

Easter Sermon 2017 *“Abba Father”*

This past week Christians from all over the world have been focusing on the events leading up to Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection (that we've been celebrating this morning). Over the next several minutes I'd like to focus our attention on one very specific application for each of us here this morning that is intended to transform our relationship with God and dramatically change our approach in coming to Him.

To lay the foundation for this transformational truth I need to take us all the way back to the very beginning of mankind to the Garden of Eden. As you likely recall God created this massive universe including our earth and then created Adam and Eve. And then He placed them in this incredible setting called the Garden of Eden. At this time there was tremendous harmony and a close relationship between Adam and Eve and God as well as all of the many animals God created.

In the middle of the Garden there were two very specific trees.

1. The tree of life
2. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now we don't have a whole lot of information about either of these trees. Some theologians debate whether these were real trees or just symbolic of deep truths. I believe they were both real trees as well as symbolic of deep truths.

The Tree of Life we see both here in the Garden and once again in the end of the Bible in God's glorious dwelling in Heaven. From this tree flows life in various forms. I believe this tree symbolizes our deep personal relationship that God has always desired to have with each and every one of us. It's the type of relationship where we trust completely in God and by faith follow Him always and seek His face. This tree typifies the type of relationship where we trust like a little child implicitly in God's good will for our lives. It's a relationship where we know without question that God loves us and we want to be with Him every minute of every day. It's the type of relationship where we walk and talk with God and enjoy each other's company.

The other tree: the tree of knowledge of good and evil represents us venturing off and doing life our way through our wisdom and strength. We think we know better or at least as well as God does and we can figure out life. It's not inherently an "evil" tree except for the fact that it represents not trusting in God to know what's right and good vs. evil in the world. If we really solely on the tree of life there really isn't any need for us to take from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because we trust that God will share with us everything we need to know to live life as it was designed to be lived.

God instructed Adam and Eve that they could eat of all of the fruit of the Tree of Life but they couldn't eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil for when they did everything would change for the bad, they would die. And I probably don't have to tell you how that turns out. Adam and Eve both ate of the tree they weren't supposed to and unknowingly at the time began a life of separation from God rather than in connection with God.

Genesis 3:15 (NIV) *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament you see God unfolding and working His plan to bring His people back to Himself. You see the first step in the pronouncement of judgment upon Satan when God declares: In other words, Satan, there is going to come a time in the future where a child born of a woman will destroy your power completely but in the process you'll inflict tremendous pain upon him (an obvious reference to Jesus' crucifixion).

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament you see God's plan unfolding to redeem his people back to Himself. He chose Abraham to be the father of a great nation, the Jewish people, and it was through this line of people that God would bring that son to redeem his people from their sins.

Throughout the Old Testament God often appears as their Rescuer and Strong Refuge, a Mighty God, their Everlasting King and often serves as their Judge. Their relationship can best be described as on again off again as they would get into trouble and run back to Him and He would rescue them and then begin the cycle all over again. Often God appeared distant and unapproachable and yet to a few individuals, He seemed to have a particularly close relationship with, such as Moses and King David. But to most people God was powerful and holy and not be messed with. Once the temple was established only one person, the high priest could come into God's presence in the Holy of Holies and only once a year.

But then Jesus was born and throughout his ministry he began to show a different approach to God. He began to talk about God's love and mercy and kindness towards sinners. And not only did Jesus teach it but he showed it through his actions and healings as well. He often got into trouble from the religious rulers because he didn't hang out with the "right" people, i.e. meaning them. Instead Jesus got a reputation for being a "*friend of sinners.*"

One of the aspects that was so strikingly different about Jesus was the way he talked to and about God. His favorite term for God was "*Father*". Now, this was not a term for God unfamiliar with the Jewish people. Many times in their history, as recorded in the Old Testament writings, God was referred to as their Father. But no one would consider directly calling him "Father". That would have been seen as disrespectful. They were very careful about how they would address God directly. In fact they had safeguards in place to ensure that they wouldn't call God directly by name for fear that they might mispronounce his name.

In fact, God is only referred to as Father 14 times in entire Old Testament. You can search from Genesis to Malachi and not find one individual who spoke directly to God as Father. But when Jesus came on the scene this changed dramatically. Jesus always referred to God as Father. The Gospels (just four books compared to the Old Testament's 39 books) record Jesus using "Father" more than 60 times in reference to God.

