

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, June 26, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 6:9

9 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,”

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD’S KINGDOM #20 THE LORD’S PRAYER: THE NAME

Vacation Bible School 2011 will forever be known as the year that our students learned that, “God is wild about us.” I want to publically thank Kathryn Kimball and the fantastic team of volunteers that she assembled who helped pull off a great week of ministry. There were some students who entered into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ this week, beginning a journey with Jesus that will never end. For eternity, they will look back upon this past week as the time that they were introduced to their Heavenly Father, and we praise God for that!

The great A. W. Tozer once wrote, “What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” What a powerful statement, and one that I think is true; for if we are wrong about Who God is, then we have created God in our image and it is not God that we serve at all.

What comes into your mind when you think about God?

We saw last week that for Jesus’ First Century followers, the image of God that came to mind was not the image of a father. The disciples of Jesus were shocked when Christ began the Lord’s Prayer with the words, “Our Father in heaven.” Our formal translation of “Father,” doesn’t quite do the word justice. Jesus was truly addressing God as “Dearest Father” or “Daddy.” It was a revolutionary concept for the disciples. So revolutionary that some theologians have written that it is the major difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Not one time in the Old Testament was the fatherhood of God understood as something that was for us personally. The concept was only mentioned fourteen times in the entire Old Testament, and always on behalf of the nation of Israel, never on behalf of an individual.

When you think about God, do you think about Him as your Father? Do you recognize the immanence and transcendence of these words? Jesus is our Father who we can approach with anything as our Daddy, concerned about our daily needs and our day-to-day existence, but He is also the God who is worshipped by angels, adored in Heaven, seated on the throne as the Creator and Sustainer of life.

After addressing His Father, as Father, Jesus offered the first of His six petitions in this prayer. The first three petitions have to do with God’s glory and the final three with our needs. In His model prayer Jesus shows that we should be concerned with God’s glory

first and then our needs. It is the proper order of things for followers of Jesus Christ. He is to become greater and we are to become lesser. In a world where our lives seem to revolve around ourselves, where we can easily become the center of our universe, this is so important. God must be given His proper due.

William Beebe, the naturalist, used to tell this story about Teddy Roosevelt. At Sagamore Hill, after an evening of talk, the two would go out on the lawn and search the skies for a certain spot of star-like light near the lower left-hand corner of the Great Square of Pegasus. Then Roosevelt would recite: "That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun." Then Roosevelt would grin and say, "Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed."¹

Our God is the Creator of every star. He is the All Powerful One. Elmer Towns writes, "There are three primary names for God in the Old Testament: God (*Elohim*), LORD (*Jehovah* or *Yahweh*), and Lord/Master (*Adonai*). Beyond these, God is called by over 80 other compound names or descriptive titles."² In his book written about the names of God the Father that he entitled, *My Father's Names*, Dr. Towns very appropriately entitled his first chapter, *Hallowed Be Thy Names*. For, we cannot understand who God is if we do not take the time to get to know His names.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructed us to pray by beginning this way in Matthew 6:9: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

What does it mean to hallow God's name? Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote that the word *hallowed* means "to sanctify, or to revere, or to make and keep holy."³ Is that how you treat God's names? Is God's name honored in your daily conversation? Is His name held in the utmost esteem? Do people see you treating God's name with more favor than any other? Is there awe and reverence or is it a joke? Does your attitude in prayer reflect that you are entering the presence of the Holy One?

Remember what I've told you about how the Israelites approached worship at Solomon's Temple? They would not enter the temple without first preparing themselves for worship. They took the time to recognize to Whom they were offering prayer and petition.

Kent Hughes gives a helpful illustration here. He writes, "Those who have the occasion to visit Hawaii learn a new word, if they do not already know it. The word is *haoli*, the word Hawaiians use for those from the mainland. Though often used without any malice, it can be used with withering disdain. Alice Kaholuoluna gives the derivation of this term:

¹ <http://bible.org/illustration/now-we-are-small-enough>

² Elmer Towns, *My Father's Names*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), p. 9

³ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 59.

Before the missionaries came, my people used to sit outside their temples for a long time meditating and preparing themselves before entering. Then they would virtually creep to the altar to offer their petition and afterwards would again sit a long time outside, this time to 'breathe life' into their prayers. The Christians, when they came, just got up, uttered a few sentences, said Amen and were done. For that reason my people call them *haolis*, 'without breath,' or those who fail to breathe life into their prayers.

