhaps it was my tradition, but my immediate thought of God was always in terms of his transcendence. The God who stands at a distance. The God who is holy other. I believed in grace, but for as much as I publicly preached it, I inwardly wondered whether this holy, transcendent God really wanted to be gracious to an annoyance like me.

That's the way I thought of God in my heart of hearts. But I had him wrong. I learned that he's greater by far than the transcendent, distant God I had him down as.

He is more glorious than I could ever have imagined. Why is that? It's because I realized that he's my Father in heaven, who loves me more than I could ever love myself or anyone else could ever love me, whose love for me is altogether unconditional.

[2 : 19] No matter how weak, fickle, undeserving, sinful, useless, unlovable I am, he loves me infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably.

And so now my immediate thought of God is in terms of his fatherhood. Having been a Christian for 35 years, which is longer than most people in this room have been alive, I confess it's only in the last few months I've begun to know God as he really is and keep the third commandment.

The God whose grace toward me in Christ is free and not forced. The process by which I came to realize my mistake was both by reading the Bible more deeply and by the bitter experience of personal weakness.

I would save you all the bitterness. You may avoid it if you read the Bible as your heavenly Father intends you to read the Bible.

I suspect I'm not alone in having God all wrong.

[4 : 05] I suspect all of us can learn at least something from these sermons on the fatherhood of God. Last time we considered together how our identity as human beings is as children of God from Genesis chapter 1.

We studied how the Old Testament lays the foundation for how we are to think of God as our Father. We now move into the New Testament and the Sermon on the Mount, that very portion of Scripture which brought me to my senses and introduced me to a new world of joyful security and assurance in God's love for me.

These are the very words of Jesus. As you read through this sermon, you get to grips with a God who perhaps you had never known.

And then how we as children by faith in Jesus can relate to Him. So I want to ask two questions from the Sermon on the Mount.

First, what kind of father? And second, what kind of children? What kind of father? What kind of children?

[5 : 20] They are simple questions, but you never know. They might change your life just as they have changed mine. First of all then, what kind of father?

What kind of father? When someone uses the word father to me, I immediately think of my father. Committed, loving, sincere.

For those of us who are unfortunate enough to have absent or abusive fathers, it can cause pain to talk of God as Father. I understand that. But it is unfair to judge the fatherhood of God by our own experiences.

Rather, we want to learn who God really is. And who better to learn it from than the Jesus who best knew God as Father.

In the Sermon on the Mount, as you read through Matthew 5, 6, and 7, Jesus repeatedly refers to your Father in heaven. And your Father who sees what is done in secret.

[6 : 29] Your Father in heaven. Your Father who sees what is done in secret. And from the title that Jesus gives to his Father, we want to say three things about the kind of father God is to us.

Heavenly, secret, and ours. He is, first of all, heavenly. This is the description of the fatherhood of God with which perhaps we are most familiar.

Our Father who is in heaven. Jesus frequently uses that title in this sermon, your Father in heaven, or your heavenly Father.

Earlier, I spoke about how experiencing God as Father helps you to realize just how glorious he really is. More than merely bowing before him as a king, embracing him as your heavenly Father widens your horizons of worship, service, and joy.

Regrettably, in our society today, father has become a mere biological title. A father contributes half of our DNA, and beyond that, any contribution to the upbringing of his children is discretionary.

[7 : 52] But more properly, the word father should evoke emotions of intimacy, commitment, and familiarity.

In Jesus' day, father evoked these emotions, but also emotions of respect and honor. Perhaps it's closer to the American model, where in the past, and perhaps still in some places in the present, children call their father, sir.

There's intimacy, but there's also honor. To talk of your Father in heaven is not to strike up a contrast between intimacy and honor, but to give fuller expression to what it means to have God as your Father.

The phrase in heaven does not take away from, but adds to the intimacy of our relationship with God. Our Father doesn't take away from, but adds to the glory of the God to whom we will worship. So I say again, your Father in heaven gives fuller expression to what it means to have God as your Father. If there is a contrast in view in these words, it is the contrast between what it means to have God as your Heavenly Father and what it means to us to have an earthly father, our biological dad.

[9 : 28] Now, our earthly fathers love us, but they're very far from perfect. My own father passed away just over 15 years ago.

One day I know that I, as father to my children, will no longer be here. When I was a child, I had so much more energy than my dad did.

