

2. Why do we Pray? - Because we are sons of God

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Date: 14 March 2010

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you'd like to turn up, to begin with anyway, Luke chapter 3 and 4, we'll look at that in just a few moments.

This is the second of a short series entitled, Why Do We Pray? And it's important to realize that this is not an exhortation to pray.

It's not what I'm speaking about. It's easy to preach and exhort people to pray, but the trouble is that often just makes us feel guilty and actually doesn't make us any more likely to really pray at all.

What I'm concerned with us thinking about over these evenings is not an exhortation to pray, but an explanation of prayer. In other words, what prayer is and why, in fact, prayer exists in the first place, why there is such a thing.

And last Sunday evening we saw that at the most basic, we pray because God himself is a speaking God. We pray because of who and what God is.

[1 : 1 2] God speaks and we are created to answer him, to respond to him. That's what our existence is all about. So God spoke the whole of creation into being and in a very real sense, all of creation answers back to God.

It pours forth its praise as we saw in some of the Psalms. And God spoke human beings into being in his own image, in his own special likeness, made above all other creatures and everything else in creation, made to be in particular intimate, special relationship with God himself.

He created human beings as unique sons of God, bearing his image, sharing in the very life of God himself.

But of course we saw, and the Bible is very clear on this, that human beings rebelled against God, destroying that relationship that humans enjoyed with God. And so everything fell silent.

There's no more answering God. Remember when God went walking in the cool of the day and called out to Adam, but Adam didn't answer. He hid. And so ultimately man is banished from God's presence, banished from the garden, banished from the fellowship with God that he had hitherto known and enjoyed.

[2 : 4 1] There was no prayer anymore, no talk, no sweet communion between God and human beings. Just silence.

I think that's why C.S. Lewis, in his space trilogy of books, if you haven't ever read those books of C.S. Lewis, they're not as well known as some of his others, but I do recommend them to you. But the first book in that series is called Out of the Silent Planet.

And Earth is the silent planet. And people from all the other worlds talk about it as the silent planet, because it, of all of these worlds, is the one that has no communication with what he calls deep heaven, where God himself dwells.

The end of communication intimately with God, the end of prayer, the silent planet. But of course we saw that the whole story of the gospel is the restoration of true prayer.

It's the story of the restoration of real relationship between man and God. God kept calling out to man, all down through the ages.

[3 : 53] And of course his last, his ultimate word and call to human beings is in the person of Jesus Christ, his only Son, God's ultimate word to man. And so we said that at its very essence, real prayer is simply answering God in the call that comes to us in Jesus Christ.

It's responding to him. And so we can pray because God is a speaking God and because we are created to respond to him.

And through Jesus Christ we are redeemed. We might again respond to him, answer him in prayer. But tonight I want to take things a little bit further because we need to see just how central the person of our Lord Jesus Christ is in all of this about prayer.

It's not just that God calls out to us ultimately in Jesus Christ his Son. It's that we, we can only respond to God through Jesus Christ.

God's Holy Son. Because Jesus is not only God's ultimate word to man, but he is also man's ultimate word of response to God.

[5 : 16] It's in Jesus and in his relationship with the Father that we see that perfect relationship of humanity fully restored to all its glory, to its intimate fellowship with God, our Heavenly Father.

That's what I want to think about tonight. And there's two things we need to understand. And the first is this. Jesus is the true Son of God.

You might say, well that's obvious. We know Jesus is God's Son. But listen, he is the only Son of God in the sense that he is the only true human being. And therefore, he is the only true prayer.

The only true prayer to God that there's been since man's first rebellion in Genesis chapter 3. Adam, remember, was created to be the Son of God. We saw that in the genealogy that we just read in Luke chapter 3.

It goes right back to Adam, the Son of God. And he was made for that relationship with God, to love and to trust God, and to rest in God's grace as his obedient Son.

[6 : 27] And that was manifest in his life before the fall. He was obedient to God's commands. And it was manifested just as much on his lips. That is, in his conversation with God.

You could say that prayer was, if you like, the audible evidence of that real relationship, that relationship of obedient perfection between God and man.

Prayer, you see, as deep and personal communion with God is, well, it's the privilege, the unique privilege in all creation of God's holy and obedient Son, Adam.

God doesn't go walking in the garden with the hippopotamus. He doesn't call out to the crocodile or to the birds or to anything else. He calls out to man.

