

Hallowed be Your Name

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[0 : 0 0] Right now we're in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and during the crisis many more people have started to pray. So Google searches for prayer have surged, which has opened up more research into prayer.

For example, the Wall Street Journal recently had an article called The Science of Prayer by Elizabeth Bernstein. And it's written from the perspective of mental health. And it's saying that scientists have been trying to study prayer as hard as it is to find out its impact and its benefit for the person praying.

And they're saying that the practice of prayer may boost mental health. And so amidst much uncertainty right now, when many people are feeling weak and afraid, the article shares stories of people who found help through praying.

Prayer has helped them feel better. It's helped them find comfort and become more hopeful. And the problem with the article is that it only touches on self-focused prayer.

In other words, they only report on prayer for meeting felt needs as opposed to prayer that's focused on God. Now, in church right now, we've been looking at the Lord's Prayer.

[1 : 1 3] It's Jesus' model for how to pray. So last week, we looked at our Father in heaven and the need to know who it is that we're talking to when we pray. Next, Jesus gives six simple and direct petitions.

The first three focus on God and his kingdom. And then the next three focus on ourselves and our needs. And so it's clear that when it comes to genuine prayer, we don't start with a focus on ourselves.

We start by focusing on God. So Jesus is teaching that prayer should always be directed towards God and his kingdom before it's directed towards ourselves and our needs.

And this is reflected in the very first petition of the Lord's Prayer, which is, Hallowed be your name. And so Jesus tells us to pray this first, which means it's the most important thing we can pray.

And so today we're going to consider Hallowed be your name. We'll look at it under three headings. What it means, why it matters and how it applies.

[2 : 2 1] Hallowed be your name, what it means, why it matters and how it applies. So first of all, what it means. Let's think for a moment about the word Hallowed, because it's not a word that's used very much these days.

We do sometimes hear it used in the context of sport when someone speaks about the Hallowed turf. It means the place where great sporting achievements have taken place, like the Hallowed turf of Murrayfield Stadium, where the Scottish rugby team have sailed to victory over England in the past.

Or even the Hallowed turf of Pataudry Stadium, where back in the day, Aberdeen Football Club would beat the giants of European football. In this sense, Hallowed conveys the notion of greatness, of respect and honour.

So to hallow something is to treat it as special and important. And so when Jesus teaches us to pray, Hallowed be your name, he's telling us that the great God deserves respect and honour because he is special and he is of supreme importance.

So the word translated here as Hallowed is the word we get our English word holy from. Because to hallow means to make holy, literally to sanctify or to set apart.

[3 : 39] And so when it comes to God, to hallow God's name doesn't mean to make his name holy, because it already is, but to set apart his name in worship and in adoration because of who he is.

In the Old Testament, the word that's used most frequently to describe God is the word holy. And it emphasises just how unlike us God is.

And so we read in the prophet Isaiah chapter 6 and verse 3, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. Also at the end of the Bible, in Revelation chapter 4 and verse 8, we read, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

And so when we pray, Hallowed be your name, we want God himself to be set apart and exalted above everyone and everything.

Jesus is telling us to pray that the whole world would bow before God in adoration, so that God would be worshipped by everyone, everywhere.

[4 : 47] That's the hallowed part of Jesus' petition. But we're to pray, Hallowed be your name. So what about the name part? Well, the name of God in the Bible is a way of speaking about his character and nature.

And so God ought to be hallowed because of who he is. Now, these days, we don't tend to place too much importance on names. And so when it comes to baby's names in 2020 so far, apparently Luna tops the girls' list of names.

And it's the name of the Roman moon goddess. Asher is the most popular boy's name. And Archie has dropped out of the top 10, despite Harry and Meghan choosing it for their firstborn son last year.

In Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Juliet says to Romeo, What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

She reasons that a rose would still smell the same, even if it was called something else. And so with Romeo, his name as a Montague doesn't really matter. Because a name, and certainly in Western culture, doesn't really say anything significant about you.

[5 : 57] It doesn't define you. But when we're told to pray, Hallowed be your name, we've got to realise that God's name is significant.

Because it stands for all that he has revealed about himself. It expresses who he is, his being, his character, his attributes, his activity. So Jesus is teaching us to pray that God would receive the honour and the glory he deserves for who he is.

That's what it means to pray, Hallowed be your name. That's our first point, what it means. Secondly, why it matters. So in teaching us to pray, Hallowed be your name, Jesus wants us to recognise how holy and separate from us that God really is.

