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The Lord's Prayer: Hallowed be Your Name
Matthew 6:1-15

Suppose we were to meet for the first time at some social gathering, a dinner party let's say, and after being introduced, what would be the first question you'd ask this stranger standing before you? "Where are you from?" most likely, or possibly, "What do you do?"

That's how we make polite conversation. It's also how we tend to construct our identity, isn't it? From our jobs or where we come from. But what if I asked instead, not "what do you do?" or "where are you from?", but "what are you *for*?" I can just imagine the funny looks and blank stares. I'm pretty sure I'd not be invited back to any dinner parties any time soon.

But from a *Biblical* perspective, the last question is the most important of them all. We need to understand not simply what we do, or where we are from, but *what we are for*. Only once we have adequately answered this last question will we truly know who we are.

This morning we are continuing in our examination of the Lord's Prayer, and we've come to the first petition, the first prayer request this prayer makes of our Father in heaven. In the Lord's Prayer our first request is, "Hallowed be Your name." In this simple phrase, as we'll see, we have the answer to the great question that shapes the entire significance of our lives—what are we *for*?

Paul answered that question in Romans 11:36 "of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever, Amen." God does all He does for His glory. *We exist for His glory*. We are *for God* and for the praise of His name. And so the petition, "Hallowed be Your name" is a prayer that God might get the glory, in fulfillment of the very reason for our existence.

When we pray "hallowed by Your name," we are addressing ourselves to the most basic and fundamental need of the human heart, the need to fulfill our purpose. If *that* is true, however, it becomes critically important for every one of us to know what on earth it is we are actually asking for each time we pray "Hallowed be Your name." We need to know what it is for God to be Holy, what His name means, and how we ought to hallow His name.

So, first let's think for a moment about *the holiness of God*.

Often we stumble at the word *hallowed*, don't we? It's not language we use in common every day speech, and some modern translations do not help when they try to solve the difficulty by translating the phrase "Holy is your name." While that is a true statement—God's name *is* holy—it does not capture what is being said in this first petition at all. This is not a simple statement of the facts. This is a *request*. "Let your name be hallowed, Lord." So what does it mean to hallow God's name?

Well, first of all, we are confessing the truth that God is holy. The word *holy* in scripture means separate. While it has moral connotation, even more fundamentally it refers to His otherness, His transcendence, His unapproachable uniqueness. God's holiness teaches us that God is infinitely higher and wholly other than we are. He is the creator, and we are the creature.

The classic text that vividly depicts the holiness and otherness of God is Isaiah 6:1-3, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; The whole earth *is* full of His glory!"

Now when Isaiah met the LORD in the temple, he fell down in abject terror at the glory of God and was filled with conviction of His own sin. But look! What the angelic beings are doing? They are sinless creatures. There is no guilt in them. Yet they cover their faces and hide their feet. They are struck by the transcendent holiness of God that is about more than simple moral purity but speaks about the essence of what it means to be the Creator rather than a creature. Before the otherness of God, even the shining purity of the angels is veiled in reverent awe. Hosea 11:9 makes the point succinctly, "I am God and not man—the Holy One among you." That is fundamentally what God's holiness means. It is His essential difference from us. Holiness is a summary term for everything that makes God not like you or me.

But the holiness of God also has moral overtones. It is not just that He is alien, different to us, dwelling in unapproachable light, as Paul puts it in 1 Timothy 6:16. It is that His holiness excludes moral impurity. That is why in Isaiah 6 the prophet thinks he is about to die when he sees something of God's holiness. "Woe to me! I am undone." He

cries, “For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the king the Lord of Hosts.”

God’s holiness is a hostile environment for sin. Fish cannot breathe out of water. Men cannot breathe in the vacuum of space. Sin cannot live in the presence of God. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. “God is light;” 1 John 1:5, “in Him is no darkness at all.” “You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with You.” (Psalm 5:4) When we pray “hallowed be Your name,” we are recognizing the fundamental fact of our existence. We are confessing that God is holy and we are His creatures. We are confessing that God is transcendent and we are mundane. He is infinite, we are finite. He is pure, and we are sinners.

That is a point driven home even in the structure of the Lord’s Prayer itself. Look at it, please. It begins with a preamble, the opening address to God as “our Father in heaven.” But then instead of moving immediately to our needs, it lingers over the priorities and prerogatives of God. “Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Only then, after dwelling on the glory and purposes of God does the prayer turn to human need. “Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” The order is important. God is addressed and then the first three petitions, the first three requests are all concerned with Him rather than with us, with His glory rather than our comfort, His purposes rather than our needs. The Lord’s Prayer itself is structured in such a way that praying it ought to subtly teach and constantly reinforce one vital lesson: we are *for God*. He is holy. He is exalted. He is high and lifted up and the train of His robe fills the temple.

