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SERIES: The Shape of Prayer
MESSAGE: Hallowed Be Your Name
PASSAGE: Matthew 6:9
SPEAKER: Ryan Harmon

Is there a prayer, a prayer that if God would answer it immediately and fully, it would begin to right all that is wrong with the world? I believe there is. I believe there is a prayer like that, but I will tell you this—in my experience, both as a Christian and also as a pastor, I have found that we don't pray this prayer very often.

I'll confess to you that in my own life of prayer, I have not found in my rhythm of prayer that I often pray these words that could bring about this world changing effect. Now, see, so often when we pray, we go immediately to the details of our life, and there is nothing wrong with that because God cares about the very minute details of our life. But what's so interesting is that when Jesus teaches his disciples, when he brings them into his school of prayer, he doesn't start with small details. He goes straight to the root of every human problem there is.

Jesus, in beginning of the Lord's Prayer, teaches his disciples to pray, "hallowed be your name." Hallowed be your name. Now that is a foreign phrase to us. Certainly an unusual word, an old-fashioned word. It's a word and a prayer that is very subtle in its power. But make no mistake, if we would pray this and God would answer it immediately, it would begin to change our world. It would change our families, it would change our neighborhoods, almost immediately. That's why it's very important, very important not only that we pray it, but that we understand what it means. So open your Bibles with me to Matthew chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6.

Now, you know this summer we are moving very slowly through the Lord's Prayer. We are only going to be in verse 9, just on this one singular phrase, "hallowed be your name." Or if you're so inclined, hallow-ed be your name. Do some of you say hallow-ed? It's the very proper way to say it.

Now, of course, as we turn to the Sermon on the Mount, the longest continuous sermon of Jesus that occurs in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, right in the heart of that sermon, in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus begins to focus on prayer. Two weeks ago, we began our look at Jesus's teaching on prayer, and we started with how not to pray. In chapter 6, verse 1, Jesus said that we aren't to pray as the pagans do, as the Gentiles do.

And he named a number of bad, improper motivations for prayer. We aren't supposed to pray seeking to gain the attention of others. We're not to pray thinking we can somehow manipulate God—if we butter him up, then he has to answer our prayers. We are not to pray as if we are informing God of that which he doesn't already know. All of those motivations are off target.

Here's our motivation for prayer: relationship with God. We can enter into ongoing relationship, dialogue, conversation with the living God who brought everything there is into existence. That's what prayer is. But I think we as small, finite, human creatures can admit that that's a little daunting. It's a little daunting to stand before the God that created everything and brought it all into existence and holds it all in existence.



lincolnberean

And that's why I'm so thankful that Jesus starts his prayer the way he did. Mark covered this last week in verse 9. The way Jesus begins the prayer that we call the Lord's Prayer is to say, "our Father, who is in heaven." Our Father, who is in heaven, this is the address of the prayer. It's important that when we pray, we do address the one to whom we're praying. We bring God to mind. We understand that we're now stepping into a different reality, the reality where God is the most real thing there is.

See, as we move our way through life, our world is clamoring constantly and trying to convince us that it, and that which we can see and touch and taste and hear, that that is what is most real. But ultimately when we turn to prayer and we address the God of the universe, we step into a different reality—that which is the realest thing possible: God. The God of the heavens.

Now Mark helped us understand that when we pray to our Father who is in heaven, we are announcing that he is both transcendent—he is bigger than we can possibly imagine, therefore, whatever we bring to him, he can handle it— and he is also imminent. Mark used that word, means he's closer than we could possibly know. Our Father, who is in heaven, closer and bigger than we could possibly imagine.

Now the second thing we understand is that because of Jesus Christ, as we place our faith in him, we are brought into relationship with this God, but he is not distant from us. He brings us into his family. We are now in the Father's household. And because he is our father, we can count on the fact that he protects us and he provides for us. All of that is wrapped up in these words of address, "our Father who is in heaven."

So with that address established, Jesus then continues, and our prayer can continue. So we say, "our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name." Hallowed be your name. Now to understand that phrase, we need to understand those two words—hallowed and name—and we're going to get to that in just a moment.

