

Matthew 6 (9) – Confession for Christmas

Christmas is supposed to be joyful. And everywhere you turn, it seems like everyone is having a good time. But maybe you are having a hard time. Or someone you love is. So, instead of making you happy, Christmas makes you feel worse. Now, maybe things aren't all that bad for you. I'm happy that you're happy. I don't want you to feel guilty because you're feeling good. But no matter who you are, the most wonderful time of the year makes the hardships and heartaches even more clear.

Christmas reminds us of Christ, who came to save our souls and make a whole new world. But Christmas also reminds us of Christ, and why he *had* to come to save our souls and make a whole new world. No matter what time of year it is, just when you think "what a wonderful world", something comes along and reminds you not to get too attached to it.

Still, Jesus is the reason for the season. You know he is worth your worship. But it seems harder than ever when the season is full of sorrow, frustration, and uncertainty. It's like you fear unwrapping any present from God because you think it's just going to be more pain. So, you know that you need to pray, but where do you even start? You turn to the Lord's Prayer.

In Matthew 6:9-13, we read what is known as the Lord's Prayer. This is where Jesus taught his disciples (and us) how to pray. Leading up to vs.9, in vs.7, Jesus says, "*And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases...*" Then, in vs.8, Jesus says, "*Pray then like this*". Jesus is clearly indicating that his "prayer" is not simply something to repeat. It is not necessarily bad to repeat this prayer. But it is not some incantation. It is a form of how your prayers should look. It speaks to your heart approach in prayer. And in the opening line of vs.9, Jesus mentions the word *hallowed*. This word is foreign to most people today. But it is vitally important for you to understand. Hallowed means sacred, holy, and separate. And so, this means that God's name (and God himself) is to be valued above all else, and in a way that is altogether different than anything else. Everyone needs this message today.

The truth is that we all hallow something. We respect it, we revere it, we relish it. It might be an idea, another person, a job, your image, fame, strength, money, your reputation, or your looks. There aren't two kinds of people in the world: those who hallow and those who don't. There is only one kind: the hallower. In other words, the worshiper. Everyone is at their core a worshiper. We all hallow something. We all worship.

Worship and prayer are related. And if you boil our prayers down to their essence, most prayers tend to be asking God to give us things we want that we don't have, or take from us things we have that we don't want. And it's not that God doesn't want you to pray about your needs, your desires, your fears and frustrations. He does, that's why Jesus includes it in the Lord's Prayer. But you have to remember who it is you are talking to. When you pray, you are coming to meet with Almighty God. Whatever your priorities are, you need to remember his priorities. And remember how Jesus has said to order your prayers. By hallowing God's name before anything else.

None of us are immune to missing this. And it isn't a matter of saying, "hallowed be your name" at the beginning of your prayers. It is a matter of your heart. We are all prone to allow other things to assume the hallowed place in our lives. Your greatest desire can be something other than God. So, you might mean well, but your prayers might not reflect Jesus' values. And if you give anything other than God the place of ultimate value, it affects you, and it leads to disorder and distance in your relationship with God. But you can turn that ship around today. Because this prayer not only tells you what to do, it reveals how to do it.

In giving the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is telling us that if you want to pray to God as a close and caring Father, you also have to hallow him as an awesome and transcendent Lord. Your prayers are meant to be infused with both intimacy and reverence. Hebrews 4:16 says – *Let us then with confidence (or boldness) draw near to the throne of grace.* This boldness is not brazen disrespect. It is intimacy, combined with respect. Mature Christian prayer is having the confidence to be in God's house as if you were in your parents' house. But

you don't come into your parents' house just wailing away about what you want them to do. You start with "Hello, Mom and Dad."

How can you possibly have that kind of intimacy combined with the proper respect? You can have it because that is how Jesus taught us to pray. He wants you to have intimacy with God (to call him Father), and he wants you to have reverence for God (to respect him as hallowed).

Jesus is why you can do this right. Jesus is both intimate (with us) and also transcendent (apart from us). In other words, Jesus is like us in our humanity, but unlike us in his divinity. And Jesus came to give himself for you – to die for you – so that you can approach God as Father and hallow him above everything else. That's why we come to the Father in Jesus' name.

Hallowed be your name – With these words of Jesus in your heart, you begin to understand that God isn't just available to comfort you. You also begin to know that he is of such beauty and value that he transcends every good thing in your life, and by understanding that, you begin to experience him as your ultimate good. You see how God is blessed, and it blesses you. You begin to experientially believe the truth: God has brought his holiness near to you in Jesus. And in the holiness of Jesus, you can truly begin to hallow God.

The gospel says that Jesus took on a body, that he became incarnate. And you can begin to embody the gospel, to live out vs.10 – *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. Then, with the proper perspective, the proper ordering of your pleas, your prayers, your desires, your affections and actions are transformed. You are being transformed because you have renewed your mind around the proper object and order of your worship.

If God is my Father, what is there to fear? Nothing. If God is the only ultimate thing, then what thing of ultimate value could be taken from me? Nothing. To truly understand, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*" is to embrace the kind of courage and confidence that's only possible for a true child of God. And all of this starts with confession.

You see, part of the Lord's Prayer involves the confession of your own sins. But even in this first phrase, hallowed be your name is a confession of who God is. And this allows us to truly confess who we are and what we have done. We confess in honesty and humility, and ask for forgiveness, and that is how we are able to forgive others. Forgiven people become forgiving people. And that bring me to our closing application. Daily confession of your sins before the Lord, who is hallowed above all else.

Daily confession of my sins before the Lord brings clarity, conviction, and confidence. It brings a clear conscience. It is a direct assault on my self-righteous pride, and a defense against the assaults of the Devil and his accusing ways. It helps me stay honest and humble. It helps me hear from God. It guards my heart. If I am confessing my sins daily before the Lord, I have already confessed harsher motives than anyone else could identify.

After my time of confession, I can rightly hear and process the concerns and criticisms of others. To keep yourself honest and humble before the Lord will allow you to be able to hear what God might be saying to you, even in the middle of someone else railing against you. Or you railing against yourself. Confessing your own sins also helps you when lots of people seem to be "needing to talk to you". Or when something or someone else bombards you with anxiety, or anger, or fear, or frustration, expecting you to make things right, right now. Confessing your own sins gives hope when life in general is overwhelming you. That is why a big part of growing and becoming stable and strong is to confess your own sins, before God, every day.

God is the one person that you can be fully honest with. He's the one person that knows you better than you do. Confessing your sins brings conviction. But is also brings comfort, knowing that God forgives you. And as you confess, you find that your sin is even deeper than you thought, so you also find that God's forgiveness is deeper than you even knew.

Confess your sins before God every day. That is what this whole message is about. And that is what will make this the best Christmas you've ever had.