

122. Q. What is the first petition?

A. Hallowed be Thy Name. That is: Grant us first of all that we may rightly know Thee, and sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which shine forth Thy almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth. Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life - our thoughts, words, and actions - that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised.

When we were going through the ten commandments,

we saw that God’s name is holy.

The third commandment warns us not to take the name of the LORD our God in vain, because God’s holy name reveals his character and his attributes.

Throughout the Old Testament he revealed himself by various names:

To Abraham he proclaimed himself El Shaddai—God Almighty—
the God who has the power to do all that he promises.

To Moses he revealed himself as Yahweh—I AM who I AM—
the God who remembers his promises and is faithful to his covenant.

But when Jesus teaches us to pray “hallowed be your name”

which name is he referring to?

He is referring to the great name of God, previously revealed only in a general way:

“Our Father in Heaven.”

God had revealed himself to be the Father of Adam, of Israel, and of David’s seed,
but he had not yet revealed fully what that meant.

In the same way, it appears that Abraham and the patriarchs

knew that God’s name was Yahweh,

but God did not fully reveal the power and meaning of the name, Yahweh,
until he revealed it to Moses.

Only at Mount Sinai do we discover fully what Yahweh means.

Only here does Israel learn the power and the glory of the name of Yahweh.

Likewise, while Israel had known that God was “Father,”

they did not understand the power and glory of that name.

Only in Jesus do we learn the true meaning of “Our Father Who Art in Heaven,”

because here we discover that our God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in Matthew 6,

we are only three chapters past his baptism.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ first sermon in Matthew’s gospel
after he was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And at the Jordan River, when John baptized Jesus,

“behold the heavens were opened to him,

and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove
and coming to rest on him;
and behold, a voice from heaven said,
‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” (Mt 3:16-17)

Jesus has already been revealed as the Son of God.

He is the true firstborn of the Father

In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, we finally understand what it means to call God
“Father.”

If all you did was read the Old Testament,

you might come away thinking that the fatherhood of God was a metaphor;

but in Jesus Christ we discover that God has been Father from all eternity.

Indeed, Jesus himself declares to us this most marvelous name of God

at the end of Matthew’s gospel,

when he commands that we baptize “in the *name* [singular]
of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

And so when we pray, “Our Father who art in heaven,”

we immediately add, “hallowed be thy name!”

Because in this name—the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—

we have been incorporated into the family and kingdom of God.

You were once aliens and strangers,

but now you are not only citizens of the kingdom,

you are children of the heavenly Father—you have been united to his Son, Jesus Christ,

and so all that belongs to Jesus is now yours.

The inheritance that he has received, sitting at the right hand of the Father,

has now been promised to you—

and in your baptism you have received the firstfruits of that promise
in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Many of the Psalms speak of the holiness of God’s name.

Psalm 111 does so in an acrostic of 23 lines,

each line starting with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Since there are an odd number of letters in the alphabet (23)

the author uses a triplet at the beginning, and two triplets at the end;

but the rest of the Psalm follows a fairly standard parallelism.

The first triplet focuses on praising Yahweh, wholeheartedly and publicly:

Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,

in the company of the upright, in the congregation. (v1)

When we pray “Hallowed be thy name”

this is not merely a personal and private thing.

We are to love the Lord our God with *all* our heart,
and we are to demonstrate our love and thanks to him before his people.

The scriptures could not imagine a Christian who is detached from the congregation.
Hallowed be thy name
comes in the context of saying *our* Father.
We come to God together with all his people –
but of course we also come giving thanks to him, “with my whole heart.”

Why do we come with a whole heart?
Why do we give thanks in the company of the upright?

Because of God’s works.
The Name of God is revealed in what he has *done*.

The heart of Psalm 111 consists of seven couplets
that celebrate the works of the Lord.

As we’ve seen, God revealed his name to Abraham and to Moses –
and the revelation of his name came in the context of his mighty deeds.

And so Psalm 111 reflects on this:

*Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them. (v2)*

First, the Psalmist declares the importance of studying God’s mighty deeds.
Studying the word of God is not primarily about studying “theology” or “ethics” –
studying the word of God is first and foremost studying what God has *done*.
It is about *history*.

