

Psalm 89
Read Isaiah 63:7-64:12

“Our Father, Who Art in Heaven”

January 18, 2009

Isaiah 63 recounts the wilderness wanderings –
how God brought Israel out of Egypt.

The LORD had spoken to Pharaoh,

“Israel is my son, my firstborn – let my son go that he may worship me.”

Isaiah reflects on this – and how the LORD said,

“Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely.”

And he became their Savior.

And in love and pity, God redeemed them from Egypt and brought them through the sea,
“who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit.”

Did you know that the Holy Spirit was in the midst of Israel?

The pillar of cloud and fire that led them through the wilderness –

that was the presence of God, the Holy Spirit in their midst.

And Isaiah cries out:

Look down from heaven and see,

from your holy and beautiful habitation...

For you are our Father...

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven.

Though Abraham does not know us,

and Israel does not acknowledge us.

You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old...

You claimed us as your son.

You told Pharaoh that we were your firstborn!

But we have sinned against you.

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;

in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven.

We have no where else to turn.

But now, O LORD, you are our Father;

we are the clay, and you are our potter;

we are all the work of your hand.

Be not so terribly angry, O LORD,

and remember not iniquity forever.

Behold, please look, we are all your people.

So Isaiah comes to the Father in heaven,
but there is something missing from Isaiah's prayer.

You are our Father –
but the problem is that we have sinned!
God is our Father,
but we don't resemble him very well!

This problem goes back throughout Israel's history:
in the wilderness wanderings, Israel was called to be the Son of God –
but a son should resemble his father,
and Israel did not resemble the LORD.

And so God called David.

Last week we looked at David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 17,
after God had promised to take the son of David,
and establish him—adopting him as his son.

David reflects on this when he spoke to Solomon in 1 Chronicles 22:10,
and tells him of God's promise that Solomon would build the temple.
God had told David that:

*He shall be my son, and I will be his father,
and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.*

This is what Ethan the Ezrahite sings about in Psalm 89 [Please turn there].
Part of my reason for using the Psalms in this series on the Lord's Prayer
is my continuing desire to see you regularly using the Psalms in your prayers.

Martin Luther once said that

“Whoever begins to pray the Psalms earnestly and regularly
will soon take leave of those other light and personal little devotional prayers
and say, ‘Ah, there is not the juice, the strength, the passion,
the fire which you find in the Psalms.
Anything else tastes too cold and too hard.’”

For 3,000 years these prayers have nourished the hearts of the people of God.

Psalm 89 begins with a confident statement:
I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever.

God is faithful.
He will do what he has promised.

And in verses 3-4 of Psalm 89 Ethan recounts this promise to David:
I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.

Verses 5-18 then give thanks and praise to God for his wonders:

Verses 5-7 give praise to the one who is feared in the council of the holy ones –
the heavenly throne room.

How often, as you pray to “Our Father, who art in heaven”
do you reflect upon the one to whom you pray?
Or do you zip through that part,
“Almighty God...”

and then it is all about me!

Ethan lingers here,

*O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD,
with your faithfulness all around you?*

And verses 8-10 speak of how God rules the seas,
as he reflects on God’s crushing Rahab like a carcass.
Rahab was the name of a primeval sea monster.
There were stories in Babylonian mythology of how Marduk
had slain the great sea monster, Tiamat.
Ethan says, “NO, if anyone slew the great sea monster, it was Yahweh!”

Verses 11-14 speak of how God rules the earth as well,
completing the summary of how God rules the heavens, the seas, and the earth –
in other words, all of creation.

And verses 15-18 then conclude part one
by pointing out that the people who know the festal shout are blessed –
those who walk in the light of God’s face.

Why are these people so blessed?

Because their king is the son of God.
This was a common motif in the ancient world.
Every nation believed that its king was adopted by its god.
And at first, Psalm 89 appears to be simply one more version of the divine Son theme.

Verses 19-37 then set forth part two – the covenant that God has established with David.

And this covenant starts with the earth (verses 19-24),
as God promises that David will not be outwitted by his foes.

