

Our Father Which Art In Heaven...

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[0 : 0 0] Well if we could, with the Lord's help this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 6 and if we read again from verse 9, where Jesus says, After this man are therefore pre ye, our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. You know these words of Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount, as we said they're very familiar to us, because most of us and if not all of us, we have memorized these words from a very young age, especially the words that we have them in the authorized version, and we would have been taught these words and taught to recite them at home and in school and also in Sunday school. But as you know the Lord's Prayer, it's in danger of being neglected, and it's in danger of being neglected for two reasons. The first reason is fashion, because some would say that the Lord's Prayer is old fashioned, and that the Lord's Prayer belongs to a time in history when we needed to believe in God. But now that we've moved on and we've progressed in science and in our intelligence, the Lord's Prayer doesn't feature as part of our ever growing multi faith and multicultural inclusive and tolerant society. Therefore many seek to regard the Lord's Prayer as an indoctrination of children, and they want to remove it from our schools and even ridicule it as unsafe. You know thankfully our teachers, especially here in local school in Barvis, and also other schools throughout the island, they still begin each school day with the Lord's Prayer either in Gallic or in English. And of course those who wish to opt out, they can do so if they want to. But you know the Lord's Prayer, it's not only in danger of being neglected because of fashion, it's also in danger of being neglected because of formality. Because for those who are very familiar with the Lord's Prayer and maybe recite the Lord's Prayer every day at family worship or at school, our familiarity with the

Lord's Prayer can be in danger of becoming a formality where we miss out on the fullness of the Lord's Prayer. I'll say that again, our familiarity of the Lord's Prayer can be in danger of becoming a formality where we miss out on the fullness of the Lord's Prayer. And in many ways this is the reason why I think it would be helpful for us to study the Lord's Prayer together.

Because there's always the danger of the Lord's Prayer or even prayer itself. There's always the danger of it becoming a formality. And you know I don't think there's anyone who honestly feels that they've mastered how to pray, not even if they've been a Christian for over 50 years. Because you know when it comes to prayer and when it comes to speaking about our prayer life, we're probably better at talking about prayer than we are at actually engaging in prayer. Because we would say that prayer is one area in our lives that we always feel is lacking and that it's something that we don't do enough of and it's something that we don't persevere with. And yet the Lord has given to us the Lord's Prayer in order to teach us how to pray. In fact in Luke's account Jesus's teaching on the Lord's Prayer was initiated by a request from the disciples in the first century.

Lord teach us to pray. And you know I don't think the disciples of Jesus in the 21st century should ever stop making that same request. Lord teach us to pray. My friend it's good for us to be taught how to pray and who better to teach us than the Lord himself. And so as we begin our study of the Lord's Prayer we're considering this evening the opening words, our Father which art in heaven. And I'd like us to think about these opening words with three headings. Accessing our Father, adoption with our Father and addressing our Father. Accessing our Father, adoption with our Father and addressing our Father. So first of all accessing our Father.

Accessing our Father. You know when we speak about accessing the Father we're speaking about God the Father who's the first person in the Trinity. Because as you know there are three persons in the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And these three persons are one and they're the same in substance and equal in power and glory. But you know God the Father he's revealed to us in Scripture in what you could say is he's revealed to us in the lowest sense as the Father of Creation. Therefore when we pray we address him as Father because he's our Creator.

[5 : 49] He is as James reminds us he is the Father of Lights in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. And even when the prophet Isaiah prayed he said, Thou art our Father and we are the clay, Thou our potter and we are the work of Thy hand.

And the Apostle Paul he even confirmed that it's the Father, it's in the Father that we live and move and have our being. Therefore when we pray we address him as Father because in the lowest sense he's our Creator. But in the highest sense we address him as Father because he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus as you know he's the Son of God. He's the only begotten Son of the Father. He's equal to the Father and he's eternally begotten off the Father.

And you know we considered this and we touched on it last week when we looked at the prologue to John's Gospel the first 18 verses. And we saw that God the Father and God the Son they have this uniquely intimate and eternal relationship. As John began his Gospel he said in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. John said that before the foundation of the world God the Son was with God the Father. God the Son was literally face to face with God the Father enjoying this uniquely intimate and eternal relationship. And they were enjoying that uniquely intimate and eternal relationship as one God. He was the Word who was with God and who was God.

And you know this uniquely intimate and eternal relationship it's something that's repeatedly highlighted in the Gospels and it's highlighted by Jesus because Jesus says time and time again the Father is in me and I am in the Father as the Father knows me I know the Father.

