

The Sermon on the Mount
The Lord's Prayer, Part 3
Matthew 6:9-15
February 3, 2013, AM
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When I was in college, I read for the first time a biography that I have since reread and found so encouraging. It's the biography of a man named George Müller. Müller was a remarkable man. He lived in the 1800's but, in spite of that, he traveled 200,000 miles in seventeen years of worldwide evangelistic efforts. He traveled to forty-two different countries, ended up preaching to almost three million people. And all of that was between the ages of seventy and eighty-seven. Müller was one of the founders of the Brethren movement, perhaps best known for the orphanages that he founded – five of them in all. More than ten thousand English orphans passed through those orphanages and three thousand of them professed faith in Christ. Müller preached his last sermon on March 6th, 1898. The sermon was on Isaiah's vision from Isaiah 6. He was ninety-three years old. Four days later, they found him dead and tens of thousands of people lined the streets of Bristol, his hometown, for the funeral - a remarkable, remarkable man.

But perhaps the thing that he was best known for and is most remarkable, is that Müller was a man of prayer. In fact, a well-known story that perhaps you've heard highlights and illustrates the kind of life he lived. One morning at one of the orphanages, they began the day, had the tables all set for breakfast with bowls and plates and cups, but there was no food. There was no food in the pantry and there was no money to buy any food. Those who witnessed it said that the children were standing there waiting for their morning meal and Müller just said this. He said, You know, children, it's important that we begin the school day on time and so let's pray. And he lifted up his hand and he said a prayer very much like this one, it's reported to us: "Dear Father, we thank You for what You are going to give us to eat." No sooner had he finished that prayer than there was a knock at the door. It was a baker. The baker told Müller, he said, Mr. Müller, I couldn't sleep last night. I was afraid that you didn't have any breakfast for the children. And so I got up at 2 a.m. this morning and I've been baking fresh bread so that they would have some breakfast. Müller thanked the man, but literally no sooner had he finished thanking him than there was a second knock at the door. And this is not an apocryphal story; this is a witnessed story that actually occurred. A second knock at the door and it was a milkman. And the milkman said, Mr. Müller, my cart has broken down right in front of your orphanage and I can't repair it with all of the milk on it, and so I've decided I'd love for you to have this for the orphanage.

When I read that story and when I rehearsed it again in my mind, I'm reminded that we serve a God who cares for His own and who answers prayer. Perhaps you have seen answers like that. I think back over my life, and while God always hears and answers our prayers (He's promised to) there are times when that has been amazingly clear and demonstrative. I am the pastor of this church because of an answer, I believe, to my prayer. It was in February of 2003 that Sheila and I decided, after seeing her father through terminal cancer and burying him in January. In February of that year, we decided that it was time for us to leave Grace Community Church and pursue the senior pastorate. We told absolutely no one else of what our plans were. We just started praying. Obviously, we prayed that God would direct us to a place where we could serve Him, but I also added this very specific request. I said, Lord, I don't believe in signs. I'm not hanging out some fleece. I believe this is what You want us to do. We're convinced of that from the scripture and from what You have been doing in our lives and hearts through the years. But it sure would be encouraging--You don't owe us this and I'm not demanding this--but it sure would be encouraging if, before anybody but You knows this is our heart, if a church would call and express an interest. That was in February. Within one month's time, two churches had called. The first one to call (and obviously where we eventually ended up just in the process of all of the discussions) was the pulpit search team from Countryside Bible Church.

Our God answers prayers. You have undoubtedly experienced similar answers. But what's remarkable about that is: in spite of the fact that we as believers have seen God work in response to our prayers, we still are often inconsistent in our praying. And frankly, often, I don't think we fully grasp the importance of prayer in our lives. The disciples didn't, but at least they understood they didn't. And they asked Jesus to teach them a few months after the account we're studying in Matthew 6. And here in Matthew 6, Jesus for the first time lays down for them a pattern for prayer. We don't get it, and so it's important that we sit at the feet of our Lord and let Him teach us. And that's what we're doing as we work our way through the Lord's Prayer. Let me read it for us again. Again, they're familiar words. I would just encourage you each time we read it, try to read it with a first time attitude, as though you hadn't seen these words before. Matthew 6:9:

Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'

Jesus, here, is teaching us how to pray. Last time, we looked at the legitimate uses for this prayer. Jesus, in His introductory comments in the two places that this prayer's recorded in the New Testament, helps us see two different potential uses. Here in Matthew 6, He says, "Pray, then, in this way..." In other words, He's saying that this prayer is a model. It's a pattern. It

contains all of the categories that should be contained in our prayers. It's a roadmap for our own personal prayers.