And the determined God centeredness of this prayer in turn puts us in our place. It does not allow us to fill our own horizons and dominate our own concerns as we approach God. It demands that we recognize the Creator-creature distinction. *He* made *us*. *We* belong to *Him*. *He* is *independent* of creation. Creation is utterly *dependent* on *Him*. We need Him, He does not need us.

So the Lord’s Prayer is shaped the way it is to drum that one regular beat home till we sing along with it instinctively more and more. We exist for the glory and praise of God. We exist for God. We exist for God. We exist for God. Every time we say it together we are taking up that rhythm.

But we are doing more than simply *confessing* that God is holy here, aren't we? We are actively praying that God's name would be hallowed. We are praying that God's holiness would be *seen, recognized, felt, and trembled before*. We are praying for *worship*. We are asking God to enable *us* to adore Him as He ought to be adored, and we are praying that *others* would come to join us in bending the knee to Him.

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When we pray "hallowed be Your name," we are praying "O Lord, let me fulfill my purpose. Let me give You the glory You deserve and the praise You demand. Enable me to turn every thought, every decision, and every conversation to Your praise. Enable me to engage in every action, cultivate every relationship, and use every resource for the honor of Your name."

To pray "hallowed be Your name" is to give yourself in renewed commitment to existing 24-7 for the service and glory of God. This is not a prayer we can pray lightly, therefore. It is not something we can take on our lips flippantly or without thought. When we recite the Lord's Prayer, we are not parroting a traditional part of our liturgy: we are confessing the terrifying holiness of God, engaging in the pursuit of the glory of God, recommitting ourselves to exaltation of God, and praying for the grace we need to do it.

Then secondly, we are praying here about *the name of God*.

We pray that God's name might be hallowed. The Bible everywhere confesses the holiness of God's name. Psalm 111:9 tells us that God "has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: *Holy and awesome is His name*." Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, *whose name is Holy*: 'I dwell in the high and holy *place*, With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'" Ezekiel 39:7 adds, "So I will make *My holy name* known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not *let them* profane *My holy name* anymore. Then the nations shall know that *I am* the LORD, *the Holy One* in Israel."

But what does it mean to talk about God's name being holy or being hallowed? Why is His name so important? What's in a name anyway?

Well, you may know that names in the Bible point to the character and nature of the person named. They are not like our names which are mere labels, chosen because we

liked their sound. For example, Adam is taken from the Hebrew word for earth (adamah). Abram had his name changed to Abraham because God promised that he would be not simply the father of a nation (Abram) but the father of a great nation (Abraham). Jacob was given the name Israel because he wrestled with God and prevailed.

Names in scripture teach us about the person. Because of this connection between the name and the person named, God's name in the Bible became another way of talking about God Himself. God's name is God as He has shown Himself to His creatures. The name of God is the sum total of God's qualities, attributes, and actions. It is all that God has revealed concerning Himself.

That becomes clear when we look at the Biblical names for God. All of them, except two, are really descriptions of some quality or activity of God. "God is who His name is," writes Phillip Ryken. "Thus all the Biblical names and titles for God reveal His true character... He is Jehovah-Jireh, the God who provides. He is El-Shaddai, the Mighty God. He is the Holy One, the Everlasting Father. He is the Maker and the Redeemer. He is the Shepherd, the Rock, and the Hiding Place. Whatever the name, God is who His name is because He does what His name says." (Ryken, *When You Pray*, 68)

The two names for God that stand apart from all this, that are not descriptions of what God does but of *who He is*, are the two great covenant names by which God is known especially to His people. The first is the name Jehovah or YHWH, indicated in our Bibles by the word "LORD" in capitals. It was given to Moses in Exodus 3:14. It is related to the Hebrew verb "to be." God said, "I AM WHO I AM." It indicates the self existence and self sustaining fact of God.

The second name is the name by which God has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, in Matthew 28:19ff., Jesus said, "Go into all nations and make disciples, baptizing them into *the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" "The name" there is *singular*, not plural. God has one single threefold name. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is who He is. The name here reveals the Trinitarian nature of our one God.