In its original sense *haoli* was a term of biting religious reproach. Just how deserved it was is subject to question because missionaries often get a bum rap from their would-be converts and form unsympathetic historian. However that may be, *haoli* well describes the condition of multitudes of today's Christians who live life in the fast lane – dashing into God's presence, uttering some empty conventionalities, pausing to make a few requests (unless they are *really* in trouble!), then stepping back into the rush. This problem is extensive, undoubtedly one of the great sins of modern Christianity. We are spiritual *haolis* if we do not take the time to breathe life into our prayers."⁴

When is the last time you really took the time to think about Who it is that you are praying to? We honor God's name when we reflect upon Who He is, His character, His promises, His names.

John Hamby writes, "When you pray 'hallowed be your name' you are saying, 'let your name be holy and revered on earth as it already is in heaven. May your name be given the unique reverence that is due your character and nature as the Heavenly Father.' When you begin your prayers 'Hallowed be thy name,' you are not rushing into the presence of God to demand something, you come into his presence recognizing who God is and what He can do for you."⁵

What an amazing request! How many of us come to God asking that His name be holy and revered on earth as it already is in heaven? Isn't it amazing that Jesus chose to begin the petitions of the Lord's Prayer with this one? If I had a chance to DVR every television show that graced the airwaves of just the sets in the Twin Cities this week, I wonder how many times just the opposite of this prayer request happened. Culture will never be the answer to this request. There is a theological sense in which some day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, but that day is not now. God's name will be hallowed for eternity. It is hallowed now in heaven. And, it can be hallowed on earth, if God's children will take seriously our role in lifting up and revering the name of God on earth.

People of God have always revered His name. The Old Testament Jewish believer would not even utter the name Yahweh. In Psalm 20:7, the psalmist said, "7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

⁴ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 161.

⁵ http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly.asp?ContributorID=&SermonID=33717

In Exodus 3:5-6, when Moses approached God who appeared in a burning bush we read the following dialogue:

5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

God’s people respect the name of God. In his Greater Catechism, Martin Luther asked, “How is it [God’s name] hallowed amongst us?” Answer: “When our life and doctrine are truly Christian.”⁶ To this point Hughes writes, “God’s name as Father is revered when we lead lives that reflect his Fatherhood. We cannot truly pray ‘Hallowed be your name’ without dedicating ourselves to him. If we pray this without commitment, it is just idle talk. Jesus himself is the example *par excellence*. As the cross grew near, he prayed, ‘Father, glorify your name’ (John 12:28), but he knew what that meant in terms of his own commitment. He gave his own life so the Father’s name would be glorified.”⁷

Which begs the question, how can we glorify the Father’s name today? How are we part of the answer to the Lord’s Prayer?

1) Obey The Third Commandment

Almost every commentary and sermon that I read on the subject began with us obeying the Third Commandment found in Exodus 20:7. 7 “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

Towns writes, “The Ten Commandments prohibit a person from taking God’s name in vain. When a person lightly uses the name of God, he is speaking lightly of God. When a person blasphemes God’s name, he blasphemes God. When a person curses by using God’s name, he is either trying to take the place or authority of God or he is rejecting God’s authority in his life. Because God’s name represents His person, He said, ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain’ (Exod. 20:7).”⁸

In 2010, PBS aired a Frontline special entitled Digital Nation. If you purchase the DVD video, you’ll read the following paragraph on the back cover of the DVD, “Over a single generation, the Web and digital media have remade nearly every aspect of modern culture, transforming the way we work, learn, and connect, as well as what we may be learning about ourselves in the process.”

It’s amazing how much can change in one generation. I sometimes feel as if in one generation we have forgotten the Third Commandment. I hear Christians continually take the name of the Lord in vain, whether it is shouting, “Oh my God,” or texting “OMG,” to a

⁶ Hughes, p. 164.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁸ Towns, p. 24.

friend on their cell phone, we have belittled the name of God. What we say about God and how we handle His name matters.

2) We Revere God's Name in Worship

There is a second way that we revere the name of God, and it's one that many of you have done today. We publicly and privately worship God. When we sing songs in church, we think about the words. We sing songs that we believe are true about God. When I preach, I seek to honor God with my words, rightly communicating truth about Him. When we pray, we recognize His dominion in our lives.

True Christians seek to honor God through praise.

Louis Albert Banks tells of an elderly Christian man, a fine singer, who learned that he had cancer of the tongue and that surgery was required. In the hospital after everything was ready for the operation, the man said to the doctor, "Are you sure I will never sing again?" The surgeon found it difficult to answer his question. He simply shook his head no. The patient then asked if he could sit up for a moment. "I've had many good times singing the praises of God," he said. "And now you tell me I can never sing again. I have one song that will be my last. It will be of gratitude and praise to God." There in the doctor's presence the man sang softly the words of Isaac Watts' hymn, "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,/ And when my voice is lost in death,/ Praise shall employ my nobler power;/ My days of praise shall ne'er be past,/ While life, and thought, and being last,/ Or immortality endures."⁹

3) We Revere God's Name By Seeking and Knowing Him

There is a third way that we give God's name the reverence that He is due. We seek Him, get to know Him and see to it that our beliefs concerning Him are worthy of Him. Listen to the words of God through the Prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 9:23-24.