But there's a second legitimate use of the Lord's Prayer and that's found in how He introduces it in Luke 11 because there He says, "When you pray, say (*these things*)..." So obviously then, it is acceptable for us not only to use this prayer as a pattern or a model, but even, at times, to use the words themselves either in private or in corporate prayer as an expression of our hearts to God, as long as it doesn't degenerate into what He's just attacked in verse 8, and that is meaningless repetition - as long as it truly is the expression of our hearts to Him.

Now as far as the structure of the prayer, we noted it's fairly simple. There is a preface, "Our Father who is in heaven". Then there are six petitions that outline the categories into which all prayer falls. And then, finally, there is a conclusion. Now in our study this morning, we want to continue to study the preface together. Look at verse 9: "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven...'" From the fact that this prayer, this model prayer, as well as the other prayers that are recorded in Scripture, usually have such a preface, we learn that we need to be careful in how we approach God in prayer. Jesus is here teaching us exactly how--that there is a particular mindset with which we are to come before God. He prescribes in this condensed preface three attitudes that should permeate all of our prayers--three attitudes in which we come before God in prayer.

The first attitude, as we saw last week, is we are to pray as a member of a family, as a member of God's family. You know, we have a tendency to think of ourselves as individuals only: I am a child of God. Yes, you are, but you are part of a family. Look around you. These people are part of the family of God as well, and our prayers are to start there. Genuine prayer is always plural: "Our Father who is in heaven." We are to pray for others. We are to pray with others as we saw from the model of Acts last week. And we are to pray with Christ. Christ is not only our older brother according to Hebrews 2 and Romans 8. He is also our High Priest. And as we pray here, He prays on our behalf in the Father's presence. And He's praying what? He's praying exactly what He's teaching us to pray. So we are to pray for others, with others, and with Christ as our older brother. We are to pray as a member of a family.

Now today I want us to examine the rest of the preface. And I want us to discover the other two attitudes that should characterize every single prayer we pray. The second attitude in which we should pray is: as a child of a father. This is obvious, but look again at verse 9: "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father...'" God is characterized and described as Father. Now in American culture, fathers find themselves in very difficult times. They are lambasted. They are undermined in their authority, in their intelligence. Watch a couple of commercials and it's the father who's always the brunt of the joke, who's always the last one to get it, who's practically stupid. That's the mindset and attitude of our times. I remember reading an article, back now more than a decade ago, in *Newsweek* magazine, an article that was describing what it means to be a father in

today's world. Listen to what the author wrote: "These are tough times to be a father. The media are full of stories about abusive fathers, fatherless children, and deadbeat dads. This is an age when fathers get little respect, and you don't have to look farther than the biggest father figure of them all – God." The author says, at that stage, and it's still true in contemporary liberalism: "God the Father is out unless coupled with God the Mother. Few theologians these days seem to want a God who takes charge, assumes responsibility, fights for His children, makes demands, risks, rebuffs, punishes, as well as forgives – in a word, a father." I was shocked to discover this. Back a few years ago, my family and I went to a concert by Chris Parkening, the classical guitarist whom we got to know when I was in California. He was at a local venue here and it was actually a church, a nice church in the larger metroplex and it was a United Methodist Church. And as we were sitting there waiting for the concert to begin, I pulled out the hymn book and there was a little addendum to the hymn book. And I was shocked to discover that in this United Methodist Church (I'm sure Wesley was turning over in his grave), there was this hymn that said, you know, *Praise God the Mother*. Just a couple of weeks ago, a member of our own congregation came up to me after Sunday night service and said, I had an unusual event happen this week. Somebody knocked on my door and they asked me if I believed in God the Mother. Well, that's a pretty easy question to answer, but this is where things are.

