



## Hallowed be Your Name

St. Matthew 6:9

Fr. William Klock

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This morning I wan to continue in our study of the Lord's Prayer by taking up the second half of Matthew 6:9. Jesus introduced the prayer by telling us to whom we pray; we start our prayer, "Our Father in heaven." We saw that last week. Those words tell us who can pray and they remind us what a privilege it is for us, sinful men and women, to be able to come before the throne of our Heavenly Father. It's a reminder that prayer is for Christians and Christians alone – that we can come only before the Father as his sons and daughters. And we can only be his sons and daughters by humbly acknowledging that we're sinners and by putting our faith and trust in his righteous sacrifice on the cross. If we're willing to put off every attempt to earn salvation on our own merit and if we're willing to let Jesus do it for us, then he who was "firstborn among many brothers" presents us before his Father and we become is brothers and sisters by adoption. Again, prayer is for Christians – for those who follow Christ, for those who have made him their Saviour and Lord.

But what do we do once when we're in the presence of God? What do we ask him? What do we say to him? That's what the disciples wanted to know as they saw Jesus in his all-night prayer sessions with the Father. How does he do it? What does he say? That's what they were asking. And so Jesus outlines six petitions in verses 9 to 13:

### Our Father in heaven,

- (1) **Hallowed be your name,**
- (2) **Your kingdom come,**
- (3) **Your will be done,**

### On earth as in heaven.

- (4) **Give us this day our daily bread.**
- (5) **Forgive us our sins**  
**As we forgive those who sin**  
**against us.**
- (6) **Lead us not into temptation,**  
**But deliver us from evil.**

Notice the order of those petitions. The first three have to do with God's honour and his interests. The second three have to do with our interests and our needs. Jesus didn't order them that way randomly; he had a good reason. And again, this ties into the fact that prayer is for Christians. We all have unbelieving friends and family. We've been around them when they pray or when they talk about having prayed for something. Do you ever notice that when unbelievers talk about prayer, it's always in respect to something *they* need. They're having a hard time with life, so they prayed about it (or they want you to pray about). They're having financial difficulties, so they ask God for help. They're sick or a loved one is sick, so they ask God for help. And that's just it. The natural man or woman is concerned *only* with the things they think are important – and God isn't one of those things. In our natural state all we're interested in getting from God is our needs met. If we do think about God, it's only after we first think of ourselves. But Jesus reverses that. He puts first, *Thy* name, *Thy* kingdom, *Thy* will, and then, *give us*, *lead us*, *deliver us*. That's a lesson we need to learn. And this doesn't have to do just with prayer, but with every aspect of our worship, whether it's what we do here on Sunday morning or the way we lead our lives in the world out there: If our worship is true and real worship, then the Father has to come first – and not just first – he has to be everything. We need to learn that it's not about us. In fact, true worship happens when we forget ourselves and when we're overwhelmed with the desire to see God glorified. In true worship and in true prayer, we need to sacrifice ourselves to the glory of God in the knowledge that nobody ever loses by what he sacrifices to the Father.

This is a hard lesson to learn. Our natural tendency is to think of prayer as something that brings God into line with our own desires. We want something, so we're going to petition God until he decides to give it to us. We pray as if God doesn't know what he's doing and we need to show him where he's wrong. Think about it. God is sovereign. God is all-knowing, he's all-powerful, and on top of that he is perfectly good, perfectly holy, perfectly righteous, perfectly just. God doesn't make backup plans and he doesn't need our feeble advice to help him figure out what he should do. What's sad is that even those of us raised in Christian homes are often taught to do this right from the

start. How many of you were taught to pray as kids, saying:

Now I lay me down to sleep;  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;  
If I should die before I wake;  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Right from the start we're taught that prayer is little or nothing more than bringing a list of our personal requests to God.

And then as we get older we keep doing the same thing – we just get more sophisticated about it. Do you ever bargain with God? Do you ever offer him *this* in exchange for *that*; you'll do this for *him*, if he'll do that for *you*. "I'll scratch your back, God, if you'll scratch mine." This is what Jacob did the morning after he ran away from Esau. God gave him a vision that first night of a ladder going up to heaven with angels going up and down. Jacob was worried about what was going to happen to him and God gave him a not-so-subtle reminder that he was looking out for him. But what does Jacob do? He made a vow, "*If God* will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, *then* the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you" (Genesis 28:20-22). Wow! Isn't that generous and noble of Jacob? "God, *if* you prove yourself doing all these things for me, *then* you can be my God and I'll start tithing."