And it moves to the seas in verse 25
as David will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the river –
ruling as God’s vicegerent over the earth and the seas.

Verses 26-27

*He shall cry to me, You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.
And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.*

In other words – he shall cry to me what Isaiah said in Isaiah 63

You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old...

The Davidic king is said to be – and to do – what Israel was supposed to be and to do.

All that God had promised to Israel has now been promised to David:

*My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.
I will establish his offspring forever and throne as the days of the heavens.*

Of course, the warning and curse of Israel also remains!

*If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,
if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,
then I will punish their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,
but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.*

God has promised to David – and he *will* fulfill it: “I will not lie to David”

*His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.
Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.*

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven.

When we pray, do we reflect on what we are saying?

We are joining this history of prayer.

We are participating in this story – a story that weaves its from before the beginning through countless generations.

Ethan’s prayer also has a point.

He did not merely take some random event in redemptive history and say:

Well, today I’ll give thanks for the Davidic covenant –
and then ask God to help my Aunt Abigail with her rheumatism.

Ethan’s prayer is going somewhere.

He has reflected on the current situation of the people of God,
and he realizes that God’s promise to David
speaks directly to the situation Israel faces.

But now...

Verses 38-45 describe the situation:

*But now you have cast off and rejected;
you are full of wrath against your anointed.
You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
you have defiled his crown in the dust.*

The walls of Jerusalem have been breached.

All who pass by plunder him.
You have exalted the right hand of his foes.
You have made his splendor to cease.
You have covered him with shame.

This is *not* the way things should be.

You look around you today, and what do you see?
The church is not looking like the church should!
Yesterday a minister in my presbytery renounced the jurisdiction of the presbytery
and became an independent minister without any accountability to anyone.

That is not the way it should be.

There are people calling themselves ministers of Jesus Christ
who are baptizing in the name of the Mother, the Daughter, and the Womb.

That is not the way it should be!

There are pastors and priests who are abusing children,
embezzling money, and making a mockery of the name of Jesus.

That is not the way it should be!!

I'm not saying, "don't ever pray for Aunt Abigail" –
but what I am saying is that if you let the words,
"Our Father, Who Art in Heaven"
come out of your lips,
without thinking about who you are praying to –
and where he sits—
then, to put it bluntly,
you are taking the name of the Lord your God in vain!

Ethan the Ezrahite is not the Davidic King.
He is not the Son of God.
And yet he grieves and sorrows for the plight of the house of David
as though it is the most important thing in the world...

because it *was the most important thing in the world.*

After all, what happens to the Davidic king will determine what happens to the people of God.

And so Ethan asks:

How long, O LORD?
Will you hide yourself forever?
How long will your wrath burn like fire?

Verses 46-51 finally then turn to Ethan’s petitions:”

Remember how short my time is!

For what vanity you have created all the children of man!

What man can live and never see death?

Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?

Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

I remember what you said, O Lord.

What happened?

Why are you letting this happen?

Why is the world coming crashing down around me?

My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me?

What happened to your promises?

But as we have seen so often in the Psalms,
the Psalmist does not shake his fist at God.

There is no crazed raging against the LORD.

There is, instead, a longing, a pleading – rooted in the conviction that God is faithful:

*Remember, O LORD, how your servants are mocked,
and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,
with which your enemies mock, O LORD,
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.*

Ethan cannot bear to hear how the LORD’s anointed is mocked.

Remember, O LORD!

And it is for this reason that the Lord’s anointed commanded us to address God as our Father.
As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

120. Q. Why has Christ commanded us to address God as Our Father?

A. To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer that childlike reverence and trust toward God which should be basic to our prayer: God has become our Father through Christ and will much less deny us what we ask of Him in faith than our fathers would refuse us earthly things.

It is interesting that no Psalm ever addresses God as “Our Father.”

Psalm 89 is the closest, when it says that the Lord’s anointed – the Davidic king –
would cry to my “You are *my* Father.”

Throughout the Old Testament there are references to God as the Father of Israel –

and yet there is a reluctance to address him as such.