Listen. God characterizes Himself in masculine pronouns and He refers to Himself not as God the Mother but as God the Father. Now the concept of God as Father appears in the Old Testament, although not very frequently. For example, in Deuteronomy 32:6, Moses, in his final words to Israel, says: "Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? (*speaking to Israel*) Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you." Sometimes God is compared to an earthly father in some way. For example in Psalm 103:13. "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." Isaiah comes to this image of a father in Isaiah 63:16. Again, speaking to God on behalf of the nation Israel, he says: "For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name." So the concept of God as Father does occur in the Old Testament, but it is usually of God as the Father of the nation, as opposed to in an individual sense. And it's only a small number of times. The small number of times that this image is used of God in the Old Testament makes it clear that this is not the primary way that Old Testament believers thought of God. Sinclair Ferguson writes, "Even at their highest, the saints in the Old Testament never rose to a settled, personal relationship to God that was defined and enjoyed in terms of individual sonship and personal fatherhood." Wayne Grudem writes: "Even though there was a consciousness of God as Father to the people of Israel, the full benefits and privileges of membership in God's family and the full realization of that membership did not come until Christ came and the Spirit of the Son of God was poured into our hearts, bearing witness with our spirit that we are God's children." You see, when Christ came, everything changed, because this was the way He usually referred to the first member of the Trinity. In fact, if you read the gospels, more than sixty times in the gospels Jesus calls God His Father. In fact, there's only one time in His life when He didn't refer to the

first member of the Trinity as Father. You know when that was? It was on the cross near the end of His suffering when, according to Matthew 27:46. “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” But after He paid the debt for sin; after He was finished bearing the wrath of God against the sin of every person who would ever believe, He ended His life by coming back to this as well. After He said, “It is finished”, what were His last words? “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

Jesus not only referred to God as His Father, but He also chose a term of deepest intimacy. He chose the word *Abba*. You see this in Mark 14:36 where Mark reports for us through the eyewitness account of Peter that, there in Gethsemane as Jesus was praying, this is what He said: “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” *Abba*. *Abba* comes from a Hebrew word, but it’s actually an Aramaic word. Aramaic was the language that was the most commonly spoken language in first century Palestine. It’s the language that Jesus and the apostles would have spoken mostly. Jesus knew Greek. He knew Hebrew. But the language He spoke most often, the language of the country in which He lived and taught was Aramaic. So most of the times when He referred to God as His Father to those original audiences, He would have used this word *Abba* just as Mark quotes Him in the Garden.

What does the word *Abba* mean? Well last century, a German scholar by the name of Jeremias did extensive research on this word. And he discovered that it was a very common word used many times every day in every Jewish home. But here’s the remarkable thing. Even though it was such a common word, he never found one instance in any Jewish document in which a Jewish author referred to God as *Abba*. This was new with Jesus. Jesus comes along and, as a matter of course - more than sixty times recorded in the gospels and it was how He always referred to God - He refers to Him as *Abba*. Jeremias also discovered that three of the early church fathers, those men who came in the early history of the church after the apostles - men including John Chrysostom who actually grew up in a home where Aramaic was spoken – they all agreed unanimously that *Abba* was originally how a small child addressed his father. In fact, listen to the Talmud. I think it captures it well. The Jewish Talmud says this: “When a child experiences the taste of wheat (in other words, when he’s weaned, the first time he moves from his mother’s milk to real food. When a child experiences the taste of wheat), it learns to say *Abba* and *Emma*. ” You capture, even in the Aramaic language, the sounds that are similar to the way our children address us. In other words, the words *Abba* and *Emma* were the first words that a child learned, the first words that he babbled in a way to refer to his parents. *Abba* then is like our terms *Daddy* or *Papa*. Eventually, the word *Abba* was no longer limited to small children. It became the way that grown children referred to their fathers as well. It was a term of endearment that included both intimacy and respect. We understand this. This happens in our language, right, with the word *Daddy* or *Papa*. My sister is over seventy years old and she still refers to our father, who’s now with the Lord and who would be nearly a hundred if he were still living, as *daddy*. That’s what happened with this word *Abba*. It started out as the way a small child would

refer in first syllables to his dad and eventually it's the word that stuck. It's the term of endearment and respect that continued throughout life.