I and the Father are one. But you know what's remarkable is that the Father sent the Son. God the Father as we're told in John 3 16 God the Father so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. The Father sent the Son in order to reveal the Father. Jesus was sent to make the Father known. John tells us that in his Gospel no one has seen God at any time but the Son has made him known. And you remember Philip. Philip's question. Philip's desire he said he said Lord show us the Father but Jesus said whoever has seen me has seen the Father because I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Therefore accessing God the Father can only be made through God the Son accessing God the Father can only be made through God the Son and you know that's what Jesus asserted and affirmed to his disciples.

[9 : 15] He said I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the Father but by me. You know my friend our only access to God the Father is through the Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is something which Paul also repeatedly taught and emphasised to the church that accessing our Father can only be made through God the Son because Paul reminds us that the creation was brought into being by God the Father through God the Son. We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the blood of God the Son. We experience reconciliation with God the Father through God the Son. We have peace with God the Father through God the Son. We are made righteous before God the Father through God the Son. We give thanks to God the Father through God the Son. We're blessed by God the Father with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places through God the Son because through him through God the Son we have access to the Father.

My friend it's through the Lord Jesus Christ that we gain access to our Father because as the Bible clearly reveals to us Jesus is our great high priest. He's our intercessor. He's our mediator, the mediator between God the Father and the sons of Adam. He's our advocate with the Father and it's in his name that we approach the throne of grace, the name of Jesus Christ the righteous.

And you're always Jesus who actually repeatedly said to his disciples whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give it to you. Now notice that Jesus never said that he will give it to you. He will give you whatever you ask. He said he may give you whatever you ask but he will give you what you need. And you know my friend you may be asking the Father this evening. You may be asking for help and or healing or harmony. You may be asking the Father for grace, gladness or guidance. You may be asking the Father for strength to deal with sin, sickness, suffering or sorrow. But you know your assurance that your voice will be heard in heaven is that you have access to God the Father through God the Son. Because it's because of the Son. It's because of God the Son that we have adoption with our Father which is what we see secondly. It's because of God the Son that we have adoption with our Father. Adoption with our

Father. So we've seen accessing our Father then secondly adoption with our Father. Adoption with our Father. You know one of the greatest privileges of salvation is being able to call God our Father. Because without accessing the Father through God the Son the Lord's prayer would be very different. It would probably begin with the words our mighty God or our Creator God or our righteous judge. And yet Jesus teaches us here that because of him we are able to call God our Father. You know this is what's remarkable because as we said from before the foundation of the world Jesus enjoyed this uniquely intimate and eternal relationship with his Father. Jesus enjoyed uninterrupted communion with his Father where there was always this joyful face to face and heart to heart conversation between God the Father and God the Son. And even when Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us, when Jesus became one of us, when God took to himself our human nature they still carried on. The Father and the Son still carried on the conversation. There was still perfect communion and fellowship between God the Father and God the Son. The only difference was that Jesus was in communion with the Father not only as the Son but also as our elder brother.

[13 : 55] Because as you know the only way which we could be brought to share in this conversation and this communion and fellowship of the Father and the Son, the only way we could enter into that wonderful relationship is by the Son of God dying as our sin bearer and substitute on the cross.

And the cross is the only time my friend, the cross is the only time in the life of Jesus where that unique and intimate relationship with the Father, with that conversation it's the only time it's on the cross that it's the only time in the life of Jesus where that conversation is silenced and the communion and fellowship ceases with the Father.

As you know when Jesus became sin for us, when he became our sin bearer and substitute, he was left crying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And as you know my friend, the answer to Jesus's question, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The answer is because of the love, the love of God the Father and God the Son for the lost sons and daughters of Adam. You know our Bible says to us, behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God and the love which the Father bestowed on us is the love which we behold at the cross because the love of the Father was demonstrated to us through the death of his only begotten Son. It's an old Paul said, God demonstrated his love towards us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us. But you know our Catechism, it's a wonderful document which teaches us, also teaches us about the Lord's Prayer, but our Catechism also teaches us that there are three benefits which we receive through the death of Jesus Christ and these benefits are justification, adoption and sanctification. And in our justification as you know we're declared righteous before God the

Father because on the cross Jesus became sin for us so that we could receive his righteousness. We're told in the Catechism, justification is an act of God's free grace wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. So that's our justification but in our adoption we're declared to be loved and cared for by God the Father as his own children. In our adoption we're given all the rights and privileges of children in a family, a family which we didn't belong to by nature because by nature we were born the children of Adam, by nature we were the children of a fallen humanity, by nature we were children of wrath as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2 but our adoption, our adoption was an act of God's free grace whereby we were received into the number and now we have all the rights to all these privileges as the sons and daughters of God.

