

Doubtless Thou Art Our Father

Heidelberg Catechism

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Bible Text: Isaiah 63:7-64:12
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For the scripture reading, we turn to Isaiah, chapters 63 and 64. Isaiah 63, beginning at verse 7, reading through the end of chapter 64. What we're reading in this entire passage is a prayer, a prayer that God's people make in Babylon in their misery and hardship. We're going to focus especially on verses 15 and 16 of chapter 63 and verse 8 of chapter 64. It will be profitable to keep our Bibles open to this passage in the course of the preaching this morning. Isaiah 63 verse 7.

7 I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. 8 For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not [or that must not] lie: so he was their Saviour. 9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. 10 But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. 11 Then he [this is the child of God] Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? 12 That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? 13 That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? 14 As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name. 15 Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? 16 Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting. 17 O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. 18 The people

of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. 19 We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.

1 Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, 2 As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! 3 When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. 4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. 5 Thou meetest [thou approachest] him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.

That's a little unclear, could mean we continued in sin a long time and we shall be saved or perhaps better, in God's dealing with his people there is eternity, he deals with his people continually and therefore his people shall be saved.

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. 7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. 9 Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. 10 Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. 12 Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

So on the basis of this passage of scripture, on the basis of many passages, that we have the instruction of Lord's Day 9 in the back of the Psalter, page 7 in the back of the Psalter, Lord's Day 9, where we begin our treatment of the first Article of the Apostles' Creed. This is what true faith believes.

Q. What believest thou when thou sayest, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; who likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence is, for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body; and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is your God? Who is your God? That is the most fundamental question that could be asked. The most fundamental question is not, who is Christ? The most fundamental question is not, who are you? The most fundamental question is this, who is God? Everyone in the whole world knows that there is a God and that he is God indeed, who alone must be worshiped and honored. The question is, who is God? Well, last week, with Lord's Day 8, we began to answer that question. First of all, we said that God is one God. That's who God is, God is one in being. There are not many gods. There's not the God of the heaven and the God of the earth, the God of the hill and the God of the valley. There's not the God of warfare and the God of peace or the God of the water and the God of the crops. No, there is one God. And furthermore, God, this one God is not composed of parts. He is a simple being. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." He is love. He is justice. He's the God of life, of all power and wisdom and knowledge, and all his attributes are one in him. He is the sum total of all infinite perfections. He is one in being. And second of all, as we said last week, God is also three. He is three in persons. God is not some cold abstract deity, a one-dimensional figure who dwells far off in some poor and lonely environment, existence all by himself. No, he is the Triune God. As we said last week, he is the God of grace and love and communion within himself as a Triune God. He's not in need of anyone or anything outside of himself, but he enjoys warmth and blessedness, the warmth and blessedness of family life within himself. He is one God, and he is also three in persons.

Well this morning, as we come to the first line of the Apostles' Creed, we learn something more about who God is. We learn something that is also, just as last week, so staggering and so amazing that this can only be something, that this is something that can only be truly embraced and received by a living faith and it's only true for those who have a true and living faith. Who is God? This God, the Triune God, is our Father. Beloved, do you realize how amazing that is, right? The Triune God who is pure spirit, who is eternal, who spoke everything by the word of his power, who holds the sun in his hand and causes the rays of the sun to beam on us, who's holding all the stars in his hands, who is the Almighty One, who is so far above us, and yet he is your Father. And what does that mean? Well, it means that you and I are part of the family of God. It means he has established an everlasting relationship of friendship with you as his child personally. He has adopted you into his family, and he loves you, and he cares for you, and he is working all things together for your good. And it means that he, as your Father, is always faithful to you. He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. He will always do you good. He will always love you. He will always do just what is necessary for your

eternal well-being. He will provide you with all things necessary for soul and body, and he will, as your Father, make all things turn out to your advantage. And we need to understand, he's not just a Father, but he is the Father. He is the sum total of all the perfections of what a Father is. He is the archetypal Father. Anything about the idea of fatherhood that is proper, that is good, and that is right, comes from the very fact that God himself is the Father. It is from God himself that we get the idea of what a perfect, glorious Father looks like.

