

Our Father

By

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Isaiah said that he saw the Lord “sitting upon a throne high and lifted up” and above him were the seraphim, who cried unto each other and said, “holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” Isaiah made no attempt to actually describe what God looked like, but this brief vision caused him to say, “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts” (Vs.6:1-3). One glimpse of the holy God was enough for Isaiah to recognize himself as a sinner, unfit for God’s presence. One of the seraphim touched his lips with a live coal, and announced that his sins were forgiven (Vs.7).

In the Old Testament God is repeatedly described as Holy. In Isaiah alone He is described as “The Holy One of Israel” no less than 29 times.

In Hebrew the word for ‘holy’ is *qadosh*, which has as its root meaning ‘different’, ‘separate’, ‘set apart’. The Temple was holy because it was set apart for a special use. The priest was holy because he was different, and set apart for a special purpose. God is holy because He is different from all else. This recognition of His holiness made it seem that He was unapproachable and detached from men. Many only thought of Him in terms of power, judgment as impersonal and without feelings.

Yet He was not so separate that men could not communicate with Him and experience fellowship with Him. “In thy presence is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). The Psalms are filled with songs of ‘His loving kindness.’ David sang of His ‘tender mercies.’ He said, “I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me” (Psalm. 40:17).

But it was not until Jesus appeared bringing the “good news of the Kingdom” that Jehovah could be understood as a personal, intimate Father to each one who is adopted into His family through Christ. Early in his ministry, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly identified God as our heavenly ‘Father’. “You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). On the giving of alms: “thy Father who sees in secret shall recompense you” (Matt 6:4). Jesus taught us to “pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who sees in secret shall recompense thee...for your Father knows what things ye have need of before you ask him” (Matt.6:6-8). He then taught the disciples to pray, addressing God as “our Father.”

Jesus is not only our savior and our Lord, but he is also our teacher and our example. The way he understood God is to be the way we understand God. His attitude toward God his Father should be our attitude. So how did Jesus view God, the Father?

(1) Men often refer to God by various names – The Man upstairs, The Supreme Being, The Life Force, The Almighty, etc. All such descriptions are impersonal. But Jesus

always taught of and addressed God as a person. And as a person who desired and sought a mind-to-mind relationship with man.

In the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel understood that God was connected to the tabernacle. For centuries God had been thought of as having his home in the temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus announced that the time was coming when the Father would not be worshipped in Jerusalem. "But the hour comes. And now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). Temple worship involved ceremonies conducted by the priests. But Jesus revealed that worship is a direct spiritual connection between man and God, a relationship between two persons.

(2) Jesus gave us a picture of God as One who invites man into his fellowship. In the parable of the Marriage Feast the Father sends out invitation after invitation to those who scorn and make light of the invitations. Finally his servants "went out into the highway's, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests" (Matt. 22:10).

At the moment Jesus died, the gospels say that the veil, which shut off the Holy of Holies in the Temple, was rent in two (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Only one person, the High Priest, could enter the Holy of Holies, and that only on the Day of Atonement. The rending of the veil meant that henceforth there is no barrier to approach God, because Jesus had made atonement for sin. It is only through faith in him, his death and resurrection, that we have access to God. Jesus said, "No one comes unto the Father but by me" (John. 14:6). Jesus taught that men are welcome to enter into God's presence with childlike faith and confidence.

(3) The Pharisees and scribes criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. But Jesus said that he had come to seek and to save that which was lost (Matt 18:11). He said that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus portrayed God as the father who waited expectantly for his erring child to return home. When the repentant son finally came home, "while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). He was received with a lavish welcome and celebration. Here is a God of infinite mercy, who seeks sinners in order to forgive them. Such should be the mission of every Christian who follows the example of Jesus.

(4) Before Christ came God was generally thought of as omnipotent, but exercising His power in an impersonal way. It was difficult to think of God having concern for the lowly, the slave, and the outcast. But Jesus presented our holy God as a Father having tender care for all creatures, even for the birds that were of no value to man. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father's will" (Matt. 10:29). "Your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matt. 6:26). Every person is of value to God, even those who are deemed worthless in the eyes of society. God's care goes beyond that of earthly fathers. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt 7:11).

The holy God that the prophets sometimes presented as unapproachable was the Father who can feel, love, suffer, sympathize and rejoice, and who seeks the love and fellowship of each person.

People often speak of the “fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.” Fatherhood in this sense means no more than the one who gives life to a child. But instead of the term, fatherhood, Jesus used the term, Father. This means a relationship of intimacy and love. As William Barclay put it, “It describes a relationship which day by day, so long as life and need last, the father cares for the child in body, mind and spirit, in which the father nourishes the child with food, guides the child with advice, surrounds and strengthens the child with continual love” (The Mind of Jesus).

(5) The Pharisees considered themselves to be perfect examples of the people of God because they meticulously followed the rules and regulations of traditions that had been handed down since the Babylonian captivity. These traditions had little or no significance in relating man to God. Jesus demonstrated how a personal relationship of Father and son results in loving obedience to all the Father’s desires. He said, “That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (John 14:31). “As the Father taught me, I speak these things...for I do always the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:28-29).

On the night before his crucifixion, as Peter sought to defend him, Jesus said, “Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). There never occurred to the mind of Jesus the thought of being disobedient to the Father. So Paul could later hold him up as our example of one “becoming obedient, even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

We see God as our Father just in-so-far as we see Christ as His son and our brother. The chief concern of Jesus was that he do the Father’s will, that he reveal the Father and glorify Him, and help men to know Him. In his farewell prayer, he prayed that we, too, might have the kind of relationship he enjoyed with the Father: “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me” (John 17:21).

Many have substituted orthodoxy for obedience and are more eager to say the right words than to live as believers in the Father’s love and grace. For Jesus to call God Father was something of deep sacredness and tender intimacy. When we come to associate with God as the Father to whom we can go with the same trust that a child goes to his earthly father, we may come to experience what Jesus meant by “that they also may be in us.”

“Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so shall you be my disciples” (John 15:8).

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