I always wanted to play with him. Sometimes he obliged, but at other times he just got off shift and he was too tired and lacked the energy. Our fathers are not morally or emotionally perfect.

They get grumpy, selfish, and angry. They're just as sinful as the next man. I try to be the best earthly father I can be, but my kids will tell you when I know even better than they do how painfully short of the perfect standard I fall.

By contrast, our heavenly father knows no such limitation. He is infinitely energetic. He never falls asleep on duty.

[10 : 38] He never neglects us. He's the perfect father in every way, harnessing all his divine attributes in service of his fatherhood. He withholds nothing which is good for us or gives us nothing which will harm us.

His wisdom and his love for us are endless even when we kick against him as so often we do. He holds us fast because his love toward us is more powerful than our apathy toward him.

He's the perfect father because he's our heavenly father. Not far away, but loving, powerful, faithful. That's what it means for him to be heavenly. I'm sure my children are from time to time disappointed with me as their father.

I'm grumpy, I'm selfish, I'm angry and desperately uncool. You never have to worry about God's fatherhood being as fallible as mine. Infinitely powerful, eternally loving.

[11 : 49] you can be more intimate and expressive toward him than you can be toward the man you call dad. His heart is warmly passionate.

This gives you assurance and stability in life. You are deeply loved. Get God wrong and though you might talk about assurance until the cows come home, don't even talk.

it's not real. God is heavenly. That's the kind of father he is. Second, God is secret. That's another title.

Your father who is in secret. Your father who sees what is done in secret. This title for God predominates in Matthew chapter 6, especially in that passage which talks about our acts of righteousness, our acts of piety, prayer, fasting, giving.

We do these things with reference to the God who is in secret and who sees in secret the God whose fatherhood of us is hidden. In Matthew 6, Jesus' emphasis is on the way our father meets us in the secrecy of hiddenness and not in the publicity of openness.

[13 : 12] an iceberg is an amazing object all the more so when you realize that 90% of it cannot be seen because it's underwater.

We're blessed in this church to have many father-son relationships. Think, for example, of Alex and David or Donald and Scotty.

what we see is only a minute fraction of Alex and Donald's fatherhood of their sons. The majority of their fatherhood is exercised and enjoyed in secret.

The conversations, the laughter, the things they do together. Likewise, I know that whatever I know about David and about Scotty pales into significance beside what Alex and Donald knows about their sons.

The point is this. The vast majority of our relationship with God as father is exercised and enjoyed in secret in places and at times where no one else is aware of what is happening.

[14 : 25] That doesn't mean to say that no one else can see us or that we're alone when we're enjoying our relationship with God. For example, it may be during a Lord's Day worship when during the singing of praise or during the exposition of a passage of scripture our hearts are strangely warmed by the intimacy closeness and glory of our heavenly father.

No one else can see us what's happening in our hearts. They just see us sitting smiling perhaps or standing singing perhaps but inside like an iceberg there's spiritual conversation and joy and there's excitement in our relationship with our father.

Likewise, what I know about David and Scotty is but a fraction of what their earthly fathers know about them. But what David and Scotty's earthly fathers know about them is but a fraction of what their heavenly father knows about them.

As King David reminds us in Psalm 139, there is nothing hidden from his sight. Our father sees us and knows us as no one else does, not even ourselves.

How thankful we are for that. He knows our joys and our sorrows, our insecurities, our anxieties and our doubts.

[15 : 51] He knows us and loves us unconditionally. He loves us for who we are and who he's made us. Intimacy and closeness, greatness and glory, this is your father who is in secret and who sees in secret.

Don't treat these truths as negatives. The God who's always watching, waiting to trip you up. Treat these truths as positives, bringing joyful security and worshipful assurance into your heart.

You are safe in the secret embrace of your heavenly father. Do you hear that? You are safe in the secret embrace of your heavenly father.

God's fatherhood is secret and it's heavenly. And thirdly, it's ours. It's ours. Now, I'm going to ask you to get your heads in gear here.

We often miss little words in the Bible, but they're very important. Little words are very important in the Bible, sometimes the most important words of all. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expresses God's fatherhood in terms of you, your, rather, and our.

[17 : 14] God's not just anyone's father or a father. He is your father, our father. Here, then, is the personal connection, the deep commitment of person to person.

Martin Buber was a Jewish philosopher of the mid-20th century. He coined a phrase which has become very famous to describe how people should relate one to another.

