

"Hallowed Be Your Name"

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[0 : 0 0] So, would you turn with me to the Gospel of Matthew? We are back in the Gospel of Matthew this morning, chapter 6, that's page 761 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there.

As Pastor Matt mentioned last week, we're continuing our series in the Sermon on the Mount, and we've come now to the center of the sermon, what we call the Lord's Prayer. And for the next few weeks, we'll be slowing down and considering the Lord's Prayer pretty much line by line. Now, you might be wondering, why spend so much time on prayer? Well, because prayer is that important. You know, imagine someone handed you the keys to an enormous mansion high up in the mountains with beautiful views, with spacious rooms, with vaulted ceilings.

Imagine it was just given to you. It was all yours. You own it. You live there now. But imagine you kind of arrive at this new home, and you walk in the door, you put your luggage down, and then you just stay right there in the entryway, right? You sleep there, you eat there, you brush your teeth there. In the vestibule, you never explore the house, you never take in the rooms, you never admire the warmth of the fireplace, you never see the sunrise over the mountains from the panoramic windows. You just strangely just stay right there in the entryway. That would be ridiculous, right? Who would do that? And yet, many of us actually live the Christian life that way.

God in the gospel has given us, as Paul says in Ephesians 3, the unsearchable riches of Christ. Yet, we are still only standing in the entryway of this unspeakable gift that we've been given.

We're still only standing in the entryway of this new life, this eternal life, this kingdom life in Christ. But the question is, how do we move in? How do we move in and inhabit this unsearchable grace that we've been given? How do we explore the splendid views and rooms and comforts and joys of faith in Christ? Well, the answer to that is prayer. By prayer, we explore and inhabit more and more this great salvation that's been given to us. I like how John Calvin put it in chapter 20 of the Institutes. He said, we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel and which our faith has gazed upon. We dig up by prayer the treasures of the gospel.

[2 : 5 1] And here's how wonderful the Lord Jesus is. Our Lord Jesus has not only purchased the riches of salvation for us through His life, death, and resurrection, and He not only gives them to us free of charge by His Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, the Lord Jesus also taught us how to pray so that we can explore those riches and enjoy them more and more and more.

So, we're going to go slowly through the prayer that Jesus taught us in Matthew chapter 6 so that we might learn how to pray. Last week, we looked at the opening of the prayer, our Father in heaven. Today, we'll look at the first petition, hallowed be Your name. So, let me pray for us, and then I'll read verses 9 through 13, and then we'll unpack the first petition. Let me pray.

Father, how we need Your help to learn how to pray. Thank You for the unsearchable riches of the gospel, and thank You for giving us Your Holy Spirit who intercedes for us when we lose the words to pray.

Thank You most of all for sending Your Son, our Lord Jesus, who teaches us to pray so that we might experience all the riches of intimacy with You and so that we might experience the advance of Your kingdom in the world. Help us now as we come to Your Word to read, to mark, and to learn what You are saying to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. All right, Matthew 6, 9 through 13. Jesus says, Pray then like this, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

So, the 17th century poet, English poet George Herbert, once described prayer as reversed thunder. He says, it's God's breath in man returning to His birth. What a powerful image that is, right?

[5 : 09] God's Word spoke the heavens and the earth into being, and in words, in prayer, we speak back to God, to this awesome and majestic God. Thunder, right? Thunder is something that comes down from heaven and sort of shakes the earth, right? But prayer, says Herbert, is reversed thunder. It's human words that resound in the heavens. What a thrilling picture of prayer, reversed thunder.

Father. But I wonder, is that your and my experience of prayer? To borrow a line from T.S. Eliot, too often our prayers seem to end not with a bang, but with a whimper.

If we're honest, prayer just doesn't really excite us all that much. It's not that we can't pray, it's that we honestly don't want to pray. And we don't want to pray because prayer doesn't seem all that exciting. After all, in a world of ice cream, who wants to eat a stalk of Brussels sprouts, right? Who wants to spend time like that? Prayer sort of feels like a stalk of Brussels sprouts.

But, you know, prayer sort of becomes this way for us. It sort of becomes dull and undesirable because our view of God has become so dull and undesirable. We have cold and joyless hearts toward prayer because we have cold and joyless hearts towards God. And this, I think, is one of, if not the greatest obstacles to prayer, you're in my cold and joyless heart toward God. And that's why Jesus teaches us here in the Lord's Prayer to pray the first petition first, hallowed be Thy name.

