

Our Father 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: 13 May 2026

Preacher: Rev Calum M Smith

[0 : 00] The last time we were together looking at this, we were looking at verse 5 to verse 8, which speaks first of all, as the Lord is teaching on prayer, He's teaching first on how not to pray.

So it says, when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. They love to be seen by others and heard by others.

And then He also said, when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases. So do not be babblers. Do not be just speaking with many words to be heard. So He started with how not to pray. But this evening we're going to then go into the Lord's prayer itself, as in verse 9. Pray then like this, our Father in heaven. I'm just thinking of these words in particular, our Father in heaven. This section of Matthew's Gospel is where you find Jesus giving the sermon on the mount. And you look through it from chapter 5 through to chapter 7, and you see how He's giving a sermon on how we are dealing with other people, how we are dealing with ourselves, and how we are dealing with Him. And a point of interest, if it means anything, it's that the Lord's prayer is actually at the very centre of this sermon. Half of what comes before, and then half, the other half comes after. But in the middle is the Lord's prayer. And when you look at the kind of things that are either side, so many of them are practical things. Love your enemies, giving to the needy. Do not be anxious, lay up treasures in heaven, judging others. There's a lot of practical things around either side of the Lord's prayer. But as a reminder to us that in the centre of this sermon, there is this instruction that our relationship with God is what is key in all of these things. And that relationship is developed, it grows as we come to the Lord in prayer. And the

Gospel of Matthew as a whole was written primarily towards the Jewish community, those who had a relationship with God, as you see through the Old Testament, but they couldn't see the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the Lord Jesus, not seeing that this is a continuation, a fulfilment of God's work. And so Jesus is teaching them, just as he is teaching us, of our dependence on God for all things, and that this is through Christ. And this relationship develops, as we have here in prayer, a dependence on God. So it's not a complete change for the people that Matthew was writing about here, that Jesus was addressing in this sermon. It's not a complete change, it's just a reminder to keep that relationship secure, to keep that relationship close. Prayer is a vital part of their lives, just as it is for us. And for the Jewish people at that time and since, prayer has always been important, and it should be to ourselves as well. There's a saying from the Jewish community that says, he who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron. So you see that importance of prayer that is there. But it's a devotion towards God. But as with them and as with ourselves, when it comes to prayer, there are many faults that can creep in. As we looked at the last time, there were those who would stand, they loved to be heard in prayer. They were called the hypocrites who loved to be heard. Or there were those babblers who used empty phrases, many words, but empty phrases just to be heard by others as well. But they're being reminded here, and we're being reminded here, that it's so easy for ourselves to enter into that kind of prayer relationship with God. That isn't what it should be. We have our own faults when it comes to prayer. We can just go through the motions. We maybe find ourselves, it just becomes a routine for us, where we don't actually think about what we're saying. And the irony of it is, we're looking at the Lord's Prayer, which is something that we repeat often. We say it every Lord's Day at the morning service in Kennet Street. We repeat it together. But how often do we actually think, what do these words mean? What are these words actually saying to us? They just become so formulaic that we just repeat them, and we move on. But what do they actually mean? Do they just trip off our tongue?

And so the danger with prayer is that it becomes just so formal that we just go through the motions, connected with a certain time or a certain place or a certain occasion. And that's very much what it

was becoming to the people in Jesus' day. And so he's teaching them here of the dangers of that, and how to keep close to God in prayer. Do you find that yourself? As you pray to the Lord, you can find yourself, it just becomes, there's a sameness to it. We just use the same phrases or the same words.

[5 : 25] It just becomes a ritual. Staying fresh in prayer is difficult. It's difficult for me. I'm sure it's difficult for you. But in order to stay fresh in prayer, we have to realize who we're coming to and what he is doing for us, our Father in heaven, to realize who it is that we're coming to. And so as we look at these words this evening, our Father in heaven, it's just this reminder to us of who we are coming to in prayer and how we are to come in prayer. And the first thing is recognizing that word, our, our Father. The Lord's Prayer as a whole, it's a short prayer. And it can be broken into two parts with three petitions in each part. So you've got six parts to it. The first three, you notice, are focused on God. Your is used. Your name, your kingdom, and your will. So it's focusing on God.

The second three are focused more on us. Our daily bread, our debts, and lead us not into temptation.

So you see there's an order to prayer there. God first, your name, your kingdom, your will. And then our needs, our daily bread, our debts, and lead us not into temptation. But you notice how it starts with our Father in heaven. You could almost say that they're both there. We begin with that word, our. We recognize in there that we come to him, our Father. But we're recognizing too who it is that we're coming to, the one who is over all and able in all, our Father in heaven. And so there's this kind of combination there at the start that then leads into your name, your kingdom, your will, and then our needs coming after that as well. And so as you look at that opening phrase, what he's preaching here is that as those who have gathered around him to hear this sermon, they're dependent on God. Our Father in heaven. There's a dependence on God. And there's to be a devotion to God.