The same kind of perfect, intimate grace and love and communion that the Father has towards the Son and shares with the Son in the Trinity is the same kind of perfect, intimate grace, love and communion that the Triune God has with respect to you. And what is so striking is that God, the eternal God, wants you to know this, right? He's given you a true faith. He's worked this true faith in us so that we know this, we experience this, and are assured of it. He puts this confession in our hearts and he puts these words on our lips so that we call him our Father. This assurance of who God is as our Father, that doesn't come from ourselves. This is not a confession that we have invented for ourselves. This is what God himself has worked within us because from a certain point of view, from all eternity, God has been our Father. He has, the scripture says, he has predestinated us unto the adoption of children in Jesus Christ and the result is that every single day again, whatever our circumstances, whatever our sorrows and griefs, whatever our joys, whatever our circumstances, God says to us through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, "This is who I am toward you. You have me always as your Father."

That's where the Apostles' Creed begins, all right? So last week we looked at the structure of the Apostles' Creed and that's where the Catechism begins, the Trinity, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but now this week, as we enter into the content of these articles, we begin here. I believe in God the Father Almighty. I believe in God my Father Almighty. I don't just believe that God exists. No, I believe in God. He is my Father. In him, I am able to put all my trust and confidence. That's what we look at this morning, and we're going to look at that especially from the viewpoint of Isaiah, chapters 63 and 64. So we take as our theme, "Doubtless Thou Art Our Father." We're going to look at two things, first we see that this is an amazing confession, and second we see that this is an encouraging confession.

So to understand this beautiful idea of who God is as our Father, which is the main focus of Lord's Day 9, I want to focus on Isaiah 63 and verse 16. "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting." And in chapter 64 verse 8 we have the same language, "But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand."

Now the first thing to point out about these words is that these words do not originally come from the mouths of God's people. Yes, I said this is a prayer that God's people make in the Babylonian captivity, but we need to understand the reality is this is a prayer that the prophet Isaiah puts on their lips already 150 years before they're in the Babylonian captivity. This is the word of the prophet. We must understand this is a

prayer that God himself gives to his people so that when the time comes, 150 years later, they might rightly know how to communicate with their God. And how does God teach his people to address him? Even in the Old Testament, God teaches them to address him as their father.

God says, "This is who I am. I am your Father," and that thought was exactly what God's people needed to hear, because God's people had just gone through the darkest days of their existence as a nation. You know the story. The Babylonian army under King Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem, came up against the whole land, came up against Jerusalem and destroyed the whole city. The houses were burned up, the farms were burnt up, everything was laid waste. In the course of the attack, three years, many people starved to death, women were raped, babies had their heads smashed against the rocks, children were cruelly put to death. This is real warfare. And then what's even more on top of it all, you might say, if we can even say this, but this is how it is, the temple itself was destroyed. The church itself, from all outward appearances, was destroyed. There was only a little remnant left, and they had been taken away to Babylonian captivity and there was only a few demoralized peasants left to tend the land. And you can imagine how the people were having a great struggle of faith. "If God is truly our God, why does he allow these things to happen? Why does he bring these things upon us? If God is our Father, why has this happened? Is this the behavior of a father?" Well, what we need to remember is that God had warned his people about this coming judgment. God told the people that it was their sins as a nation, it was their gross impenitence and wickedness that brought this misery upon them.

And yet, even in the midst of all these horrible, devastating circumstances that the people so justly deserved, what does God do for his people? He gives them this prayer and in this prayer, he teaches his people a few things. First, he teaches them to recall the tender mercies that he had showed them in the great days of old. He teaches them, "Remember what I've done in the past. Remember how I delivered you from Egyptian slavery. Recall the multitude of my lovingkindnesses towards you," that's verse 7, chapter 63, verse 7. Then he teaches them to confess their sins openly and freely, to own up to their rebellion and to acknowledge that they deserve the heavy chastening of the Lord, that's verse 10. But then in addition to all of that, he teaches the captives in Babylon who are fearing his name, he teaches them to continue to call him their father. He is their father. "Doubtless thou art our father." That's not first Judah's prayer to God, that's first of all the words that God puts in Judah's mouth. God says, "I have destroyed Jerusalem. I have vacated my temple. I brought great chastisement upon my people," but God says, "you must still call me your father because doubtless I am your father."

Now, that's beautiful when you understand what's going on. He teaches them to say, Thou, Lord, art our father, our Redeemer. Thy name is from everlasting. Thy name, the name father, the name Redeemer, it's from everlasting. Your name is unchanging. Who you are as LORD," capital letters, "You are the same every day. Who you were back when we were in Egyptian slavery and you brought us out thence, you are the same God still today in these present circumstances." God says, "I am your father. That's what you call me because that is who I am. I am your father."

