

Praying for Reign: Hallowed Be Your Name

Exodus 33:12-34:7; Matthew 6:9

The way we speak with someone is deeply affected by the kind of person that “someone” is. For example, I find that I speak with my grandchildren in a far different way from the way I speak with the chair of our church, Jim Howe. I think both Jim and my grandchildren are happy that I do!

Or, as another illustration, when you will be having a meeting with your boss, knowing something about that person makes a difference both in the way you prepare for them and for the way you engage them in conversation. So, if you can grasp how our relationships and conversations change based on knowing what the other person is like, then you can understand the point about prayer I want to make today.

This Lent season, we are learning from Jesus about how to speak to God in prayer. Last week, we saw that, when we speak with God, we enter confidently and intimately into conversation with him because he is our Father in heaven. Today, we come to the short phrase that follows “Our Father in heaven” in Mt 6:9, i.e., “Hallowed be your name.” It’s the part of the Lord’s Prayer often overlooked and, yet, in my understanding of it, it is one of the most far-reaching phrases in the Lord’s Prayer. We’ll see that, even though Jesus taught speak to God as our “Dear Father in heaven”, he said we also speak to him as the one with a name that is hallowed. To show this to you, I want us first to consider those two words: “hallowed” and “name”.

The Word Hallowed

This is a word we don’t use often in our day-to-day speaking. And, yet, almost all translators of the word into our modern English Bibles have chosen to use the word “hallowed” rather than a word like sacred or holy. The reason is that what this word speaks about whatever is of ultimate importance to us. “Hallowed” refers to the thing or person or concern that you have as the supreme focus of your life. It is whatever is of greater worth to you than anything else. In Mt 23:17 & 19, “hallowed” speaks of the way people viewed gold. So, whatever you value or revere – whatever you put at the center of your being -- is what you hallow.

So, I must ask you directly now: What do you hallow? What is the ultimate concern of your life? Who or what is at the center of your desires? When you

pray, “God, be hallowed”, you are saying, “God, may you be honored and revered as the supreme, only-perfect, holy, and sacred person that you are, the one to be put above all else – in my life and in this world.” The most unmistakable way to determine what the real “god” of your life is – is to identify what it is that you hallow.

The Word Name

In Western societies like our own, we may find it strange to discover that Jesus taught us to hallow God’s name rather than simply to hallow God. For us, a name is often just a label without any necessary relationship to the kind of person we are. But, in the Bible times, names actually said a great deal about who we are.

My first name is Gregory. It means vigilant or alert. And, my family name is much like it, i.e., way-bright. If you met me and noticed that I seem to be drowsy, lethargic and dull rather than alert and way-bright, you might not think anything about it because, in our society, we’re not expected to have our lives fit our names. But, in Jesus’s day, you would probably say that my name should be changed. This happened often in the Bible.

For example, in the Old Testament, there was a man named Jacob, meaning "Grabber." When his mother saw him clutch at his brother's heel as he came out of her womb, her maternal instinct recognized this trait; he was a "Grabber." As you may know, Jacob became a bit of a cheat. But, after he had wrestled with an angel and not given up, Jacob, "the Grabber," became Israel, "the man who strives after God". Or, after Abram had received a new calling from God, Abram, meaning "Great Father," became Abraham, "Father of Multitudes."

All this is to say is that when Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be you name,” he was saying that the person God is should be hallowed, i.e., should be revered and honored as being above all else in our lives and in our world.

So, understanding Jesus’s words in this way -- what is the name of God? Has he told us who he is and what he is like? As you may know, the Bible uses many names to describe the eternal qualities and character of God: He is El-Shaddai, the Almighty God. He is Jehovah-Jireh, the God who provides. He is Jehovah-Rapha, the God who heals. He is the Maker and Redeemer, the Shepherd and the Rock, a Refuge and Ever-Present Strength. When God’s Word makes God’s names known, each time it is telling

us that this name is what God is like. When you know God's name, you will have a good idea about what you can expect from him.

