

Matthew 6:5-18

Hallowing God's Name

...hallowed be thy name – v. 9

As we contemplate the Lord's prayer in greater detail we must always keep in mind that this prayer represents the positive side to the Lord's teaching on prayer. Our Lord begins His teaching on the subject of prayer in v. 5. We noted in our earlier studies that 3 times in the course of vv. 5-7 we find the phrase *when ye pray*.

- *When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are – v. 5*
- *When thou prayest, enter into thy closet – v. 6*
- *When ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen – v. 7*

Two of these 3 references are negative – one is positive. The negative statements pertain to praying to be seen of men or praying with the mistaken notion of merit. The merit to our praying is not to be found in the length of our prayers or the loudness of our voices in prayer, or in the depth of the knowledge of God that we demonstrate in our praying or in the number of times in the day that we may pray.

This is a point that needs to be kept clear in the minds of God's people because we are called upon to pray earnestly and fervently and we are called upon to keep seeking and knocking and asking. The thing that must be borne in mind, however, is that it is not the merit of the manner of our praying that will gain us a hearing and a favorable response with God. It is always the merit of Christ's life and death that will gain us that hearing and that favorable response from God. The fervency in our praying should reflect our faith in Christ's merit. If we believe that Christ is worthy of the things we seek then we will pray fervently and we will pray constantly.

These are the negative aspects of prayer, then – the things that must be avoided. In the wider context of chp. 6 these negative aspects of prayer are seen along with the negative aspects of a couple of other spiritual exercises. The same thing applies to *almsgiving* that applies to prayer – we are not to be engaged in the practice of giving or being charitable in order to be seen of men. When we reach the end of the Lord's prayer we'll see that the same thing applies to fasting. *Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast (v. 16).*

The Lord is using the examples of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting in order to emphasize the point that in all our spiritual endeavors we must avoid putting on shows for men and we must, instead, strive to be God-conscious rather than man-conscious. It is as an aid to this God-consciousness that the Lord gives us the Lord's prayer. It is by using the guidelines that this model prayer supplies that we are enabled to shut the doors of our closets, so to speak, and close in with God.

The opening words of this prayer, when approached carefully and spiritually, perhaps more than any other thing given us in this prayer enable us to not merely enter our closets

but enable us, rather, to enter the very throne room of heaven and close the door behind us so that God has our undivided attention and we have God's undivided attention. *Our Father which art in heaven* we begin. And we saw in our last study that by approaching God this way we are approaching Him on the grounds of our relationship to Him. He invites us into His presence, not as subjects would approach a king – not as suppliants would approach a judge – but as children would approach their Fathers.

We find then in this approach to God the immanence or the nearness of God – He is *our Father* and we also find the transcendence of God – He is *our Father which art in heaven*. We are mindful of our closeness to Him as His children and we are mindful of His greatness. As our Father in heaven we revere Him as the Creator of the universe and the ruler of all nations.

We come now to the first petition in the Lord's prayer. And I think you'll see at once that the perspective provided by this petition does indeed steer us away from man-pleasing or self-centered religion to God-honoring religion. *Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name*. What I'd like to do this morning is to look at the theme that's presented by this petition so that we may know more precisely what it is we're praying for when we pray *hallowed be thy name*. Hallowing God's name, then, is our theme or our subject –

We Must Learn to Hallow God's Name

I have 3 thoughts this morning on what this petition teaches us about hallowing God's name. Consider first of all that:

I. We're Taught by This Petition to Make the Hallowing of God's Name Our Highest Priority

It is with good reason that this petition is first. The honor of God, you see, or the hallowing of God's name takes precedence over every other concern. In fact it's interesting to note in this prayer that the first 3 petitions show the importance of God's honor coming before man's desires or man's needs. It is not until we've prayed *hallowed be thy name – thy kingdom come – thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* – only after being taken up with God's honor and God's cause and God's will do we then pray *Give us this day our daily bread – forgive us our debts – lead us not into temptation*.

You begin to see, then, how the Lord's prayer steers us away from man-centered religion to God-honoring religion? This is not to say that there's no place for men's needs to be met or that there's no concern on God's part or on our part for the needs of men. There is concern for those things. But what this first petition in combination with the next two petitions does is teach us to put and keep things in their proper perspective.

Everything that God does is done with the ultimate aim of bringing glory to His name. So we see in Rev. 4:11 the worship that takes place in heaven recognizes this truth: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all*

things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. Creation took place for the honor of God. The same thing can be said for redemption. It is true that you and I are the great beneficiaries of God's plan of redemption. By His mercy and grace we have been and are being transformed from sinners into saints. By His gracious provision in sending His Son we are rescued from the deepest hell and exalted to the highest heaven.

