
HOW CAN GOD HEAR US WAY UP IN HEAVEN? Michael B. Beaugh
Ps. 33:13-15; Ps. 139:7-10; I John 5:14-15 January 25, 2009

Jesus once said children are the model of a living faith. In Mark 10:15, he says, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." He was talking about the trust that seems to come naturally to children. Just as they trust their parents without question, so should we trust God as our Father in Heaven.

But I wonder if Jesus might also have been referring to the inquisitiveness of children. Children are really good at asking basic questions. Their questions are like starter questions on the path to a more mature relationship with God and a more mature understanding of their place in the universe. We ought to encourage them to ask questions. When we stop asking questions, we stop growing.

On the other side of the coin, we need to have good answers for our children. If we don't have good answers, or if we ignore their inquisitiveness, we will shortchange them and leave them debilitated in the area of spiritual growth. They will miss out on the wonderment that comes with a growing appreciation for an amazing God who creates us and then invites us to a dance in celebration of life.

What a wonderful basic question we are looking at this morning: "How can God hear us way up in heaven?"

On the surface, it is a simple question, but there is no simple answer for a child. We are here. God is there. How can God hear us? This is similar to another question children often ask: How can God hear everybody? One of our members shared this story with me. When her family got ready to move to a different state, her six year old wanted to know, "Will they have first grade?" Then she added, "Will God be there?"

Sounds so simple, and yet underlying these questions is the fear that God may not be there. God may not be able to hear us. Later, it might morph into the question that we start asking as teenagers, "Are we wasting our time praying?"

We need to give good answers to our children's questions. Apart from just answering our child's question by saying, "Of course, God can hear us", we want to address other back-story issues. We want to hear the underlying concerns and give a strong foundation for their later faith development.

The passages of scripture for today provide that strong foundation. **They affirm that God knows each one of us, God is with each of us, and so God hears each of us and responds.**

Psalm 33 has a wonderful way of affirming that God knows each of us, intimately. The psalmist says God looks down from heaven and sees everyone. That might seem a little scary, especially in verse 15 where it says God "observes all their deeds." But for the psalmist there couldn't be anything more positive. God didn't just create us and then mosey on along. God watches all the inhabitants of the earth. God delights in his creation and keeps his eye on each one of us. The sovereign God of all creation, the One who rules over the world, has time to keep his eye on you and on me and on your neighbor.

Jesus said it this way in Matthew 10:29. Not a sparrow falls that God does not notice it. His eye is on the sparrow. The hairs of your head are numbered. Not one falls out that God doesn't notice it. I can see that God doesn't have much more counting to do with some of us.

God knows your name and watches over you. Can you imagine the Creator and Sovereign Lord knowing your name? Knowing who you are? Because of this, the psalmist says, "*Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.*"

We want our children to know that God knows them, knows their needs, knows what is going on in their lives, and cares enough to listen to their prayers.

Psalm 139 says God not only knows us, but is an inescapable presence. God is with us, wherever we are, whatever we are going through. We cannot get away from God even if we try.

This is one of my favorite psalms. The first time I as a pastor ever visited someone with Alzheimer's, I didn't have any idea what I should say or do. He was the husband and father of a family that had been active for years in the church I had just started serving. I didn't know him or the family. They warned me that he would probably not respond in any way to my presence, but they wanted me to visit and pray for him. When I entered his nursing home room, my heart sank. I felt at a loss for words until God put on my heart to read Psalm 139. As I read these beautiful words, the family started crying, I started crying. No matter where we are, God is present, God is with us. We cannot escape God's presence, even if we are million miles away with a disease that takes our minds away. When I finished my visit, the family thanked me profusely for coming. They said the scripture was perfect and just what they needed to hear. Then they said something that crushed me. I was the first person from the church to visit this man. It was as if everyone had forgotten them. Psalm 139 reminded them that God had not forgotten them.

Think about this Psalm. It says if we go to heaven, God is there. If we go down to Sheol, God is there. If we take a trip to the other side of the

world, God is there. Think about it for children. If we go outside to play, God is there. If we go to bed in a dark room, God is there. If we open the closet, God is there. If the lights go out in the house, God is there.

The psalmist brims with a confidence that is hard to surpass. He exudes courage, not because he is brave, but because God is there with him. No matter where he goes, he says to God, *"even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast."* Just put out your hand, and God will take it. He will hold you fast.

I don't know how to convey this reality of God in any fully comprehensible way. But I am going to take a risk here. God is like the air we breathe. This is not original with me. The word for "spirit" in the Bible is the same word for "wind" or "breath". When God created Adam and Eve, He breathed into them and they became living beings. Jesus once said this life giving Spirit of God is like the wind. It goes where it will. You don't know where it comes from or where it is going.

Yes, God is in heaven. Heaven seems like a long way off. But God is as close as the next breath you take. "You are the air I breathe." Imagine that with every breath you breathe, you are breathing God into your lungs and into your soul.

So how can God be in heaven and also with us? Because that is who God is and no other is like our God. We cannot escape God's presence. We want our children to know that because there is life in knowing that.

So, finally to the question, "How can God hear us?" "Does God hear us?"

I John 5:14-15 gives a definitive answer. *"If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."* But that is not all. *"If we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him."*

This passage clarifies a big misunderstanding on the part of some. Some believe the Bible says that you get whatever you ask for. So when that doesn't happen, it must mean the Bible is wrong. We jokingly say we must not have been good enough to get what we asked for.

The key to prayers heard by God is "asking according to his will." The only way we know what to ask for is by knowing God's will, is by knowing God. It is all about a living relationship with God. Until we draw so close to God as to know Him, as we might know our father or our mother, we will not know what to ask for. A lot of praying will be a scatter gun approach, even off the charts. God gives us what to pray for. But how can we know God in this way? By growing in our relationship with God through reading God's word, listening to God, gathering with others who want to know God.

The biggest favor we can do our children is to help them know God. And then teach them how to pray. And to teach them that praying is a natural part of our everyday lives. Talking with God becomes the rule and not the exception.

We want our children to know that wherever we are, God hears our prayers because God knows us and loves us, and God is always, always with us. A Bible commentary says, "Prayer, rather, is a force that promotes restorative life, bestowed on us by a mercifully responsive God (5:16)."

The three Bible passages for today are worth marking in your Bibles. As I studied these again, they spoke to me in a deep way. I realized that I don't preach enough on passages like this. As I prepared for this week, and for this sermon, my wife went through a biopsy for potential cancer. For about a week, we were afraid it might be a return of the cancer she suffered from 9 years ago. Maybe it was just a coincidence, but I don't believe it. These passages assured me that whatever the outcome, God was with us, and knew what we were going through, and could hear our fervent prayers.

We do not believe that our praying changed the outcome, but we praise God that the results were negative. Our dance with God goes on. I thank God He is not imaginary! And I wish for those who don't know him, or who reject him, that they might become as little children.