I, thou. I, thou. The person I am, I, recognizes, respects, and relates to the person you are, thou. I am not an it. Others may use, like, they may use a microphone, a knife, or a chair. I am a person, an I.

In the same way, the person you are, thou, deserves to be recognized by me, respected by me, and related to as a person by me, not as an object or something to be used by me.

[18 : 29] You are not an it, an object, a pawn, in a game of chess. You are a thou, a person. Anything less than an I, thou relationship between persons is a denial of the dignity of who God has made us to be, not as objects to be used by one another, but as persons made in the divine image.

Now, for many years, I labored under the misunderstanding that God treated me like a pawn in a divine game of chess. Oh, yes, I preached about God's grace and of his great love for us, but in my heart, I had adopted an ossified, cold, stony Calvinism and stoic evangelical view that God can use me as an object, but whereas he commands me to treat other people as I, thou, I must respect you as a person and not use you as an object, it's okay for him to treat me in an I, it kind of way, just as long as he's glorified.

I no longer believe that and I want to sternly argue against it. Did Jesus ever treat any person he ever encountered as an it, an object he could use for his own benefit, or did he treat them as a thou, a person made in the divine image, a needy person whom he could love, whom he could serve, whom he could die for?

Now what caused me to change my view of God? The small personal pronouns of the Sermon on the Mount, like your, he's your father, he's my father, he's our father, this is the language of I, thou relationships, two people relating one to another, not I, it, one person, one object, God treats us as the persons he made us, he recognizes, he relates to us, and he respects us as people.

When you begin to understand the fatherhood of God in these terms, your spiritual maturity will leap light years ahead, only then can you begin to truly glorify and enjoy God as your chief end in life.

[21 : 04] when you become his created and redeemed child. I know this is deep stuff. It took me many months of the study of scripture and the crucible of personal weakness to learn it, but I now truly believe that God is my father and his greatest glory is my greatest good and my greatest good is his greatest glory.

Again, I know it's deep stuff, and over the next few studies I plan to explain more and show you from scripture how God relates to you as a person, as the father, but it all began here with the personal pronouns of the Sermon on the Mount where the Almighty God of heaven and earth does not treat you like a pawn in a game of chess, just so that he can get the glory, but as a person, as a child he made, redeemed, and loves.

In fact, he relates to us, as we'll see next week, hopefully, or the next time I'm preaching on a Sunday evening, just like he relates to his own son, Jesus. Now, I admit these truths may well be the most profound I ever preach.

I'm sharing these truths with you, not just because it's cathartic for me, but because it's good for all of us to hear them, and even more to experience them. Here's a question that I pondered for months and months and months.

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do bad things happen to good people? I dare not give you a glib and cliched answer to that most perplexing question, but what I do know is that they came from the hand of your father, who recognizes, respects, and relates to you as his child, and who loves you more than you can ever dream.

[23 : 12] They come from the hands of a father whose heart beats with love for you, and who wants not just to enjoy you, can you believe that?

God wants to enjoy you, but wants you to enjoy him. That's the kind of father we have, as Jesus tells us in this sermon.

Well, secondly, and very briefly, if that's the kind of father God is, what kind of children ought we to be? What kind of children ought we to be? I've stretched your minds enough for one evening, I want to switch the perspective from examining what kind of father we have to what kind of children he wants us to be?

How we may glorify and enjoy him as he designed us to? It seems to me that we can summarize what kind of children our father wants us to be in four terms from this sermon, the Sermon on the Mount.

Devote, depend, do, and dedicate. Devote, depend, do, and dedicate. Devote, first of all, let's look at Matthew 6, verse 1. Devote. The primary relationship that we enjoy as Christians, is that which

we have with God as father.

[24 : 30] We were created to be his children, and Jesus in Matthew 6 talks about how we as kingdom disciples are to relate to him as father. And Jesus command is this, devote yourselves to him.

Devote yourselves to him. Let God dominate your mind and your heart and your will, your emotions, your intelligence, your attitudes, your dreams, your ambitions, your career.

Make his fatherhood your fundamental motive for prayer and for fasting and forgiving, your acts of righteousness. Mirror your father's love for his enemies. Purity of heart is the mark of your sonship, Jesus says.

Devote yourselves to him. In public and in private, let his fatherhood fill you with the energy and excitement of grace and holiness. Devoting yourself to God as father will change your approach to life.