This is the prayer our cold and joyless hearts need. But maybe of all the petitions, this one is probably the most foreign to us. After all, how many of us use the word hallowed on a regular basis? I was thinking about that this week, and there's only one instance of the word hallowed I can think of, and it's in a song we sing in church in Christmastime. Like, that doesn't count, right? So, I think we need to approach this petition, hallowed be Your name, by maybe asking three questions. So, here are the three that are going to kind of order our time together. First, what are we praying for when we pray, hallowed be Your name?

[7 : 48] And second, why are we praying it? And then third, how can we actually pray that prayer? So, okay, so first, what are we praying for when we pray, hallowed be Thy name? Well, let's just look at the two halves of this petition, first hallowed and then name. What does it mean to hallow something?

Well, that's an older English expression that means to treat something as holy. Okay, well, what does that mean, right? Well, when you encounter something that's holy, what is it? Well, it's set apart. It's unique. It's worthy of admiration. It has no peer.

And when you're in the presence of something holy, your response is awe and wonder. It's the opposite of something being commonplace. Commonplace things, right? What do we do with commonplace things? Well, you kind of use them, maybe they're useful, and then you ignore them, right? Because they're common. But if something is holy, you realize that it doesn't exist for you to use it or consume it and then ignore it. Rather, you're struck by it in wonder. It's bigger than you.

It's greater than you. It's holy. And this wonder and awe in the face of something like that leads to reverence and respect for it. It leads to honor. Mountain climbers tend to treat great mountains this way. You know, they're not just sort of in awe and wonder at their beauty, but they approach them with reverence and respect. You know, a mountain climber would never speak about K2 or Denali the way you and I speak about Sleeping Giant or East Rock, right? Those things are commonplace. You wake up on a day off, you're like, eh, let's go hike Sleeping Giant, right? But if you're around a mountain climber, you're talking about K2, there's a reverence. Those things are set apart. They're worthy of awe.

They're worthy of respect. They're worthy of fear even. So that's what hallowed means. Hallowed means to treat something or to treat someone with awe-filled reverence.

[10:16] But what about thy name? Well, notice that the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer are all God-centered, aren't they? Here, in these first three petitions, we turn our hearts to God's kingdom, to God's will, and in this first petition, to God's name. But what is that? Well, in the language of the time, to speak of something's name was to speak of its nature, what it really is, what it's revealed itself to be. So God's name is God's revealed nature, who God is. And that sort of makes sense when you think about it. A name, after all, is how you do what? It's how you identify someone, right? Hi, my name is Nick. That's how you can sort of identify me. And over time, what happens through usage is that a name begins to gather up all that's true about someone and then kind of holds it forth. You know, think about when you hear the name of someone you love, right? Just hearing their name can make you feel wonderful, feel good. It brings to mind all that's true about your experience of that person. But the opposite is true, too. When you hear the name of someone who's hurt you, someone you don't like, just hearing the name can bring up all sort of feelings and emotions. Why?

Because a name sort of functions to carry the identity, the character of the person. Okay, so let's put these two things together. What are we praying for when we pray, hallowed be your name? In short, we're asking to live in awe of God. We're asking for God to be known with wonder-filled reverence just because of who He is.

When we pray this first petition, we're praying, God, would you be seen and known as holy, as wonderful, as good, as just, as loving, as wise? In my heart, would I live in awe of you? In the hearts of my family, would they be filled with wonder and reverence just because of who you are? In the hearts of my fellow church members, would we live in awe of you? Would you be at the center of what we do?

In the hearts of my neighbors, would they see you as good and worthy? In fact, would you be seen and known and worshiped as God in the whole world? Hallowed be thy name.

So that's what Jesus instructs us to pray here. But why? Why do we pray this? Why does Jesus tell us to pray this first? Well, that brings us to our second point. After considering what we pray for, now we'll consider why we're praying for it when we pray, hallowed be thy name. And I think we can answer the question of why in two ways. First, we should pray this prayer because God deserves public renown. God deserves public renown. No one is more worthy of public honor and renown than God.

[13:37] I mean, just think of all the things that we extol and praise and give credit to. We live in awe of the latest technological advance, the next championship sports team, the artist or actor or musician who's made it big. The human heart is like hardwired to publicly praise, right? But who ought to be uppermost in our exaltation? Who should be getting the glory that we so readily dole out? You know, we get excited about the latest scientific breakthrough. Okay. But what about the one who so fashioned the universe, who so fine-tuned the laws and constants of reality such that it makes rationality and science and discovery even possible in the first place? You know, we walk into Target or Costco, and what's the first thing you see when you walk into Target or Costco, right? Oh, I know this is true of BJ's anyway. We go to BJ's.

