

“LIVING WITH GOD AS FATHER” (Creed – Part 2)
by Rom A. Pegram (9/20/20)

Today, we continue in our worship series called, “CREED”—specifically talking about ‘living with God as Father.’ Each week in this series, we’re going to take just a few moments for theological reflection—ideas that will give us a deeper understanding of ‘what we believe.’ Today, we’ll be focusing on the part of the Apostle’s Creed that says, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator (maker) of heaven and earth.”

In Mark 14:36, the Bible talks about Jesus praying. There he says: “Abba, Father, [Jesus] cried out...” So, we’re going to talk about the issue of God as Father. And let me begin with this: Do you remember last week when we were talking about the word ‘catholic’ with a small ‘c’ (holy catholic church)? It’s toward the end of the Apostle’s Creed and we said it’s not a proper name (i.e. Roman Catholic Church), but rather it’s a word that means ‘universal’ or ‘worldwide’. And we’re part of that ‘holy catholic’ or universal Church; we’re a local expression of God’s kingdom in the world. So, it’s God’s Church ... because ‘we believe in God the Father Almighty.’ That’s the universal Church that believes that—the Church all around the world...

And ‘father’ is an interesting metaphor. It’s a human term we’ve put on God. Do you know what that’s called in theology—when we use human terms to describe God? It’s called ‘anthropomorphism.’ The way we use the word ‘father’ is *anthropomorphic*. So, if you’re ever in a game of Jeopardy and you win anything with that word, make sure you tithe back to Trinity on that one, okay? But we have a habit of doing that; we take human words and describe God with them—so we can understand God better. Now, God is not human. Please don’t misunderstand today. Calling God ‘father’ is just a way we can understand God or God’s heart better...

Folks, Jesus—while he walked this earth, both human and divine—did the same thing. Why? I’m guessing because he was always teaching, wanting others to know God like he did. Jesus’ favorite term for God was ‘Father’. (By the way, the term is used rarely in the OT, but 135 times in the NT—65 of those by Jesus.) So, Jesus liked the word ‘Father’, but the actual term he used—translated ‘Father’—was ... ‘ABBA’. *No, it’s not just a band from Sweden.* Jesus introduces the word ‘Abba’ to describe God; it’s an intimate word. Literally, it means something like ‘Daddy’. I don’t know what you called your father when you were young, but I know some have used the term ‘Daddy’ to describe their fathers and it’s an intimate word...

For Jesus it’s not just a child-like term, though. There’s some intention behind that specific word. Jesus was signaling here the relationship you can have with God NOW is different than the relationship you could have with God prior to his coming (OT/NT). It was the idea you could have a personal confidence in God like never before—your heavenly Father. Do you remember when you were a kid and used to go to new places ... and sometimes those places could be a bit scary, just because they were new. *But if you had your dad beside you ... look out!* It’s that kind of an idea. And no one had ever had that kind of a relationship with God before Jesus was here!

One final note before we get into today’s study: the use of God the Father is rarely the same as God the Creator. Generally, in scripture, it keeps those terms separate—God the Creator and God the Father. But the Apostle’s Creed shows us

what's now happened because of Jesus. When we're reconciled to God, through faith in Jesus—our broken lives put back together, then we move from God the Creator to God the Father—*Abba*. Jesus did that for us! So, let's move into what that means for us...

As we approach this topic of 'God as Father,' I approach it cautiously. Because I know, for some, their earthly fathers haven't been a great experience. Some've grown up with *absent fathers*, some with *distracted fathers*, and some with *abusive fathers*. And some of you had a great experience with your fathers. Regardless of your experience, would you do me a favor right now? I need you to do something that may be a bit difficult for some, but necessary if we're to get all God wants us to out of this time today. *I need all of you to re-imagine what a father looks like...* Can you do that?

Study after study has shown that *our experience with our earthly father is the exact projection that we place on our Heavenly Father*. So, if we grew up with an unsettling experience with an earthly father, guess what. We sometimes project the same feelings we had in that situation toward God the Father, thinking God will also treat us the same way an earthly father has. Again, this may be a difficult thing to do, but we have to, if we're going to understand the type of relationship we can have with our Heavenly Father. So, let's lay aside any stereotypes we have for the moment...

Jesus helped us with this in this way: *He said we have two fathers*. We all have an earthly father. All are born of a father. But Jesus said we also have a Heavenly Father. In the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9a), when the disciples come to Jesus and ask him to teach them to pray, Jesus says, "Pray like this: Our Father in heaven...." Listen to our scripture for today (Matt. 6:9-13), where Jesus teaches the disciples; he says...

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. ¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today the food we need, ¹² and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. ¹³ And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

So, Jesus teaches us to call on God as Father ... but what kind of father is that? What does having God as my Heavenly Father mean? Folks, here are...

3 Ways to Recognize God as our Heavenly Father:

I HAVE LOVE THAT IS UNCONDITIONAL. Real love, true love—by definition, is *unconditional*...

You know, if that's true (and scripture says it is), why is it humanity so often perverts real love and makes it *conditional*? Do you understand? We'll say things like, 'I'll love you IF...' or 'I'll love you WHEN....' We put conditions on our love, don't we? Or we say things like ... 'when you do certain things or act in certain ways, that's when I'll love you or love you more. But when you act in a negative way, I love you less!' In this world, it seems like love is generally *conditional* in some way...