We recognize the love of God behind this plan. Most gratefully do we recite the most well known verse in the Bible – *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* But God's love in the matter of our redemption serves an even greater purpose. This is brought out very clearly by the Apostle Paul in Eph. 1 where 3 times he makes reference to God's work of salvation as being *to the praise of the glory of his grace* v. 6; *that we should be to the praise of His glory* – v. 12; *Who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory* – v. 14.

The hallowing of God's name, then, encompasses this perspective that everything that God does is to the praise of His glory. I'm afraid that in our day and age this perspective is all but lost. It seems much more common to harbor the notion that everything God does must be for our well-being, as if to say, that God's plans and purposes terminate on us. It's as if we say that God's very existence serves the purpose of tending to us. And if we're not happy with the way that God rules and reigns or if we don't understand some of the things that God subjects us to then sinners issue their almighty decree that God must not really exist – because if He did exist He would conform to the way they think the universe ought to be run.

The mark of the man who has truly been regenerated is that he recognizes that God alone and especially Christ is worthy to receive blessing and honor and glory and power. The man who is saved gains the desire for the name of God to be hallowed. We saw in prayer meeting this past week examples of Old Testament characters that held the honor of God in highest esteem and made God's honor the basis for their pleas before His throne.

In Isa. 37 we have the account of Hezekiah being surrounded by the Assyrians. The Assyrians had conquered every nation in their path and in Hezekiah's day they were knocking on the door of the city of Jerusalem. *Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee,* the Assyrian representative writes to Hezekiah. He then goes on to recount all the nations that the Assyrians have conquered and how powerless the gods of those nations were before the mighty Assyrian empire.

Hezekiah takes the letter into the temple of God and spreads it out before the Lord and in pleading for deliverance he doesn't merely plead the helpless and hopeless plight of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Instead he asks God to take note of how the Assyrians are insulting the true and living God and bringing reproach to His name. Will God allow His name to be brought down to the same level as the false gods that the Assyrians have cast into the fire? Hezekiah's concern was for the honor of God and God in turn answered

prayer for Hezekiah and sent an angel to destroy 185,000 Assyrians. They departed from Jerusalem with the promise from God that they would never return. And they never did.

We also noted the example of Moses. You know what a difficult task Moses faced when it came to leading the children of Israel in the wilderness. They constantly grumbled and complained. It seems like they were most often desirous of returning to Egypt the land of their bondage. And when 10 of the 12 spies reported that there was no way they could enter Canaan because the opposition was just too strong – the Lord threatened to disinherit them and instructed Moses to step out of the way that He might destroy them.

And in pleading against this action by the Lord, Moses says in Numbers 14:13 – *Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which He sware unto them, therefore He hath slain them in the wilderness.*

Do you see how Moses' chief concern was for the reputation of God? The destruction of the Israelites would not only be bad for them – but it would be damaging to the honor of God's name. And this plea from Moses prevailed with God. If the hallowing of God's name, then, is the mark of a true believer, then we must make it our highest priority to guard and defend and promote the honor of that name. This is what it means to *hallow* the name of God. We set that name apart. We honor and exalt and defend it and we become jealous for the honor of that name.

As I said a moment ago – this is not a popular or common perspective today. And where this perspective is missing it's not terribly difficult to perceive how man-centered churches become. I receive in the mail regularly a publication entitled TFWM – Technologies For Worship Magazine. This magazine features articles about churches that use all the latest high tech equipment in their worship services. You see pictures of these gigantic sanctuaries along with the overhead lights and the stage equipment and the mixer boards with all those levers for adjusting the sounds and creating special effects etc.

Usually these magazines find their way to the trash-can without even being opened but this most recent issue caught my eye because of an article that contained a round-table discussion about the use of secular music in the worship service. The line of argument used to defend the use of secular music was not hard to anticipate. It's effective for reaching out. It's a means to bring people in. It's deemed to be a legitimate tool for evangelism. And I suppose the proof is in the pudding in the minds of those who reason this way. They are the ones with the large churches. Their performances do draw large crowds. They profess to be leading multitudes of souls to Christ.

The question that might be harder for them to answer is how is the Lord's name being hallowed? How is reverence toward God and toward Christ being demonstrated or taught? Of course, in their minds, these are questions that only legalistic Pharisees ask. I would remind you, therefore, that it was not a legalistic Pharisee who taught us to make the hallowing of God's name our highest priority. It was, rather, Christ Himself – the One who loved us – the One who gave Himself for us in order that the name of God might be hallowed.

