

One God, the Father Almighty

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[0 : 00] I won't get you to read the Nicene Creed in full every week, but we will read at least the relevant section for the Sunday. Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

Okay, that's it for today. Please do take a seat. Let us now go to that God that we just declared our belief in for help.

Let's pray to the Lord. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And so, Father, we pray that indeed you will give us today our daily bread. And you will also feed us spiritually from the food of your word. Sustain us in every way.

That we might not fall into temptation. That you would deliver us from the evil one. That we might live for your kingdom that goes on forever and ever.

[1 : 24] All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, many years ago, I watched a film called *Life is Beautiful*. I don't know if you've ever heard of it.

It's an Italian film that was nominated for several Oscars, including Best Picture. It tells the story of Guido, a Jewish-Italian father and his young son.

At first, all is well. Life is wonderful. As we are introduced to this naturally funny guy. But then, World War II happens.

And the Nazis come. And Guido and his son are taken to a Nazi concentration camp. So, what does this father do when they are surrounded by all kinds of horrors and evil?

To comfort and protect his son, he pretends everything that is happening is a game. He does all he can to convince his son that the guards are referees.

[2 : 28] There are rules to follow. And the prize is a real army tank. And so, shielded by his father's imagination and love, this little boy goes through the camp without ever fully realizing where he is.

It is both hilarious, as the father invents all sorts of outrageous ways to keep the illusion going. But also very poignant.

Because you see the father pouring every ounce of creativity, every drop of energy, every bit of himself into making his son feel safe.

But towards the end, everything turns bittersweet. In the final scenes of the movie, the camp is being liberated, but Guido has been caught.

A soldier is marching him to his execution. And the path takes him right past the box where his son is hiding, watching through a gap.

[3 : 42] Guido knows he is about to die. And he knows his boy can see him. So what does he do? He does an exaggerated, clownish march he invented earlier in the film to make his son laugh.

He plays the game one last time. So that the last image his son has of his father is not of a man being led to his death, but a man who is still being playful with his son.

And then he turns the corner and he is gone. It is both beautiful and heartbreaking.

And the reason why that final scene moves us so deeply, I think, is because it names something about our world. It reveals to us that the people who love us the most cannot always protect us.

Their love is real, but their power has limits. And it is that gap between one's love and one's power where our deepest anxieties lie.

[5 : 00] We feel it when we lie awake at night worrying if our future is secure without being able to do anything about it. We feel it when someone we love is afflicted with something we cannot fix.

We feel it when the world feels chaotic and those who love us cannot control the chaos. And we wonder, is anyone loving yet powerful enough to hold it all together?

Well, today, the section of the Nicene Creed we are studying will give us an emphatic yes. For the Nicene Creed says, we believe in one God, the Father Almighty.

That might be some of the most reassuring words we could ever say. For when we give voice to that truth, we are affirming we have someone who is both so big yet so kind watching over us. And this morning, that's what I want us to reflect on. I want us to spend time this morning pondering on the bigness of God, the nearness of God, and therefore, the sufficiency of God.

[6 : 27] So let's consider, first of all, the bigness of God. You see? Who is our God? According to the Nicene Creed, he is the maker of heaven and earth.

You can see that already in our Bible reading this morning. In today's reading, Jesus simply assumes God is the one who has created the birds of the air, who makes the flowers grow, who clothes the grass of the field.

And he does such a remarkable job of it, doesn't he? As Matthew 6 verse 29 to 30 points out, even when something is only here for today and gone tomorrow, God still creates it with such extravagant and loving care that even the most glorious of human kings cannot compare to it. Now, I know absolutely nothing about physics, but I've been told that if the ratio between certain nuclear forces were different by just one part in 10 million billion, there would not be any stars. Or if the earth wasn't sitting at its very precise angle, that is 23.5 degrees on its polar axis, there would be no life at all.

[7 : 56] That is the care and precision with which our God made this universe. And whether it is the stars or the grass, he made it all.

To say he made the heavens and the earth is simply another way of saying he made everything. Everything apart from God exists because God spoke it into existence.

That is how big God is. And actually, we need such a big God.

Because just imagine if there is no creator. There is a song by the singer-songwriter David Wilcox who captures this thought experiment very well.

Let me quote you some of the lyrics which should be on the screen. They taught us kids in school between the recess breaks that the universe just sort of fell together like a big mistake.

[9 : 01] It started with a bang that sent the pieces flying and then it cooled and twirled into dinosaurs and dandelions. It was a big mistake to have eyes that see, to have love like this inside of me, to have lips that smile as I swim your kiss, to have minds that will forever every part of this.

You see, David Wilcox gets it. If there is no maker, then our world will really be a very small and impoverished place.

