

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## OUR FATHER

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### Matthew 6:9a

Let me recite to you a passage that you probably all know by heart. This passage is found in Matthew 6:9-13 and it says this.

*Matthew 6:9. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.*

*10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

*11 Give us this day our daily bread.*

*12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

*13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

I remember that when I was in grade 2, we used to recite the Lord's Prayer every morning. Our teacher was a nun, and it was part of her routine to begin the day with this prayer. That was the first time that I was introduced to the notion of praying to God.

Today I would like to begin a series of eight messages on the Lord's Prayer, a prayer that is recited every week in certain churches as part of their worship. This prayer has been part of your own prayers, I am sure. But I wonder if we really know what we are saying when we recite the Lord's Prayer. We mumble the words without too much thought about its meaning. Perhaps, its meaning simply escapes us.

### A model for prayer

I should mention to you that the Lord Jesus, before He begins the prayer, says this. *In this manner, therefore, pray.* He didn't necessarily say, 'Pray these words', but rather, 'Pray like this.' In other words, this prayer is meant to be a model for prayer. It is not meant for mere repetition. And in this prayer, we find very important elements that God wants to hear when we pray to Him.

Now, there is nothing wrong in repeating the Lord's Prayer very often. As I said, you find it used as part of the weekly liturgy of certain churches. And there is biblical support for that since in the gospel of Luke, Jesus introduces the Lord's Prayer in a slightly different way. In Luke 11:2, we read, *When you pray, say (...these words, not 'Pray like this.' But, say...), 'Our Father in heaven...'* That might explain to a certain extent, why our Catholic friends use the rosary even if their catechism clearly states that the Lord's Prayer has not been given as a formula to repeat mechanically.

A rosary, if you don't know what it is, consists of 165 beads held together by a string, and at the end of which there is a cross. These beads help you to keep count of your prayers. When you use

the rosary, you are supposed to recite the Ave Maria 150 times and the Lord's Prayer 15 times, for a total of 165, hence the 165 beads that we find on a rosary. Well, I don't have anything against the use of the rosary. My main concern is whether we understand what we say when repeat the Lord's Prayer word for word. This is what I would like to clarify in these lessons. We want to study the meaning of the Lord's Prayer.

When we come to God in prayer, perhaps the first thing that we realize is that the presence of God is essential to prayer. That is to say, we must be conscious of God's presence. There is no point trying to talk to somebody who is obviously not in the room, unless you want to talk to the walls. I remember the reaction of the people when answering machines appeared on the market in the mid-1980s. People found it difficult, if not ridiculous, to talk to a tape recorder. No matter how good you are at trying to imagine a person at the other end of the telephone line, we feel a certain reluctance to talk to a machine. And even today, we just can't have a normal voice when we know that we are not talking to a person. Our voice becomes more mechanical. It seems that we are really just talking to ourselves.

### **Praying to an invisible person**

So prayer can be a problem for certain people because the presence of God is a problem. How can I pray to someone that I cannot see? How can I speak to an invisible God? That, for some people, is enough to remove any desire to pray because indeed who has the desire to talk to a wall?

Prayer, if it is to have any meaning at all, cannot be simply a mental or spiritual exercise. It is not a meditation either because it is not talking to yourself. It is talking to God. Or better, it is talking with God. It is a dialogue with God by which we allow Him to talk to us too. Prayer is about building a relationship with our Creator.

When we ask, 'How can I speak to someone that I cannot see?', it shows a certain spiritual blindness because the Bible tells us that God is to be found everywhere. We call that the 'omnipresence' of God. Take Psalm 139. Let me read to you Psalm 139:7-10.

*Psalm 139:7. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?  
8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.  
9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
10 even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.*

So we find that in this psalm, the psalmist is saying that there is nowhere that God's presence cannot be found. God is absolutely everywhere. He is up in the heavens. And if you go down to the Hades, the realm of the dead, you can't escape Him either. There is no way by which anyone can escape the presence of God. God is to be found everywhere.

