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“*What comes into our minds when we think about God may be a most important thing about us.*” (A.W. Tozer)

**JESUS MOST CRUCIAL IDEA? KNOWING *GOD* AS “*ABBA*”**

Jewish Scriptures focused on God as “the great *King* over all the earth,” recognized for his power that controls every action (Ps. 47:2f; 2Chr 20:6; Isa 14:26f). But Jesus doesn’t address God as King. Instead, he emphasizes a relational image most defined by its’ love. God is “our ***Father***”(170x! Mt 6:9; Gk: pater).

Indeed, the Gospels reveal that Jesus spoke Aramaic (cf Mk 5:41; 7:34). So to convey Jesus’ deep feeling in Gethsemane, they explain that his actual word for Father was the Aramaic “***Abba***,” the affectionate term a child used to express an intimate trust in their parent (14:36). The term we’d use may be Papa or Daddy. And Jesus’ use of it even led Paul to affirm that the Spirit within us enables us also to call God *Abba*, confirming that we are His children, freed from our fears and bondage (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:15f).
 By telling even the crowds to call God their “*Father*,” Jesus implied that the God worthy of our devotion is the *Abba* of everyone created in His image (Mt 5:1; 6:9; 23:1,9). And he magnified the prophets’ sense of God’s tender affection (Isa 40:11; 49:15f; Hos 11:4), teaching that He is the “good” Abba bent on freely giving “gifts” to us, running to us in our darkest hours, and calling us to display *his* own goodness in the world.

 (Mt 7:7-11; 5:43-48)

Yet devoted Jews had read that the Bible God’s approach for evil was to apply “eye for an eye” violence, kill folk who violate his rules & purity, and show “no mercy” to their enemies. They perceived that God even promised a Messiah to help them again destroy their pagan oppressor (now Rome) and regain power. (Lev 20:9-13; 24:10-23; Ex 21:24; 31:14f; 2Chr 15:13; Dt 13:6-11; 17:1-5; 18:20; 21:20f; 22:22-4 **/**7:2; 20:16f; 2:34; 3:6; 1Sam 15:3; 27:9;

 Num 31:17f,27; Jos)

But Jesus’ main teachings flowed out of his own sense of Abba and His ways. So, he angered them by rebuking every such violent remedy, and warning that their interpretation only leads to another round of destruction. He says, “***I*** tell you” different, and urges “the way that would bring you peace.” Thus he challenges, “Do *not* resist evil ones,” but “turn the other cheek, do good to them and love your *enemies.*”

Taking the risk of such love rested upon a faithful trust that the Source of our life actively cares for our own real needs. For in nature, Jesus saw portrayals of Abba’s grace that could free us from our anxiety.

 (Mt 6:25-34; 26:51f ; Lk 19:41-44; 9:51-56; 26:52; Jn 6:15; 18:36)

He spells out that the basis of loving our enemies is imitating what we find *Abba* is like. We do this “*because* ***He*** is kind to the wicked.” For observing that God provides sun and rain just as much to evil people led Jesus to urge that returning good to those who do us evil is *the* way “that you may be children of the *Father*.” This reality calls us to “be merciful just as your *Father* is merciful.” (Lk 6:27-36; Mt 5:38-48)

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Knowing Abba as the One who loves us perfectly also led Jesus to believe that all of God’s laws must be “made for (benefiting) man” (Mk 2:27), and thus reinterpreted whenever they oppose man’s well-being. For he explained that *love* is the one absolute. Thus it is loving Abba and every ‘neighbor’ that “***sums up***” *all* of the Scripture. Indeed, such love “is more important than all sacrifices.” For “*all* of the Law and Prophets ***hang***” on this call to love (Mt 7:12; 22:35-40; Mk 12:28-34).

Thus Jesus always chose interpretations that allowed practicing Abba’s love. For example, he sees this love is more important than the Bible’s purity rules. So he violated its’ calls to ostracize the “unclean” and defective, and urged *us* also to embrace those it said to shun (Cf. Num 5:1f; Lev 7:21; 12-15; 21:16-21; 22:3-6**/** Lk 5:12f; 8:40-54; 14:13). Similarly he opposed its’ laws about foods, and often violated its’ demands for no seventh day “work” when it met human needs, declaring that he saw Abba “work” and love even then.

 (cf Lev 11; Num 15:32-36; Ex 31:12-17; 35:2f **/** Mk 7:1-23; Mt 12:1-14; Lk 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn 5:10f,17)

In fact, Jesus was most known for an inclusive table-fellowship that welcomed all sinners rejected by the devout. And he justified such scandalous grace as simply imitating *Abba*’s own endless love that pursues the lost “*until* they are found.” For Abba’s love remains constant even when we are “prodigals.”