Because all that we have just described, the precision of the stars, the extravagance of the flowers, the love you feel for your family, would be just the product of a random accident.

It's simply a big mistake. And if there really isn't anyone who holds this world together, no wonder everything is chaotic.

Because that will just be the nature of the world. But thank God the Bible says, otherwise, there is a maker.

[10 : 17] And everything he made is good. Not by accident, but by design. But notice the creed says something even more remarkable.

It doesn't just say God made heaven and earth. It says he is the maker of all things visible and invisible. Now, what does that mean?

On one level, it simply means the things you can see, the mountains, the oceans, your own body, he made them.

And the things you cannot see, the spiritual realities, the angelic powers and authorities, the forces that operate beyond what our eyes can perceive, he made those too.

They are his creatures, not his competitors. But actually, when the authors of the creed included that statement, they meant more than that.

[11 : 23] They also wanted us to understand God did not simply reshape something that was already there. He didn't work with pre-existing material, the way a builder works with bricks or a sculptor works with clay.

No, he made everything from nothing. Before he spoke, there was nothing but God. And then he spoke and everything else came into being.

that's what the psalmist in Psalm 33 declares. And that is just so amazing. Because if God could only create with pre-existing material, there would be limits to what he could do, wouldn't there?

Yes, he might be a brilliant craftsman, but he wouldn't truly be creator. But the Bible makes clear God alone creates out of nothing.

So if creation was a song, even the musical notes and the time signatures were made from scratch. He did not borrow pre-existing ones.

[12 : 46] And that begins to help us grasp how big God is. No one else is like this. God is in a class of his own.

There is no other God, no rival power, no alternative source. That's why the creed begins with that little word, one.

We believe in one God. And this is not just about maths. It's another way of saying there is none like him.

God's nature. scriptures, this is possibly the most fundamental thing you could express about God's nature. And it is also fundamentally good news.

Why? Well, imagine a world populated by many gods. And actually, you don't really have to, because that's the world God's people have lived in for most of history, and even today.

[13 : 53] In Old Testament times, the nations around Israel worshipped gods like Baal and Asherah. And in New Testament times, the Roman empire was more than happy for people to worship all sorts of gods as well.

In fact, the Romans would often say to the people that they conquered, you can keep your gods, no problem. We'll just make room for them. So people believe in a world filled with all sorts of different gods, some in charge of the sky, others in charge of childbirth, others over agriculture, and so on. But think about it. How might that affect the way you live? Well, it meant that at home, you might worship your family gods or the gods of your city.

But if you traveled to another city, you might very well worship the local gods there, just to be safe. It was simply good sense to pay respect to the god who supposedly watched over that region.

That was just how things were. But in such a world, your anxieties would be sky high, wouldn't it?

[15 : 21] You see, if there are many gods, then how do you know which one of them is responsible for your problems? And how do you know if they are able to get you out of it?

Maybe it's beyond your pay grade or your area of expertise. Perhaps your business is failing. Is it because you have neglected the ancestors because a rival has enlisted a more powerful spirit or god against you?

Or your child is sick. Do you need to move on from different healer to different healer, making offerings after offerings at different shrines because you haven't figured out whose jurisdiction this falls under?

Such a world is plain exhausting thing because it is so fragmented. There is no single throne to approach.

There is no one being who holds together all things. There is no one supreme enough to ensure the stability of our world. It is a world without rest.

[16 : 36] But thankfully, that is not true reality. That is why the Nicene Creed says we believe in one God.

In doing so, they are simply affirming what the scriptures say everywhere. Deuteronomy 6 verse 4, the Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Psalms 86 verse 10, for you are great and do marvelous things, you alone are God. Isaiah 45 verse 5, I am the Lord and there is no other.

Apart from me, there is no God. Indeed, Jesus identifies the Shema as the most important commandment in Mark 12.

Because that is who God fundamentally is. He is one. God is one. why back in Exodus 3, when God first reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush, and is asked his name, he declares, I am who I am.

[17 : 53] In other words, I am a one-off. I am not one among many gods. I am not part of a team. No, I am God and I am self-existing.

I am not dependent on anyone else. There is none like me. And so the universe is not a place where rival gods are constantly warring over who gets to be in charge.

For if there is one God, there is only one throne, only one maker, only one place to bring all of your life, only one place you need to go to cast all of your anxieties.

And that is good news, is it not? But the problem is sometimes we do live as if there are other gods. Now, we might not believe in all those Roman gods, but here is something to ponder. Do we sometimes believe that our work will give us all that we want in our lives as long as we work hard?

[19 : 08] Or perhaps do we sometimes sacrifice church in the pursuit of good grades? Or do we look to our bank accounts to provide ultimate peace of mind?

