

**HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME
(LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY, PART 2)**

Matthew 6:9

[A sermon preached by the Rev. Stan Gockel at the First
Presbyterian Church of Portland, Indiana on August 13, 2017]

I

Two lawyers who were good friends were talking one day.

Much to the amazement of one, the other said he had recently become a Sunday School teacher at his church.

The second lawyer found it hard to believe, and said,
"How can you do that? You don't know the first thing about the Bible."

The first lawyer said, "Yes I do."

The second one said, "Oh, yeah? I'll make you a bet. I'll bet you 10 bucks that you can't even recite the Lord's Prayer."

"Sure I can," said the lawyer. "Everyone knows that. *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.*"

The second lawyer said, "Here's your ten bucks...I didn't think you could do it."

II

One of the dangers of prayer is the tendency to pray without knowing what we are praying.

This is particularly true of memorized prayers such as the Lord's Prayer.

It is so familiar to most of us that we can say it casually,
without really thinking about it or understanding its meaning.

We may think we understand it, but how easy it is to misinterpret it and gloss over the depth of meaning to be found within it.

A small boy who got down on his knees to pray one night and said, "Hi, Harry, how ya doing?" His mother nearly fainted. She said, "What did you say...what did you call God?"

The boy, in all innocence, replied: "I called him Harry. After all, it says in the prayer, 'Our Father who art in heaven, Harold be thy name.'"

No wonder William Barclay writes:

"Just because of the frequency with which it is used, the Lord's Prayer is always in danger of becoming a vain repetition."

Could that be the way you find yourself praying this prayer—
as a vain repetition...

repeated Sunday after Sunday...

with little or no thought as to its meaning
or its implications for your life?

III

If we are to understand the Lord's Prayer correctly,
if we are to pray it with any depth of sincerity,
if we are to avoid the danger of vain repetition of which William
Barclay spoke—
then we must first note the significance of its structure.

As we saw last Sunday, Jesus begins by defining the nature of God.

Jesus addresses God as "Father"
and gives us, his disciples, the privilege of addressing God the same way.

Through Jesus we are brought into a relationship with God that is closer and more intimate than we ever thought possible.

We are children of a loving Father whom we address when we pray as,
"Our Father in heaven."

And with the phrase “in heaven,” Jesus reminds us that God is the ruler of the cosmos who intends to transform it into a new heaven and a new earth.

This first phrase of the Lord's Prayer has been called the *invocation*.

The proper approach to prayer is first to invoke the presence of God,
to give praise and honor to God,
and only then can we go on to place our petitions
before God's throne in heaven.

Now when we come to the petitions we notice that there are six of them,
and they break down nicely into two groups of three.

The first three petitions focus on God and God's work in the world.

We pray for God's name to be hallowed,
God's kingdom to come,
God's will to be done.

Notice that the emphasis in these three petitions is on God,
as the pronoun "your" is used three times:

your name...
your kingdom...
your will.

In each instance we are praying that what is already true of heaven will be true of earth also—

that God's name will be hallowed on earth as in heaven;
that God's kingdom will come on earth as in heaven;
that God's will is carried out on earth as in heaven.

Earth is just as much the realm of God as is heaven
if only humankind would turn to God in love and obedience.

IV

From these first three petitions we learn an important lesson about **the priority of prayer**.

A *Pew Research* survey in 2014 indicates that more than half of Americans (55%) pray every day and an additional 21% say they pray at least weekly or monthly.

So 76% of Americans pray once a month or more.

But if we pray at all,
 and if we use words when we do,
 what is the first thing we are likely to say?

Could it be some form of the word "give"?

Prayer is, after all, a request.

 To pray is to ask for something.

Could it be that the vast majority of people who pray start off by saying "Give"...

 "Give me strength...
 give me wisdom...
 give me guidance...
 give my family and me good health...
 give help to those in need...
 give us peace in our time, O Lord"?

For most of us, prayer becomes a matter of getting God to do our bidding,
 rather than dedicating ourselves to doing God's bidding.

But Jesus reminds us that prayer must begin with God—
 with the acknowledgment that God is our Father,
 and with the dedication of ourselves to—
 hallowing the name of God,
 seeking the kingdom of God,
 and doing the will of God.

Too often we treat God at the beginning of our prayers the way we used to treat
 our parents when they came home from a long trip.

Usually, the first thing out of our mouths was,
 "Daddy, Daddy (or Mommy, Mommy), what did you bring me?"...
 when it should have been,

“Mommy, Daddy, I’m so glad to see you!”

Too often we run to God asking for this and that first,
 when we should be thanking God for who God is
 and enjoying the blessings of God’s presence.

Now it is true that Jesus included in the Lord's Prayer the petition,
"Give us this day our daily bread."

But notice that it is the 4th in the series of petitions.

Before we ever reach the point of saying "Give," we are to say:

**"May your name be hallowed...
 may your kingdom come...
 may your will be done on earth as in heaven."**

Jesus says in effect,
 "Think about God first,
 praise and thank God first,
 then go to your own needs, problems, and concerns."

Before you ever come to the point of asking,
 acknowledge the One to whom you are speaking.

The Lord's Prayer begins with God,
 and that is where we must begin if we would learn to pray as Jesus taught...
 ...if we would live as Jesus taught.

V

So, with our priorities in order, we can now turn to the phrase,
"Hallowed by thy name."

What does it mean to pray that God's name would be hallowed?

First, we need to understand that a name in the Bible was more than a name—
 far more.