So *Abba* then is like our terms in English *Daddy* or *Papa*, whichever carries the greatest respect. Sometimes the word *Daddy* in English doesn't carry respect because of the culture. In the first century, this word *Abba* would have carried respect with it as well as intimacy. So whichever works for you in English - *Daddy*, *Papa*, but with respect. That's how Jesus always referred to God. Let that sink into your mind for a moment. That's how Jesus spoke to God. And here's the amazing thing - Jesus not only referred to God as His *Abba*, but through His apostles He taught us to think of and refer to God as our *Abba* as well. Romans 8:15 – Paul says: “you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we all cry out, ‘*Abba!*’” Here in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to approach God in prayer by referring to Him as Father. And when He originally taught this sermon there on the north side of the Sea of Galilee, He was speaking to a crowd who largely would have spoken Aramaic and so He probably even spoke this in Aramaic at the time - “Pray in this way: ‘Our *Abba*...’” We are to approach our God as we would a father.

We are to pray with the attitude of a child to a father. But what does that mean? Let's drill down on this just a little more. What are the nuances of praying as a child to a father? There are really three of them very briefly. To pray to God as a child to a father means, first of all, we pray in awareness of our adoption. In one sense of course, God is the Father of all men in the sense that He is the Creator of all. Paul drew this out in Acts 17 on Mars Hill when he was speaking to the pagan philosophers. He says to them in Acts 17:28, “For in God we live and move and exist, just as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’” He's talking now to pagans and he's saying, We all in the sense that God is our Creator are His children. And then he makes this point: “Being then the children of God, (*if we're made in His image*) we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.” Look at man and you see that God can't be like that.

But in the fullest sense, only believers can truly call God Father. Jesus made this point very clear in John 8. He was speaking again to a crowd of unbelievers and He said to them: John 8:42, “If God were your Father, (*and the clear implication is He's not, if God were your Father*) you would love Me...” You see, God only is the Father of those who love Jesus Christ, who have turned from their sins and have embraced Jesus Christ as Lord--who love Jesus. To them, God is their Father. Everyone else – what about them? What about the good people you know? What about the people who appear to live decent lives? Jesus says either your Father is God because you love Me or your father is (whom) the devil. He said to them, Your father is the devil. You know, we like gray, right? Jesus was pretty black and white. There are only two options here. Either your father is God or your father is the devil. And the way to tell the difference is: do you love Jesus Christ? 1 John 3:1. “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God...” We, as believers, would be called children of God. So only

those who have believed in Jesus truly, in the redemptive sense, in the spiritual sense, have God as their Father.

Some of you are adopted. Others of you have adopted children. And you had the privilege of beforehand selecting the children that you would adopt. God did the same thing. According to Ephesians 1:4, "...God chose us in Jesus before the foundation of the world" And that verse goes on to say at the end of verse 4 and the beginning of verse 5 "In love He predestined us to the adoption as sons." He predetermined our destiny to be adopted as His sons and daughters. In eternity past, believer, He chose you and said I'm going to adopt that one. Your actual adoption happened at the moment of your salvation. At that moment that you repented of your sins and believed in the gospel, a lot of things happened and one of the things that happened in that moment of time, was that you were adopted by God. And this isn't some sort of faint image. This is the reality. You were actually adopted by God and He is your Father. It's incredible. We now can also, like Jesus, call God our Abba. Look at Romans 8. I alluded to this a moment ago. I want you to see it. Romans 8:14. "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, *(in other words, all who have the Spirit. That's what he says back in verse 9. If you're a Christian, you have the Spirit. So if you have the Spirit, then)* these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery *(a mindset that is characterized by slavery)* leading to fear again, but you have received *(and I think here he makes a play on words. I think he means a spirit in the sense of an attitude or a mindset of adoption where we come to understand it, but I also think he means the Holy Spirit who confirms our adoption to us. We have received)* this spirit of adoption as sons and because of that we cry out, *(what?)* "Abba!" Because God has adopted us and because the Spirit has brought us to understand that we've been adopted, we cry out Abba! Look over at Galatians 4:4.

