



OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:9-10

We have a great vision of being a gospel-centered, city-renewing church. We've set our mission to renew the city through city groups by making disciples. If you've been here the last few weeks then you're probably a little overwhelmed, if you're taking it seriously, but there's more. It's not enough to state great things, or even attempt great things, *we must ask for great things*. Jesus said: "Ask anything in my name and I will do it" (Jn 14:14). The Lord's Prayer tells us why, what, and how we should ask. It is Jesus' guide to prayer. Each week we'll take a phrase from the prayer and look at it closely. This week *why* we pray comes from—"Our Father in Heaven."

Our Father

There are two reasons why we should pray bound up in the initial phrase of the Lord's Prayer: "[Our Father who is in heaven](#)" The first reason is in the words, **our Father**. When we address God, as "father" what are we meant to think of? Some of us might import notions from our earthly fathers. To some that makes God a "buddy" or doter who lets you have whatever you want. No real guidance. Present but lenient. The word "Father" here comes from the Aramaic word "Abba", which some people say means "Daddy" or "Dad." I have some friends, when they pray, say something like: "Dear, Dad. Thanks for being a good Dad." They call God, Dad. To others father might mean a distant disciplinarian, a lawgiver, with firm rules. Absent. Intolerant. What did Jesus mean when he prayed "Our Father"? Did he see the Father as Present or Absent? Lenient or intolerant? Or, perhaps, he's a blend of the two! Let's see. God first appears in Bible as a father when Moses walks into the court of Pharaoh and boldly announces God's command: "[Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"](#)" (Ex 4:22). God takes the place of Father and Israel his son. What kind of father is he? Well, He gets them out of trouble, slavery. Then leads them through the Red Sea onto the Promised Land. But, then, on the other side of the sea, he gives them a law, filled with regulations and moral codes. Is God a blend of our fathers? God is not a blend; he is better than a blend. He redeems our categories for father—present or absent, lenient or intolerant. He is a **Rescuer**. He rescues us...but from what? For starters, he rescues us from our petty perceptions of him as a Father. We've imported imperfect notions of father into Him. We expect him to be like our Dads or the opposite, but he's better. He's perfect. Our fathers were never meant to be perfect, to live up to our expectations. But we act like they should have. How often do you hear this: "I got that from my Dad." In other words, Dad FAIL. My father has a keen attention to detail. Growing up, he knew every misplaced sock. Now, he likes his coffee just right. Yeah, annoying Starbucks guy. So I have this coffee cup, I just love, *Intelligentsia*. It went missing for a few days. I was getting distressed. Then I realized; it must be in Kelly's room (she lives with us). But I'm not supposed to go in there...but the coffee cup is in there! I blew off her privacy, and when she wasn't home, I went in and retrieved it. Later, she busted me...so I kind of apologized but I told her the cup is off limits! Attention to detail or borderline obsessive? I got it from my Dad. It's his fault. **No, you got that from your heart**. We are so quick to shift blame, but God the Father loves us enough to show us the mirror,

to hold up his law to confront us. As the **lawgiver** he loves us enough to go deep, to expose not just our behavior but what's behind it, our idolatry of things, relationships. His law shows us the problem isn't with our dads; it's with us. It's not our fathers; it's our desires. Luther: an idol is whatever your heart clings to most, what you most desire. Remember that attention to detail thing? Yesterday we had my daughter's sixth birthday. About forty (10) more kids came than my wife told me. They took over my house. Worse, they were all doing crafts, with scissors, glue, paper, and they are all 5-6. Plus they got to decorate cup cakes, with sprinkles...everywhere. Inside I was freaking out. Inside I wanted the kids quieter, the house was cleaner, the people gone sooner, and the parents to stay and clean. My domain was disturbed, details out of place, and my introvert was withering up and dying. You might say control became an idol, what I desired most. I was obsessed with control, not trusting that God was in control, even over the sprinkles! As lawgiver, God holds up the mirror and shows us our heart, but he isn't just a lawgiver; he's also a **liberator**. He offers us liberation from the illusion of control. He offers us liberty from daddy-bound conceptions of him. He liberates us from idolatrous demands of our relationships, fathers and people at parties. **God redeems our categories. He redeems our demands people be what only he can be.** How does he do it? **A second exodus.** Matthew applies this statement to Jesus: "Out of Egypt I called my Son." He's referring to Jesus' return from Egypt, as a child, to begin his rescue plan for Israel (Matt 2:15). He grows up keeping the law perfectly. He sets his face to Jerusalem, where he will deal with our demands and idols. How? **At the cross, God the Father blows our categories wide open. The lawgiver takes our sentence. The perfect lawkeeper, the one innocent Israelite, slain for the guilty. At the cross, the lawgiver becomes the liberator!** Jesus leads us out of the slavery of our idolatrous desires, taking ungrateful, demanding slaves and making us sons with new desires. Content in our slavery, he threw his strong arms around us, and on the pain of death he lifts us out of our sin, kicking and screaming, to liberate us into his thrilling, perfect love. The Father starts a new exodus in Christ. He makes the temporary exodus permanent. **And because of this Jesus prayer becomes our prayer; Jesus father becomes "Our Father."** Our father in heaven hallowed, revered, glorified be your name! This isn't just the Lord's Prayer; it is Our Prayer, the Church's Prayer, the prayer of a new Israel. Why should we pray? **Because we get to, because we have a Father who has loved us more than any earthly father could, because we have a new Father.** Because "our Father" is our Liberator.