Now this passage in Isaiah is special because, as far as I am aware, this passage is the boldest affirmation of God's fatherhood in the whole of the Old Testament. The idea of who God is as father doesn't really come into its own in the Old Testament like it does in the New Testament and that's because of what happens, right, from Old Testament to New Testament. First, God the Son takes upon himself our flesh and blood, and he becomes the incarnate Son of God and it's through his sonship to the Triune God, it's through his sonship that we come to understand more fully our relationship to God as his sons and daughters. And then in addition to that, it's not until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost that the idea of who God is as father really comes into its own, because with Pentecost, we receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. But nevertheless, that idea of who God is as father is present in the Old Testament. Already way back in Exodus 4 verse 22, God tells Moses to speak to Pharaoh with this kind of language. Exodus 4 verse 22, "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn." And in the next verse, God says, "And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn." So there you already have this idea of who Israel is as God's child. It's actually very strong language as well. In Jeremiah 3 verse 4, God says these words to his people, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?" And in Malachi 1 verse 6, God says these words, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour?"

So you have this idea of God as a father in the Old Testament, but in the whole of the Old Testament, it is this prayer in Isaiah 63 and 64 that perhaps speaks most boldly of God as the father of his people. Well, let's delve into that. Why is God the father of his people? What does it mean for God to be the father of his people? Well, he's the father of his people Israel in the Old Testament for the same reason that he's our father today. He's the one who chose his people in Jesus Christ. He's the one who chose them. He's the one who's redeemed his people through the blood of the lamb. He's the one who has adopted them, paid the price of adoption through the blood of his Son. And he's the one who's also begotten his people through the word of truth. He's the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt as a newborn child. God is called the father of Israel because he's the one who begot them as his children. That's what a father does, right, he begets. Within the Trinity, the Father eternally begets the Son. That's fatherhood. And outside of the Trinity, God is the father of creation in the sense that he brought forth this creation. And now God is also the father of Israel and Judah because he was the one who brought her forth, who begot her out of the land of Egypt. In fact, their deliverance from Egyptian bondage was quite literally their birthday. That was the beginning of their calendar. That was the beginning of their history as a nation. That was the day they were born when they left Egypt.

But not only did God beget his people, but God also brought Israel into his covenant. He received them into his communion and fellowship. He formed them as his children and as his family and he did that when he shared his thoughts with them. He shares his intimate thoughts with them, as a father does with his children. He did that at Mount Sinai, when

he gave them his law and his instructions for many things. And through their existence as a people, he also protected them. He provided for them and loved them. We read it in Isaiah 63 verse 9, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." It makes you think of Psalm 103, "as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him." That's how God is the father of his people. He sympathizes with them in their afflictions and sorrows.

Even at the very beginning of this beautiful prayer, reference is made to who God is as father. Notice verse 8, Isaiah 63 verse 8, "For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie," or children that must not lie. The point is these were God's children. Go to the book of Hosea. The book of Hosea emphasizes that theme very often. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." And all throughout their history God dealt with them faithfully as a father pities a child. He loved them. He provided for them and cared for them through the wilderness wanderings, during the days of the judges, during the days of Saul and David and Solomon and the divided monarchy. He was always treating Israel as his child, instructing her, blessing her, raising her up. That's what a father does.

And when Isaiah 63 verse 16 says, "Doubtless thou art our father," the idea is this: God has always been our father. He's proved it over and over and over again and he will prove himself to be our father in these circumstances also, meaning God will deliver his people from Babylonian captivity. That's what a father does. A father delivers his children from distress, though they have been very wicked and they have rebelled against him again and again and again. Nevertheless, "Doubtless thou art our father."

To get the idea, think of the New Testament parable of the prodigal son. Right, that son takes his inheritance and he spoils it in reckless ungodly living. He brings heaps of shame upon his family name and yet when he returns, how did his father behave? When he repents and returns, his father came running to him, embraced him and kissed him. That's what a father does. And here in Isaiah 63, you really have the Old Testament prodigal son, Israel as a nation. "We repent, O Lord, we have sinned." Isaiah 64, verse 6, "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. But now, O LORD, thou art our father."

Then in Isaiah 63, verse 16, we read, "though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not," and the meaning there is this, even though Abraham and Jacob, our earthly fathers, are ignorant of us, even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our earthly fathers, are unable to help us, or perhaps even the meaning is, they would be unwilling to help us because of how gross and wicked we are, nevertheless, God is our father. No point looking at Abraham and Jacob, our earthly fathers. No point praying to them for deliverance. Don't hope in them. Don't hope in your earthly fathers. They can't deliver you from Babylon, but hope in God. He is your father. That's Judah's amazing confession in Babylonian captivity. This is the confession God himself gave them, "Doubtless I am your father."