And yet we tend to do the same thing. We pray for things first (that might take us from God), for friends (that might compete for his friendship), or for an ordering of events (that might accomplish our plans, but not his). When I first went away to University I was an immature Christian riding on the coattails of my parents' faith. I didn't really *know* God. But he put me in a situation where I was utterly alone and had no friends. And for most of that time I was praying and asking him to give me friends – even just one – until I was finally desperate enough to turn to him as my friend. And it's funny that once I acknowledged God's presence and made a commitment to look to him to meet my needs, that my prayers for human friends were answered. You see, we need to learn to start our prayers thinking about God's honour and the advancement of his

purposes in the world. We need to start by looking for what he wants from us. What we want from him comes last.

And so Jesus tells us that when we pray our first petition to our Heavenly Father is: “Hallowed by your name.” Someone asked me this week, “What does that mean?” She was specifically asking what “hallowed” means. And I realised that it’s not really a word that we use much anymore. The Greek word that St. Matthew uses here is a form of the word that we translate into English as “holy.” In other places in the New Testament we translate it “saint” or “sanctify.” Most of the time it describes something that’s been set aside for God’s use. The altars and utensils in the Temple were set apart for God’s use in the worship of Israel. As Christians we bless or consecrate things like our Holy Table, or the Communion vessels, our building, or even our ministers for the purpose of setting them apart for God’s use. We as Christians are called “holy” because God has set us apart for his use. But what does it mean to set God or his name apart?

There’s only one other place in the New Testament where this word is used of God and it helps show us what Jesus means. First Peter 3:15 says, “But *sanctify* the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (KJV). What St. Peter is saying is this, “Give God the place in your heart that he deserves. Put him first.”

And that’s what Jesus is getting at when he tells us to pray, “hallowed by your name.” But what Jesus says is a lot broader. Think of it in terms of the first of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2-3: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” When we pray Jesus’ model prayer, when we pray “Our Father in heaven,” we’re addressing the God who brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and who, through the death of his Son, brought *us* out of slavery to sin. And when we pray “hallowed be your name,” we affirm that we have no other gods – no things, no people, no things we’ve made into idols – before him. You could sort of rephrase those first lines of the Lord’s Prayer saying, “My Father in

heaven, my first desire is that in everything you might have pre-eminence.”

That’s the first half of the petition; that’s what it means to “hallow” something, but what does it mean that God’s *name* be “hallowed.” We don’t think much about names. We pick our kids’ names based on the fact that we like the sound of them or because we had a friend or a close relative with that name, but it’s not very often we name our kids based on what the name actually means. In fact, it’s often a surprise when we do find out what our names mean. And yet that wasn’t the case in the Bible, and it’s definitely not the case with God. He has lots of names in Scripture, but those names reveal who he is – they tell us about his character, his acts in history, and his very being as Saviour and Redeemer.

Think back to Moses standing before the burning bush, kicking his shoes off at the realisation that he was standing on holy ground. Not that the ground was holy of its own accord, but that it was holy because both he and the ground were in the presence of a holy God. Moses asked God what his name was, and God told him, “I AM who I AM.” That’s where the Hebrew word “Yahweh” comes from. God is the I AM. He’s so great, so awesome, so magnificent, so powerful that his very name isn’t so much a proper name (like Zeus or Baal), but something that reflects his being. Do we honour God for who he is? Do we honour God in his perfection of being?

Think of him as Creator. In Genesis 1 we’re told at the very beginning of the story that “God created the heaven and the earth.” He’s the one responsible for the sun, moon, stars, and planets. He created the trees and the mountains, the flowers and the plains, the fish and the sea. He formed and brought life to every thing that lives. He formed man out of the dirt and breathed into him the divine breath of life. Do you honour him as the one and only Creator? Isaac Watts, the famous poet and hymn writer wrote:

I sing the mighty power of God,  
That made the mountains rise,  
That spread the flowing seas abroad,  
And built the lofty skies.

I sing the goodness of the Lord,  
That filled the earth with food;

He formed the creatures with his word,  
And then pronounced them good.

Lord! How thy wonders are displayed  
Where’re I turn my eye!  
If I survey the ground I tread,  
Or gaze upon the sky.

Creatures as numerous as we  
Are subject to Thy care;  
There’s not a place where we can flee,  
But God is present there.

When we pray “hallowed be your name,” we can ask that God be honoured as the Creator – not just by us, but by all the world.