Among all these names of God, there is one passage that tells us what is central to all the names, i.e., Exodus 33:12-34:7. In that passage, Moses was asking the same question that we are asking today: "What is your name, Lord?" Moses said, "You know everything about me? You know my name. But, I need to know you. I long to know you. What is your name? What are you like?" As you have already in our Scripture reading earlier, God set up a place to meet with Moses and to make his name known.

When God revealed his name, he said this:

God announced his name. He said, "I am Yahweh, Yahweh. I am the God who is tender and kind. I am gracious. I am slow to get angry. I am faithful and full of love. I continue to show my love to thousands of people. I forgive those who do evil. I forgive those who refuse to obey me. And I forgive those who sin. But I do not let guilty people go without punishing evil..." (Exo 34:6-7)."

As you look at what God said about his name, you see that among all the other names he would reveal in his Word, there are two characteristics that are at the heart of God's identity: 1) that he is loving, patient and ready to forgive and 2) that God is just and holy and will not allow evil to go unpunished.

This passage in which God revealed his name to Moses was then quoted again and again in the rest of the Old Testament. It found its way into the prayers of God's people. And, I believe it is central to what Jesus meant when he taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

How "Hallowed Be Your Name" Transforms our Prayers

In the Lord's prayer, Jesus taught us that this desire to hallow God's name precedes all other petitions. In just a few sentences in his prayer, Jesus would teach us to ask God for daily bread. But, if we don't know that God is loving, that he cares about our needs, we would have no basis to come to him and ask him to meet those needs. But, God has told you, "I am full of love. I love you! Ask me for the bread that you need each day."

And, after teaching us to pray for daily bread, Jesus taught us to pray that God would forgive our sins. If we do not know that God has revealed his name as being patient with us, slow to anger, and ready to forgive, then, when we pray, we would have no idea whether God will receive us, forgive us and start

again with us. Do you see it? When you know the name of God and hallow it, you can ask for forgiveness. You can ask for bread.

The Book of Psalms was the prayer book of Israel, of Jesus and of the early church. From it, I want to show you two ways that hallowing God's names changed the way they prayed. I think it will help you to pray.

Situation #1: Psalm 86 – *Praying for a Daily Need*

David prayed this prayer in a time of great personal need. His opening words were, "Hear me, Lord, for I am poor and needy!" It's pretty obvious that he was in a very tough place. David needed daily bread – provision and sustenance for each day. He was in distress and felt under attack. How did he pray? Twice, he remembered the name of the Lord as God had revealed it to Moses.

In 86:5 he prayed, "*You, LORD, are forgiving and good, full of love to all who call on you.*" Then, in 86:15, he prayed, "*Lord, you are a God who is tender and kind. You are gracious. You are slow to get angry. You are faithful and full of love.*"

In other words, David prayed, "Hallowed be your name!" He remembered who God is and laid his needs in front of him. What happened? Listen to David's testimony in the last verse of this prayer, 86:17: "*You LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*"

So, I've wondered whether any of you who have come to Lake today might feel some of the distress that David felt the day he wrote Psalm 86. Then, I think Jesus has something very practical to teach you about praying. He said you should first remember who God is -- and then pray. God loves you. God knows what is going on in your life. Bring your needs to him and pray, "May your name be hallowed in this situation. Father, be true to your name to love and to provide.

Situation #2: Psalm 103 – *Praying for Forgiveness*

Psalm 103 is mostly a prayer about gratitude and praise for God. It starts, "All my inmost being, praise his holy name. Forget not all his benefits!" It ends, "Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion!"

But, David the Psalmist knew that all these benefits had not come to him or his people because of their own goodness. In 103:8-13, he prayed a beautiful prayer about how benefits come only because God is who he says he is, i.e., one who does not remain angry but is always ready to forgive those who come to

him in repentance and faith. David remembered the name God had made known to Moses and then hallowed that name:

The Lord is tender and kind. He is gracious.

He is slow to get angry. He is full of love.

He won't keep bringing charges against us.

He won't stay angry with us forever.

He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.

He doesn't pay us back in keeping with the evil things we've done.

He loves those who have respect for him.

His love is as high as the heavens are above the earth.