He demands to be worshipped and honoured and adored and revered. And that's why our praying must begin with him. But we're not simply to pray, Hallowed be your name, because by implication, we're to live lives that reflect this reality.

So we should understand that our chief purpose in life as human beings is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. We exist to give God glory, because he always has and always will matter more than anything else.

[7 : 20] And so he is to be set apart in our hearts, but also in our world, because he is of ultimate importance. He should be hallowed by everyone and everything, because that's no less than what he deserves.

And so for those who know him as father, even for those who don't, his name alone is to be recognised as great and special by people from every nation.

And that's why Jesus puts this desire for God and his glory above ourselves and our needs, because we can't pray for ourselves unless and until we've acknowledged the ultimate worth of God.

So when it comes to prayer, we can easily be far more occupied with ourselves than with God. But the problem with this is that God matters infinitely more than we do.

We wouldn't be here if it weren't for him. And that's why praise is the priority in prayer before we get to petition. And so getting prayers answered isn't the most important part of praying.

[8 : 28] Praying for ourselves or praying for others isn't the priority of prayer. Even confessing our sins should come later, because the priority is hallowed be your name.

And yet we are far more concerned so often about ourselves than we are about God being glorified. Because we pray and live as if everything revolves around us, making our chief purpose in life our own comfort and happiness.

But Jesus teaches us to pray, hallowed be your name, because we live in our father's world, and so everything revolves around him. That's why he is to be set apart and exalted above all else.

And so when the priorities in our praying are topsy-turvy, it indicates that our life is too. Because if we think that God exists for us, rather than we exist for God, we'll inevitably hallow other things before him.

So instead of seeing God as our father in heaven, whom we depend on and revere, we'll see him as a kind of divine Santa Claus, who's just there to give us what we want, like good health, or a good job, or a good spouse, or a good home, or a good income, whatever our hearts desire.

[9 : 48] But what if we don't get what our hearts desire? What happens then? Well, perhaps we become resentful towards God, and even think prayer is just a waste of time. That's why Jesus needs to teach us that in prayer and in life, our deep desire should be for the honour and glory of God.

So here's the test. What is it that we hallow most? What do we adore more than anything else in life? Because that's what we'll spend our time thinking about.

And probably that's what we'll spend much of our time praying about. Is it safety, security, success, work, comfort, family, relationships?

And it's not as if these are bad things, but they can replace the affection that we ought to have for God. Because they can become the ultimate things in our life in place of God.

We can set them apart as most important, and hallow them instead of God. That's why this first petition in the Lord's Prayer matters. Because when we get the right perspective on God in our praying, that he comes first, and it will help us keep everything else in perspective as well.

[11 : 05] When we capture the amazing reality that God is our Father in heaven, then the things of this earth will become less of a big deal for us.

Because we can trust that our Father knows what we need before we ask him. So hallowed be your name. What it means. Why it matters.

Now how it applies. Here's how you can know if God has become a reality in your life. It's when hallowed be your name isn't just a few words that you say, but it's the burning desire of your life, and your desire for everyone, everywhere.

So let's think how hallowed be your name applies to ourself and to our world. First of all, ourself. If we pray, hallowed be your name, we're essentially saying to God, make me holy.

Listen to 1 Peter 1, verse 15 and 16. We read, Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

[12 : 10] For it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. So God is set apart from us, and he alone is holy in a way that we could never be.

But his people are to participate in and reflect his holiness. And so as children, we are to reflect the character of our heavenly father. So we'll want to be holy in our thoughts and words and actions.

Let's think about those. First of all, our thoughts. We'll be careful in what we think about. In seeking to be holy, we won't want to fill our minds with rubbish.

And so we'll aim to avoid anything that's unhelpful, whether that's what we watch or read with our eyes, or what we listen to with our ears. We'll be careful what we daydream about, and we'll aim to think about what is pure and good.

That's our thoughts. What about our words? Well, we'll be careful in what we say. And so when it comes to God, we won't misuse or dishonour his name, and we won't misrepresent him in anything we say.

[13 : 16] If we take vows that involve his name, such as in marriage, then we'll hallow his name by keeping them. When we speak to others, we'll be careful not to curse or to use bad language.

We'll avoid foolish talk and coarse joking, and we'll try not to criticise unfairly or get angry unnecessarily. We'll aim to speak in a way that honours God.