23 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

True wisdom comes in knowing and understanding God. The more we know Him, the more our lives will honor Him. You cannot truly know God and not seek to bring glory and honor to His name.

John Wesley was about 21 years of age when he went to Oxford University. He came from a Christian home, and he was gifted with a keen mind and good looks. Yet in those days he was a bit snobbish and sarcastic. One night, however, something happened that set in motion a change in Wesley's heart. While speaking with a porter, he discovered that the

⁹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/praise.htm>

poor fellow had only one coat and lived in such impoverished conditions that he didn't even have a bed. Yet he was an unusually happy person, filled with gratitude to God. Wesley, being immature, thoughtlessly joked about the man's misfortunes. "And what else do you thank God for?" he said with a touch of sarcasm. The porter smiled, and in the spirit of meekness replied with joy, "I thank Him that He has given me my life and being, a heart to love Him, and above all a constant desire to serve Him!" Deeply moved, Wesley recognized that this man knew the meaning of true thankfulness.

Many years later, in 1791, John Wesley lay on his deathbed at the age of 88. Those who gathered around him realized how well he had learned the lesson of praising God in every circumstance. Despite Wesley's extreme weakness, he began singing the hymn, "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath."¹⁰

What a difference a true understanding of Who God is makes in our lives!

4) We Revere God's Name By Living A Life That Honors Him

From the earliest Christians to those who walk with God today, the church has always understood that true Christians bring glory to the name of God by living a life that honors Him. Nothing brings more reproach upon the name of God than a Christian who deliberately chooses to dishonor God with his or her life.

The early church father Gregory of Nyssa prayed this prayer, "May I become through thy help blameless, just and pious, may I abstain from every evil, speak the truth, and do justice. May I walk in the straight path, shining with temperance, adorned with incorruption, beautiful through wisdom and prudence. May I mediate upon the things that are above and despise what is earthly, showing the angelic way of life . . . For a man can glorify God in no other way save by his virtue which bears witness that the Divine Power is the cause of his goodness."¹¹

May our lives bear witness to the work of God within us! May a world that is hostile towards the Gospel see love of God within us. May we hallow His name.

I'll close with this story from the life of Elmer Towns.

"One evening I visited Mount Rushmore National Monument in South Dakota-and almost missed it. I had spoken at an evening meeting for pastors some 30 miles away, and after my message I asked one of the ministers to drive me to the monument. I did not know that the floodlights that illuminate the gigantic sculptures of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Roosevelt were turned off at 11 o'clock. We arrived at the base of Mount Rushmore at 11:10 p.m.—10 minutes late. The spectacular carvings were veiled in darkness. As a result of an imminent storm, there wasn't even any moonlight.

¹⁰ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/praise.htm>

¹¹ Hughes, p. 165.

But what I thought was a barrier became a blessing. Flashes of lightning accompanied the thunderstorm, and with each flash I got a quick glance at the great sculptures. I had certain preconceived images in mind from photographs, and I strained to compare each statue with the likeness in my mind's eye. The more I watched, the more I realized that I was appreciating their magnificence and grandeur even more than I would have if the storm had not forced me to view them more intensely.

In the same way, we struggle to understand God. We know He is there, but in the darkness of this life, we cannot see Him. Then come flashes of light that reveal Him—the creation ... the miracles ... the Ten Commandments ... His presence in our conscience. But there is another flash of illumination that is often overlooked. We can come to know God through His names. The many descriptive titles and names given in Scripture are like lightning flashes in a summer night, revealing His nature and works. We can get to know God better through His names.

Why does God have many names? Just as white light is made up of seven different rays or colors, so God is made up of different attributes that are illuminated by different names. Just as a person can examine each of the seven different names.

The many descriptive titles and names of God given in Scripture are like lightning flashes in a summer night, revealing His nature and works.”¹²

Get to know His names. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. To You all glory is due! To you all praise is given. May our lives reflect you, and may others see in our words and deeds a church that is in love with our Heavenly Father, demonstrating that love by making more disciples for Jesus Christ. In the precious, powerful, and loving name of Your Son Jesus, we pray, Amen.

¹² Towns, pp. 12-13.