 (Lk 15:1-32; 5:18-32; 19:1-10; 14:7-24; 13:29)

Jesus agreed that what God wants is already “written” on our hearts (cf Rom 2:15). So what counts is not *professing*, “Lord, Lord,” but actually *doing* Abba’s loving will (Mt 7:21-27; 21:28-32). This meant that we need a “heart” that chooses to serve Abba over our money, which especially moves us to help the poor. Thus he can say, “Be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean” (Lk 11:41; 12:21,33; 6:20,30; 14:13f;

 18:22; 18:8f; 21:1-4; 16:9; 4:18; 3:11).

Knowing Abba’s reigning presence also caused Jesus’ main theme (over 100x!) to be experiencing *now* “the kingdom (or reign) of God” which “the Father is pleased to give you.” He explains that “seeking” this means having Abba’s “will be done” now, and is recognized by “the fruit it produces.” He admits, “entering” this reign seems “small,” yet is the “treasure” worth “everything” that one day will be huge.

 (Lk 4:43; 6:20; 12:32; 18:17; Mt 3:2; 6:10, 33; 10:7; 18:3; 19:14; 21:43; 13:31-46)

Jews expected this to come in a future violent day, and so asked when they would see it. But knowing Abba’s nature, he replied, No, it’s “*not* something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ *because* the Kingdom of God is *in your midst*” (Lk 17:20,21). And he noted that those with money and religion often missed this present joy, while ‘sinners’ were more open to “receive” it (Lk 18:4).

Another application of Abba’s reign as merciful was to enjoy his forgiveness, and pass that on to others. Jesus explains that keeping on forgiving others, not treating them as they do us, is based on the generous forgiveness that we find that Abba gives to us. Plus, Abba’s compassion feels the suffering of others, and God will even feel what we do for others as done unto him (Mt 9:2; 6:12-15; 18:21-35; 25:31-45; Lk 7:48f; 1:77).

Jesus sees that leaders of God’s religion reject him and Abba’s alternative way, and will bring Rome’s destruction on Jerusalem. Thus, he comes there to confront them, openly claiming to be the king that God promised, but on a humble donkey, not on a war-horse, to display that he brings the way of peace. Then, since their Temple was a selfish center of violent Jewish nationalism, he uses a bold purifying demonstration to call for a “house of prayer for *all* nations” that might repent of rejecting Abba’s ways.

 (Zech 9:9; Mk 11: 1-18; Lk 19:28-48; Mt 21:1-13)

He sees that they plan to kill him. But rather than flee to save his life, he is convinced Abba would have him be Isaiah’s martyred caring servant, as he confronts and lovingly absorbs the worst their sin and evil can do, willing to live out his own teaching of turning the other cheek. So, overwhelmed and still hoping for a safer way, their final rejection leads him to pray, Abba, I trust “*your* will be done” (Lk 22:24-31).

 Jesus never says his death is needed by God to satisfy his wrath, or to pay God for forgiveness. For he had often affirmed Abba’s mercy as simply forgiving with no such requirement, and that *we* too are like Him as we choose *not* to base our forgiveness & love on obtaining payment for sins against us. Indeed, being one with Abba’s heart, his last words affirm God’s forgiveness, even for Jesus’ crucifiers (Lk 23:34).
 He only says it “must” happen in order to “fulfill” the Scriptures about what occurs to God’s prophets, and their portrayal that suffering and death will precede the Spirit’s wider work (Lk 24:25f, 44-49; 11:47-51; 13:33f; 18:31f; Mt 26:54-6). Jesus knows that his body will be “given” for their sake (Lk 22:19,27), and he trusts his own message, that with Abba, it is the seed which dies that will produce much fruit (Jn 12:23,24).

He has faith that God would use laying down his life to complete his mission and bless the world. He even quotes from Psalm 22 where one who suffers will lead “all the earth” to “turn to the Lord”(Mt 27:46). For Jesus’ sacrificial demonstration of love invites us also to resist the world’s values and live as Abba’s children. It will be used to accomplish what only God can do, create a people who reflect *His* character.
 Trusting that even death won’t end his life or mission, he also anticipates that God will validate him at Easter, and enable him to remain with them in the Spirit. And his disciples’ Easter experience convinces them that God *has* made Jesus the promised Messiah, and validated his message of forgiveness and how Abba wants us to love! They believe God has acted in this unique servant to assure our hope that God (and His kingdom) *is* always working for good, and that love rather than death will have the last word.

Sharing in Jesus’ death, suffering, life, and trust in Abba, they can continue as “followers of the Way” of Jesus (Acts 24:14) who challenge evil, peacefully seek his kingdom, and imitate his emphasis on love and welcoming sinners as those made in Abba’s image. For a growing confidence in Abba’s love and enablement brings a “grace” that frees them to choose love, become what we are meant to be, and flourish in faithfully serving the One in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Nothing may be more vital in Jesus’ message than embracing his central representation of God as Abba, experienced not in power that controls us, but in tender love that woos and enables us. It is thus Abba’s presence that we sense in the gentle voice that keeps calling us forward toward love and our truest self.