Think for a moment about the meaning of that truth in relation to prayer, that God is everywhere. It is not a question of finding His presence. It is a question of not being able to escape from Him presence. When we pray and we feel that God doesn't seem to be there, the problem is that we have shut out His presence. It is we who are hiding ourselves from God. Much like Adam and Eve, when they sinned, they hid themselves in the bushes. Remember then the first point. God's presence cannot be escaped. If His presence seems to be remote, the problem is us, not Him.

### **God, our Father**

So we see that when we pray, we must know that God's presence is with us. Now, the second point has to do with our view of God. You see, it is not just a question of knowing that God is there, but also how He relates to me. When we pray to God, who are we talking to? How do we view God?

We come here to the heart of these two words, *Our Father*, that the Lord Jesus gives us here in the Lord's Prayer. He is telling us that when we become His disciples, we become His children. And God is our Father.

This might not be anything new for you. But remember that for the Jews of that time, this was something unheard of. Jesus is teaching here a totally new concept of God. To my knowledge, there is nowhere, in no religion in the world, not even in the OT, do you ever find God addressed in prayer as Father. The Lord Jesus is the only person who ever taught to pray to God as Father.

Nowhere in Judaism do you ever find God addressed in prayer as Father. A great German scholar of a past generation by the name of Joachim Jeremias wrote a book called 'Abba', *abba* being the Aramaic term for 'father'. This book is the result of 25 years of research with the help of his Ph.D. students in which he went through all the literature that he could find in ancient Judaism. And in that book, he made the observation that he could not find one single instance of God addressed in prayer as 'abba' or 'father'. The Jews had tons of titles for God. But nowhere in the prayers of the Jews is God addressed as Father. It was too personal, too familiar, too intimate to be appropriate. In fact, it would have been considered as blasphemy. And yet, Jesus invites His disciples to call God, 'Father'. *In this manner, pray, Our Father...*

## **Close to God**

Now, think about that. Do you realize the unique privilege that we have to be able to call God, 'Father'? You know, the point of the good news of the gospel is not just that we can escape from hell but that we can become God's children. In the hierarchy of heaven, there are different classes of beings, with different ranks. Just think of the angels and of the different ranks of angels. The Bible tells us that from the spiritual point of view, even the lowest of the angels is higher than man.

But the amazing thing about the gospel is this. That God lifts us up from the lowest section of the creation to the highest. He puts us above the whole hierarchy of God's creation and makes us to be His children. You have often heard that we are God's children. But have you ever pondered about what it means? To be God's children means that we are lifted up right next to God. As Paul says in the second chapter of Ephesians, we are seated in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, at the right hand of God. The children of God are right next to God. That's where He wants us to be, close to Himself. Do you realize the privilege of a child of God? Don't take familiar spiritual truths in a superficial way, but meditate deeply on it, until your heart overflows with thanksgiving, that God has given us such a privilege to be seated next to Him in the heavenly places.

The son of a high ranked official in a Communist country was sharing about how he could easily have access to his father's office when he was a little boy. He said, 'In order to meet my father, people had to make special appointment. But I could walk pass all the guards, all the soldiers, all the people's doors, walk straight into my father's office and nobody would question me. I was a nobody. I had no education, no qualification to produce. I had no title. But because I was his son, I could walk into his office twenty times a day, any time I liked. No matter how many guards were there, nobody could stop me.'

In the same way, we have the same kind of access to our heavenly Father. There is no spirit being in heaven who can stop you from coming into the presence of God. That's the kind of access that we have as a son, as a child. And the Lord Jesus tells us that when we pray, we pray as a child. You don't need to come with your degrees, with your titles, with you accomplishment, with your make up. Just come with a genuine and trusting heart. That's all that He wants. Do you begin to see the beauty of the Lord's Prayer?

## Prayer and conduct

Now in the Scriptures, a privilege is never to be enjoyed without its responsibility. Enjoying the privilege of being a child of God comes with responsibilities. And here I would like to show you the relationship of prayer and conduct.