When you look to those things, you are really believing in many gods. And you end up just as anxious and exhausted as someone running from shrine to shrine because you are serving many masters and not one of them is big enough to hold your whole life together.

But the creed says it doesn't have to be that way because we believe in one God.

And every good thing we are looking for, security, identity, beauty, love, purpose, he holds them all together in himself.

As Psalm 16 verse 4 to 5 puts it, those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips.

[20 : 34] Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup. You make my lot secure. Because our God alone is that big.

God is the God we knew about God, we might still be afraid. Because power without love is terrifying.

And almighty God who doesn't care about you is not good news, it's the worst news imaginable actually. Yet that is not what the scriptures tell us and it's not what the creed tells us.

Which brings me to our second heading for today, the nearness of God. Come back with me to our Bible reading for this morning, Matthew chapter 6.

And did you notice how Jesus keeps referring to our big God? Let's take verse 26 for example. Look at the birds of the air.

[21 : 44] They do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Or take verse 32. For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly father knows you need them.

Over and over again, Jesus keeps calling God by one particular name. Father. God is God the Father Almighty.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty. In fact, did you notice that the creed, before naming God as creator, names God as Father?

that is not accidental. That is intentional. But why? Because that is who God at his very heart is.

Think for instance of that famous verse in John 14, which we looked at recently. I am the way, the truth, and the life, Jesus says. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[23 : 09] Now, did you notice how Jesus puts it? Jesus didn't say, no one comes to the creator except through me. Nor did he say, no one comes to the ruler except through me.

No, he says, Father, because that is who God essentially is. Or think about it this way.

Did God exist before he created the world? The answer, of course, is yes. But if that is so, that means creator cannot be God's most fundamental identity.

So what is it? Once again, Jesus answers it for us. Because Jesus tells us about that moment before God created the world.

what was he doing? Look at John 17 verse 24. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

[24 : 27] Did you spot it? Before God created the world, he was a father loving his son.

That is the essence of who he is. And so when he creates, he creates as father.

When he rules, he rules as a father. That's why the creed says he is father before he is maker.

But because he is father, that is why he is also maker. You see, God didn't make the world because he was lonely.

Rather, he has always loved his son from all eternity and their life together was infinitely full, joyful, and complete. So why did he bother creating other things then?

[25 : 32] Because that is what overflowing love does. Think about it. Whenever you discover something wonderful, maybe a beautiful place or a great meal or a YouTube video that you just absolutely love, what's the first thing you want to do?

You want to share it with someone. Goodness loves company. And God's goodness is so full so rich, so abundant that it naturally pours itself out.

He creates a world so that there might be others who can taste the love between the father and the son. In other words, creation itself is a fatherly act.

It is not a display of raw power, but the overflow of a father's generous heart. Now at this point, I need to pause and acknowledge that this morning, not everyone who hears the word father will necessarily hear it as something good.

Perhaps you had a father who was absent or authoritarian. perhaps your father evokes feelings of disappointment or resentment in you.

[27 : 00] But as one theologian helpfully puts it, God's fatherhood is not human fatherhood thrown onto the screen of the heavens and given infinite dimensions.

Human fatherhood is meant to reflect God's fatherhood, not the other way around. For as Ephesians 3 verse 15 puts it, he is the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

And as Jesus makes clear, our heavenly father is fundamentally a loving father. But how do we know that? How can we be so sure we're not just projecting what we want God to be like?

Answer, because Jesus shows us. His whole life is a window into the father's heart. Think about the very first moment of Jesus' public ministry, his baptism.

As he comes out of the water, the heavens open, and the voice speaks, you are my son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.

[28 : 23] Now pause and listen to those words carefully, because they tell us something profound about what this father is like. Notice, before Jesus has ever preached a single sermon, performed a single miracle, his father declares his love.

You are my son. I love you. I am pleased with you. I delight in you. This is a father whose love is not based on performance.

It is given freely, spoken first, declared before anything is accomplished. Oh, come with me to the last moments of Jesus' public ministry.

Think about the night before the cross. Jesus is in agony. He knows what is coming. And what does he do? He prays, Abba, Father, everything is possible for you.

Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. Do you hear what's happening there? He calls God Abba, the most intimate personal name for a father.

[29 : 51] And in the same breath, he submits to his father's will, even though that will lead him to the cross. Intimacy and authority are held together.

this is not a cold, distant God issuing orders from on high. And it is not an indulgent father who never asks anything hard of his children.

This is a father who is close enough to be called Abba and yet big enough to be obeyed even when the cost is everything.

And even on the cross itself, Jesus' last recorded words in Luke's gospel are father into your hands I commit my spirit.

He dies the same way he lives, trusting his father. Because even at the end he knows whose hands are holding him.