We're like a BJ's family. You walk in, and like, what's the first thing you see? These huge flat-screen TVs, right? And they just keep getting bigger and bigger and bigger as the years go on. But you can go and stand in the middle of Times Square and see a digital display like a hundred times that size. But friend, stare up at the night sky, and there you see just a speck of the depths of a universe that stretches farther than our imaginations can even fathom. Who placed the stars in their orbits? Who extended the reaches of space beyond human calculation? That's the one that deserves public renown. Hallowed be His name.

And again, you know, we rightly extol those men and women who stood up for justice and righteousness, don't we? The Dietrich Bonhoeffers, the Martin Luther King Juniors, the Mother Teresa's, the Susan B. Anthony's. We admire how they could go against the tide of their day and do what is right despite misunderstanding, despite opposition, despite even the threat of death.

But who is righteous in all their ways? You know, consider the lives of even the most admired social reformers, and you will see that they too have feet of clay. Their lives too are imperfect and broken. They too fall short. But there is one who is just in all His ways, who never errs, who is always trustworthy and true, whose righteousness is like the mighty mountains, whose faithfulness stretches to the skies. That one certainly deserves public renown.

Hallowed be His name. But this one is not just infinitely wise and powerful. He's not just infinitely righteous and just. This one is also supremely beautiful and good. How lovely is Your dwelling place, Lord God Almighty, the psalmist say. One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

[17:17] How long can a human stare at the sunrise and still be thrilled as the colors of dawn spread across the horizon? I mean, a long time, right? And yet the Lord is infinitely more beautiful, infinitely more satisfying. God deserves public renown. We too often give our glory to another, to created things, when our praise belongs rightly to our Creator. But this brings us actually to the second reason why Jesus teaches us to pray this prayer. It's not just that God deserves public renown, but it's also because our hearts long for lasting joy.

As we've said, we humans, we're sort of hardwired to publicly praise, aren't we? And when we praise something, what are we doing? We're kind of finding our joy in that thing. And of course, there's nothing necessarily wrong with praising a masterful symphony or praising a delicious meal or praising a trustworthy friend. But does your heart have no greater joy than in these passing things, no more lasting joy? I mean, what if the human heart only hallows a created thing, a fellow creature? What will the outcome be? What mere human, what mere created thing can bear the weight of a human soul looking for lasting joy? You see, friends, you're going to hallow something. You're going to set something apart as the object of your desire for lasting awe-filled joy. What will it be? There's only one that can sustain that weight. There's only one who can be the object of lasting, awe-filled joy. Psalm 1611 says of God,

God, You make known to me the path of life. In Your presence there is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Only the eternal God can satisfy your desire for eternal joy.

So, when you pray, hallowed be Your name, you're actually praying at the same time, all at once, a very dangerous prayer, but also a very liberating prayer. You're praying a very dangerous prayer because praying, hallowed be Your name, by praying that, you're asking God to cleanse your heart of idols. You're asking God to cleanse your heart of the misdirected worship of created things, and that is a dangerous prospect because you might find that your life has been built around things that God is now going to unsettle and remove. You have lived for human praise. You and I have lived so that our names might be praised. We've lived for human honor. We've lived for human recognition, but now God's going to dethrone those things. And you know, if you live now no longer for those things, it's actually going to put you out of step with many who sought their utmost joy in those things too. Work colleagues or friends or neighbors will be surprised that you no longer chase the same thrills and passions and goals that you used to chase with them. You no longer join with them in the hallowing of things that only give fleeting satisfaction. It's a dangerous thing to pray, hallowed be Thy name. You may find that it leaves you like Daniel and his friends, standing alone in the court of earthly power, refusing to eat from the king's table, facing the prospect of a fiery furnace for your nonconformity to the gods of the age. But this dangerous prayer is also the most liberating.

The deep wellspring. Hallowed be Thy name means let me find in You, God, the deep wellspring my thirsty heart has been yearning for. And what does God say? Come and drink. Without money, without price, come and drink.

[22 : 28] No longer do you need to serve the idols of your own making, hoping they bring you joy. In praising God, you will find the joy you were created for. God is an infinite God of infinite beauty and goodness. How could our finite human hearts not be forever satisfied?