He has removed our sins from us.

He has removed them as far as the east is from the west.

A father is tender and kind to his children.

In the same way, the Lord is tender and kind

to those who honor him.

Maybe, like David, you know of some things in your life that need to be confessed to God and turned away from. I tell you: you should first remember and hallow the name of God. Remember that sin is serious. God does not leave evil unpunished. But, God loves to forgive all who come to him in repentance and faith. Remember that the Apostle John, drawing on this truth in 1 Jn 1:9, declared to all who sin, *“If you confess your sins, God will be who his name says he is, i.e., faithful and just, and he will cleanse you from all unrighteousness.”* If you hallow the name of the Lord, then you know that his name promises that, when you seek God's forgiveness, you will be cleansed. You can leave church today with the confidence that you are right with God.

Do you see it? When you hallow the name of your Father in heaven, you can ask for bread and know he cares. You can ask for forgiveness and know he restores. Hallelujah!

How “Hallowed Be Your Name” Transforms Our Lives: *The Word Be*

Before you go home, I want you to see that “hallowed be your name” is a plea for God's name to be hallowed, i.e., “God, may you be honored and revered as the supreme, only-perfect, holy, and sacred person that you are, the one to be put above all else – in my life and in this world.” That certainly is not yet true of all people in our city, nation or world, is it? How will it happen?

Today, I will only say that it must begin with us as his children. You should pray, “Let it begin with me.” God is our Father in heaven and we are his children here on earth. We are his representatives, his ambassadors on earth. People in our world need to see how hallowed God’s name is by the way we live our lives. I think that means that you and I must love people in ways that God loves people. They must see his love in and through us. We must forgive people as God forgives people – when they seek forgiveness. They must see his mercy in and through us. Yes, we must hate evil and work against it – both in our own lives and in our world. But that hatred of evil and longing for justice must be mixed with a deep love for people, the kind that makes us ready to forgive. As the 3rd Commandment says, our lives dare not dishonor or misuse the name of the God whose name we bear (Exo 20:7). Our names must be consistent his name.

Francis Chan wrote about this in his book, *Forgotten God*. He said:

“Jesus calls us to a radical faith... His call is to love those who have cheated us in business, who have spread nasty rumors about us, those who would kill us if they could; those who disagree with us politically, practically and fundamentally.

We are to be like that because our Father in heaven is like that. That is his name – he loves and forgives. We love him only because he first loved us. While we were sinners Christ died for us. We ask God to have his name be hallowed in this world and that must begin with us. That’s why we pray, “our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

At the close of the service:

I’m sure you have heard that Billy Graham died this past week at the age of 99. Lake Avenue Church was deeply involved in Mr. Graham’s 1948 crusade in Los Angeles, the one that launched his ministry. And, I personally have had a connection to him. In the 1970s, I was a singer at many of the Billy Graham associates’ crusades. Even, now, I am a member of the board of the Billy Graham Center. Whereas many religious leaders have lived lives that did not honor God, Billy Graham’s life, though constantly in the public eye, was faithful to God. I’m not saying he lived a perfect life. He had to ask the global Christian community for forgiveness for becoming too involved in politics in 1974. I was there in Lausanne, Switzerland when he did. He sought forgiveness from the Jewish community because of some of his comments

during the Nixon era. But, Billy Graham maintained his public integrity even as many famous religious leaders have been ravaged by financial and sex scandals. As Jim Wallis wrote, “He was a man who remained humble. He was willing to change. he never stopped growing.”

So, Graham’s name was in the Gallup Poll’s top ten most respected people in the world list a record 61 times in a row, often at the top. I think we may see why he was so respected when we read some of his final sermon, preached in New York City in his 417th crusade. It was about who God is, a God who is both just and loving. He said, “God is the only balm for those who feel hurt or who have failed. Wherever you are, whatever you have done, your Holy Father in Heaven will be who he always has been. He hasn’t abandoned you and he never will. He only asks you to turn from your sins and to place your faith in Jesus. When you do, he will give you peace.”

I think Graham’s name pointed to the hallowedness of God’s name. May that be true of us.