[30 : 59] That is the father the creed is talking about. Not a projection of our human fathers with all their failures and limitations, but the God whom Jesus knew, trusted, obeyed, and loved from his baptism to his death and beyond.

And the extraordinary thing is this is the father that Jesus invites us to know. This is the father who showed us the depth of his love.

He gave his own son for us. This is the father who also showed us the extent of his power. He raised his son from the dead. The cross shows us he is near, near enough to enter our darkest moment.

and the resurrection shows us he is big, big enough to reverse the worst thing that could ever happen. Now this is the father we can know as our heavenly father through Jesus who has opened the way.

And that makes all the difference in the world. Which brings us to our third and final point, the sufficiency of God.

[32 : 26] Come back with me to Matthew chapter 6. Because here, Jesus takes everything we have been saying about God's bigness and God's fatherhood and he draws a breathtaking practical conclusion.

Verse 25, therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

And we ask, why not Jesus? Well, because verse 26, look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them.

Are you not much more valuable than they? Or look at verses 31 and 32. So do not worry saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear?

For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them. Do you see what Jesus is doing?

[33 : 36] In each case, he is taking the two things that we've been considering this morning, God's creative power and God's fatherly love and he is holding them together.

He is saying your father, so that's your relationship with him through Christ, who happens to be the one who feeds the birds and clothes the fields, so he is the maker who sustains his creation, knows what you need, so he is near paying attention to you.

And then Jesus draws out the implication. He says, if that is your father who cares for the birds he made, how much more will he care for you whom he also made.

And that is exactly what the creed is trying to teach us when he calls God the father almighty. You see, the word behind almighty is the Greek word pantokrato.

And it means more than simply very powerful. It means the one who holds all things. The one who sustains, upholds, and governs everything that exists.

[35 : 06] And do you notice how beautifully that fits with what Jesus is saying here? The one who feeds the birds and clothes the fields is not merely powerful, but your father almighty.

He is like a father holding a newborn child. He is infinitely stronger than that child, yet infinitely gentle towards that child.

The strength is entirely in the service of the love. That's what it means for God to be father almighty. He holds all things the way a father holds his children, firmly, tenderly, and with their flourishing in mind.

everything he gives you, he gives freely. Because this father doesn't need anything from you.

He is the source of all that exists. Remember? So he doesn't need your worship to feel better about himself. He doesn't need your offerings or your service to keep himself going.

[36 : 20] No, when he cares for you, he does so out of pure generosity because he has nothing to gain and everything to give.

So my brothers and sisters, here's what I want to ask you this morning. Where will you look to for help? Will you run from shrine to shrine whether those shrines are the old ones of popular religion or the new ones of career status and relationship?

Or will you be like the psalmist in Psalm 121 who looks to the hills and to the mountains where people often worship other gods and say my help comes from the Lord the maker of heaven and earth.

Will you be a Nicene Christian and say I believe in God the Father Almighty. How will you know? Well Jesus tells us in Matthew 6 verse 33 He says you are a Nicene Christian when you seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

[37 : 38] He says you are a Nicene Christian when you bring your anxiety about your child's exams to the Father before you bring it to the tuition center. He says you are a Nicene Christian when you refuse to make romance ultimate because only the almighty can bear the weight of your deepest hopes.

He says you are a Nicene Christian when you choose to be generous with your money because you trust that the maker of heaven and earth can provide what you need. For when you truly believe in God the Father Almighty you will seek to fulfill his agenda not yours and trust him with the rest. You will live in the sufficiency of God because you know as the psalmist does that he will not let your foot slip he who watches over you will not slumber.

He is pantocrator. So my friends let's bring everything home. Today we have learned that our God is one God so there is no rival power you need to fear.

Our God is the Father so his heart towards you is love. Our God is almighty so his love is backed by sovereign sustaining all sufficient authority and our God is the maker of heaven and earth of all things visible and invisible so nothing absolutely nothing falls outside his care.

[39 : 36] So today will you trust him? Will you seek first his kingdom? Will you bring your anxieties to your heavenly father and leave them there?

I'm going to give you a few seconds now to talk about that with your heavenly father and then we'll pray together. father your word says that you are the one who makes the flowers of the field grow in such splendor that not even Solomon can compare you are the one who closed the grass of the field which is here today and gone tomorrow so how much more will you care for us so help us to place our faith in you help us again to remember that you are our heavenly father the father almighty the one who holds the whole world together and Lord if right now our world is feeling a bit shaky and fragile perhaps even falling apart we pray that we would run to you because we know that you alone are sufficient to hold us during such times and help us to keep trusting in you not living for our own little kingdoms not living for all those so called gods that do not really have any power at all that are just empty but help us to put all our trust and to live solely for you and you alone we pray all this in the name of Christ Amen