

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Matthew 6:9

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

We are in the middle, the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, looking at the Lord's Prayer. And the Lord's Prayer is here, in the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, because prayer is the heart of Christian ethics. The Sermon on the Mount is the heart of Christian ethics and prayer is the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. Without a well-formed, properly ordered, fervent, persistent prayer life, our faith is deeply defective. For, as Calvin has said, prayer is the principal exercise of faith. Last week we looked at the preface: Our Father in heaven. Today we will start looking at the six petitions which make up the prayer.

It has often been noted, correctly, that the first three petitions focus on God – his name, his kingdom, his will --- and the second three focus on us – our daily bread, our forgiveness, our being delivered from evil. It's a basic, but very important, observation. The shape of the prayer is the shape of Christian piety. And the very structure of the prayer displaces, it removes man from the center. It levels, it pulverizes our hubris, our egoism, and our self-sufficiency. The very fact that we need to pray, to petition God on this matter, shows, as the Westminster Larger Catechism says: our utter inability, our lack of any disposition, to honor God aright.

This is why our catechisms also say we are praying for God to *enable us* and others to glorify him. Prayer is the language of beggars, of the spiritual disabled, of the lowly, of the poor in spirit. The Lord's Prayer is then (as all prayer should be), vertical, upward, theocentric, profoundly oriented to God himself. To God whose glory is our chief end. To God who is our highest joy. We saw this even in the preface last week. We pray to our father IN HEAVEN. And we saw that it matters – profoundly – that God is in heaven, that Christ is in heaven, that the saints and angelic hosts are there, and that we ourselves are there in the Spirit through faith.

Heaven is the atmosphere, the context, and the destiny of the Christian life. Thus, we direct our prayers to God – in heaven. To pray is to be oriented above. To be oriented to God is to be heavenly minded. To be heavenly minded is to be oriented to God.

To put God, just God, God alone, and his glory, his heavenly splendor, his radiance, his Triune light and life, above all things, is built then into the very

structure of the prayer. Even at the outset. From just the preface. And we might say, that, this first petition – hallowed be your name – this petition is the chief petition. All the other petitions serve this one. We shall return to this. But for now we can simply ask: Why do we live, move, and have our being? Why do we pray? Why do we do anything we do as Christians? So that the name of God will be hallowed. It is for this reason that the worlds were made. Creation itself exists for the glory of God. So, this morning we will look at the first petition of the Lord's prayer: Hallowed be thy name. We will make two points. The Name and the Hallowing. Repeat.

I. The Name

First, then, the name. Hallowed be your name. God's name is not the letters G-O-D. It is his character, his God-ness. Unlike human names, which are chosen for numerous reasons, but remain distinct from the essence of who we are. God's name is God. And God is his name. This highlights the utter uniqueness of the being/name of God. Thus, when he reveals his name to Moses at the burning bush he says: I am who I am. I just am the self-existent One. Underived, independent, immutable, utterly faithful and unchanging — I AM.

This is what YHWH — the tetragrammaton (the four Hebrew letters) translated in your Old Testament as LORD means. This name places God outside of any class, or any comparisons, with other so-called gods or beings. He is the incomparable, unique One, who alone, just IS. He is the LORD, the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — as He goes on to tell Moses. So, His name is who he is - and who he has revealed himself to be — in his works and word. God makes his name *known* in Scripture and in the created order. Reflected in an infinite array of creatures, each of which shows us just a thimble, a droplet, of his oceanic glory.

Now, we don't worship the creation, but we do worship the God whose Name is revealed in the wild variety and unity of creation. Thus we say with the Psalmist: O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy NAME in all the earth! Thus we worship God's name, we bless God's name, we call on God's name, we are saved and defended by God's name. For God's name is God. And when God comes in person to save us, Jesus Christ, is given the NAME above all names, at which every knee will bow and every tongue confess, the Greek equivalent of YHWH, namely, Lord. For all shall confess that Jesus is LORD (the I AM of Exodus made flesh) to the glory of God the Father.

And, notice, we ascribe, and Scripture ascribes, many, many names to God. This is because no single name (creatures and our language), or group of names – just like no group of creatures -- can exhaust his unsearchable greatness, his infinitely full, yet unified being. We pile up names to give us multiple angles, like facets of a diamond, on the ineffable mystery of the Triune God. The preface

itself gives us the wonderful name Father. We multiply names (plural), yet because God is One, we speak of his name (singular) – as here.

To us, there are a myriad of wonderful names, but mysteriously, in God, who is not made up of parts, all the names are one, they cohere in the Tri-personal divine essence. We get something of glimpse – and when it comes to the being of this God in himself, all we get in this life are glimpses – we get something of glimpse of this mystery in the Great Commission: For there we are told, to baptize in the name (singular) of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three persons just ARE the name of God. And the name of God just IS the three persons.

The Name, then, God's name, is the thickest, the most-dense, the most mysterious, the most luminous, the most interesting, the loveliest reality. The Name alone IS. It IS "isness." From it, everything else derives whatever being or splendor or goodness it has. That's the name.