Why is this?

Because God has become our Father through Christ.

And while that was true for Israel as well

(after all, Israel was saved by the same atoning sacrifice as we!)

yet there is a sense in which until the coming of the Son of God,

Israel's relationship to God as Father was somewhat compromised!

It is perhaps instructive that in the gospel of John,

Jesus refers to God as "Father" or "my Father" more than eighty times.

From John 10-17 Jesus refers to God as his Father at least 65 times (8 chapters).

"I and the Father are one" (10:30)

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper" (14:16)

"He who loves me will be loved by my Father" (14:21)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser" (15:1)

"The Father himself loves you because you have loved me" (16:27)

In all of these 65 usages –

as in all 80+ times that Jesus calls God "Father" before the resurrection –
there is an exclusive feel to this.

Jesus calls God his Father in a unique way – in a way that no one else ever had.

Only after the resurrection does Jesus finally say,

"go to my brothers and say,

'I am ascending to my Father and your Father'" (20:17)

Now we know from the other gospels that Jesus did in fact teach his disciples to pray,

"Our Father" even during his earthly ministry.

But John's emphasis on the exclusive relationship between the Father and the Son
throughout Jesus' earthly ministry is helpful for us.

As the catechism puts it,

"God has become our Father through Christ."

Because *he* is the Son of God, therefore those who are united to him

become fellow heirs with him –

Because he is the natural Son of God,

we who receive the Spirit of adoption

are adopted as sons.

The Heidelberg Catechism goes on to ask:

121. Q. Why is there added, Who art in heaven?

A. These words teach us not to think of God's heavenly majesty in an earthly manner, and to

expect from His almighty power all things we need for body and soul.

Both in Isaiah 63-64 and in Psalm 89 we have already seen the way in which these prayers highlight the importance of heaven.

Why is heaven so important to your prayers?

Because heaven – the place where God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth – is the most important place in the universe.

For that matter, it is the most important place in your life.

Because heaven is where God reigns.

Heaven is where Christ is seated in glory as King of kings.

You may be so busy – caught up in all the rat race of life, constantly running from one thing to another – that you say, “I don’t have time to pray!”

It is said that Martin Luther prayed for several hours each morning.

One man asked him how, with all his responsibilities, he could possibly pray so much.

Luther replied that the busier he was, the more time for prayer he needed!

After all,

prayer is the one place where the pace of life slows down in the light of the glory of Christ.

I find that only in prayer does the pace of life seem proper – because only then, when I glimpse the glory of Christ, do I see “all these things” in their proper perspective.

If things are getting too hectic, that is a sure sign that you are not spending enough time in prayer!

And don’t you dare groan and say, “Oh no! Not one more thing to do!”

Prayer is not a “thing to do.”

I will not trivialize prayer by calling it “a relationship.”

That would downgrade prayer to a conversation with a friend.

No, prayer is *the* thing.

When we make it “a thing to do,” it becomes all about us.

When we think of it as a relationship, it becomes an earthly thing.

But prayer is a heavenly thing.

But where did we start?

Israel is my son, my firstborn.

Let my son go that he may *worship* me.

Prayer is part of our worship.

We pray toward the temple – not a temple made with hands –
but the temple where our Lord Jesus Christ sits in glory!
Indeed, by the power of the Holy Spirit we enter that temple.
We come into the holy of holies and we speak to the living God.

If you are wondering, “how do I do this?”

Then let me encourage you to begin with the Lord’s Prayer.

“Our Father, Who Art in Heaven”

and then spend a few minutes developing that –
like Psalm 89 did with God as the creator and ruler
of the heavens, the earth and the seas.

And so on, through the Lord’s Prayer.

Or pray through the Psalms.

I would suggest starting with one like Psalm 89 –
one that tells a story or has a clear pattern that you can easily see.

Start by literally “praying” the Psalm,
and then improvise on it!

Draw out the Christ-centered focus of the Psalm –
how Christ is the singer of the Psalm –
and then the petitions that flow from that.

So let me ask you:

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