Heavenly Father

A second reason we should pray is hidden in Our Father *who is in Heaven*—our Heavenly Father. How is he in heaven? Does Jesus conceive the Father strolling the clouds? There are two meanings for "heaven" in Scripture—the place of the stars *and* the place of God. The reign of God to be more specific: **"Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool" (Isa 66:1).** The universe is his cosmic temple. This imagery is all over the Bible, and its telling us that heaven is his domain, the place of his reign. Our Father in Heaven refers to the place of God's reign, his kingdom. *His kingdom is the realm where he reigns.* It was in Israel in the temple, then it moved to Jesus. When Jesus showed up he said repent and believe the gospel, the kingdom of God is at hand (Mk 1). Wherever the king



goes, there goes the kingdom. Demons cast out, people healed, marginalized restored, sinners saved. He turned everything upside down. When we pray to our Father in heaven, we're to **ask**: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10). We're asking for everything to be turned upside down. We're asking for the justice of heaven on earth, for his **righteous judgment**. God's righteous judgment is social and spiritual. He frees the captive, gives sight to the blind, heals the brokenhearted. Why isn't there more justice? Because we're not close enough to injustice to pray. **If we're not close to injustice we wont cry out for justice**. Join your city groups in the projects to show them God's mercy and justice. Check out the webpage. Feed the poor, love the marginalized. **Social justice is true justice but it is incomplete justice**. In Austin, people want social justice not complete justice. God has a bigger agenda. When Jesus teaches us to pray your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, he's teaching to ask that the future would come into the present, that the city to come would arrive in the city that is. With that city comes a judgment. Revelation 20 shows us the great white throne, where all are raised from the dead to stand judgment before the Heavenly God. There, salvation is an aspect of the judgment, those who trust in Jesus as their Rescuer are liberated into a new creation. For them God is Father. But judgment also falls on all who rebel against his kingdom, those who have insisted on serving other idols, like control. For them, God is not Father; he is Judge and righteously banishes them to the Lake of Fire. Heaven on earth comes with complete justice. That justice can fall on Christ or on us. If we believe this, we will ask God to rescue our friends and neighbors. If we are unmoved by this, then we aren't close enough to sinners. **If we're not close to sinners, we wont pray for their salvation**. If we aren't close to injustice, we wont pray for justice. God the Father says—ask! "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This a plea for social and spiritual justice. Its asking for judgment to come sooner, for the kingdom to come and make all things right. Will we ask? Will we pray God's kingdom come? Will we become a praying church? Through the Lord's Prayer, our prayer, we get to join the rescue mission. Heaven is overlapping with earth, and those who take Jesus in, who ask for his exodus, who pray his prayer, will enter his kingdom. When the kingdom comes it turns everything upside down. Justice for injustice, slave to son. Pray for the nations; pray that the cities of this world would become the cities of our God. ASK the Father that his kingdom would come, on earth, in Austin, in Montreal, in Kampala, in Chiang Mai, as it is in heaven. **If you want to rebel against injustice pray for justice**. Do prayer walks around your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors by name. Walk Town Lake or go to the top of Whole Foods and pray his Kingdom Come, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Pray for entire nights as city groups. Pray for justice. Pray for salvation. So when we join in Jesus prayer, it isn't as though we are saying "Hi Dad" but rather "Can I join your revolution, can I follow after your Son, can I take up his cross, and turn the world upside down with the grace of Jesus? (NT Wright) But before we rush off to do kingdom work, lets slow down and ask: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."