But of course, we've said Adam, at the first, lost that status as God's holy Son through his disobedience. By the way, we tend to call that, don't we, the fall of man.

[7 : 32] But the Bible's much more specific than that. There's no sense at all in which that fall of man is something of an accident. It wasn't bad luck that Adam fell. It wasn't like, you know, going out and falling on the ice.

It wasn't that kind of fall at all. It was willful, deliberate disobedience. And so Paul speaks about it, isn't it, in Romans chapter 5. It was one man's trespass, he says.

It was one man's disobedience that brought sin and condemnation and death to all men. So, sometimes it's more helpful for us to talk not about the fall of man, but the transgression, the disobedience, the breaking of that covenant that God had with man.

And it was that disobedience that dehumanized man so that we became no longer a true image of the perfect God.

Yes, of course, human beings still bear God's image, but it is a vitiated one. It's a distorted image. And our relationship with God became distorted along with our image of God.

[8 : 45] Because our status as sons of God was lost by that transgression. And therefore, the privilege of prayer as a deep and personal communion with God was also lost.

Sin came into the world through one man, says Paul in Romans chapter 5, and death through sin, including the death of real prayer, of real knowledge and fellowship with God, of real relationship with God in that intimate sense.

Because God, through Adam's transgression, lost his holy son. But you see, in the coming of Jesus, at last, the world has once again seen God's holy son.

Another Adam, as the New Testament calls him, a second man. What was it that the angel said, do you remember, to Mary? Back in Luke chapter 1 about the child who would be born to her?

The child, to be born, he said, will be called holy. The son of God. Now, God had called Israel, his people, his firstborn son.

[9 : 57] Language is used often in the Old Testament. But of course, Israel, as a son of God, was a constant failure. God called the anointed kings of his people, his special sons, especially above all, Solomon, the son of David.

He will be a son of God. And yet, even Solomon, after that brief moment of glory in his kingdom, even he fell away in sin and shame. But at last, here is one in Jesus who is a true son, who is again a true human being, as God meant human beings to be, obedient in every single aspect of his life.

And that perfect relationship was visible in his obedient life, but audible in his lips, in the two-way communication that there was constantly between Jesus and his Heavenly Father.

Not only did Jesus pray constantly to his Father in Heaven, but also, his Father in Heaven answered him. Heaven was never silent to the prayers of this man.

There were no mediators who were needed. No priests who were specially needed to intercede between Jesus and his Heavenly Father. He had direct access to the Father because he was everything that Adam had failed to be.

[11 : 27] Everything that Adam had rebelled against. He was the true son of God in whom God was not disappointed. Who God was not let down by. Now as we read there in Luke chapter 3, he's the son in whom God delighted, in whom he was well pleased.

Verse 22 of chapter 3 at his baptism, that marvelous voice from the glory of Heaven that said, this is my beloved son. You are my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

And then immediately do you see that Luke tells us exactly what that means. As he unfolds that genealogy going all the way back to David, to Abraham, to the son of Adam, verse 38, the son of God.

See, Jesus is not only the true king of Israel, he's not only the true heir of all God's promises to Abraham, but at last he is the true Adam, he's the true human being, he's the true son of God.

And then immediately as we read on, you see that's demonstrated for us in Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. We are again just like Adam. Jesus, as the second man, as the new Adam, is tempted by the devil.

[12 : 41] Tempted in exactly the same way, to disobey God and to seek great things for himself. It's almost the rerun of the story of the Garden of Eden. Except that where Adam failed, despite all the glory and the perfection and the perfect circumstances for obedience that there were right then in Edom.

Whereas Adam failed, Jesus triumphed. Jesus remained faithful despite his testing being in the wilderness, not in a beautiful garden. Amidst hunger, not in a place of plenteous food.

Amidst all the wild beasts that come against him, not as Adam who had power over all the animals. The very opposite of Eden where Jesus plumbs the depth of that temptation and yet he triumphs.

And twice Satan taunts him, if you are the Son of God. We read it there in verse 3 and again in verse 9. If you are the Son of God, he says, worship me and I'll give you all your heart's desire.

It's exactly what he said to Adam and Eve. But no, says Jesus, for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God alone.

[14 : 02] Jesus was the true Son of God. He obeyed with the obedience of true faith. And that's why we read in verse 14 that he returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit.

His life was marked by constant communication with the Father in the Spirit. by constant real prayer. That's why when you read in John's Gospel chapter 11 at Lazarus' tomb, Jesus could stand there and pray and say, Father, I know that you have heard me.

I know that you always hear me. He had no doubt whatsoever that God would hear and answer his prayer. Just as in John chapter 17 in the great prayer in the upper room, he makes requests of his Heavenly Father with absolute confidence, not a shadow of a doubt.

See, all Jesus' prayers on earth are heard because he is the true Son of God. Because he is a true and holy man as man was meant to be, communing intimately and constantly with the Heavenly Father.

And as the book of Hebrews tells us, his prayers on earth were heard because of his reverent submission. He was the reverent Son of God. So also, Hebrews tells us, that his prayers in heaven are heard for his people because he lives forever, says the writer.

[15 : 30] That great word of the book of Hebrews, forever to make intercession for his people. Why? Because he is a Son, it says, who has been made perfect forever.

Jesus is the triumphant holy Son of God. He is the last Adam. He is the second man, the new man. He is the true human being and therefore, his prayers are always, always heard.

His prayers will always be acceptable to the Father. They will never, ever be rebuffed because he is God's holy Son and he has infinite and unlimited access to him.

I don't know if you know the story, whether it's true or not, I'm not sure, but it might well be. So it goes that President Kennedy, John F. Kennedy was president in the White House and he was in the Oval Office in a meeting for very important VIPs and leaders and the strict instructions had been given to his staff, to security, that under no circumstances was anybody to come in and disturb this meeting and they were at the middle of tense talks and negotiations when suddenly the door flew open and everybody looked startled at who would dare to defy the presidential decree and in marches a little boy straight up to the president jumped up onto his knee and said, Daddy, he was the son of the president and so no matter what, he, he had privileged access.

No one could stop him coming to see his father. Well, that's all very well, you might be saying to yourself, I can't quite understand what this has all got to me. What's all this theology got to do with the practicality of me and my prayer life?

[17 : 31] Well, the fact is all practicalities in the Christian life stem from theology, from learning about God. So it is relevant.

Now you might be saying, well, that's all very well, I'm not Jesus, so I can't pray as Jesus can, so what about me? Where do I fit into this? Well, the answer that all this theology, all this talk about Jesus and God gives, is that you're wrong.

Yes, you can pray just like Jesus, if that is, you're a Christian believer. And that's the second thing, and a vital thing that we've got to grasp because it's fundamental to all of our prayer as Christians.

And it's this, through the gospel, we also are made sons of God through Jesus Christ. Prayer is the privilege that belongs only to God's beloved and holy son.

It's an address of intimacy. It's real access to the father whose throne really does rule the whole world. not just like the office of the president of the United States, who thinks he really rules the world.

[18 : 42] There's a far greater access than that. And therefore, of course, if prayer is that privileged access, then unless there is that very real relationship of a son with the father, then prayer just can't happen.

It's just pretend, isn't it? you see, there are only two people in this whole world who can call me dad. Although, actually, it's more often these days, dad.

You know, you sort of, you get past that stage, don't you? There's that lovely stage where it's daddy, and then you get to that stage where it's dad. I'm well into that stage now.

Somebody cheerily told me the other day, you never get out of that stage. But, anyway, regardless of the tone of voice, there are only two people in this world that can call me dad.

And if somebody I didn't know at all shouted out dad, well, I would assume they're not talking to me, they're talking to somebody else. Nobody but my true children can call me dad, can call me father.

[19 : 47] Unless, of course, unless, of course, they were to become my true children through adoption. You see, that is exactly what the gospel tells us God has done to those who have become united with Jesus through his great redemption.

Turn over to that text that we read in Galatians chapter 4. Let me just read it to you again. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

You see, adoption is the legal transfer of sonship from one father to another. From being children, as Paul says here in verse 3, in slavery to the world, or as he puts it even more graphically in Ephesians 2, verse 3, who were sons of disobedience following the prince of the power of the air, that is the devil.

That's what we once were. Strong language, isn't it? That's what we were thinking about this morning. The language Jesus uses. Those who are not his are sons of their father, the devil, he says.

And once you were that, says Paul, but now you have received adoption as sons. Whose sons? God's sons. God sent his son, Jesus, that we might receive all the status of Jesus.