Otherwise, it can just become that ritual as we've seen with empty words or just standing to be heard by others and not a relationship with God. Our Father reminds us of this great need, but also this great relationship. Romans 8, 15, Paul mentioned this verse in prayer.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father. It is that spirit that leads us into prayer, that relationship. That relationship we're seeing, who it is, our Father in heaven, Abba, Father.

[8 : 50] And so are you being led by spirit into prayer or are you being led by self into prayer? Because that spirit leads us into a closer relationship with God, giving glory to him, whereas self-prayer just leads us into almost making demands of the Father. It's like our relationships. When we have a close relationship and our love with someone, that is what comes across. That's the kind of relationship that Jesus is describing here, our Father in heaven. We love you. We know that you can do so much for us.

Whereas a relationship that's not right is, Father, just do this for me. Do that for me. Give me what I need. Do as I'm saying. This relationship that's wrong. But it's to see who it is that we're praying to, our Father. So we're led into that sense of coming before him in this way, our Father. And when you use the word our too, we're being reminded here, there's a powerful statement here that believers are one together before the Father. We are praying together to the Father. Even when we're praying by ourselves, we're praying for our people, our brothers, our sisters, to our Father. There's that family relationship that's so important. We read in John 17 for that purpose, that oneness in Christ that is found through that relationship with Jesus, who was saying, Father, that they might be one as we are one. It's all about that closeness, that relationship. And his prayer in John 17 is such a wonderful prayer. It emphasizes that for us again and again. His relationship with his Father, Jesus' relationship with his Father. And then as he's praying for the disciples in verse 11, Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. That they would be able to call on our Father. And then in John 17, 21, to all believers, that all of them may be one, Father. Just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. So we are praying our Father. It reminds us that we have that communion together, but also that communion with the Lord Jesus, our Father, the same Father that he had to pray for. It reminds us that we are one in Christ. It reminds us of the benefits of belonging to the church, to the people of God. That we are not alone, but that we join in with believers all around the world, asking for God's blessing in everything that we seek from him.

Our Father. Think back a week ago to when we had Derek Maxwell here with the Slavic Gospel Association. We are reminded there of the oneness in prayer. And as both Carla and Paul were praying this evening, that came across as well. It always does. The power of prayer, the oneness of prayer, as we pray to the Father, not just for ourselves, but for God's people everywhere. Praying for Derek and for Carol, as they have been with us. Praying for the ones that they mentioned. We heard names mentioned last week. Peter, Thomas, Alexander, David, Alicia. We heard about these people. If you were there on Friday, you saw these people that were on the screen in the hall, praying for them in Hungary, in Moldova, in the Ukraine. That oneness. Our Father, the same Father for us as it is for them. So we can rejoice in that prayer with God's people everywhere, just as we can pray for those in need anywhere as well.

And just think about it from your own perspective. Many of you, many of us, we've gone through different things, different times in our lives, different experiences in our lives. But you know there's been people praying. Our Father, look after that one who is grieved. Look after that one who is in hospital. Look after that one who is going through a difficult time. And you know that there are people praying. In the same way as you pray for others. And you know that God is listening because we are calling on our Father in heaven. We are together in our petition before God, each one of us saying, our Father. There is that relationship together and through Christ with our Father in heaven.

[13 : 54] But then you see secondly that it is that Father that we are praying to, our Father in heaven. And again, Father takes us back to John 17, how often we see Jesus use that. Father, he says again and again, through that prayer, it shows Jesus himself dependent on his Father and of that relationship that they had.

And it reminds us of our relationship in that way, that we are dependent on the Father. But we can call on our Father. Just think of how Jesus prayed himself at other points as well as John 17. For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane, in Matthew 26, verse 39, and going a little further, he fell on his face and prayed saying, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. There is Jesus praying again, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

He is depending on the Father. And as a reminder to us as well, that the same is true for you and for me, that we are dependent on this Father as well. Another verse that reminds us of this relationship is John 3, verse 1. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are. The children of God. And he is our Father. That is our privilege as believers that we can come to God in this way and cry, Abba, Father, our Father in heaven. We can call upon him. He is our Father in heaven. Again, we're just reminded of relationships in this world. Relationships. We all have fathers. We've all had fathers. But we can still become fatherless in that sense. But God is a Father who is always there. As we sang, he's the Father of the Father of the Father. And Deuteronomy chapter 10, verse 17 says there, For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and he loves the alien and giving him food and clothing. He is a loving, a caring, a gracious father. And it's in this way that we come to him in prayer.

[16 : 41] And the people in Jesus' day, they had known this relationship, but it was a relationship that was fading and failing in many different ways. And you see it even through the Old Testament. We sang about the idols that people would make. And that is the way they lived. They were so easily taken away, not looking to the Father in heaven, but instead looking to idols in the same way as you do, in the same way as I do. We look to idols in this world for help, for protection, for all things. But when we do, we lose that intimacy with God. When we turn away from our Father in heaven. Like the prodigal son, we want to go away and live our own lives, do our own thing, but we lose the benefits that the Father gives us. Sin does that to us. Sin robs us of that intimacy with God. And yet God is there, graciously calling us to himself. Another Old Testament text is in Isaiah 64, verse 4 to 8.

