

# The Lord's Prayer - Our Father Who Is In Heaven

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 15 January 2020

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn for a short time now as we wait on the Lord to the passage we read in Matthew chapter 6 and reading again at verse 9.

Pray then like this, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Now we did begin looking at this passage some time ago, as it happens, at the end of last year, towards the end of last year. You may recall that we looked at the verses before this, verses 5 to 8, and then we had a number of Wednesdays and New Year, Christmas, when we weren't able to come back to pick up this study again.

But I want to just try and pick it up again this evening, and then we'll go through, God willing, the rest of the Lord's Prayer. Because for some time, as you know yourselves, we've been saying it on the Lord's Day at the morning service, so the children can actually learn it themselves by heart. Some of them, even the younger ones, have already done so. And actually, when there was a little gap some weeks back, some of the tweenies themselves, some of the younger ones said, When are we going to be able to say the Lord's Prayer again?

[ 1 : 09 ] So obviously, that's something that they're also concerned to learn more of themselves. And it's important for ourselves, too, that we know something of the inner meaning of these terms that the Lord gave to the disciples as this great model of prayer when he set this before them.

So tonight, we're just looking at the first part of it here. Pray then, like this, the previous verses dealt with, as you remember, how we are not to be the same or like the Gentiles, like the hypocrites, like others mentioned there, who pray just because they want to be seen, and so on. God's disciples, the Lord's disciples, are different to that. And that's really setting out as it is throughout the whole of this section of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, which is in many ways a counter to the ways of the world.

It is really the culture of God's disciples taking on and opposing and being different to the culture that you find in the world itself, as it opposes the gospel and opposes God's people as well. So tonight, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Just the first part of that, our Father in heaven, or our Father who is in heaven.

[ 2 : 25 ] And the words that you have there contain two things, really. Firstly, there's a matter of paternity or fatherhood. And then there's, secondly, the matter of fraternity or brotherhood, which, of course, as you well know, includes sisterhood as well.

When the Bible speaks about brethren, when it speaks about Christ's brothers, when it speaks about the family of God as brethren together, it means, of course, includes all those women as well who are in the same relationship with God as the male disciples are.

Our Father in heaven. So it speaks here about God the Father. Now, we're not going to go into the whole idea of the Trinity, the persons of the Trinity, but so often you find, even in this kind of verse, that you find that is obviously behind what this reference is.

Our Father who is in heaven. And it was Jesus especially that revealed to us the fatherhood of God, more so than anything in the Old Testament, or it's there, but it's very much through Jesus as he spoke about the Father and his Father, as he brought out this emphasis that there is the fatherhood of God, which then comes to be seen as associated with this particular person of the Godhead, the first person of the Godhead, of which Jesus himself, as the Son of God, is the second person, the Holy Spirit being the third one.

Now, this father-son relationship, where he says, our Father in heaven, and we'll see in a minute that there is a distinction between the way that Jesus is the Son of the Father eternally and the way that we as his people are his sons or his children by adoption.

[ 4 : 14 ] But here you find Jesus addressing the Father, although he is saying to them, to the disciples, this is how you pray our Father. And the Father and Son relationship is something that existed from all eternity.

This is something that's within the very depths of the Trinity, that area of mystery that you find mentioned in the Bible, but which we can only follow in a very small part.

But prior to creation, God in himself comprised these three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. And from Scripture, it's plain to see that the relationship between them, though it's one God that's mentioned, nevertheless, the Father loved the Son, and the Son the Father from all eternity. And that's made particularly clear by Jesus himself. For example, John 15. John is the gospel that mentions more of that than any other gospel.

John 15 and verse 9. You find there, By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit. As the Father has loved me, so I love you.

[ 5 : 28 ] So he's saying this to the disciples in the upper room. As my Father, as the Father has loved me, so I love you. In other words, there's a correspondence between, though not identity, between the love that the Father has or had, has always had for the Son, and the way that the Son has loved his people.

So, that's obviously something behind it. But the main emphasis there, of course, is on God being our Father. The Father of his people. And, as we said, there is a distinction between the way that the Son of God, Jesus, and the Son, the Eternal Son, relates to God the Father.

A distinction between that and the way we relate to God as our Father in Heaven. The sons, by adoption, do not share Christ's Sonship.

And that is a very important theological point. because we don't come up to the same level, though it is indeed a very, very high level, the highest level indeed that you can imagine, that we should be sons or children of God.

Nevertheless, the Son of God himself, the Eternal Son, as he has always been, is in that special category of relationship to God, which is shared only by the persons of the Trinity itself.

[ 6 : 51 ] But notice how he's saying here, when you pray. In other words, he's not saying, when we pray, when you join me in prayer, this is how you pray.