So we pray, hallowed be Thy name, not just because we want God's public renown to be rightly spread, but because we want our hearts to join that song, to find ourselves liberated for lasting joy in the praise of our Creator. Hallowed be Your name. There is no greater prayer than that. It's actually the most compassionate prayer that you can pray for your neighbors. It's the most thrilling prayer you can pray for your own soul. This is why Jesus makes it the first of all prayers. Put God in the center.

Yes, we will soon learn to pray for our daily bread, for forgiveness, for strength in trials. Our Lord knows that we need these prayers. But first, always first, pray to know God is holy and good and satisfying before all else. After all, what good is bread? What good is forgiveness?

What good is victory in trials if you don't have God? What does it profit to gain the whole world, Jesus said, and lose your own soul? I wonder, are you facing a trial today, brother or sister?

Are you facing a very real need? Then yes, take that specific care to your heavenly Father. Father. But also, and first, pray what Jesus has taught us. Hallowed be Your name. God, help me to really know You and to praise You for all Your works and for all that shines forth in them, Your almighty power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy, and truth. And help me in this trial, in this time of need. Help me so that everything I think and say and do will honor and praise Your name, for there is my greatest safety, my greatest provision, and my greatest joy. And you know, as we so often see in the Gospels, Jesus Himself lives out what He teaches here. In John 12, Jesus realizes that the time is drawing near for Him to face the cross, and He says, now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose, I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.

[25 : 42] Then a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. You see, Jesus' prayer, even and especially in trial, was this, Father, hallowed be Your name.

So make it your prayer too, friends. So here it is. Here's the answer to the cold, joyless heart toward God that chokes out our prayer life before it even begins. The answer is to take up this first petition and to ask God to fill your heart with all of Him, to pray for His public renown in your life and in the lives of those around you.

But our last question is, how can we pray this prayer? And what I mean by this question is not kind of practically what words do we use. Use your own words, or use the words of the Psalms. You'll find much help in the Psalms as they direct our hearts to the goodness and glory of God.

So when we ask how can we pray this prayer, I'm not asking what words we should use to pray, hallowed be Your name. Rather, I'm asking this question, what right do we have to pray this prayer?

You know, the older one gets, the older you realize how cold and joyless your heart can be. Many Christians have followed the Lord for many years, and they can testify that there are seasons when the things of God grow cold, when His name does not evoke awe and wonder. When we've become so familiar, God's become so commonplace. You know, that's perhaps one of the greatest dangers of ministry, whether paid ministry or volunteer ministry. One of the greatest dangers is God and the things of God just become commonplace. So what right do we have to pray this prayer, hallowed be Your name? How can we, sinners, sinners who know better, take this prayer on our lips again and pray it, expecting for God to hear us an answer? Have we not spurned Him or ignored Him or used Him one too many times?

[28 : 17] But friend, brother, sister, consider with me, who is it that teaches us this prayer?

It's the Lord Jesus. And what did He come to do? He came for cold, joyless sinners like you and me.

Yes, you have made God commonplace in your life, but that is exactly why Jesus came. Friends, this is the gospel. As the Holy One, the Lord Jesus Christ became common so that we, the common, could become holy. Jesus stood in the place of sinners and was rejected so that sinners could stand in the presence of God and be accepted.

The truth is you're not running out of chances with Him. His work is finished, and there's no exhausting it. And when you see that, friend, when you see it, when you see the way He died for you, when He looked at you in your cold, joyless heart and said, I love you, and I'm coming for you, and I'll become common so that you can become holy, when you see that, then you're really starting to see His glory. Then you're starting to really see what sets God apart as holy and worthy of awe and wonderful.

example. Christ died for sinners. God justifies the ungodly. That is how God has set His name apart for eternity. In the center of the throne in heaven is the Lamb who was slain. There is no other God than God, and this is who He is. This is His name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God of the gospel.

[30 : 16] And God the Son invites you. Come out of the entryway. It doesn't matter how long you've been stuck there. It doesn't matter how long you've neglected prayer. It doesn't matter how cold and joyless your heart is.

Come out of the entryway. Start here. Hallowed be Your name. Pray that prayer. God, help me to really know You, and may I live in awe of You, and may my life glorify Your name. Amen. Let's pray.

God, that is what we pray this morning, that You would come by Your Holy Spirit, and as the old song says, tune our hearts to sing Your praise.

Amen. We ask this not because we deserve it, but because You, Jesus, are a sufficient and loving Savior who give good gifts to Your children. We pray this in Your mighty name. Amen.