It will make you willing to be his servant, his steward and his shepherd. And why is that? Because you're first and foremost his son. If we devote ourselves to our earthly fathers, how much more, given the magnitude of what our heavenly father has done for us in the cross of Jesus, are we to devote ourselves to him?

[25 : 55] Devote. Second, depend. Now we're in Matthew 6 verses 32 and 33. Depend. God is not a divine chess player, a heavenly Magnus Carlsen, who rather like the Greek gods of his day stands distant from us.

God is closer to us than we know. That as such, he sees who we are, he hears what we say, he understands our inner needs and pain.

We cry out to him for help and he answers us. Is this not the essence of the Lord's prayer? Us as children, we cry out to him and he answers us, give us our daily bread, he feeds us and gives us exceeding abundant above all that we can ever ask or imagine.

in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is calling upon us to depend upon him as our father. In the latter portions of chapter 6, Jesus calls us not to worry about what we're going to eat or what we're going to drink or what we're going to wear.

The Gentiles worry themselves into an early grave about these things. They don't have a heavenly father who sees them, who knows them, who hears them. By contrast, Jesus says, your heavenly father knows that you need them all, verse 32.

[27 : 22] He knows all about us. Again, in chapter 7, verse 11, Jesus bases our confidence in prayer upon this principle.

Your father in heaven will give good gifts to those who ask him. Jesus is saying, depend upon your father.

Trust your father. For we've got a heavenly father who is closer to us than we can think, who loves us so dearly. Third, do.

Now we're in chapter 5 and verse 46. Do. And chapter 7 and verse 21.

What real difference does it make to know God as our father? What can others see? In a word, knowing God as our father makes us doers of the word and not just hearers.

[28 : 29] Makes us doers of the word and not just hearers. In the words of Jesus in Matthew 7, 21, it changes us so that we don't just want to, do, but we do the will of our father in heaven.

We don't just talk about it and look the part of the child of God. We do what he says. And before anyone says, well this is taking us away from love toward law.

Tell me, did you do what your earthly father told you to do? Of course you did because you were confident he loved you and wanted the best for you, so you did what he said.

How much more our heavenly father? And more even than that, our outward actions begin to mirror our inner attitudes. We take on the character of our father.

He loves his enemies. In Matthew 5, Jesus tells us that our father makes the sun rise on the evil and on the righteous.

[29 : 30] And he sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Even as we grow into the image of our father, we begin to love our enemies also. That's why Jesus commands us in Matthew 5, 44, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who's in heaven.

After all, tell me, how thankful are we that God loves his enemies? For while we were yet his enemies, he loved us and gave his son Jesus on the cross for us.

Stop talking about God and his will. As his child, get on with doing it. And then lastly, in chapter 5 and verse 16, dedicate, dedicate.

One of the greatest days in my father's life was the day I graduated from Aberdeen University. He was so pleased and he was so chuffed and he was so proud.

All his investment in me had come to fruition. The first dow from our family to get a degree from university. The greatest days in our lives as children of God are when we give glory to our father in heaven, when others seeing our good deeds give him praise and glory.

[31 : 04] That's why Jesus says, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven. We glorify God as father and we enjoy him as father.

We dedicate our lives, our ambitions, our careers, everything to the glory not of a distant God whom we'll never know, but to our heavenly father.

And you know the most wonderful thing is also true. What pleasure our heavenly father takes in the good works of his children.

What pleasure our heavenly father takes in the good works of his children. He himself is filled with joy in our devotion to him, our dependence upon him, and our doing of his will.

Not because we're his servants to command around this and that and the next thing, but because we're his sons. For 35 years of my Christian life, I had God all wrong.

[32 : 17] I preached a God of grace and love, but I believed in a God who was distant and ambivalent. This had all changed through my reading of scripture for the perspective of weakness.

God is now my father, not just preached but believed upon and experience. I can, for the first time in many years, experience the joy of the Lord because he's my father.

Maybe you're different. Maybe you've never had God wrong. Maybe you've always known him this way. But maybe you're just like me.

Let Jesus' teaching and the Sermon on the Mount change you for the better as it has me. May our father, may your father embrace you in his love and may he express his love in your joy and in your assurance.

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[33 : 28] Never care not. Mary goes into the kingdom. Let's take picture comes into■ here.

Let's see the