

Fatherhood of God Part I

Down through history there have been memorable statements made on occasion that significantly impacted the world going forward.

Examples might be Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech or Ronald Reagan's speech at the Berlin wall "Mr. Gorbachev tear down this wall".

There are many within Christianity and many who would not call themselves Christians who would regard Jesus as a great teacher.

They might look to a parable such as the Good Samaritan as an example of how Jesus' words impacted the world.

But few would think of the Lord's prayer as a 'world changer' lesson and yet the first two words of that prayer "Our Father" were hugely significant for the people of our Lord's time, and for all generations that followed including ours.

Jesus here is teaching his followers to address God as their Father. It was a teaching that was revolutionary.

The entire Old Testament age was a time where people were taught that God was awesome, infinitely holy, and a God to be feared.

Yahweh is the principle name in the Old Testament by which God revealed himself and is the most sacred, distinctive and incommunicable name of God.

Consider the words of Lev, 24:16:

"He that blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death"

This emphasis on the holiness of God and reverence for the name resulted in a practice where Jews generally avoided the use of the name Yahweh and substituted Adonai or Elohim for it when reading Scripture.

This served as a constant reminder of the separation between an infinitely holy God and a sinful people that began with the fall of man and the entrance of sin into the world in the garden of Eden.

This separation, or perhaps what should be thought of a lack of a possible close relationship with God was also emphasized from time to time in terms of physical distancing.

For example, in Exodus chapter nineteen when Moses is preparing to meet God on Mount Sinai, God provides these instructions in verse twelve to be given to the people:

Mark off a boundary all around the mountain. Warn the people, 'Be careful! Do not go up on the mountain or even touch its boundaries. Anyone who touches the mountain will certainly be put to death.

So, the focus of the Old Testament is on the Holiness of God.

This holiness implied that there was a great insurmountable distance between a Holy God and sinful men and women.

A space so great that a close personal relationship with God was impossible.

Perhaps this situation can be summed up well by a few words from the prophet Habakkuk who said in chapter one verse thirteen (NASB):

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor.

Again, and again, it was stressed that God was infinitely holy, man must keep his distance, and this spirit, this fearful atmosphere overshadowed everything else.

But even in this period there were prophetic hints that a change was coming.

In the third chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy, in verse nineteen we find God giving these words to Jeremiah for the people:

I thought to myself, 'I would love to treat you as my own children!' I wanted nothing more than to give you this beautiful land— the finest possession in the world. I looked forward to your calling me 'Father,' and I wanted you never to turn from me.

So, we see in these words God looking forward to a time when he would be addressed as Father. Looking forward to a time when he would have a father-child relationship with his children.

And the first two words of Jesus in his teaching on prayer for his disciples reveal that the time had come for believers to address God as Father.

“Disciples” he says, “This is how you address your God when you pray, begin by saying our Father”.

But how as that possible? To legitimately call God ‘our Father’ is certainly a dramatic change, a revolutionary change from the Old Testament mindset.

What has changed? What has happened to allow his people who were once afraid to even pronounce the name Yahweh now address their awesome and infinitely holy God in a very informal way?

To call God our Father implies that we are his children. I suppose that it could be argued that since God is the giver of life, the giver of all life that he is in that sense father to all living things.

But when Jesus was teaching his disciples to pray ‘Our Father’ he was not teaching about all life on the planet that he created, but rather he was teaching his disciples about their relationship with God.

When Jesus teaches his disciples and us to address God as our Father he is implying that an adoption has taken place.

Adoption by definition means that God has chosen us. Chosen to adopt us, chosen to embrace us as his own children.

So, how did this dramatic change come about?

How was the seemingly insurmountable gulf between the distance and separation that characterized the

Old Testament become the close, personal and family relationship encouraged by the Lord's prayer?

In John chapter fourteen verse six Jesus says to Thomas:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

In other words, no one can move from the state of separation, into a close personal relationship, a family relationship with the infinitely holy God as our Father without the blessing and work of Jesus.

Today is communion Sunday. It is a day when we observe and celebrate what we sometimes refer to as the work of Jesus on the cross.

The cross and our Lord's accomplishments there is a gift of grace. We benefit from what was done there not because we deserved anything, but we benefit because it is a gift of grace.

It was and is a gift that was given freely at great cost, but a gift that must be accepted by faith.