Today we think of a name as the label that identifies the person.

But in our culture names seldom have to do with who one is.

I was named after my father's favorite baseball player,
which is nice and I am proud of it.

But there was never the expectation that just because I carried that name, I was supposed to be able to hit a baseball as well as Stan Musial.

And this may be a good thing. I read about a man whose mother named him after a favorite character that she liked to read about.

What was embarrassing to him was that his mother liked to read "Archie" comic books, so she named her son Archie.

(Come to think of it, I'm glad my father wasn't a fan of the New York Yankees, or my name might be Babe, Yogi, or Whitey—although Mickey or Derek wouldn't be too bad).

In the Old Testament a person's name meant everything.

It revealed something of the essence of the person...
it expressed the person's inner most being and personality...
it said something of the circumstances of the person's life and faith.

For instance, the name Jacob means "supplanter" or "trickster,"
and that is exactly what Jacob was.

Twice he tricked his brother Esau, so that Esau eventually says,
"He is aptly named, for he has supplanted me these two times."

The Jacob story also teaches us that a change in one's name signifies the transformation of a person's character and personality.

In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with the angel at the River Jabbok and is given a new name—

"Israel," "one who strives with God."

Likewise, Abram becomes Abraham,
Simon becomes Peter,

Saul becomes Paul.

It is much the same with the name of God.

To know the name of God was to know...
 the nature of God,
 the character of God,
 the personality of God,
 the very essence of God.

God's name was revealed to Moses as YAHWEH.

In that revelation Moses discovered a God who...
 heard the cry of the people,
 cared deeply for them,
 and acted to deliver them from slavery in Egypt.

So when the Psalmist says, "Those who know thy name put their trust in Thee," he is not saying that those who know God is called YAHWEH will put their trust in God.

He means that those who know what God is like,
 those who know the character and nature and personality of God,
 will gladly put their trust in God.

In Psalm 20:7 we read,

*"Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
 but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God."*

This does not mean that in a time of difficulty a person will remember and boast in the fact that the name of God is YAHWEH.

It means that in such times a person will not trust in human or material aid and defenses.

Instead that person will remember and trust in the nature and character of God.

In remembering what God is like, the person will have the courage and confidence

to trust in God and forge ahead.

So we can well understand what the Psalmist means when he says,
"O magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt God's name together."

It is simply another way of saying, "Hallowed be thy name"!

VI

The second aspect of this petition is the meaning of the verb "to hallow."

"Hallow" is not a word we commonly use,
 and the Greek word that is used here can have two meanings.

It can mean to make an ordinary thing holy by means of certain rituals,
 or by bringing it into contact with things that are holy.

But that is not the meaning here.

We do not pray, "Make thy name holy,"
 because God's name is already holy.

The second meaning of the word "hallow" is to treat something as holy,
 that is, to hold as sacred.

To hallow a thing is to regard it as sacred or holy,
 to treat it with reverence and awe.

In the Bible the basic idea of holy is difference.

What is holy is different from ordinary things.

Holy has a different sphere of life...
 a different quality of being.

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was holy.

It was a day different from other days because it was a day devoted to the
 worship of God.

Jesus does include personal requests in the second part of the Lord's Prayer.

But when these petitions become central in our prayer,
it is a sign that we—
not God—
have become the center of our world.

Beginning the Lord's Prayer with "Hallowed be your name" puts God back on the throne.

Along with the two petitions that follow--

**"Your Kingdom come...
Your will be done"—**

we are reminded that God and God's kingdom and God's will
are more important than our everyday desires.

Praying "Hallowed by your name" puts the personal requests that follow in perspective.

It reminds us that we are here to serve God,
not just to have God serve us.

It quiets our hearts and submits the urgency of our needs to the greater
priority of God's purposes.

But there is more at stake in this petition than just our private relationship with God.

You and I are God's representatives here on earth.

We provide a picture to unbelievers of what God is like.

As the old saying goes: *"You are the only Bible some people will ever read."*

Jesus said, *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:23)

God's very name,
God's reputation, if you will,

is at stake in how we live our lives.

If we cling to our pet sins,
 if we put our personal agendas ahead of God's
 if we harbor attitudes and engage in activities that dishonor God's
 name,
 then we have profaned God's holy name just as surely as the Israelites who
 constructed the golden calf.

But if, with God's help, we strive toward holiness,
 people will gain a true impression of what God is like.

They will be drawn to God,
 and God's love will be demonstrated in our lives for all to see.

VIII

Martin Luther once said that this first petition of the Lord's Prayer "*demand*s
nothing else than that God's honor be sought in all, before all, beyond all else,
and that our whole life rebound forever only to God's glory."

This is our challenge here at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer—
 to honor God,
 to hallow God's name,
 to give God that central place in our lives that God, being God, deserves.

How do we do this?

How do we hallow God's name?

By allowing God to work through our lives
 and by seeing life itself,
 not just as one darn thing after another and then you die,
 but as God's precious and holy gift to us every single day.

In other words, we hallow God's name by seeing all of life as extraordinary.

Praying this petition means treasuring every moment—
 every relationship and experience in life,
 as a precious gift from God.

When we live that way,
God will be glorified
and God's name will be hallowed
in everything we say and do.

Do you see now why Jesus began the Lord's Prayer this way?

It is an eternal reminder that we live as we pray and we pray as we live.

Hallowed be thy name.

May God give you the grace not only to pray it,
but also to live it.

Amen.

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