So that's our thoughts and our words. What about our actions? Well, we'll be careful in what we do, whether that's with our bodies and how we use them, or in the way that we relate to others.

We'll ensure we love and care for our families, that we're loyal to our friends and kind to our enemies. These are just a few examples, but in what we think and say and do, we can hallow or fail to hallow God's name.

So if we're going to pray, hallowed be your name, we can't be a hypocrite whose life doesn't reflect that desire. Because if we profess to be a Christian, we are a walking, talking reflection of God to the world around us.

[14 : 24] We sometimes speak of children being a credit to their parents, or of bringing disgrace upon the family name. And so when it comes to God's family, we will either honour him or dishonour him.

We will either reflect him well or badly. We'll give the impression that he matters more than everything else, or it doesn't matter much at all.

That's how hallowed be your name applies to ourself. But how does it apply to our world? Well, by praying hallowed be your name, we'll want the whole world to honour God.

And so we'll feel grieved when God is publicly criticised and ridiculed. We won't want to tolerate his name being blasphemed and patronised.

And so the offence may be blatant, like the mocking and belittling of God's name in public life, as in so much entertainment, it just deliberately sets out to blaspheme God's name, to mock his character, and to make a joke of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 29] But the offence might be more subtle because God's name is frequently misused as an exclamation mark in many people's speech. So their frustration or their excitement isn't necessarily directed at God, but God is still insulted.

OMG, oh my God, it's so common that it's not just dropped into text messages anymore, it's found its way into normal conversation, even onto clothing.

Now, most wouldn't see this as a big deal, but it all empties God's name of its value and makes it just an inconsequential word.

So what we are commanded to pray as hallowed, set apart, wholly special, is just made cheap and meaningless. Of course, many who don't know God are unaware of their blasphemy.

But blaspheming God's name is not the most serious speech offence these days. The Hate, Crime and Public Order Bill, published by the Scottish Government last month, makes it clear what the most serious speech offences are.

[16 : 40] And so the bill decriminalises the age-old offence of blasphemy. And yet it replaces it with a new, modern notion of blasphemy, and introduces the policing of a different kind of speech, viewed as hate crime.

And so to speak against God's name isn't a serious offence anymore. Today's hate crime is far more wide-ranging because it covers speaking against the holy and untouchable gods of modern Western culture.

So Jesus telling us to pray, hallowed be your name, couldn't be more relevant to life today. So can we really pray, hallowed be your name, and not be offended by the mocking of God?

Because of who God is, and because of how he has revealed himself to us, he deserves the honour and adoration of everyone, everywhere.

And so this should be our chief purpose in our life. And it should be the primary focus of our prayers. And yet it's impossible to hallow God's name as we should.

[17 : 47] We just can't do it. And so this creates a problem because as sinful human beings, we can't be in the presence of this holy God. We deserve punishment for our sin and our failure to be holy.

And yet God himself has given the solution to this problem because there is one who did hallow God's name perfectly, Jesus Christ.

And his burning desire was for the honour and glory of God. And so Jesus lived the life that we could never live, a life without sin. And Jesus died the death that we deserve to die, a death for our sin.

And so on the cross, Jesus was punished for our sin so God could accept us as holy before him. Jesus willingly gave his life as a substitute for any who will trust in him.

And so the great news of Christianity is that Jesus Christ did not remain socially distant from humanity. Instead, Jesus came to let the deadly virus of our sin be transmitted to him so that his holy life could be transmitted to us.

[19 : 03] And so it's only by faith in Jesus that God accepts us as holy in his sight. That's why we can approach God and enter into his holy presence in prayer.

Do you see? There is no other way that we can have access to God other than through Jesus Christ. And so if we reject Jesus, we will never be acceptable to God.

And if that's you, then turn from your sin and trust in Jesus Christ. That's how we recalibrate our lives, to seek to live for God's glory instead of our own.

And only then can we pray, hallowed be your name and want his fame to spread and to increase throughout this world. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. How we want this in our lives and want this in our world.

[20 : 10] We thank you that you accept us because of what Jesus Christ has done through his perfect holy life. He was the perfect sacrifice for our sin so that we could be made holy and acceptable to you.

We thank you that you take us and you forgive us and you use us in this world and you help us see that this world is not for us, but this world is for you to be glorified and honoured.

And so we pray that we would do that and that more and more people would do that until the day that Jesus Christ returns. For we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.