Well, beloved, that's our amazing confession as well. God is our father. What does thou believe? What do you believe when you confess, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?" Answer: that the eternal God, that eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is for the sake of Christ, his Son, my God and my Father. That's the confidence of every child of God, "God is my Father for Jesus' sake."

Well, how is he our father? In the same way that he's Judah's father. He chose us in Christ from before the foundations of the world. He is the eternal Father of Jesus and he is our father for Jesus' sake. Ephesians 1 verse 5, he predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to his good pleasure. He chose us in his love.

Second, not only did he choose us, but he also redeemed us through Christ. That's how he is as our father. He paid the ransom price. Just like in the Old Testament, God paid the price. The Passover lamb, the blood was shed, sprinkled on the doorposts, so that God redeemed his firstborn out of Egypt and he led them through the Red Sea on dry ground. So that's what God has done for us. Christ is our Passover lamb. Christ is our Red Sea through whom God delivers us and redeems us out of Egypt. Galatians 4 puts it this way, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman made under the law to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons."

And third, God not only has chosen us, not only has redeemed us, but God has also given us his Holy Spirit and by his Holy Spirit he's made us new creations. He has begotten us again unto eternal life, as Galatians 4 verse 6 puts it, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth his Spirit, the Spirit of his Son, into your hearts, crying, Abba." And the word Abba simply means father, crying father. God is our father, and as our father, he protects us, he provides for us, he cares for us, he lives with us, he loves us. In all our afflictions, he is afflicted. And that love of God, our Father, comes through expression, especially in sending Jesus to be our mediator and our sacrifice.

God was willing to give up so much for us, his children. He was willing to bear such a great cost for us and what is true is that that same love that God had for us when he sent Jesus to die for us is the same love he has for us today and day by day. So you don't have to turn to anyone else for help. Properly understood, you must not turn to anyone else, any other God, for help. Not Abraham, not Jacob, not any mere mortal here below. God is your father. That's an amazing confession. God, the Almighty One, the Triune One, who is pure Spirit, who is pure light and glory, he is my father.

Well, this confession is not only an amazing confession, it is an encouraging confession. We already touched on that, but in the second point of the sermon, I want to shift the attention away from verse 16, Isaiah 63 verse 16, back a verse to verse 15. Look at verse 15, "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory." So look down from heaven and look on us from your dwelling place. "Where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels," right? Where are your intense

feelings of compassion for us? Are they restrained? And then verse 16, "Doubtless thou art our father." The connection is this: it's because of the truth in verse 16 that the people pray the words of verse 15, right? It's because the people know God as their father that they dare approach him and ask him to look down upon them in that way, in verse 15. So they pray, "Look down from heaven. Behold from the habitation of thy holiness, thy holy habitation, and thy glorious habitation. Look down upon us, father. Look at our plight. Here we are in a land filled with idol worship. We're in Babylon. Our children, look at our children. They're being forced to forsake the Lord their God. They're being forced to eat meat offered to idols." Remember Daniel and his three friends. "Here we are by the rivers of Babylon in a dark and strange land, and they're mocking us, forcing us to sing a song of Zion. Look upon us, father. And look at Judah. Look at Jerusalem," right? This is 64 verses 10 and 11, "Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste." "Look at thy church. She is in a miserable state. Look down on us, father. Help us!" And they say, "Doubtless thou art our father. You alone are our father. We cry to you. Where is your zeal? Where are your compassions for us? Where is your jealousy? Lord, we know you are our father. Show thyself to be our father." That's what they're saying. It's very bold language but that itself is encouraging for the child of God in these circumstances. The people need someone to go to and they have someone they can go to. They have someone they can rely on. They know they are not alone. God is with them. He is faithful. Why? Because he's father. That title, that name is from everlasting.

And then the answer God gives is also encouraging. We didn't read that, that's the last two chapters of the book, and part of the answer that God gives in Isaiah 65 and 66 is this, "Many will be destroyed. The unbelieving majority of Judah will be destroyed. But I will keep a remnant. I will keep mine elect. I will preserve them and bring them back. I will fulfill my promises regarding the Messiah and the salvation of my people." And that's the answer he gives them and he causes them to look ahead to heaven and that sure reality that is in store for them.