Again, *God's love's not like that!* True love—the kind that only originates in God, is *unconditional!* Why is that? Because it comes from God ... and that's what God's love is like; *that's what God is like.* It's a heavenly love, unconditional love, a perfect love. God's love says to you, 'I love you regardless.' You say, 'But, I've done all these things that were bad.' And God says, 'I love you.' You say, 'But, God, I've run from you.' And God says, 'I love you.' You say, 'But, God, I don't really even think about you.' And God says, 'I love you.' God's love is *unconditional!* God defines love; God IS love. The truth is, *there's nothing you can do to make God love you more ... and there's nothing you can do to make God love you less.* Isn't that amazing?

The Apostle Paul wrestled with this concept and wrote some pretty amazing words about it in Romans 8:38-39. He said: "...I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." In other words, God's love is *unconditional!* And isn't that the kind of father we all want?

God is a Father who pursues his creation with love. And God's showed us his love by sending his very best—his own son, Jesus. 1 John 4:10 tells us, "This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." *God loves us so much that ... he was proactive on our behalf!* God knew what we needed ... and provided for everyone! Why did Jesus go through what he went through (*The Passion of the Christ*)? Why did he go through torture and death on a cross? God's unconditional love. That's why. The gift of salvation he provided is ... for everyone—regardless. *God doesn't just talk about his love; he shows it.* With God as Father, I have this kind of love ... and there's also this...

I HAVE STRENGTH THAT IS UNLIMITED. Do you all remember the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17)? Goliath is taunting the Israelites and King Saul is trying to figure out how to deal with this problem. The Israelites go through many possible scenarios, but eventually the shepherd boy—David—shows up, takes a sling and five stones, and goes out and takes Goliath down! And *most people stop reading the story right there...*

But this is just the beginning of the interchange between King Saul and David the warrior. After Goliath, David wants to become a great warrior in his own right. He goes on to win many battles and eventually becomes a national hero. This made King Saul jealous (*Do you remember that 'quiet giant'?*). King Saul had been the greatest—the most powerful, which is why he was king. But at this time, there was a little song in Israel that made it into the Top 40. It was sung by everyone and went, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David has tens of thousands." 'Probably a country song! And it didn't go over very well with the king...

But Saul took the strategy of 'keep your friends close, and your enemies closer' with David. David was a part of his court, where he developed a great friendship with Saul's son, Jonathan. But things were never really right between Saul and David. Saul tried to kill David ... a few times...

David ended up a fugitive on the run for a good part of his early life; during this time, *David had two sources of strength:* 1) *his friendship with Jonathan.* But when

Jonathan couldn't always be there, David's other source of strength was 2) *his relationship with God!* David, being a musician and writer, once wrote this (Psalm 46:1) when he was on the run: "God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble." David is saying: GOD IS ALWAYS READY ... to give us strength beyond our own...

You've probably heard me say before that *there's a word to describe those times where there's one problem after another after another; that word is LIFE.* Jesus describes life this way (John 16:33b): "...Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." That, folks, is what we can count on! With God as our Father, we will have his strength always available to us. The Apostle Paul reminds us, even as he was personally struggling in his life (2 Cor. 12:9, MSG), "...My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.' Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness." Strength that is unlimited... And, finally, with God as my Father...

I HAVE LIGHT THAT IS UNENDING. When you have God as Father, not only do you have love that is unconditional, and strength that is unlimited, but you also have the *light that is unending!*

We don't know exactly what Paul struggled with personally, but we do know he asked God to take it away and God said, 'No.' And so often when that happens to us, we tend to have a pity party or worse. But, not Paul! Paul would have remembered the words of the psalmist (Ps. 16:11) when he said, "You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever." That was Paul's attitude...

So often we want to focus on the handicap, don't we? We want to focus on the negative in life, when God wants us to have ... *light that is unending!* LIGHT is such an interesting word. The Aramaic word for 'light' goes beyond just happiness; the light is an 'intention of the will to understand things as they truly are, not just as they appear.' That's why Paul said, "I was glad to let it happen...."

Quit focusing on the handicap and begin appreciating the gift. When you have God as your Heavenly Father, you have 'light that is unending.' So, when you think about God being your Father, you know that means you're a child of his, right? Jesus himself says in Luke 10:20, "...don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven." With God as our Father, we can rest assured our names are registered as citizens of Heaven.

But there's a myth I need you to know about—one I've been guilty of spouting from time to time, that simply says, "We are all children of God." But, is that right? Nicodemus asked Jesus what he must do to have eternal life? And in Jesus' own words (John 3:3), he replied: "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." We've been talking about what it means to have God as Father. But Jesus says we 'must be born again' if we're to experience that. Folks, *there are two*

types of births we can experience in this world—one we have no control over, the other is our choice...

- 1) Born: creation of God.
- 2) Born Again: child of God.

And the 'born again' part has to happen before we're actually a 'child of God'—knowing the salvation he offers as a heavenly Father. We'll get into this more as we move through this series, but let me just ask you as we close today—those who want desperately to experience God as Father—as we've described it today: *Have you put your hope in God's unfailing love (Ps. 147:11)—the love shown us through his son, Jesus?* Do you believe in your heart of hearts that Jesus is your savior? Scripture tells us (Eph. 2:8-9, NCV), "I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. ⁹ It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it." It was through faith in Jesus; that's it...

By God's grace, and through a faith in Jesus, you can know God's gift of salvation ... and you can know what 'living with God as Father' is all about. Again, we'll keep going deeper (Apostle's Creed/Scripture) as the weeks go by. Join us next week as we learn what 'living with Jesus as Savior' is all about...