And you know it's as we were brought into the family of God that our sanctification then begins to work in our lives where we're transformed day by day to become more and more like the only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our sanctification as the Catechism teaches it's a work of God's free grace in the whole man after the image of God and we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. But you know what's key to receiving these benefits of justification, adoption and sanctification. The way to receive these benefits of justification, adoption and sanctification is that it's that we receive Christ as our Savior. What's key to receiving these benefits, what's key to becoming sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father is that we receive Christ as our Savior because it's when we receive Christ as our Savior that we're born again of the Spirit of God. It's when we receive Christ as our Savior, Paul tells us in Romans 8 that we're not only experienced no condemnation and no separation, we also receive that spirit of adoption in which we are enabled to cry, Abba, Father. And of course Abba is the Hebrew word for Father. It's also used in many languages from the Middle East. But the word Abba, it's a term of endearment and it expresses the intimate relationship that exists between a Father and his children. And like it is for us with one of the first words of a baby being, one of the first words of a baby when after they're born is daddy. And like it is for a Jewish baby, their first word would be Abba. And as you know even when a child grows up they never stop calling their Father dad or daddy. That stays with them throughout their life. And the same was true of the Jews, they would always address their earthly father with the intimate term of Abba. But you know for Jesus, the disciples would have heard Jesus always addressing his heavenly Father as Abba. And what Jesus is teaching us here is that by receiving him we enter into this wonderful relationship in which we are able to speak to our heavenly Father with that same term Abba. And that's what Paul emphasizes as well in Romans 8 that when we receive Christ as our Savior, when we are in Christ, when we are in union with Christ, when our identity is in Christ, as those who are in Christ, we receive that spirit of adoption which enables us to cry Abba, Father. We have the privilege of praying to our heavenly Father and entering into that conversation and communion and fellowship which Jesus enjoyed with his

[20 : 50] Father. My friend, it's our relationship with Jesus Christ that exhorts, encourages us and enables us to pray our Father which art in heaven. You know as Jesus teaches in this section we receive that spirit of adoption. When we receive that spirit of adoption, we don't need to pray like the hypocrites who love to make long public prayers. Jesus says we can pray to our Father and we can go into our closet and we can utter the most private and personal prayer.

And Jesus also says we don't need vain repetitions. We don't need vain repetitions but we just need to come to our Father and speak to Him like a child to their Father.

And you know is that not what Jesus says to us in the Gospel about how we are to come to our Father? Jesus said unless you become like little children you shall never enter the kingdom of heaven. You know someone once said when it comes to prayer, when it comes to prayer we are not world weary soldiers calling on our heavenly sergeant major. We're not overworked employees calling on our divine line manager. No, we're children. We're children adopted in the beloved Son calling on our Abba Father. But you know for some people they find the concept of God as a Father. They find it difficult and that's because they have a tainted or tarnished view of God the Father because of an absence or because of abuse of their earthly Father.

As you know the reality for many families in our nation is that there are single parent families where the mother brings up the children either because of a broken relationship or because the Father has passed away. And for many children there's also the case that they've been abused by their Father. They've been abused either mentally, physically or in some awful cases sexually. And sadly the outcome is that they have a tainted or tarnished view of God the Father because of the absence or the abuse of their earthly Father. And it's because of this that some liberal theologians they seek to describe God as our mother. But of course that description is not only blasphemy, it's also completely unbiblical. You know the concept of God as our Father it's not only taken from the Gospels and the words of Jesus. It's also taken from the New Testament letters but it's also drawn from the Old Testament as well. Because when the Lord brought the people of Israel out of Egypt he said Israel is my firstborn son. And you know God's covenant promise to His people that's repeated throughout the Old Testament is I will be to you a Father, you shall be to me a Son. Therefore God has always revealed Himself to His people as a Father. And even where earthly Fathers may fail God remains a faithful Father. You know if our earthly Father is absent our heavenly Father is described in Psalm 68 as a Father to the Fatherless. If our earthly Father is abusive our heavenly Father is described in Psalm 103 as gracious and compassionate. If our earthly Father is careless we're told in Hebrews 12 that our heavenly Father is careful because he deals and disciplines us out of love. If our earthly Father is comfortless our heavenly Father is comforting because Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 1 that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ he is the Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort.

My friend earthly Fathers may faint and fail but the wonder is and this is something we need to cling to the wonder is our heavenly Father is a faithful Father. Our heavenly Father is a faithful Father. But you know what I've always found interesting is that if God is our Father and Jesus is our brother then the church is our mother. And this is something that Calvin proposed in his Institutes where he said that you can't have God as your Father unless you have the church as your mother. Calvin said there is no other way to enter into eternal life unless this mother the church unless this mother conceive us in her womb give birth to us nourish us at her breast and she keep us under her care and guidance until we enter heaven. And you know it's a wonderful thought that just like Jesus had a heavenly Father and an earthly mother so too are those who are brothers and sisters in Christ we receive a heavenly Father and we have an earthly mother in the church.

