

Hallowed be your name

1—May your name be revered

Jesus has taught us how to pray. Given the relation between prayer and life, this prayer also teaches us how to live. Martyn Lloyd Jones calls it a summary of all prayer.

The prayer in Matthew's Gospel is embedded as part of the Sermon on the Mount and this gives us clues for understanding the particular prayers.

The series will cover the first five of the six requests in the Lord's Prayer. (There are seven articles online covering the whole prayer at < grantataberfoyle.com >.)

God is our Father in heaven. This is a summary of who God is—as revealed to this point and as Jesus will reveal him. This is a remarkable confession. To have access and a place of privilege before the world's Maker is astonishing. It is what we know of him that leads to each of these prayers.

The word hallowed is literally, 'sanctified' (as in 'holy'), and so, revered be your name. That is, by me, by us, in the church and in the world.

Clearly, we don't make God holy! Holiness is God's nature. He cannot be other than who he is. But his name is the way he has revealed himself in the world. This revealed God is to be regarded by us as holy. That is to receive who he is in faith. And then to adore whom we have come to know, and to proclaim by word and deed what we know.

There are two examples of this—in Isaiah (Isa. 8:13) and in Peter (1 Pet. 3:15). Both refer to situations where God's people are under attack, but they are told to reverence him. Honouring God, or 'fearing' him is contested territory. Our opponents want us to regard them as special, not God as holy. They want to diminish, desecrate or abolish God. We are surrounded with attempts to degrade his name.

There cannot be anything more important for a human being than to reverence God's name. He is our Creator (Psalm 8:1). He is redeemer (Psalm 138:2). He is to be announced in all the world (1 Chron. 16:23-24). All people should come before him in thanksgiving and submission.

God is wholly powerful, entirely good, glorious to know. To honour him is to be human because we are his image. The world is created to function, flourish and finish by reverencing God (Eph. 1:10).

But, not to acknowledge God as Father, to be in awe of him, to love him and to desire his glory is monstrous, culpable and fatal. God takes issue with those who do not honour him. As at the exodus. As in the world being given over to wrath (Rom. 1:18-26).

The Sermon indicates how we may reverence God's name or cause his name to be revered. By our light shining in the world—our good works (Matt. 5:16). These must be the works assigned us—the keeping of the commandments (Matt. 5:17).

This does not happen because we are good people. The Sermon begins with people hungry and thirsty for righteousness (Matt. 5:6). In many cases, it does not happen at all. The desire that God's name be honoured must begin as a prayer. We are asking God about something we should do.

God's name is not honoured by his people Israel (Ezekiel 36). Rather, they defile his name. This happens, not just by their sinning but the necessary judgement that comes on them. The nations say their gods are greater than the Lord.

In the first century, God's name was being profaned by the Jews (Rom. 2:23). It is profaned whenever we fail to walk in his truth. Our problem is we want to be centre stage rather than God.

God's judgment has come on our western churches, and the nations are saying that their gods—the things to which they give ultimate value and rely on—are greater than the Lord. They say our God doesn't even exist!

Are we stirred to pray for a new day of God's coming to bless his tardy and self-reliant people? What is it that makes us want his name to be revered? And how does God answer our prayer?

This request for God's honour is not a roundabout way of saying that we want the church to be more worshipful. We want God to be known as he is. If we ourselves have wandered, or if we have family and friends who have moved away from faith in God, the question is acute.

Ezekiel is shown how God will cause his name to be honoured (Ezek. 37:16-38). He will begin again to bless them. But God will also turn their hearts from corruption, give them a new heart and spirit so that they love God. They will be restored, and then loath what they had been. They will repent (vv. 24-32). Now God's name is sanctified. God has shown himself to be God.

Jesus has come to fulfil this. He wants the honour of his Father's name, so he is teaching us to pray the same things that he prays. His whole life can be summed up as sanctifying his Father's name. His miracles show God has come again to do them good—even though they are far from him. People can see that God is with him—and that God is real and good.

But then, in two of his prayers, Jesus asks for God to glorify his name (John 12:27-28; 17:1-5, 17-19). He asks the Father to glorify him, so he can bring glory to the Father.

The world needs to see that the Father hates our independence and corruptions. He has no time for our hypocrisy. We can't honour God as our Father and think that our sins don't matter. He is holy!

Jesus will take all these abominations to himself—as though they were his and not ours, and the Father will show what he thinks of them. His curse falls on his own Son. And Jesus is willing to be there—because he wants his Father's name to be known as holy—to be revered. And he raises his Son from the dead to announce that what Jesus has done has revealed him perfectly.

Through this offering, God brings forgiveness to us, and brokenness, and gratefulness, and purity, and a heart of flesh that beats with love for Christ and the Father.

So, when we pray, 'Hallowed be your name!' we are asking for our arrogance to be dissolved in the purity of what God has done in Christ, and for our hearts to beat with genuine love for the Father. Isaiah is an example of how we may pray (Isa. 63:15-16).

The Corinthians church is told of a possible outcome when God's name is being revered among his people (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

If we want God to be God and not just something we imagine, if we want him to be the prime mover and not just a benevolent observer, if we want him to be revered, loved and worshipped, God draws near! There may be judgements to awaken us. But he will take us to his Son.

So, God calls us to hunger for righteousness, to mourn the loss of reverence for him. He undoes all our puff and foolery so that we trust in what he has done.

Now, God's name is being hallowed. And this is what we have been praying for.