No, he's saying, when you pray, pray like this, our Father who is in Heaven. How does God become our Father?

How do we relate to God as our Father? Has God always been our Father? These are profound theological questions, but they're very important. And God, it's important to remember that God is not our Father by creation.

There is a sense in which that's true, because by creating us, by bringing us into being, there is a sense in which that's a fatherhood, something that you associate with someone causing something else to come into being.

But that's not what the Bible emphasizes in terms of the fatherhood of God and how we come to be children or sons of God. Because the danger with that very clearly is that if we imagine, as some people, you will find this view that we are sons of God, that everybody really are children of God because He has created us.

[ 8 : 08 ] The danger with that is that instead of looking at our redemption, our being made children of God, our coming to have eternal life, as something that comes to us through grace, then you see, if you say, we're all children of God by creation, then that becomes the basis of how we are received into the relationship of children to God.

So whatever you say about God being the author in terms of our creator as human beings, there's a very close distinction between that and our becoming children of a God redemptively.

That's how God is to His people and is a father to His people. He's our father by redemption, not by creation. He's our father by redemption.

In other words, you could say from that point of view, He becomes our father through His own acts of redemption, especially through Jesus Christ and through what we know of as adoption, as an act of God's grace.

Now, that obviously takes in the coming of Jesus Himself as the Son to take our nature. We'll see that in a minute. But our being adopted by God is preceded by, or indeed you might say is made possible by, God's Son coming to take our nature, to die on the cross, to rise from the dead, to be exalted to glory.

[ 9 : 40 ] The work of Christ, in other words, precedes our being made children of God. But so also does the work of the Spirit taking what Christ has done and applying it to us savingly.

because when God applies His redemption to us, the redemption Jesus has procured for us, He does so by His Spirit. His Spirit works faith in us, thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling. That's the catechism definition. And as that takes place, then there are benefits attached to that, things which are directly flowing from or related to that, among which is adoption, along with justification and sanctification.

And I think if you go to Galatians and chapter 4, and just briefly look at that for a moment, Galatians chapter 4 has a wonderful passage or a couple of verses there which sets out a sequence for us which keeps us right in this regard as well.

So Galatians 4 and especially verses 4 to 7. He's dealing here, of course, with the way that prior or preliminary to Christ coming into the world, there was God preparing for that event.

[ 11 : 00 ] And in verse 4, but when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son. Now that means God the Father. There's a distinction there.

God is obviously God the Father because He sent forth His Son. Born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

In other words, Jesus was sent, the Son of God was sent into the world, the Father sent Him into the world to do a specific work there with a purpose. And this is the purpose.

So that we might actually receive the adoption of sons. That we might become sons of God or be made sons of God. The work of Christ is foundational to our being adopted and made sons of God. And then He says, and because you are sons of God, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

[ 12 : 04 ] Now you can say that that's true on what theologians call that redemptive level in terms of the Old Testament moving into the New. But it's also true on a personal level that each of us is brought into the family of God redemptively by the work of the Spirit but by an act of adoption on the part of God the Father.

An act of grace by which we are received, as the Catechism puts it, into the number of the children of God and have a right to all the privileges that belong to them.

So you see, He's saying there, this is the sequence. There's the sequence. It's first of all the sending of the Son and then there's mentioned the Spirit of the Son and then we have, as sons of God, we have this cry, Abba, Father.

There's a lot more that could be said of that passage itself but it fits in with what we're saying here about God being our Father, becoming our Father by an act of adoption, by an act of grace, this adoption.

So we have come to be heirs and have an entitlement to this inheritance called heaven all because God has adopted us and made us His children and given us this right.

[ 13 : 26 ] It's not something we've earned. It's not something that's come because somehow or other we've come to work our way towards it. It's all based upon what Christ has done and it comes to us via God's act of adoption, of grace, bringing us into the number of God's family.

So it's God, our Father and it involves a lot of other things we have to say along with that, a new birth as well as adoption and so on but the great thing is that we have access now to God as our Father.

This is obviously a context for prayer and a teaching for prayer and it's interesting this is how the prayer begins our Father in heaven. It doesn't say O God.

It says our Father Jesus teaching the disciples this model prayer. We have this access to God.

We're not to be hesitant coming into the presence of God as His children.

It's unnatural for a child to be hesitant coming to speak personally with their father even on human terms on the ordinary human level and it's the same when you think of God being our Father in heaven.

[ 14 : 35 ] The access that you have to God as your Father gives you the confidence that you know Him as your Father. That is right for you to know Him as your Father. That is right for you to call Him your Father because He is so through His own act of grace.

I'm sure most of us if not all of us had wrong views about God before we came to know Him. Before we were converted before His Spirit came to renew us inwardly.