Of course, when you study the mighty deeds of the LORD,
you *are* studying theology – because his deeds reveal who he is!
and you *are* studying ethics – because his call you to a certain sort of life.

The next two couplets speak of how his deeds reveal who he is:
how the study of history is the study of theology.

*Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;
the LORD is gracious and merciful. (v3-4)*

Because God has revealed his splendor and majesty in his works,
therefore you learn something about him: his righteousness endures forever.

And because he has caused his wondrous works to be remembered,
you learn that he is gracious and merciful!
You learn who God is from what he does.

*He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.*

God is faithful to his promises – he does what he says he will do.

*He has shown his people the power of his works,
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.*

And don't forget the power of God!
He revealed his power by giving Israel the inheritance of the nations.
He has revealed his power by giving Jesus the inheritance of the whole earth –
the fulfillment of all that he had promised to Abraham, Israel, and David.

So you learn your theology from history.
You also learn your ethics:

*The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;
they are established forever and ever,
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. (v7-8)*

You might think that you should study his commandments in order to learn ethics.
But the Psalmist here says to look at the work of his hands.

The Psalmist assumes that you know the commandments of God.
(He is speaking to Israelites, after all!)

If you want a lesson in ethics,
look at what God has done in history.

The reason why you do what God says is because the works of his hands are faithful and just.

The whole Psalm comes to its crescendo in verse 9:

*He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever
Holy and awesome is his name! (v9)*

When we pray “Hallowed be thy name”
we are declaring that God's name is holy –
which is to say that we are celebrating who he is and what he has done.

In verse 10 the Psalmist then turns to us and addresses us:

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.
His praise endures forever.*

In verse 1 the triplet began with the “single” line,
and the following two lines expounded the first line.

“Praise the LORD”

--I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
--in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

In verses 9-10 the triplets start with the “double” line
and conclude with the “zinger.”

Even as the Psalm as a whole calls us to get our theology and ethics from history,
even so the Psalm concludes with this in summary.

As verse 9 concludes our theological lesson: Holy and awesome is his name!
(that is true about God regardless of whether we do anything about it!)

So also verse 10 concludes our ethical lesson:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

What we think about God is at the foundation of how we live.

If you would know how to live in God’s world,
then you must fear God.

And you must *practice* the fear of the LORD.

How?

Our Father, who art in heaven, *hallowed be thy name.*

It is more than a prayer – it is a way of life.

And we see this in our scripture lesson from 1 Chronicles 29.

If you look back at chapter 28, you have David’s preparation for building the temple.
(read 28:1-10)

There are strong echoes of Moses and Joshua here:

“Be strong and courageous and do it. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed,
for the LORD God, even my God, is with you.

He will not leave you or forsake you,

until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished.”

(28:20)

In the opening verses of chapter 29 David recounts his gathering of gold and silver for the temple
and how all the people gave freely and willingly for this purpose.

And then David prays:

Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever.

*Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory
and the victory and the majesty,
for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours.
Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.
Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all.
In your hand are power and might,
and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.
And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.*

David models for us what it means to pray,
“Hallowed be thy name.”

As the HC puts it:

Grant us first of all that we may rightly know Thee, and sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which shine forth Thy almighty power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy, and truth. Grant us also that we may so direct our whole life - our thoughts, words, and actions - that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honored and praised.

David starts by exalting the glorious name of the LORD.

And he contrasts that with himself.

Here is David, the man after God’s own heart –

the most beautiful specimen of humanity since Abraham – at least!

And yet he understands that before God, he has no reason to boast:

*But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly?
For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. (v14)*

You gave us everything – we cannot repay you.

For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were.

As David is preparing to build the temple –

the place where God will dwell with man on earth –

the place that will give permanence to Israel,

he yet realizes that even the temple will not change the fact
that before God, we are strangers and sojourners.

Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. (v15)

When you see the holiness of God, you also must see yourself in that light.

David rejoices to see the willing hearts of his people –

but he seems to realize that his generation is an aberration!

O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers,

*keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people,
and direct their hearts toward you.*

In short, grant that your name not be blasphemed because of us,
but always honored and praised.

If we learn how to pray from the Scriptures,
then our prayers will begin to change.
Our prayers will be less self-centered.
Our prayers will focus more on what God has done –
and therefore, who God is,
and his call upon our lives.

“Hallowed be thy name”

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