So, what was accomplished there that defines it as such an important gift?

First, Jesus allowed his life to be taken. He allowed his blood to flow so that the punishment due our sin, our every sin, past, present and future was fully accepted and borne by our Lord's broken body on the cross.

This makes forgiveness, and restoration with God possible. But what is required on our part?

Simply being sorry for our sin, asking forgiveness and exercising faith, that is believing that Jesus really did accomplish the payment for our sin on the cross.

Now the result of that is being born again, In other words,being given a clean slate.

Now remember in the Old Testament environment the separation from a Holy God was necessary because of our sin. Sin could not co-exist in the presence of the all holy God.

But once we have been born again, a new birth made possible only by the accomplishments of our Lord on the cross, we have a clean slate.

Now every sin we ever committed, and every sin we will ever commit has been paid in full. The sin problem that kept us at a distance from our all holy God has been completely removed.

Restoration and a new relationship with God is now possible.

In John chapter one beginning at verse twelve we have an important summation of these thoughts:

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So please listen very carefully. If you believe that Jesus paid for all your sins, past, present and future, if you

have expressed remorse for your sins and asked for forgiveness you are indeed born again.

It is a gift of God. But note carefully, you now have the right, to become a child of God. Your status is changed from a sinful man or woman that must keep their distance from a holy and austere God to that of a child who runs into the open arms of a loving father.

In our previous church we knew a couple who decided to adopt an orphan child from China. They went through great expense. Trips to and from China and so on. Another couple decided to adopt children from Haiti. Similarly huge expenses. But now these parents love these children as their own.

God went through great expense to make your adoption possible. What could be a greater expense than sending his own son to die so that your adoption might be possible, so that you might have the right to become a son of God.

The Old Testament atmosphere lasted for centuries, but the prophet Jeremiah revealed that a time was coming when God's people would call him Father and in Galatians chapter four verse four Paul confirmed that the time had come:

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."

Your freedom from the law was bought with a huge price, but in addition to freedom from the law the death of Jesus bought you the opportunity to be adopted as children by your heavenly Father.

The questions that arise from this truth are many. How does this teaching affect the way you think of God, how you respond to him and how you pray to him?

Do you still think of God as some mystical far off, all powerful figure somewhere too distant to comprehend?

O do you constantly think of him as a father, someone with whom you can have a relationship with much like your own father?

Jesus teaches his followers to pray to their heavenly Father, but when you pray to God do you address him as Father, do you bring your needs to him like you would your own father?

While the spirit of the Old Testament was one of caution, apprehension and even fear when one considered approaching God, the spirit of the New Testament is radically changed.

The emphasis of the New Testament is not on the difficulty, the cautions, and potential dangers of drawing near to the infinitely Holy God but on the boldness and confidence whereby believers may now approach him.

We read in Ephesians chapter three verse twelve:

Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence.

And in Hebrews chapter ten, beginning to read at verse nineteen we read:

And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.

And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled

The message of the New Testament is clear. We who are born again and have been adopted as God's children.

We are the children of a loving heavenly father who cares for us, who encourages us to come into his presence and welcomes us there to present all our cares and concerns.

Now it is undeniably true that some have had a very unfortunate relationship with their earthly father.

Their personal experience is not one of tangible love, acceptance and forgiveness but perhaps one of harsh criticism, and even cruel punishment.

These experiences may make it difficult to readily accept God as the loving father the scriptures reveal him to be.

But even when having experienced a difficult and troubling experience with our earthly father we can still picture what a good and loving relationship should be like.

When struggling with whether our heavenly father really loves us or not, we must constantly return to how he demonstrated his love to us:

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16.

The cross and the accomplishments we celebrate today are historical happenings. Because God loved us so much, Jesus came, he allowed himself to be beaten. He allowed his blood to flow and he died that we might be adopted as God’s children.

That’s how much the Father loves us.

So, today we have looked at the promise of adoption, we have seen it predicted in the Old Testament and seen in fulfilled in the New.

Next week Lord willing we will begin to examine some of the implications and blessings of our adoption.

We will close this part of the message and transition to our communion message by repeating the Lord’s prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.

We are turning now to I Corinthians chapter eleven verse twenty three for our communion reading:

23 For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread 24 and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it.” 26 For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.*

27 So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. 29 For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ,* you are eating and drinking God’s judgment upon yourself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.*

31 But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. 32 Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.