The Lord's Prayer teaches us that God's name is holy. It is the summary of the revelation of God's character and nature. God's name involves those words and works of His which reveal Him to us. And it specially indicates those names—YHWH, and Father Son and Holy Spirit, that tell us not simply about what God's *does*, or what He is *like*, but

who He is. He is the eternally self-existent Triune God who enters into covenant with sinful people through Jesus Christ and discloses Himself to them in His mercy and grace. So when we pray that God's name might be hallowed, we are praying that all that God is might be honored and acknowledged as holy and revered as worthy of praise. We are giving special respect to God's self-revelation. The name of God is shorthand for the self-revelation of God. It is everything by which He makes Himself known to us. We are asking God to show His glory, to reveal His holiness, so that who He is might be clearly seen and acknowledged and loved.

So how can we do it? How do we hallow God's name? The great Puritan of Kidderminster, Richard Baxter, wrote a massive book called *A Christian Directory* in which he attempted to give specific pastoral directions and advice to believers seeking godly counsel on almost every topic. He would address the problem and then give a list of directions on how to deal with it.

Here are some Baxter-like directions for hallowing God's name:

1. Recognize that we have no ability to hallow the name of God on our own.

We are sinners who much prefer the glorification of our own names to God's. We exchange the truth of God for a lie and worship the created things rather than the creator.

When we pray "Hallowed be Your name," we are acknowledging that we need God to work if His glory is to be honored. We adopt a beggar's posture, pleading with God Himself to work for His own great glory. One old metrical version of Psalm 43: 3 sings, "O send Thy light forth and Thy truth, let them be guides to me and lead me to Thine holy hill, even where Thy dwellings be. Then will I to God's altar go, to God my cheifest joy. Yea, God, my God, Thy name to praise my harp I will employ." That's what we pray for. Send Your light forth and Your truth. Pour out Your Spirit. Show us Yourself in Your Son by the gospel. Let the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ be seen clearly. Unless He sends forth His light, we remain fast-bound in sin and nature's night, as Wesley put it.

2. Understand that only those who know God's saving work in their lives hallow God's name in a way that pleases Him.

Psalm 106:47 says, “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to Your holy name and glory in Your praise.” God’s salvation and our praise are connected. We will never glorify God as we ought till we receive the saving grace we need.

Ephesians 1:13-14 describes salvation in these terms, “In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.” Notice what Paul says the purpose of our salvation is. We heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. We believed it. We were sealed by the promised Holy Spirit. *Why?* “To the praise of His glory.” God gets maximal glory in the salvation of sinners. Sinners are only enabled to give God glory as they ought when they believe the gospel of salvation as they must. You can’t pray “hallowed be your name” without praying first for salvation from sin and death and hell. Unless you go to Christ in faith, you cannot hold God’s name in honor.

3. Prize the means by which God is pleased to make Himself known to us.

If we are to pray “hallowed be Your name,” we must also make use of all the means God has given us to hallow His name. We must devote ourselves to His Word. We must delight in scripture-regulated worship. We must keep the Sabbath. We must sing His praise. When we pray “hallowed be Your name,” we commit ourselves to the worship of God in public as a church, in private as families, and alone as individuals.

4. Study all we can about God, His ways, works, and words.

If we are to hallow God’s name, we should give ourselves to the study of God. He will be the delight of every Christian forever. Our chief end is not only to give Him glory but to enjoy Him forever. There is something terribly wrong with our Christianity if we think the study of God a dull and laborious and boring task. If we devote ourselves to the study of everything from parenthood, to prayer, to politics, but have little time to ponder the mind bending, jaw dropping, life altering glories of the being, attributes and actions, ways, words, and works of the Triune God, then we are like children who want to play in the dirt with their toy trucks oblivious to their surroundings, on a trip to the Grand Canyon. It is almost shocking that we who claim to know the Lord should think so little of Him and give so little of our study to Him.

5. *Work and pray and labor for a life that hallows God's name.*

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther asked when God's name would be hallowed, to which he answered, "When both our teaching and our life are godly and Christian." (Ryken, 73) To be a Christian is to bear the name of the living God. We are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. After describing our moral condition before, Paul says of us in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were ***justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.***"

To be a Christian is to be washed, sanctified, and justified by God's name. We undermine our worshipful words by our unholy lives. To pray "Hallowed be Your name" is not only to commit ourselves to God's worship but our life to God's praise.

It is vital that we learn all that this first petition teaches us because, as Thomas Watson beautifully put it,

"When some of the other petitions shall be useless and out of date, as we shall not need to pray in heaven 'give us this day our daily bread' because there shall be no hunger; nor, 'forgive us our trespasses,' because there shall be no sin; nor, 'Lead us not into temptation' because the old serpent is not there to tempt: yet the hallowing of God's name will be of great use and request in heaven; we shall be ever singing hallelujahs, which is nothing else but the hallowing of God's name." (Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, 38)

Christian, you have the name of God placed upon you. Hallow His name here for it will be your work forever hereafter.

Amen.