And many of us would have had if we have had a belief in God it would be something like very remote very distant from us not personally involved in our lives and in many ways being glad of that because our life was not as it should be.

But then when we come to know Him as our Father all of that changes. He's no longer remote. He's no longer at a distance. He's no longer uninterested in us.

He's no longer uninvolved. Of course He never has been. But our thinking has changed so that you see Him so entirely differently. And now you see Him as the definition really of fatherhood for ourselves.

[ 15 : 58 ] Loving, caring, advising, guiding, teaching, giving. All of that belongs to His fatherliness, His fatherhood towards His children, towards His people.

You know that children come to camps I remember back in the days when I quite a while ago now since I've been involved with running camps but there were so many sadly children who would come to camp and be a bit puzzled about the Bible's definition of God being a good father because to them the word father did not mean someone who was good.

It was someone who had neglected them, someone who abused them and they couldn't understand just how the word father could encapsulate something about a person who was really good and loving and kind. So you had to try and convince them that that's not really how God is at all and that human fatherhood when it becomes other than it should be is a distortion of the whole meaning of fatherhood because God as our father is that loving and caring and advising and guiding father.

You take your definition of fatherhood from God not from any human standards. There's a story of a young woman in Germany this is a time of way back in Luther's time around that time of the Reformation.

her father was a printer and as a printer of course he began to print as became quite common then. Biblical literature and copies of the Bible itself wanted to become translated and one day she was in her father's workshop or printing room and she saw a scrap of paper or a piece of paper that had been torn and was lying on the ground and she picked it up and there were some printed words on it and all it said was God so loved the world that he gave and then it was torn after that there was nothing after that and she picked it up and she looked at it and she read it and she wondered what came next because of course in those days you didn't have a copy of the Bible the church wouldn't allow you to have a copy of the Bible the way that things had been for centuries you had to depend on the church's authority and the church's teaching of what was right and what was wrong as they saw of it you weren't allowed to have your own understanding and definition of Christianity or of the Bible anyway she saw this and she went to her father and she said father do you know what he gave us let's say see her God so loved the world that he gave what did he give

[ 18 : 26 ] I said I don't know anything about that don't know at all can't tell you what he gave oh well anyway she said if he loved us enough to give us anything surely we don't need to be afraid of him you see because they were brought up to know God as a distant God to be feared a God to be afraid of a God never to approach only the priest did that you had to do that through the priest and that's what she said if he gave us anything surely we don't need to be afraid of him doesn't that really hit the nail on the head if he gave you anything surely you don't need to be afraid of him isn't that what fatherhood is about a father who gives a person who loves a person who actually gives away even as he did himself he gave his only son that is whoever believes in him shouldn't perish but have everlasting life so there's paternity the fatherhood of

God the fatherhood of God in terms of his relationship with his son eternally but the fatherhood of God in terms of how he brings us to be his children and how we come to know him redemptively through his own acts of redemption and applying his redemption to us that we come to know him as our father and then secondly there's fraternity very briefly there's fraternity as well as paternity here is brotherhood and sisterhood people together brought into a family with God as their father now you notice that the prayer begins with a plural he didn't say to the disciples when you go into your closet close your door he did say all that to them that's all the things they have to do individually go into your room and shut the door pray to your father who is in secret there in verse 6 and your father who sees in secret will reward you that's obviously something done on an individual level you do that personally you do that by yourself but when he came to teach them the prayer he didn't say pray then like this my father who is in heaven our father who is in heaven why did he do that why is it our father why is it plural why is it not singular because the lord was teaching us and is teaching us from that that when we do go to pray to god we don't come isolated from the rest of the family we

will be on our own we'll be on our knees before him or standing or whatever we'll be having exercising that individual personal relationship we have with him but we don't leave the family outside the door we close the door we pray to him in secret but we say our father you bring the concerns of the family in with you as well as your own you don't leave them outside and so when you come to pray he's saying be conscious of this pray like this our father who is in heaven and of course that means that it takes in as the bible elsewhere tells us about jesus being the brother to his people again just refer to hebrews chapter 2 this time hebrews chapter 2 and verses 11 to 12 and also verse 17 it says here for verse 10 it was fitting that he for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory there's the element of adoption again as redeemed people should make the founder of their salvation that's the jesus himself them perfect through suffering for he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin or the or the av all are all of one and that's a distinction there or difference in interpretation but amongst the interpreters that could say all one origin like this all have a common father in other words the sons who are brought to glory are sons of the father just like the one who's the founder of their salvation this jesus who went to procure that salvation for them what else it could be that it means they have one in nature because the passage is dealing with the incarnation with jesus taking flesh and blood to himself in verse 14 there he likewise since the children share in flesh and blood he himself likewise partook of the same things but in any case it's an emphasis certainly when you get to verse 17 therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect and what a thought that is however you interpret the passage in terms of that