But when the fullness of time came, *(when everything was just right)* God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, *(that is, born under obligation to keep the whole law which we never did, because only then could He really be our substitute)* so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

This is where it was headed. From a human standpoint, the redemptive process wasn't merely to get you forgiveness. It was so God could forgive you so that He could adopt you as His child. Ultimately of course, the end goal was the glory of God. But from our perspective on a human level, the end goal for us was so that we could be adopted as His sons and His daughters. Verse 6: "Because you are sons, *(because at the moment of salvation, what Christ accomplished was applied to you and you have been adopted by God)* God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, *(what?)* Abba! Father! *(Papa!)*" This is the way (I wish you could grip this and it would grip you, this is the way) God wants us to understand our relationship to Him. This is the reality. My earthly father died when I was twenty-three years old. But since the time I was seventeen, God has been my Father. And if you're in Christ, He's your Father as well. And

here's the amazing truth. The same intimacy that exists between the Father and Christ can be ours. When you pray and say Our Father, you are praying in the reality of your adoption. God is your Father.

Now there's a second nuance to this attitude of praying as a child to a father. Not only does it mean praying in the spirit and reality of our adoption, but it means praying in confidence of His gracious response. By using this image of a father, Jesus is comparing our relationship to God as that of the best of human fathers - a father who knows what you need and who is eager to meet those needs. Look back in Matthew 6:8. He says when you pray, don't pray like the Gentiles who think they're going to be heard for their many words, who are trying to earn something from God; "for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." And you know what? He not only knows what you need; He, because He loves you as His child, wants to meet those needs. Look at chapter 7. We will eventually get to chapter 7 although I'm making no promises about when that happens. Matthew 7:7. Jesus comes back to this issue of prayer. He says,

Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (*He's urging us in persistent prayer.*) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

God's going to respond to your prayer. He's going to answer. He's going to give you what you need. And to punctuate that, Jesus uses the image, again, of father. Look at verse 9: "For what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?" Here's a father, an earthly father, and just try to imagine this. Here's an earthly father whose son comes to him and says, Dad, here's something I really need. He's not asking for something extravagant. He's asking for a loaf of bread. This is for his daily needs. These are things that are really necessary to sustain life. And he comes to his father and he says, Father I need a loaf of bread. Jesus says, Can you imagine that father giving that son a stone? - in other words, giving him something that is totally useless in meeting that legitimate need.

Or He says consider another example, verse 10. If that son asks his father for a fish - again, in first century Palestine, that was part of the daily sustenance. You see it even in the life of Jesus, how often they were carrying fish around (dried fish) as their food. So here's a son asking for a legitimate need, something that he needs for this life. And he comes to his father and says, Father, would you give me a fish? I, you know, I'm hungry. It's lunchtime. It's past lunchtime and I'm hungry. Can you give me a fish? And the father, this time, instead of giving him nothing or giving him something worthless like a stone, Jesus says, Imagine that father giving him, in response to that legitimate request, something that's going to hurt him--giving him a snake?

And what's Jesus' point? It's: clearly that's not going to happen. There is an instinctive response in the heart of a normal father, given by God, to meet the legitimate needs of his children. And so Jesus says this in verse 11: "If you then, being evil, (*and yes, we are redeemed and yet there is a part of us that is unredeemed and so we can still be characterized and are characterized as evil*

in that part of us that remains unredeemed. If you, being evil, you're not the perfect demonstration of fatherhood - and if you, being evil) know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" Just like you can never imagine an earthly father refusing to respond, from his heart, to a legitimate need of his child, He says how much more do you think God is like that! You see, we tend to think of this image of God as a Father as something that God kind of watched how things unfolded on the planet and He said, Ooh. Father, child - that's a good picture of who I am. No, that's backward. Do you understand the reason fatherhood exists is to picture the reality of who God is to His people? The reason you're a father, if you are one, is because God wanted to show what He is like to His children. And our reflections of that are faint and imperfect and sometimes tragically shattered, but nevertheless that's what it exists to do.