What about honouring God as the “Most High” – as ruler of the heavens and the earth? Do you honour God in that? When Abraham arrived at Jerusalem, he was met by Melchizedek, who was the king and high priest there. We’re told he was a priest of *El Elyon*, of God Most High, and he blessed Abraham saying, “Blessed by Abraham by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.” *El Elyon*, God Most High, describes God as sovereign over his creation. Moses used the same name for God when he sang his praises: “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. When the *Most High* gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God” (Deuteronomy 32:7-8).

Do we honour God as ruler of heaven and earth? We don’t give him that honour when we doubt his sovereignty in our lives and in the lives of others. We don’t give him this honour when we complain about the state of the world or ask how we’re going to make it through this week, or this month, or this year. But we do honour him when we acknowledge him as the one who does all things well, who cares for us, and who continually works to preserve and govern all his creatures and all their actions.

Do you honour God as Redeemer? As the one who has Redeemed *you*? Because of sin, God determined to destroy our entire race with a flood, but he also determined to save Noah and his family in the ark. God showed Noah how to build it, he

instructed him how to take two of every animal into it and seven of every clean animal, and finally the Redeemer himself shut the door and sealed Noah into the ark, safe from his own wrath as the flood came pouring down. Who saves? God does. That's the meaning of the name *Jesus*: "I AM saves." In fact, God even taught Noah a new name for himself: *Yahweh Yireh* which means "the Lord will provide." But this isn't just God manifesting himself to Noah. We experience God as the one who saves and the one who provides and we experience it personally through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Do you know God as your Redeemer and as your Provider? Do you know him as the one who came in the person of Jesus Christ to die on the cross for *you*, to purchase you out of the slavery of sin and to draw you back to himself in love? You can never fully honour God until you honour him in his character as Redeemer.

But that's still not enough. The most frequent name for God used by the Jews was *Adonai* – "Lord." Is he your Lord? Is he the one to whom you give your highest allegiance? Is he the one who directs your life in every way and in every thing? It isn't enough to honour God as Redeemer – he has to be your Lord too. And we never fully honour him until we make him our Lord. You see, as Christians we bear the name of God. When we walk out these doors into the Comox Valley, we bear his name. We say we are his followers, but do we honour his name in the way we live? We say we love Jesus, but Jesus tells us that if we love him we will keep his commandments – that if we love him we will do our best with the help of the Holy Spirit to conform ourselves to his image. None of us will ever do it with perfection, but are we even trying? Or are we tarnishing the name of God by the way we live?

And that brings us full circle, because, dear friends, God's name *will* be hallowed and honoured. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised that one day *every* knee will bow and *every* tongue confess that he is Lord. But there will be two kinds of people there on that day. There will be the people whom Christ has redeemed for himself by his own blood, people who know God intimately, who know his ways, who know his Word given

in Holy Scripture, who have spent their lives growing in godliness and growing in holiness. These are the people who knew that once they were enemies of God, that the only thing they were capable of was hating God and hating his name and hating his holiness. These are the people that know that while they were yet sinners, while they were his enemies, Christ died for them that they might be given new life and renewed and reborn hearts full of love for God. These are the people who bow their knees to honour God because they love him, because he is holy and because he has redeemed them.

But there's another group of people who will bow their knees before God on that day. These are the people who rejected Christ. These are the people who insisted on doing it their own way, who insisted on coming to God based on their own merit. These are the ones who created a false image of God – an unholy God who was willing to tolerate or even praise their sins. These are the natural men and women. And yet God tells us that on that day, when they see him revealed in all of his glorious majesty, when they see his holiness revealed, when they see his justice revealed, they will bow before him too – and in light of the awesomeness of God's holiness, they will know immediately that their own unholiness merits the Lake of Fire. And as much as they won't want to go there, I suspect that on that day there will be no complaints, because what we see darkly in a mirror now, will shine on that day like the noon-day sun in brightness that we can't even comprehend. As the redeemed bow their knees to give honour to their saviour, so will the unredeemed – but for them it will be too late.

Each of us needs to ask: "Which am I?" Talk is cheap. Jesus warned that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," is really his follower. His real followers are the ones who show they love him by keeping his commandments. His followers are the ones who faithfully show his character to a world in need of a Saviour. His followers are the ones who daily seek to know him and to know him better. His followers are the ones who daily study the Scriptures to know God better and his followers are the ones who daily come before him in prayer, truly seeking to know how they can see his name honoured.

Please pray with me: Our Father in Heaven, teach us what it means to honour your name. Give us a hunger to know who you are and to know your ways, that we may honour you in how we live our lives. Show each of us how to turn worship into the way we live, not just what we do on Sunday mornings. Show us how to honour you as we live our lives in the world outside these walls, that others would be drawn to you because of us. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.