And here it reminds us of how sin comes in, and yet God is still there for us. Since ancient times, no one has heard, nor ear has perceived, nor eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways.

But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you, for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand. You see, there's sin just coming in and destroying that intimacy. And yet it says, Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter, the work of your hand. Have you lost that intimacy with God? Where you're in prayer has become just a list of requests rather than a relationship being built on that dependence and recognizing our Father in heaven. But even now tonight, we can approach Him. We can come back to Him. We can call upon Him, because as His children, He loves us, and He longs for us to come to Him in that way. Our Father in heaven.

The final thing we see here is these words in heaven. This last part reminds us of the power of God. He is an intimate and a personal God that we can call our Father in heaven. So we have that relationship, but we are also reminded of just who He is. Psalm 33, which we sang together in verse 13, The Lord from heaven sees and beholds all sons of men full well. He views all from His dwelling place that in the earth do dwell. He is the one who is above all. He is in heaven and beholds all sons of men full well. He sees everyone. He sees everything. There is nothing that is hidden from Him.

[20 : 40] And as you read through the scriptures, you realize just who it is. He created the heavens and the earth and all that's in them. He upholds them. It is in Him that we live, move, and have our being.

He is the one who is able to turn wars into pieces. He's able to do so much. But do we recognize Him in that way? It's too easy for us to just have that cozy kind of relationship where it's the Father who's going to do everything that I want. But to forget that we are accountable before Him as a holy God who has made all things. The creator of heaven and earth. The one who sent His Son to die for our sin. The one who had the power that He would rise from the grave. The one who has promised that Jesus will come again.

We have to realize the enormity of who He is. So that we bow humbly before Him. That we recognize our unworthiness. That apart from Him, we can do nothing.

Because He is our Father in heaven. We are so often guilty of those horizontal prayers where our prayers are just focused on what's going on around us. Instead of our prayers being focused on lifting up our eyes to Him. In John 17 where we read, that's the way it speaks of Jesus there praying.

In the beginning, when Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father. He had that recognition of where God is.

[22 : 30] He is above all things. He is in control of all things. We are coming to the one who is the maker of heaven and earth. The one whom we could not stand before Him if He held our sins against us, as Psalm 130 says. But the one who has power to forgive us our sins, that with Him there is plenteous redemption. Everything is in the Father's hands because all things belong to Him. And yet this is the one who we are able to cry out together and say, Our Father. He is the one in Him we have that relationship. We are able to call Him Father. And He is the one who is over all things. There is nothing in this world that is beyond Him. And so we are to come to Him. A young boy once went into a shop with his mother. The shopkeeper behind the counter passed him a large jar of sweets and offered it to him to help himself to a handful. And usually the boy was shy at that very moment. He wasn't normally. He would normally be quite outgoing. But the boy just shied away and held his hand down by his side. And so what the shopkeeper did was put his hand into the jar and pulled out a bundle of sweets and gave it to the boy.

And the boy then took them. And as he went out to the shop his mother said to the boy, Why did you suddenly become so shy that you wouldn't take the sweets when they were offered to you? And the little boy's reply was, Well because his hand is much bigger than mine. He knew what he was doing. He knew what he was going to get if he left it to the shopkeeper. He wasn't daft. But are we? When we think what we can get ourselves and what we can do ourselves, instead of giving it over to God, whose hands are much bigger than ours, and who is able to do as Paul says in Ephesians 3, Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us. He is able because he is our Father in heaven. He is over all things. And

whatever you are praying for this evening or in these days, remember this, our Father in heaven. Because he is the one who is collectively our Father. We have that relationship. And he is the one who is close, the one who cares, the one who loves. He is our Father in heaven. But he's got power beyond anything else. Because the heaven belongs to him. And so as we pray, as we go on praying, and the privilege it is, keep praying. Keep coming close to him. Not just in that formal prayer where everything is just orderly and making our requests. But growing in our relationship together and individually with our Father in heaven, who hears and is able. Well, let us do that. Let us call on the Lord in prayer.

Lord, our gracious God, we do thank you for the very fact of being able to call upon you in this way. that this is what Jesus taught us and taught your people from the very moment that he said these words until today and even beyond today. But as your people, we can come, saying, our Father in heaven, that relationship that we have together and with all of your people. For we are dependent on you.

That love and care that you have for us as our Father. The one who remembers us in all our needs. The one who provides. The one who does abundantly more than all we ask or even think. And the power that you have, Lord, help us to remember that. That you are the one who is in heaven high, in the city on the throne, the one who is in heaven, ruling over all things. And we pray, Lord, that you would continue to hear our prayers and draw us ever closer to yourself in our prayers. That we would have that realization of our very dependence on you for all these things. So hear us and go before us, forgiving our sin in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. We'll conclude by singing again to God's praise and salvation.