

THE “OUR FATHER”

Luke 11

“Our Father, who art in heaven.” *What does this mean?* With these words God invites us to believe that He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence, we may ask him as dear children ask their dear father.

“Our Father.” That can seem to us like just the natural way to address God. But that is often because we live in a world where God is seen usually as a friendly, bearded old man who resembles Santa Claus. That God may be nice enough, but what good is He for us?

When Luther wrote the words of the catechism 500 years ago, many people saw God as a fearful judge, ready to punish and condemn people. That is why they looked to the saints, especially Mary, to help them. But in the Lord’s Prayer Jesus teaches us that we can call God “Father.”

The problem for us is that we forget that we pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven.” This isn’t just any Father. This is the Father who is all powerful and all knowing. He is God Almighty. Being in His presence is like standing on the edge of a 1,000-foot drop with no guard rails, standing next to a transformer with 100,000 volts, looking into a nuclear reactor, watching a F-5 tornado go by. Fear of God is a good thing, but otherwise what good is a God who is kind and approachable, but really powerless to help us. No wonder God can seem so irrelevant in our lives today?

But He is our Father in heaven. Nothing is too big for Him. And that almighty God nevertheless chooses to be so intimate with us that He wants us to call Him, “Father.”

“Hallowed be Thy name.” *What does this mean?* God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also. *How is God’s name kept holy?* God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

“Hallowed” is an old English way of saying “Be holy.” “Holy” the word brings to mind the idea of making no mistakes. It often can have a negative connotation when we talk of “Holy Rollers,” people who think they are better than the rest. But holiness isn’t just sinlessness and perfection. It means “other.” God is “other” than us. He is not part of our created world. That was a key concept in the Old Testament when seen in the context of pagan religions in which God is a part of the universe or even God is ultimately the whole universe. That is still the understanding in all religions except Christianity, Judaism, and Islam which get the idea of a “holy” God from the Bible.

“Holy be Your Name.” Names for us are often just to identify, so the right child can be called on, the next waiting to be seated in a restaurant, or the right person to see the doctor next can be found. But in Jesus’ time your name said something about who you were. Often it was a confession of faith. “Elijah” means “The LORD is God.” “Nathaniel” means “Gift of God.” “Jesus” means “He saves.” God’s name, given to Moses through the burning bush, is “Yahweh,” which means “I am who I am.” God and His name are holy, but we pray that we treat His name that way in our lives.

“Thy Kingdom Come.” Thy kingdom come. *What does this mean?* The Kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. *How does God’s kingdom come?* God’s kingdom comes to us when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

“Kings” have a negative connotation to us except when they are in fables like children’s stories or The Lord of the Rings. Most of the Declaration of Independence is an attack against the King of Great Britain. But in Jesus’ time having a king was a good thing. Kings kept the peace, built things like roads, city walls, and irrigation projects. So it is a good thing that God is our king.

“Your kingdom come.” What we are praying is that we be a part of that kingdom. The spiritual hymn, “*The Gospel Train*” says:

*The gospel train is coming
I hear it just at hand
I hear the car wheels moving
And rumbling thro' the land
Get on board, children
For there's room for many a more*

God’s Kingdom is like the train that keeps on going. Nothing can stop it. It goes on with or without us. So Jesus urges us to jump on board, to each day join with God and His Kingdom.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” *What does this mean?* The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also. *How is this done?* God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will.

What is God’s will? We look at things in this world and ask, “How can God let that happen?” People will confidently say about things, “It is God’s will, but how do they know?” God has let us know what His will is—that all come to the knowledge of His Son Christ Jesus and be saved. But we get bogged down in other things like winning games, making more money, living more comfortable lives, and getting more recognition. What goes on in heaven in

the presence of God is no different from what God is doing here on earth among us. He is leading people to Him and we can have the joy of being a part of that.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” *What does this mean?* God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

Luther lists so many things that God provides us. The “daily bread” that Jesus talks about is not so much a reference to all we have, but to what we need. Bread was to people in Jesus’ time like rice is to people in the Orient or potatoes used to be for the Irish or Germans. It is the basis of every meal. In Jesus’ time if you cooked something, it was put in a common pot while you broke off pieces of bread and used them as your eating utensils to dip and scoop food from the pot. Daily bread for many of the people Jesus taught meant getting enough to not go to bed hungry. A missionary our student group worked with in Mexico described how before returning to Texas after work day, they took the leftover ice water and instead of pouring it out on the ground, let the local children line up and take turns drinking what came out of the cooler. For these children to have cold, clear water was a luxury. That is what “daily bread” is. God giving us each day what we need.

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” *What does this mean?* We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

Why wouldn’t we ever want to forgive someone else? Jesus went to the house of a respected member of the community. A woman, a known “sinner,” came and washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them off with her hair, and poured ointment on them. The host and his friends were horrified. How could Jesus let this awful woman do this? Jesus knew their thoughts. He compares the lavish love to what He received from the host. His feet were not washed and he received no ointment. Now if that sounds picky, doing those things is just common courtesy to a guest like taking their coat is today. The woman, by contrast, showed great love. Why? She knew how great were her sins and how greater was Jesus’ forgiveness. The host never saw the forgiveness from Jesus because he didn’t think he needed it.

When we realize how great our sin is, then we can see how even greater was Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross. Then we want to forgive others.

“Lead us not into temptation.” *What does this mean?* God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.

We don't pray, "Keep us free from temptation," but "lead us not into temptation." James tells us, "God tempts no one." However, He does let us face it. The temptations will always be there. The only way God could make us avoid them is by turning us into robots who do nothing on our own. God promises that He will never allow the temptations to be too much for us.

"But deliver us from evil." *What does this mean?* We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven.

Many newer translations of the New Testament say that this petition reads. "Deliver us from the evil one." Evil is not something out there we just make up in our minds. It is not just material for horror films. It is very real. We can't keep it out of our lives through positive thinking. Only God can rescue us from it.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and glory, forever and ever, Amen. *What does this mean?* This means that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven and are heard by Him, for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen means, "Yes, yes, it shall be so."

For some of you this part may seem to not belong. The Roman Catholics and Orthodox didn't use it because it wasn't in their Bibles. During the time of the Reformation, copies of the New Testament in Greek were found with this ending. Those copies were earlier than the sources used the older Bibles in Latin and Greek, so Protestant churches added this. Later near the 20th century scholars found even earlier copies of the New Testament without this ending. We don't need this ending, but it is a good opportunity to give praise. What is most important is the "Amen." This means what Jesus taught us is certain.

It is that certainty about God that led Abraham to make His request to God about Sodom and Gomorrah. It is that certainty we have when we hear Jesus say, "Ask, and it shall be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be open unto you." It is that which moves us each and every day to pray.