We seen, then, how we're taught from this petition that hallowing the name of the Lord must be our highest priority. Would you consider next:

II. We're Taught by This Petition the Immensity of the Task

We're to hallow the name of God. The name of God depicts for us all of the titles or attributes of God or anything whereby God makes Himself known. You could say that this petition provides us with the positive side to the 3rd commandment – *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*

In contrast to taking the Lord's name in vain – what we do, instead, is to hallow that name. You are aware, of course, that the name of God encompasses much. We need never fear exhausting the meaning of the name of God. We will spend eternity exploring it in all it's height and depth.

The text that most readily comes to my mind when I think on the name of God is that proclamation that the Lord Himself made when He shielded Moses in the mount and passed by Him and declared in Exod. 34:6 *The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

In that passage I think we also find a good example of what it means to hallow the name of the Lord when, in the very next verse (v. 8), we read *And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.* We hallow the name of the Lord when we revere His name and are moved to worship by His name. We hallow the name of God when we are governed by the fear of the Lord. Hallowing the name of God, therefore, encompasses our knowledge of God. This fear or this reverence is not only first in priority when it comes to prayer – but it's also first in the order by which we know anything about God. Until we learn to hallow God's name it may be argued that we know nothing of God at all. It is, after all, the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of all knowledge and wisdom.

With the immensity of the task in mind, Thomas Watson lists more than a dozen ways in which the name of God is hallowed. His name is hallowed when we submit to His rule. His name is hallowed when we sanctify the Lord's Day. His name is hallowed when we raise our voices to Him in prayer and thanksgiving. His name is hallowed by the affection

or the love we harbor in our hearts toward God. His name is hallowed by our own strivings to be holy. One could argue that whatever we do – when we do it with an aim for God’s glory we are then hallowing the name of God.

The immensity of the task of hallowing God’s name is not only magnified by all that the name of God encompasses – but it’s also magnified by our own inability and sin. Who are we to be able to take the name of God at all? Our sins separate us from Him. His majestic splendor and pure holiness put Him quite beyond us.

You could say, in a sense, that this petition takes us back to the very beginning of the sermon on the mount – back to the very first beatitude – *blessed are the poor in spirit for there is the kingdom of heaven*. God’s greatness in contrast to our sinfulness puts the task of hallowing His name out of our reach. We recognize again our spiritual bankruptcy and how poor we are when it comes to doing anything for God.

It is just now, however, that we have to recognize the connection between this petition and the opening invocation of this prayer. Though the task is beyond us when it comes to hallowing the name of God – yet by His grace and for the honor of His name He has taken us to Himself, adopted us into the very family of God. It is because He is *Our Father which art in heaven* – that this great gulf can be spanned and the name of God can be hallowed by the people of God.

You begin to see, I hope, how this desire to hallow God’s name should spring quite spontaneously from the hearts of those who realize all that was accomplished by Christ in order for sinners to be saved and in order for strangers and rebels to be brought in to the family of God.

So the hallowing of God’s name should be our highest priority. The hallowing of God’s name is certainly an immense task. The immensity of the task underscores our dependence on God. And this leads to my third and final point which is that:

III. This Petition Magnifies Our Dependence upon God

We must pray for the name of God to be hallowed. We are not able to hallow His name in our strength or by our own personal merit or holiness. Christ Himself sets a good example for us in what this petition means when He begins His own high priestly prayer in John 17 with this statement and petition – *Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee*.

Although this petition has an altogether different application to Christ than it does to us, I think there is a sense in which we can draw the application from it that as God sanctifies us, we in turn are enabled to glorify God. So in praying for His name to be hallowed, we are praying for the advancement of our own personal sanctification.

We are praying, in effect, for the reality of our relationship to God to be stamped deeply upon our hearts. Nothing will stir us more to love and reverence than the heart-felt perception that I am His and He is mine. And since the hallowing of God’s name seems to be the thing that is most readily sacrificed supposedly for the cause of evangelism, could I

call your attention to that verse that was read earlier from Eze 36:23 *And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I [am] the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.*

You see what a legitimate and powerful tool the hallowing of God's name becomes for evangelism? It's when we sanctify God that the heathen come to know that He is God. By today's standards the rule seems to be that when we allow ourselves to sink to the same level as the world and engage in the same activities with the world and become conformed to the world that we'll be most effective in evangelism.

I have no doubt that this kind of strategy may be effective for drawing large crowds and producing superficial results – but God's word indicates to us very plainly that it is by the hallowing of His name and the sanctifying of His people in such a way that they're lifted above the world that the heathen will truly come to know that our God is indeed the true and living God.

We have every reason to hallow the name of God, therefore. It must be our highest priority. And although the task is immense and quite beyond us, we are enabled by the grace of God and by the love of Christ to accomplish such a task.

May God help us, then, to hallow His name. May we be enabled and motivated by our relationship to Him to hallow His name. And may we, in the process, be able to convey to those around us that our God is great and our God is holy and our God is worthy to be hallowed in the hearts of all.