[26 : 20] Where God is our Father and the church is our mother and it's through the church that we're nourished and encouraged and taught and challenged and cared for. You know it's a wonderful family imagery isn't it? The family imagery of God is our Father the church is our mother Jesus as our elder brother and every Christian throughout the world as our brother and sister in Christ. My friend when Jesus taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer he was teaching us as a family. He was teaching us as a family he was showing us that the Lord's Prayer is a family prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a family prayer and it's a prayer we should be encouraged to use when the family when the family gathers together whether in private or in public. The Lord's Prayer is a family prayer in which brothers and sisters in Christ who have experienced adoption with the Father are able to collectively and even corporately come together and pray our Father which art in heaven. And so as we begin this study on the Lord's Prayer we're considering accessing our Father and adoption with our Father but then lastly and briefly I want us to see addressing our Father addressing our Father.

We said earlier that we're able to address God as our Father because of our access through Christ and our adoption with the Father in Christ. But I want to highlight and home in on the fact that Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer to be addressing God as our Father which means that we're not to pray to the Virgin Mary or to the saints or to angels we're to pray to our Father but more so we're not to pray to the Son or to the Holy Spirit we're to pray to our Father.

And I want to highlight and home in on this point because you know in recent years I've heard many people even ministers I've heard them praying to all three portions of the Trinity.

I've heard them praying to the Father and to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. But you know I don't find that teaching in the Lord's Prayer and in my understanding I don't find it anywhere in the Bible and I would think that it's a misunderstanding of what prayer is but it's also a misunderstanding of our relationship with God because even as we've discovered this evening that as children as children we are able to address the God of heaven as our Father and we're able to address Him as our Father because of our access through Christ and our adoption with the Father in Christ and we're able to come because of the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we're to pray to the Father through the Son by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. We're to pray to the Father through the Son by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. You know is that not what Jesus said we mentioned it earlier whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give it to you. We're to pray to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. You know we don't pray in the name of the Father we don't pray in the name of the Holy Spirit because the Father didn't die for us and our adoption isn't through the sacrifice of the Holy Spirit therefore we must come in prayer addressing God as our Father and we're to come in Christ's name and for Christ's sake and we come by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

We're to pray to the Father through the Son by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. But you know and with this I'll close whenever we're addressing God as our Father you know although we are to come with that intimate term Abba and always remember that we have a close relationship we have entered into this relationship that Jesus has with his Father.

[30 : 51] You know whenever we're addressing God as our Father we must never forget where he is and where we are. He is our our Father which art in heaven therefore when we're addressing God as our Father we must always remember that he is in heaven and we are on earth and as the Bible reminds us heaven is his throne and the earth is his foodstone therefore we're not to come to him flippantly. Yes we're to come as children to our Father but we're to come with reverence, we're to come with godly fear, we're to come as knowing that heaven is his throne and the earth is his foodstone and you know Leon Morris he says in his commentary we should not miss the balance in this opening to the Lord's Prayer. We are to address God intimately as Father but we recognize his infinite greatness because he is in heaven. So we're to come my friend on bended knee before our great God and King and yet we're to come with boldness to our Father. We're to come on bended knee but we're to come with boldness therefore my friend as we close we'll close with the words of the letter to the Hebrews where the writer to the Hebrews says let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need. Our Father which art in heaven well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray together. Our loving Heavenly

Father we give thanks to thee for the relationship we now enjoy through Jesus Christ and we thank thee O Lord thy Son he has made that new and living way in which we are able to approach thy throne that we are able to come with boldness and yet Lord we are able to come on bended knee seeking thy face knowing Lord that we come not in our own righteousness but in the righteousness of thy Son that we come not in our own name but in the name that is above every other name. We thank thee that we come not for our own sake and not in our own sake but through the sake of Christ through his death and through his resurrection that he is our mediator between God and men he is our advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous that he has ascended up on high he has seated at thy right hand and even tonight he makes intercession for us we thank the Lord for thy Son and Lord we pray all that more and more even as we learn and are taught about the Lord's prayer that would cause us to have a greater love of our God to seek to walk with thee more closely and to pray to thee more earnestly and Lord to live lives that seek to bring glory to thy name all go before us and we pray bless us we ask for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake Amen.

Well we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Sam 103 Sam 103 we're singing in the Scottish Salter and we're singing from verse 8 down to the verse Mark 13. Sam 103 at verse 8 the Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plenteous and we'll sing on down to verse 12 and 13 as far as east is distant from the west so far hath he from us removed in his love all our iniquity such pity as a father hath and to his children dear like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear.

So we'll sing Sam 103 from verse 8 down to the verse Mark 13 to God's praise.

In mercy plenteous Mark 13. Sam 103 at verse 13 the Lord our God is merciful and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plenteous and we'll sing on down to verse 13 the Lord our God is merciful all our iniquity such pity as a father hath and to his children dear like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear.