

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Biblical Fathers: My Father and your Father

Today we continue with our series on 'Biblical Fathers' by considering John 20:17, where Jesus says, "*I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.*" Did you know that these words are among the first recorded words that the Lord Jesus spoke on the day of His resurrection? We know that because Jesus spoke these words to Mary Magdalene, and Mark 16:9 tells us, "*Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.*" This means that the subject of God being His Father and our Father must have been very important to Him since He spoke about it so soon after His resurrection.

What I'd like to do today is to think about why this was a new and wonderful revelation, that God could now be known as our Father. Then, I'd like to consider a few practical points on this subject, taken from John 13:1-17:26. We're going to look at how Jesus shows us perfectly what the Father is like, by considering John 14:8-12. We will think about the Father as the vinedresser looking for fruit in John 15:1-8, and what this means for us. After that, we will consider the need to love one another, and then the truth that the Father loves us, and encourages us to pray to Him in Jesus' Name, as we can read in John 15 and John 16. Finally, we will think about how the Father is protecting us now, and how He will take us to His home.

Firstly then, why was this a new and wonderful revelation, that God could now be known as our Father? Was God not always our Father? As we read through the Bible, we see that God has revealed Himself to men and women in progressive stages throughout history. Exodus 6:2-3 give us an insight into this: "*And God spoke to Moses and said to him: 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them.'*" I've just been reading from the New King James Version. If you look at those verses in print, you will see that "LORD" is capitalised. It is really the covenant Name of God to the people of Israel, Jehovah or Yahweh. In the Authorised Version, Exodus 6:3 reads, "*And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.*"

What this means is that God's Name of Jehovah, or Yahweh, was a **new** revelation given to Moses. The meaning of the Name involves what God said to Moses from the burning bush, in Exodus 3:14, "*I AM.*" The Name shows us that God is eternally self-existent. Compound forms of this Name, such as in Genesis 22:14, "*Jehovah-Jireh*", meaning "*The LORD will provide*", show us that "I AM" will bless His people. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had known God as "God Almighty", but now Moses and the Israelites would know Him as "I AM".

Now God was not generally known as "Father". There are only three Old Testament Scriptures where God is referred to as "My Father." Two of these are in Jeremiah 3. The verses Jeremiah 3:4 and Jeremiah 3:19. These two verses seem to relate to the nation of Israel as a whole. What I mean by that is, it is the nation that refers to God as Father, rather than individuals rejoicing in the fact that God was their Father. We needed the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, to bring us this revelation of the Father.

We see that revelation right at the beginning of John's Gospel, in John 1:18: "*No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.*" But it was not until the Lord Jesus had died for our sins on the cross, and risen again from the dead, that we could really enter into all the blessing of that new revelation. Hence His words to Mary Magdalene on the morning of His resurrection, "*I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God*" (John 20:17).

Now, how can we understand this wonderful relationship? The Lord Jesus taught His disciples a great deal about the Father in John 14:1-17:26. Let's start by looking at John 14:8-9: "*Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?'"* Philip found these things hard to understand, and so he wanted Jesus to show them the Father.

Jesus' reply explained to Philip that Jesus Himself was the way to understand the Father. Jesus both shows us what the Father is like, and how we should relate to our Father. Let's briefly think about these two things. First, Jesus shows us what the Father is like. We have a good commentary on that truth in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:6: "*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of*

the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The Lord Jesus is the best, indeed the only way for us to understand God. We cannot see or know the Father any better than as we know Him through Jesus. What our Lord Jesus is like, the Father is like. He is the perfect and exact representative of Him, as indeed we are told right at the start of the epistle to the Hebrews, in Hebrews 1:3: *"who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person."*

The Lord Jesus also shows us how we should relate to our Father. As we read through the Gospels, how do we see Jesus the Son of God relating to His Father? We see that He trusted in Him, He prayed to Him, His concern was to do the Father's will and to seek the Father's glory. He loved His Father, and He was confident of His Father's love for Him. Now the Lord Jesus is delighted to share that relationship with us: *"I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God"* (John 20:17). We, too, can trust in our Father; we can be concerned for His interests and His glory, and we can enjoy His love.

Let's look now at John 15:1-12, where we read about the fruit of the vine. In John 15:1-2 Jesus says, *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."* John 15:8 reads, *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."* In this set of verses, we find out that God the Father wants fruit from our lives. We can produce fruit only insofar as we remain in close association with our Lord Jesus, because in reality it is He who produces the fruit. That is made very clear in John 15:4-5: *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."*

Now the point I want to make today is that the Father wants to see fruit. He is pictured as a vinedresser, someone who is carefully looking after his vine so that it will produce as many grapes as possible. That is a picture of one of His goals, if I can use that word, for our lives.

What does the Bible mean by us bearing fruit? What does that mean in practice? From a vineyard owner's point of view, fruit is the end result that makes all the hard work of tending the vines worthwhile. It is the valuable product of the vine - the whole point of growing the vine in the first place. I have a pear tree in my garden. Each winter, I prune it so that it will - hopefully! - give me a good crop of pears in the following autumn. The pear tree looks nice, and the pruned branches are good for the pet rabbits to chew on, but ultimately, it's the crop of pears that make all the work worthwhile. If my tree never bore any fruit, it would be very disappointing.

In our lives, God wants to see fruit. Fruit includes a transformation of our character, so that we act like the Lord Jesus did. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul speaks about the fruit of the Spirit. Paul is emphasising the truth that the Holy Spirit works to produce fruit in our lives. We see then that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all concerned about fruit. Galatians 5:22-23 reads, *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."* If we display these things in our lives, through the Lord Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, we will be bearing fruit for God the Father. That is not necessarily the whole meaning of fruit - fruit could also mean things done for God, for example being used by God to lead someone to Jesus, or to help a fellow believer.

Now a practical point for me and indeed for all of us is, if fruit is God's aim and desire for my life, is that also **my** aim? Are my goals in line with God's goals? When I read John 15:2, I read that the Father prunes branches so that they will bear more fruit. This will help me to think about a day's events. Perhaps the day ahead of me may not go exactly as I would like it to go, but it may be that some of the disappointments and frustrations are really pruning, so that I will bring forth more fruit.

Now that we have thought about fruit, let's move on to consider John 15:12: *"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."* As we read through John 14:1-16:33, we will see that the Lord Jesus impresses on us the need to keep His commandments, and to love one another. John, the writer of the Gospel, evidently remembered these points well, because in 1 John 5:1-2, he writes, *"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments."*

I have two sons and two daughters. When the older three were much younger, it seemed to me that when two particular things happened, life was easy. These two things were when the children did as they were told, and when they got on well with each other! I am sure many parents would agree! Interestingly, this is what God our Father wants too. He wants His children to obey His commandments, and to get on well with each other. I just quoted from John's epistle, *"everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him"* (1 John 5:1). In other words, if we are Christians we have been born again, and God is our Father. We should therefore love others who have been born again too, because they are our brothers and sisters.

Let's now consider the subject of prayer. The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray to their Father. John 16:23-24 reads as follows: *"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."* John 16:27 says, *"for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God."* What we see in these verses is that God our Father loves us, and that He wants us to pray to Him. God the Father loves to give us blessings in response to our prayers, and we are encouraged to pray to Him. Now of course, this does not mean that we will get everything we want! We are to pray in Jesus' Name, which means that our prayers should be things that the Lord Jesus Himself would want for us, since we are asking with the authority of His Name.

Let's be encouraged to pray to God our Father. Let's also be watchful to see how He answers. A little while ago I read a book called *The Return of Prayers* by the Puritan writer Thomas Goodwin, who was writing in the 17th century. Even though it's an old book, its message is still current - we need to watch out for answers to prayer! This will help us to trust God more, and it will mean that God receives the thanks and praise that He should. If God does not answer in the way that we might have expected, it can also teach us to pray more in line with His purposes.

John 17:1-26 is taken up with a wonderful prayer of Jesus Himself to His Father. There are many tremendous things in this chapter, but let's focus on John 17:11 and John 17:26. These verses read as follows: *"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."* (John 17:11) *"And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."* (John 17:26).

Here we have two great truths about our relationship with God our Father. God our Father will keep and guard us, and God our Father loves us. Let's rejoice in our Father's love and safe keeping, and let's not doubt it. A good father would want to protect his children, whom he loves. God our Father will keep our souls safe. He will make sure that we are brought safely to heaven. He gave His only Son so that we could become His children, and He will not abandon us. Some of God's children have gone through very difficult circumstances and times. They have not had easy lives, and some have even lost their lives because of their belief in God. But not one will have been lost for eternity - all will have been brought safely to heaven. John 10:27-29 gives us a wonderful summary: *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."*

This brings me to my final point about God being our Father. Our Father has a home, and that is where we are headed for. Jesus said, *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"* (John 14:1-3).

Let's go back to the verses that we started with, when the Lord Jesus was speaking to Mary Magdalene on the morning of His resurrection. *"Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"* (John 20:17). The Lord Jesus was going to return to His home, His Father's house. But He was not going back there to be alone. He said, *"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you"* (John 14:2-3). We have a place prepared for us in our Father's home! What a wonderful prospect!

We have covered quite a bit of ground today, so let's finish off by briefly recapping what we have considered.

- We started by thinking about how the revelation that God was our Father was one of the first things that Jesus spoke about on the morning of His resurrection, showing us how important this was to Him, and should therefore be to us.
- We then considered how God revealed Himself in stages, culminating in the wonderful revelation of God as Father, given by Jesus His own Son.
- Next we looked at some of what this means in a practical sense. Jesus shows us both what the Father is like, and how we should relate to our Father.
- We saw that our Father wants to see fruit from our lives, and that this is His goal for us. Are our goals and aspirations in line with His?

Just as an earthly father would want his children to obey him and to get on with each other, so our Father wants us to obey His commandments and to love one another. Our Father loves us, and we are encouraged to pray to Him. As we pray, we should be careful to watch out for answers to our prayers, so that we will thank and praise God, and be encouraged to keep on praying. Our Father will keep us safe. He will make sure that we are brought safely to heaven. We belong to Him, and He will never abandon us or leave us. Finally, heaven is not just a place of beauty and

happiness - it is the Father's home! We have a home in heaven, and the Lord Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us there.

As we consider all of these things, let's finish off with the prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:3: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."*

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