Philip Ryken writes, "Jesus teaches us to call God Father and to do this with confidence, even if we have never known a father's love." And tragically, for many that's true because we live in a fallen world. Maybe your father was everything contrary to what God is trying to describe Himself as, by this image of a father. But he says He still wants us to use this image with confidence: "This is because Jesus knows that a father's love is what we have always longed for (and I would add what we were created to long for and desire). He invites us to become God's beloved child. He teaches us to speak to Him as our dear Father." Listen. When you come before God, always come as a child to a father, and that means you come in confidence of His gracious response. Now let me just ask you for a moment to be honest in your heart of hearts with yourself. When you come to pray, is that how you think of God? Really, is that how you think of God? For most Christians, I think if they're honest, there's a faint shadow of that, but not the full reality. There was a quote that I came across when I was in college that I have reread a number of times since that really puts this idea forward. Mark Pearse, in a book by Andrew Murray, writes this: "Our Father which is in heaven. Alas we speak of it only as the utterance of reverential homage. We think of it as a figure borrowed from an earthly life, and only in some faint and shallow meaning to be used of God. We are afraid to take God as our own tender Father. For many instead, He is a schoolmaster, or almost farther off than that, and knowing less about us an inspector, who knows nothing of us except through our lessons. His eyes are not on the scholar, but on the book, and all alike must come up to the standard. Now open the eyes of the heart, timid child of God. Let it go sinking right down into the innermost depths of your soul. Here is the starting point of holiness, in the love and patience and pity of our heavenly Father... God loves you not because you are clever and not because you are good, but because He is your Father (because in eternity past, He chose to adopt you)." To come as a child to a father means that we come in confidence of His gracious response.

Very briefly, it also means that we come in a spirit of submission. We understand this. We are to submit ourselves to our earthly fathers. Ephesians 6 says we are to respect and honor them and obey them. Jesus often reminded His hearers that He willingly submitted Himself to His Father's will. Over and over again in John's gospel, He says, "I have not come to do My will, but I have

come to do the will of the Father who sent Me.” He submitted Himself to the will of the Father. Perhaps nowhere is that attitude more gripping than of course it is in the Garden. When in a passage we read a few minutes ago in Mark, He says: “Not My will, Father (*Abba*), but Yours be done.” So to learn to pray as a child of a father means that you and I come to God in this same way. We come with a spirit of submission to His will as He’s revealed it to us. We come to Him as a member of the family. We come to Him as a child of a father.

But that brings us to a third attitude that should characterize all of our prayers. We should pray as a subject of a king. Notice back in Matthew 6:9: “Pray in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven...’” Now that’s an interesting thing for Jesus to say isn’t it, have you ever thought about that? because scripture is clear that God is omnipresent--that is, all-present. He is everywhere present. There is nowhere that God isn’t. He is not bound by space. He created space and He lives outside of it. 2 Chronicles 2:6. “. . .who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him?” And yet, while God exists outside of His creation and is not contained by it, He fills all of the space that He created. Jeremiah 23:23. “‘Am I a God who is near,’ declares the Lord, ‘and not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?’ declares the Lord. ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’ declares the Lord.” That’s a comforting thought to those of us who know and love our God, that there’s nowhere that we go that we’re outside of His presence, but it’s really a terrifying thought to the person living in rebellion against God. Listen. You can’t run from God. You can’t hide from God. There are no secret places where His eyes don’t see. He’s everywhere.

So God is not in one place, but Scripture also tells us that God, who is everywhere and who is at the same time outside of all that can be considered *where*, specially manifests His presence in heaven. Think of it as God’s address. God isn’t contained in heaven. It’s just the address where He lets us know He is. And here, Jesus tells us that as we pray, we’re to remember that our Father has specially chosen to manifest His presence in heaven. Why? What’s the point? What’s He trying to emphasize here? Well, when the writers of Scripture use this image of God being in heaven and man upon the earth, it is always used for one specific purpose. It is used to remind us of the gulf that exists between the greatness of God as Creator and our smallness as His creatures. Listen to 2 Chronicles 20:6. Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, said, “O Lord, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You.” It’s a picture of God in His complete sovereignty over everything. That’s why He’s described as being in heaven. Nothing is outside of His rule. He is the sovereign King of the universe.

Isaiah 66:1.

Thus says Yahweh, ‘Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool. (*Let that image sink into your mind for a moment. God says think of heaven as the place where My throne is and think of the earth as a place where I put My feet.*) Where

then is a house you could build for Me? (*based on the immensity of My person*)
Where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,' declares the Lord. 'But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.'

Do you begin to get the picture behind that phrase "who is in heaven"? It's a reflection of the majesty and grandeur and greatness of God as sovereign.