[21 : 28] And therefore, all the privileges that are his. And above all, that marvelous privilege of intimate access to our heavenly father, again, in real prayer.

Verse 6, and because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. The spirit that guarantees us access, not to the office of the president, but to the office of the creator and the ruler and the judge of the whole universe.

Because we are sons. Galatians 3, verse 26, tells us we are all sons of God through faith.

Not just children, but sons and full heirs. It's not an issue of gender here, it's an issue of status. All who are baptized into Christ, Paul says, have put on Christ. That's what verse 27 says of chapter 3.

They've assumed Christ's own personal clothing, that is, his sonly status. It doesn't matter whether we're male or female, we're united to Jesus, the Son of God.

[22 : 40] And that means that everything that is his by right of birth is now ours by right of adoption. And that's why we pray. Because in Jesus Christ we are all sons of God.

We all have the legal status before God the Father that Jesus himself, his only Son, has. Friends, that is vitally, vitally important for us to grasp.

Let me tell you why. Because it means that your prayers and mine, they will not be heard by God because of our sincerity in prayer, but because of our status in prayer.

We are sons of God. That means God cannot not hear us. We are his sons. That's gospel truth. He can't not hear your prayers.

And if you don't feel that at times, if you don't feel that that's true, it's not because it's not true.

[23 : 49] It's because we're disbelieving the gospel that teaches that to us. We're disbelieving our status as justified before God. We're disbelieving the reality of the legal status of adoption that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ.

It really is ours. It's changed everything. When I think of this metaphor of adoption, I always tend to think of that great old film, Ben-Hur, starring Charlton Heston.

I think I grew up thinking a lot of Bible heroes looked like Charlton Heston. Maybe some of you did as well. Moses looked like Charlton Heston, the great commandments of the law. Anyway, I think I probably thought for a while Ben-Hur was in the Bible too.

But anyway, in that film, you know, if you haven't seen it, you have to see it. It's a great film. But Ben-Hur is a Hebrew who becomes a slave in the galleys of Rome and there's a shipwreck, isn't there?

And he saves in the shipwreck, he saves the master of the ship who's a Roman lord. And in gratitude, he adopts him to be his son.

[25 : 04] And the whole world changes from one who was once a slave on the galleys of Rome to one who's wearing the clothing of Rome, the marvelous toga, and the ring and the seal of his father's house.

And at first he just can't believe the enormous change. But the seal on his finger, the ring that stamps the authority of his new name and his new family and his new privilege and his new honor reminds him and tells him.

It's true. He was a real Roman with all that privileges. And friends, that is the way it is with us. We can pray and God will hear us not on the basis of our performance but on the basis of our privilege as sons adopted into the family of God.

And that means that confidence in prayer for you and me is not presumption. It's faith. It's simply honoring the Lord Jesus Christ and his great salvation that is given to us in abundant mercy.

You see, if you are feeling that you can't pray because you feel so unworthy, because you know you've sinned, because you know you've done things that you're ashamed of, if you feel that your sin means that you can't pray to your heavenly father, then you have to realize that to think that is to add to your sin a terrible insult to the Lord Jesus Christ and everything that he's done for you.

[26 : 43] What you're saying to Jesus, if you say, I couldn't pray to God, I can't pray to God because I'm so messed up. What you're saying is, oh, Jesus, you haven't done enough. You haven't done enough in your death on the cross to really make me acceptable to God forever.

You haven't done enough. That's a blasphemous thing to say. That's treating the cross of Christ as though it was nothing, as though it was insufficient to justify your sin.

It's a terrible thing to say. But isn't that what so often in our Christian lives we are doing, really? Because so often we base our assurance of acceptance before God and therefore our standing with God, we base that on our own performance, don't we?

Have I really been good and faithful this week? Have I managed to resist sin? Have I done all the things that I wanted to do to glorify God? Well, if you feel, well, yeah, I've had quite a good week.

Yeah, well, maybe God will hear my prayers this week. Maybe he'll answer me. You get revved up to pray. Or maybe you think, well, if I pray long and intense and serious prayers, God will really hear me.

[27 : 59] I'll be a real prayer warrior. Maybe I'll have a whole day set aside for prayer and fasting or a whole half night of prayer or something like that. Maybe if I do all these things, then God will hear me.