We become a child of God by being born anew. It is the Holy Spirit who does the work of making us to be a child of God. Sonship is not something we can earn. It is a matter of faith in Christ. Now the Bible tells us that a child must prove worthy in his life and conduct. And that our conduct is the evidence of our sonship. When we are born physically, we are given a birth certificate on which is stated where and when we were born, and who are our parents. In the spiritual world, when we are born again, we don't have a birth certificate to produce. However, in the wisdom of the Scriptures, God has given us one factor by which we can know that we are His children. The spiritual evidence that we have and that is given to us is the evidence of our life and conduct. Let me show you that from the Bible. Listen to Matthew 5:44-45.

*Matthew 5:44. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you  
45 in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven ...*

*In order that you may be sons of your Father...* What is the Lord Jesus saying? Do we make ourselves to be sons of God by loving our enemies and praying for them? No. The Lord Jesus is not saying that through doing these things, we can somehow earn our sonship. He is saying that by doing that, we prove the evidence of our sonship. That's very different. Nobody can earn sonship. Nobody can earn eternal life. But we can show that we are God's sons and daughters by loving our enemies. That's the proof of our sonship and also our responsibility as a child of God.

Now listen to this. When our conduct does not match up to our sonship, something happens to our prayer life. Our access to our Father becomes difficult. Test it and see. You commit a sin and try to pray after that. See if your prayer can get through. I tell you, it won't work. You will find that somehow, there is an obstacle. Sin becomes a spiritual obstacle between you and God. And the hindrance is not merely psychological or emotional. There is a very actual hindrance, as though the door was closed. It is not God who shuts the door. It is not the angels who shut the door. You have given an opportunity to Satan to shut the door. And I tell you, he has the authority to do it. We will talk more about this when we will look at the petition *Lead us not into temptation*.

So you see that our access to God as His sons is tied up with the evidence of our sonship. We can pray *Our Father* all day long. But until we acknowledge our sins and repent, prayer becomes spiritually sterile. Nothing will happen. So be well aware of this vital relationship between prayer and conduct.

## Crying out, *Abba*

Now, we can rightly call God our Father only when the Spirit of God comes into our lives. And we become God's children when we open our lives completely and totally to the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul says in Romans 8:15: *...you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father*. It is the Spirit, crying out from our heart, *Abba, Father*. Our Father. We say it not just with our mouth, but with our whole heart. The Lord Jesus is saying in the Lord's Prayer, 'When you pray, say 'Our Father' from the depth of your heart.' It comes straight from the depth of our heart. And we can do that because the Holy Spirit is working in our heart, enabling us to cry out and say, *Abba, Father*.

Paul says this on two occasions to make sure that we don't miss the point. In Galatians 4:6, he says, *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father!'*

Grasp this truth. It is the Spirit of God who enables us to say from our heart, 'Father'. That means that the Holy Spirit is witnessing with our spirit that we are a child of God. That is where true assurance comes from. It is not based on external promises but on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. How do I know that I am saved? I have the certainty that I am a child of God because the Holy Spirit is witnessing in my heart of this fact. That's biblical assurance. And such assurance allows us to open our lives totally to God, especially in the intimate moments of prayer.

## **Children of God**

I don't know if you realize the tremendous implication of what Paul is saying in Romans 8:15 and in Galatians 4:6 in regard to us calling God, 'Abba, Father.' When Paul says that by the Holy Spirit, we say 'Abba, Father', it means that by the grace of God, we have come into a relationship with God that is on the level of that, think about it, of the Lord Jesus Himself. This is something that is enough to make anyone stunned. Don't you agree?

God has adopted us as His spiritual children. And because of this, we can come into a relationship with God that is on the level of His only Son Himself. Because you see, the Lord Jesus is the only one who addressed God as 'Abba, Father.' This expression 'Abba, Father', you will find it used in one other place in the whole of the NT. And it is in Mark 14:36, in a context of prayer. In the garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus was praying to God, He said, *Abba, Father, if it is your will, if it is possible, take this cup away from Me.*

In the same way, we find that in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus invites us to come into God's presence by calling God, 'Abba, Father.' 'Daddy, I'm here.' And we talk with Him because we know that He is present.

With two words, *Our Father*, Jesus establishes who we are in relation to God. We are His children. And who God is in relation to us. He is our Father. O, what a freedom! Whenever we pray, let us draw near to God as we draw near to a loving Father.