Now this expression *who is in heaven* provides a crucial balance for us, doesn't it? Because if all we ever thought of when we came before God was as our Abba, we might get a little too chummy. We might lose the respect and honor and fear that God deserves. And so when we pray, Jesus says we are to keep in the forefront of our minds, not only that we are approaching our adoptive Father, but that our adoptive Father is the sovereign monarch of the universe. One commentator says: "These words express forcibly the tension in the disciples' attitude to God, who is at the same time in heaven, transcendent, all-powerful, the Lord of the universe, and yet our Father, concerned for the needs of each disciple and entering into an intimate relationship with each one of them."

Now very briefly, what does it mean to approach God as the subject of a king? Just two ideas I want to leave you with. First of all, it means a comprehension of the majesty of God. Often when the Bible refers to God as being in heaven, it's attempting to help us grasp the awesome unfathomable majesty of the being of God. Look at Psalm 113. The psalmist, there, tries to capture this. When God is either in heaven or above heaven, this is the idea. Psalm 113:4.

The Lord is high above all nations; His glory is above the heavens. Who is like Yahweh our God, who is enthroned on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?

God has to humble Himself to pay attention to what's happening in heaven and in earth. He is so exalted. He is so high. He is so absolute in His rule.

You know, we don't fully grasp this, I think, as Americans. I think because we live in a democracy, for which we're grateful, we have no real concept of what it's like to live in an absolute monarchy. Our God is an absolute monarch. He doesn't have any restraint to His power. There's no capriciousness with God, but He has absolute, unrestrained power. He has no political handlers. He has no focus groups. He doesn't look at the latest survey to decide what it is He's going to do. Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Psalm 135:6. "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." Be grateful you live in a democracy, but never for a moment think that God's kingdom is like a democracy. It is an absolute monarchy. You don't get a vote. If we can begin to comprehend in just the smallest way the awesome majesty of God, it will have a profound, far-reaching effect in all of our life, but especially when we come to approach God in prayer. Solomon got it. In

Ecclesiastes 5:2, he says, “Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. (in other words, don’t treat God lightly) For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.” That same message, by the way, is driven home by the New Testament. Paul, the very one who taught us that we can cry out Abba, also says in 1 Timothy 1:17. “But to the King immortal, invisible, to the only God our Savior, be honor and glory forever and ever.”

To come before God in prayer with the attitude of the subject of a king means we have some comprehension of the majesty of God. It also means that we have a deep sense of our own unworthiness. You see, prayer is not a right; it’s a privilege. We are coming before the King. Whenever you find sinful man, even redeemed sinful man, approaching the true God in person. In scripture (not in prayer, but in person), where do you always find him? On his face, prostrate. I love that picture of John, and I was just reading it again recently, in Revelation 1 where he sees the risen Christ and he just falls to the dirt, his face in the dirt. And I love the tenderness of that moment when he’s recognizing his own unworthiness and Jesus comes over. We’re told He puts His right hand on him and says, “Do not be afraid.” It’s the attitude of Abraham in Genesis 18:27 after he encountered a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ and he says, “Behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.” That’s the right way to approach our God. God is our Father, but He is a Father who is infinitely exalted above us. He is the sovereign monarch of the universe. Lloyd-Jones says, “This is the way to pray, says Christ. Take these two things together. Never separate these two truths about God. Remember that you are approaching the almighty, eternal, ever-blessed holy God. But remember also that that God in Christ has become your Father, who not only knows all about you in the sense that He’s omniscient, but who knows all about you in the sense that a father knows all about a child.”

Are those the attitudes in which you come to God in prayer? When you pray, do you remember that you are a member of a family, that you are coming as a child to a father, that you are coming to God as a subject to a king? Before you open your mouth in prayer, make sure that your attitude is right. You want to know how to approach God in prayer? Jesus says, “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven...’” Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we are amazed at both Your greatness and Your sovereignty, the way You are exalted above us and yet that You would so humble Yourself and condescend to choose us, to choose to adopt us and to make us sons and daughters by Your grace through Christ. Lord, we are astounded at such grace. Teach us, Lord, even through our Lord’s words here, how to approach You and may we come to You with these attitudes. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.