Well, just as this was an encouraging confession for the saints in Babylon, it's also an encouraging confession for us today. That's what the Catechism is emphasizing in the second half of Answer 26, "the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is, for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father," and now this, this is the encouragement, "on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body; and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father." The Catechism speaks there about this world as a valley of tears. The people in Babylon captivity understood that, and we experience that in our own ways as well today. It's a valley of tears. From the moment of birth to the moment of death, this life is a valley of tears. There's suffering, there is anxiety, there is hatred, there is sin, there is corruption, there is death that surrounds us on every side. For some of us, our bodies are literally breaking down, our bones are falling apart. For some of us, there's the pain experienced in the loss of a loved one, an empty chair around the kitchen table. For some of us, there's the reality of the burdens at work

and the finances. Maybe some of us have children who have health concerns, or maybe they're trying to raise up children with anxieties at school or learning challenges. Maybe others of us have those loved ones who are walking in sin and it is a constant grief to our hearts and it's crushing us. And sometimes there's so much hardship, so much struggle and pain and we ask ourselves, why does this have to happen? Why does God do these things? It's a real question. There's the grief of our own sins. our sinful natures, and it makes us weep there too. We don't treat each other as we should. We yell, we cut down, we belittle, we mock. There's so much brokenness. Think about it this way. There are so many good desires and aspirations that we have in life that will never be realized. And we wonder why life has to be so hard. Tell that to the saints in Babylon. There's persecution. There's this acute awareness that we are unwanted in the earth. We are pilgrims and strangers. And what do we cry out? The child of God experiences this in his own way, in her own way. "Look down from heaven, O God. Behold from the habitation of thy holiness and thy glory. Where are you? Where is your strength? Where is your zeal? Where are your intense compassions and mercies towards me?" And yet in the midst of it all, in the midst of the sorrows and the spiritual battles and the pain and the heartache, the constant, what is constant in all of it, the encouraging reality in all of it is this: you always, you always can and must say, "Father, our Father, Jehovah is still my Father and Father knows best. This is my Father's world. He's got it in control.

"This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!"

He's Father, Almighty Father and I can't even fathom how almighty he is. There's trillions and trillions of stars in this universe that are light years apart from each other and God not only knows each one by name, but he's holding each one in its place. And that same God who keeps each star shining is also the same God who's in control of every single cell and every action in every cell of my body. And that same God who's holding it all in his hands is the God who cares for me. Who cares. And whatever he gives me in this valley of tears, he's turning it out to my advantage or else he would avert it, he would turn all evil from me, or he's going to work it for me because he's able to do it. He's able, I know he's able to do it. That's one thing. And he is willing to do it. He wants to do it. And you put those two things together and there's no other way, he's going to turn it to our good.

This is what I believe, right? This is the beginning of the Apostles' Creed. This is the faith God has worked within me. This is part of the salvation he's given me. This is what he wants me to know. He will provide me with all things necessary. The sickness God has given me, it must have been necessary for me. This strife in my family, it must have been necessary for me. I don't understand it. I don't understand why I have to be in Babylon

and the church is getting smaller and smaller and smaller, but I don't need to understand everything either. This is my confession. This is my confession of faith, and it starts like this, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." I do not criticize God for what he does. I do not try to dictate. I do not even try to change his will or change his mind. He is Father. Father is good. Father is loving. Father is compassionate. Father pities. Father understands and Father is wise. I will rely on who he is as Father.

Now I want to end with another song because this is just a song that is dear to me and as I looked at it all three stanzas make reference to who God is as Father. So let me just share it with you and then we'll be done.

"Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what he deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Ev'ry day the Lord himself is near me,
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares he gladly bears and cheers me,
He whose name is Counselor and Pow'r.
The protection of his child and treasure
Is a charge that on himself he laid:
"As your days, your strength shall be in measure"—
This the pledge to me he made."

And then the third stanza,

"Help me then in ev'ry tribulation
So to trust your promises, O Lord,
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation
Offered me within your holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when, toil and trouble meeting,
E'er to take, as from a father's hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land."

That's what they were saying in Babylon in their own way, and that's what we say too, day by day. Amen.

Let us pray.

O Lord, we thank thee that at the beginning of our study of the Apostles' Creed, this is the reality that confronts us, and this is going to color everything that follows and this colors everything in our lives, and this is the lens through which we must see everything. Write these truths upon our hearts, Lord, to know who thou art as our Father and to be doubtless about it. Bless this preaching to our hearts and to our lives. Strengthen us to live unto thee and join thy fatherly care in living to the honor and glory of thy everlasting name. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.