Friends, that's to disbelieve the gospel, to deny the gospel. No, says Jesus. That's not piety. That's paganism. Read Matthew chapter 6.

That's what he says. Don't pray these long and intense prayers, heaping up phrases like that. That's what the pagans do, says Jesus. They think they'll be heard for their many, many words, for their impressive oratory.

They're all wrong. Totally wrong. For you. Ah, much, much more simple than that, he says. You pray like this.

Jesus, our Father, in heaven. Just give thanks. Just lay out your needs to him. And God will hear you.

[28 : 57] He will hear you because you're his sons. He can't not hear you. You've put on Christ. You come to the Father, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, his holy son.

His very own spirit is in you, crying out with your words, Abba, Father. When he hears you, he hears the voice of his son. He can't not hear.

He really and truly is your Father. You see, to doubt that, to act as though that isn't true, it's to deny the very truth of the gospel itself.

Your prayers and mine, they'll not be heard because of our faithfulness. But on account of Jesus' great faithfulness. They'll not be heard because of our desiring of a hearing, but of his.

They'll not be heard because of our perfection, but his marvelous perfection for us. See, what that means, friends, is that we needed to let this Jesus and his sonship, and our wonderful sharing in that extraordinary privileged status.

[30 : 15] We need to let that fact fill all of our thoughts about prayer, especially when doubts assail us, especially when we wonder, oh, well, will God really hear my prayers?

How could he really hear me? Because I'm so feeble, or I'm so sinful, or I'm so unsanctified, or I'm so un-prayer warrior-like. I'm not like those prayer warrior people. Maybe God won't listen to me.

Don't start thinking about yourself, and whether you're good enough, or whether you're faithful enough in your prayer life.

Don't start going on asking yourself, oh, I know I ought to pray more, I really must try. The truth is all of us need to pray more. But if we start thinking like that all the time, we'll lose all of our confidence in prayer.

Don't think about yourself when you're thinking about prayer. Think about the Lord Jesus Christ. Think about how faithful he was, always, always, always, for you. Think about how consistent he was in his visible faith, in his obedience to his heavenly Father.

[31 : 18] Think about how consistent he was in his audible faith, in his prayer to his heavenly Father. Consistent in his life on earth, for your sake, and, says the gospel, consistent in his intercession in heaven.

Remember, now, for your sake, he is a priest forever, making intercession for you and for me. Remember that you have put on Christ.

Remember that you have received adoption as his son. Remember that his spirit cries out from your very own heart, crying out the words that you pray, saying, Abba, Father.

How can that not be heard? See, you can see, and I can see, and we must see just what Jesus said.

Father, I know that you will always hear me. We pray, you see, because in Jesus, we are sons of God.

[32 : 26] We don't need to pray, and we mustn't pray as those who don't know the Father. Like those who lobby loud and long to try and get an audience with the president and do everything that they can.

No. We walk straight into the room. It mustn't pray that the pagans have impressive rituals and length and words and all of these things in the hopes of impressing God into listening.

No. We, who know that we are sons through our Lord Jesus Christ, we can come confidently. We can come intimately.

We can come always to our own loving Heavenly Father. Because that's what He is. Forever. One of my daughters was once badgering at me to do something for her.

And I was just playing along with her, saying, well now, why should I do that with you? Why should I do that for you? And she tried to find a reason and said, well you have to, because you're my dad.

[33 : 48] And the strange thing was that once she'd said that, well how could I really possibly resist? That's the way it is with our Heavenly Father. We are, by our union with Jesus Christ, we are His true sons.

You can't not hear us. It doesn't matter what we've done. It doesn't matter what we've not done. We pray because we are sons of God.

In closing, just listen to what the Lord Jesus Christ, our elder brother, tells us about His Father and our Father in prayer.

I tell you, says Jesus, ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

[35 : 16] That's our Heavenly Father. And we pray because we are sons of this God. Let's pray.

God our Father, how we thank you for Jesus Christ, your Holy Son, in whom we have received adoption as sons.

Help us, we pray, always, always, as we come to you in prayer to turn our eyes and our hearts to Him. And so come with confidence, with gladness and with joy, knowing that you will ever hear our voice and never turn us away.

We ask it in Jesus Christ's name. Amen. Well, we're going to end this evening by singing hymn number 688.

Lovely hymn by Timothy Dudley Smith that speaks of this sonship that we have. Sons then...