All of Jesus' prayers begin with "Father" except one, when he was on the cross with all of our sins placed upon him and Jesus cried out in anguish, "*My God, My God why have you forsaken me?*" And yet shortly after that, in Jesus' final words he returned to referring to God as Father when he said, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" (Luke 23:46)

When Jesus taught his disciples and us how to pray he gave us permission to call God "*Father*" with "*Our Father who art in Heaven hallowed by your name.*"

On one occasion, Jesus used a very personal word for God as Father. As he was preparing to go to cross and die for our sins Jesus used the term "*Abba Father.*" (*Mark 14:35-36*)

By using the term "abba" he revealed a whole new level of depth and intimacy in his relationship with God. Abba is an Aramaic term which began as "baby talk". Like today when mothers or fathers compete to try to get their baby to either say "mommy" or "daddy" this was what Abba began with. And then as time went on it expanded to what adult sons or daughters would call their fathers. Abba emphasizes the warm, intimate and very personal relationship which exists between a son or daughter and their father. A special bond that they have with no one else. It takes us back to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. It was that type of relationship with God had hoped to have with his children, but then sin entered in. And it's the type of relationship that Jesus displayed with His Father.

The other day, our grandson, Cian, had 3 friends over after school. And while standing around in the kitchen eating pizza, one of his friends who always calls me "grandpa" was goofing around with me and said, "Grandpa, so which one of us is your favorite grandson? Me, right?" I kind of burst his bubble

when I picked Cian over all three of them. I like all of Cian's friends, but Cian and Shaylee are always going to rate higher than any of their friends.

As a result of Christ's death on the cross for our sins, we now have the amazing privilege to become part of God's family through acceptance of Jesus Christ.

John 1:12 (NIV) *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*

And the Apostle Paul expresses that our adoption into God's family has always been part of God's plan and this plan gives him great pleasure.

There are only 2 other times that this very special and personal word "Abba" is used in all of Scripture.

Ephesians 1:4-6 (NIV) *In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*

Do you get that God wants you in His family and when you choose to enter into it by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there is great rejoicing in heaven. Remember that was the culmination to the 3 parables Jesus told in Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin the lost son. When all three were found it says that there was great rejoicing in heaven because that which was lost had been found. The lost child had returned home and it brought great joy to the Loving Father who had been waiting and hoping that this day would come.

There are only two other places in Scripture where this personal term, "Abba" is used. And they are both in reference to our approach to God as His children.

Romans 8:14-17 (NIV) *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

Once you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, God confirms your adoption into His family by pouring the Holy Spirit into your heart. And part of the Holy Spirit's role is to confirm to you over and over again that you're no longer a slave to God, but you're a full fledged child of God's. And take note: the Holy Spirit doesn't just speak to you or to God, "Abba, Father." He cries it out. This conveys that this is much more than just a doctrinal statement like you'd learn in the Bible college classroom or a Bible study. This an expression of emotion. Whenever someone cries out it's always filled with emotion and it is hear as well. Even the devil recognizes that God is God. But it doesn't move Him to affection for God whereby he'd cry out "Abba, Father".

I like how **John Piper** expresses this. He says, *"This testimony of the Spirit is not a premise from which we deduce that we are children of God, it is a power by which we delight in being the children of God."*

Did you notice that it's the Spirit that initiates and enables this crying out to God. He is always wanting to connect with the Father and so that's a real blessing to have that deep desire living and crying from inside of you.

The second place that "Abba" is used is in *Galatians 4:6* where it expresses nearly the same thoughts that Paul did in the Romans passage. (*Galatians 4:4-7*)

I want to end this time by showing you a video that I think captures well this concept of being adopted into God's family. It's from the most recent episode of Dancing with the Stars and features Simone Biles

who is a follower of Jesus Christ. You may remember Simone if you watched the last Olympics in which she won 5 total medals: 4 gold and one bronze.

Play the video.

Did you catch that Simon expresses that growing up she remembers always being hungry and afraid, but when her grandparents adopted her that all changed. That can all change for you as well if you're willing to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and be accepted in to God's family.

The other part that struck me was that after her grandparents legally adopted her they said, "*You can call us mom and dad now*". That's an Abba Father moment right there.

We're going to stand and sing our hymn of invitation right now. Perhaps you're like Simone and you don't have a relationship with your Heavenly Father right now but you can feel Him tugging at your heart right now. Why not fully surrender yourself to the Heavenly Father who wants you to become a part of His family. He's done what He could do by paying the penalty for your sins when he died on the cross and now it's up to you to respond and say, "Yes, Abba Father I want to become a child of yours."

If that's your desire I invite you to come as we stand and sing, "*Good Good Father*".