particular point I've mentioned it's quite clear that it's about jesus being a brother to his brothers as adopted sons of god that's one thing to be redeemed that's one thing to be redeemed by the son of god that's another thing to be redeemed in such a way that makes you brethren of his that brings you into that relationship with him where he regards you as brothers and sisters where you can regard him son of god eternal splendid glorious as he is as your elder brother or older brother and he became our brother by taking our human nature body and soul and through that by as that passage goes on to say by making propitiation for us by coming before god to give himself a sacrifice to satisfy god tonight you have such a great privilege we have such a great privilege together all those gods of god's people all those redeemed people of god wherever they may be are all bound together in this particular miraculous wonderful fact that they are all together children of god brothers and sisters of the son of god what greater privilege can you think of than that you know sometimes we perhaps as preachers of the gospel as well as ourselves generally as christians perhaps don't give adoption as much of an emphasis as we should and that we don't give it the emphasis the new testament gives it but there is no greater privilege given to us than that we are made sons of god children of god brothers and sisters of jesus christ you can't get higher than that and the whole emphasis of redemption is really ultimately in the final analysis as god's family will be before before him and gathered with him in glory what does it say in romans 8 about them as far as the purpose of god's redemption is concerned god's saving of them god's predestinating will in fact so that jesus would be the firstborn among many brethren that they would be conformed to the image of his son made like him perfectly like him so that he might be the firstborn the preeminent one amongst many brethren you remember the account he gives of the prodigal son where the younger son left home went and wasted all that he took from his father's house and then fell into serious debt and serious want and serious need and for years forever long in the story you have he was destitute and he went back to his father having turned around having thought in his mind a picture of repentance he said

I will go back to my father and he went he arose and he went back to his father his father was looking out for him a long way off he saw him coming he ran towards him it's probably the only well it's probably the only I won't say it is the only but probably the only instance in the bible where you have a father running he runs towards his son and they embrace and he's reconciled and he's restored as you find that wonderful picture you come to a very dark blot in it the elder brother refuses to accept his younger brother back home he is hostile to the very fact that he's come back to join the family that surly angry brother of his how different is it with

Jesus he's the brother who came looking for us who found us who came specifically to take us home rather than being like the elder brother hostile to us coming back home and tonight you thank God that he sent his son to be your brother so as to bring you back into the family of God to know God as your father to deal with him in consequence of how he dealt with us and of course that opens up the whole issue of the Christian family people of God together bound together in the

bonds of this wonderful love of this family which all of that is built into these words our father our father our father father of this family and because

[ 29 : 13 ] Christ is our brother all who are in this family are our brothers and sisters we don't leave any of them out we don't say well so and so is and such and such is but I can't take them all in surely yes you can and you have to and the prayer includes that our father who is in heaven remember Hebrews again and chapter 13 if I just read the first three verses for you there you can see how it encapsulates what Jesus is here teaching the disciples therefore he said in chapter 13 of Hebrews and verses 1 to 3 let brotherly love continue in other words he said let the love that belongs to this family of these people of

God let that continue let it be pursued do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained strangers unawares remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body why do we pray for the persecuted church why do we pray for people in prison in Pakistan or wherever who are Christians who confess to be Christians who follow the Lord why do we pray for them here in Stornoway or wherever we are because they are our brothers and our sisters they have the same older brother they have the same father they belong to the same family our father you see and so we pray not only remembering them but remarkably the way it puts it there remember them as though in prison with them as if you were actually right in there with them that's how you pray for them not conscious that you're at a distance from them although it is through geographically but not spiritually as though you yourself were there with them because you are in a sense there with them because you're bound to them spiritually as your brothers and sisters in the Lord and we could widen that out into how the New

Testament and Paul's epistles especially and in John's too we've been saying going through 1 John the emphasis on love and on loving one another patterned on the love that God has for his people and so this our father brings in the whole emphasis of the family of God putting away all such things as pride and envy and cliques and falsehood because the aim is to be like our father and the way that our father is toward us that's where you find the previous chapter in Matthew ends you must therefore be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect and verse 48 of chapter 6 you find the same kind of emphasis there sorry it's not chapter 4 it's chapter well I've got that reference wrong sorry I'll need to relook at that chapter 6 48 I had down but it's not that verse obviously anyway it's aiming to be like our father is toward us in the way we are towards one another kindness and care and forgiving and supporting and waiting for each other in brotherly love and family love our father who is in heaven that definition follows us everywhere we go it dictates how we live how we think of God how we think of each other how we think of the world around us our father what special special term that is that we carry with us in our hearts let's pray