II. The Hallowing

Our second point is that we are praying for that NAME to be hallowed. Hallowed here means something like sanctified, holy, revered, esteemed, honored, consecrated, set apart. We are not asking for his name to be MADE holy for his name IS holy. His name is what it is, and nothing can be added to it, or subtracted from it. God, in no way depends on his creation. We are praying first and foremost that God's name be TREATED, or REVERED, as holy as sacred, as inviolable. That is, as the third commandment forbids, that it not be taken in vain.

That it not be treated lightly or profaned, treated as a causal or common thing. Evoked flippantly, unreflectively, without deep reverence. As the famous (Aramaic) Jewish prayer for the dead (Kaddish) puts it: Magnified, Sanctified, Be Thy Holy Name. To hallow the name, is to treat God himself, in all of our speaking, in all of our thinking, and all of our doing, as our supreme treasure. As the weightiest thing there is. In the language of Psalm 73:

Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

In this petition, we see, as Calvin puts it: That God's majesty deserves to be exalted far above (far above) all other concerns. "No one," he says, "has enough of a burning passion for the divine glory, unless he somehow forgets his own position, and raises himself to seek him in his transcendence." When this happens to Isaiah, in chapter 40 of his prophecy, when he glimpses the transcendent eternal Lord, he thinks ALL the nations are as nothing, and less

than nothing, lighter than dust on the scales. We ought to hold God in this proportion to all other things. And this is a deep internal setting that we are asking for. When Peter tells us to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, he uses this word – used here, for hallowed. Hallow Christ in your heart as Lord.

So here, we pray for Christ to be hallowed in us, in our deepest, secret places. To pray this way is to pray to be made holy, to be made reflectors of the name. And since His name includes (as the catechisms put it) anything whereby he makes himself known. We are asking for his Word, his sacraments, his ordinances, his church, his worship, to be revered in us and in the earth.

Gregory of Nyssa, the great 4th c. church father, one of the Cappadocian fathers (Turkey) who were key in discerning and helping the church articulate — as far as possible — the mystery of the Trinity, in unpacking this petition, Nyssa prayed:

May I become through thy help blameless, just and pious, may I abstain from every evil, speak the truth and do justice. May I walk in the straight path, shining with temperance, adorned with incorruption, beautiful through wisdom and prudence.

May I meditate on the things that are above and despise what is earthly, showing the angelic way of life.... For a man can glorify God in no other way save by his virtue which bears witness that the divine power is the cause of his goodness.

Now, that is how we hallow the name, that is what we are praying for. But it is not all we are praying for – after all we are petitioning God here. We are seeking to get him to act. To get him to uphold the integrity of his name in all the earth. To not only enable us, but to direct and dispose all things for his glory.

To put it another way: who is doing the hallowing of the name here? God is. In us to be sure, but also and above and in and through all things. And we know that God is jealous for glory of his own name. There is no egoism in this. He is himself the highest good. And it is good for his creatures, and his creation, that his name be lifted up, exalted on high. Above all other names. And he tells Israel, repeatedly, that by their sin they have profaned his name, caused it to be blasphemed among the Gentiles. Nevertheless, the Lord says, he will act – not because of their or our righteousness – but for his own name's sake.

Here's Ezekiel 36: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.'

Thus, the larger catechism says that here we are praying that God would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness, and whatsoever is dishonorable to him, by his overruling providence, disposing all things to his own

glory. This hallowing — by God himself and in us, in our flesh, in the earth — ultimately takes place, in Jesus Christ, the God-man, who, who in his high-priestly prayer, sums up his work with the disciples, saying the Father: I have made known to them your name. And in the shadow of the cross prays: Father, glorify your name.

This is a petition – hallowed be thy name – that Jesus repairs to in the decisive hours, at the end of his life, as he faces the terror of Calvary. The reverencing of the name of God, it's not being abused, or despised, or ignored – it's being treated as the weighty, ineffable, glorious revelation of the infinite Creator Lord, that is the first concern of Christian prayer. Is that our first, our chief, concern? Our hope, our yearning, our ache? If not, let us repent, let us do the restructuring, and adjust our prayer life accordingly. For, as we said at the outset, the next five petitions serve this one. John Piper puts this well:

The purpose of the universe is for the hallowing of God's name. His kingdom comes for *that*. His will is done for *that*. Humans have bread-sustained life for *that*. Sins are forgiven for *that*. Temptation is escaped for *that*.

This is the chief petition. This is the destiny of the cosmos. And when it is done on earth as it is by the angels in heaven, the eschaton will have arrived. For John sees in his vision (in the book of Revelation), the day when all atheism, all profaneness, all idolatry is overthrown. The day when nothing unclean, nothing detestable or false, enters the cosmic-temple-city of God. The day which Isaiah (chapter 60) foresaw saying:

²⁰ Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

²¹ Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.

And then, John says, in Revelation 22 – at the consummation of all things – that the saints: Will worship him, they will see his face, and his NAME shall be on their foreheads. Hallowing the name means being sealed in perfect creaturely communion with, and reflection of, that same unsurpassed name forever. Our Father, who are in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Amen.

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