But before I turn there, I do want to address what I believe is a pretty common misunderstanding of what this phrase is referring to or what it's seeking to do. In fact, it's a misconception or a misunderstanding that I myself, as I have prayed, have fallen into pretty much my entire life. So here's the way I've commonly approached this part of the Lord's Prayer. No matter what context I've been in, whether I have sung it in a church or whether I have prayed it, I've approached this phrase, "hallowed be your name," as an affirmation, a declaration of how great God is. It's a way for me to praise God for who he is. So when I prayed this phrase, I'd say, "Our Father, who is in heaven, you are the greatest there is."

Now, that's often the kind of thing that we do when we when we sing praises. In fact, we just did. We said, who else is worthy? There's no one. There's no one that is like you, Jesus. We're affirming that God is the greatest. We're affirming his glory. So I essentially prayed to God that which he knows. I said to him, "God, you're the greatest. Your name is hallowed." Now, I didn't necessarily know what that word meant, but I still knew it was a good thing because it was a word that referred to God. God's name is hallowed, therefore, it's a good thing to let God know his name is hallowed.

So that's how I approached it. For a number of years, that's how I approached it. And I need to affirm that all of those prayers, all of those years, were good prayers because it is a good thing to say to God and to reflect to God that which is true about him. Absolutely a good thing to do.

Some of you might be familiar with the form of prayer, the teaching about how to pray that, follows the acronym A.C.T.S. Are you familiar with that? A-C-T-S. Even our kids' ministry—my kids have occasionally brought home handouts on prayer, and it'll use that acronym. And here's what that acronym stands for, if you're not familiar with it. A stands for adoration. When we come to the



lincolnberean

Lord in prayer, we adore him for who he is, we let him know he is the greatest. C stands for confession. We come before him and we lay down that which we have done that goes against and not according to his ways, and we confess that to him. T is for Thanksgiving. We come and we thank him for all that he has done, all the blessings he has poured out on our life. We get to ask and this now becomes the point where we ask—S stands for supplication, which as a kid, I didn't know what that meant. But it meant ask for things.

And so now we've talked to God. We said, we adore you, we confess, we are thankful. And now we come and we present our request to God and we tell him, "This is what I long for. This is what I need." And I would say to you, that is a good form for prayer. That's a good way to approach prayer. Very helpful. It's not necessarily in one of the letters of Paul, but it certainly is a biblical way to pray.

So here's what I was doing when I approached, hallowed be thy name the way that I did: I was treating it as the A in A.C.T.S. It was adoration. It was a way for me to reflect to God the glory of who he is. I was adoring him, stating who he is, but—and here's the point of all this—in this prayer, this actually is supplication. It's not adoration. This is a request, Jesus is teaching us.

Now, when you begin to ask things of God, here is where you begin. This is the first request you bring before him when you pray, "hallowed be your name." We are bringing a petition to God. We're asking him to do something. We're not stating who he is, although that is a very good thing to do. We're not saying, "God, your name is hallowed." We are saying, "God, may your name be hallowed. May you make it so. Would that that would happen. Lord, let it be. Let that happen." It's a request.

If we look at the Lord's Prayer, it's interesting, there are debates about how many requests there are in the Lord's Prayer. And the numbers range from either five to up to seven different requests. I think the most orderly way to approach it is to understand that there are six requests that are being made, and those six requests are actually organized into two sets of three requests. In verses 9 and 10, there are three requests, and then verses 11, 12, and 13 there are three more requests, and each one of those sets of requests has a different focus. A different focus. We can see that by the pronouns that are used, the first three requests are all aimed at God. The second three concern us. And so we say in verses 9 and 10, "Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done," all about God. Then we turn to the second set of three in verses 11, 12, and 13. "Now, give us. Forgive us. Lead us."

So before we even turn to this phrase, I think there is a lesson that is very important for us to understand about prayer. Jesus here is helping us understand the shape of prayer, how to enter into prayer. And we are so inclined when we go to prayer to immediately bring our needs before God. But what Jesus is letting us know is that as we begin prayer, the first thing we do is we bring the reality of who God is in our relationship with him before our minds. We address God, our Father, the one who is more mighty than we possibly can know, and the one who is more intimate to us than we possibly could think.

"Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name." Jesus begins prayer, he launches into prayer, in a completely God-focused way, not an us-focused way. First things first. Here's the priority—God is the priority when we go to him in prayer. Now, I am so thankful, I'm so thankful that Jesus actually, when he launches into this prayer, starts with an address, "our father who's in heaven," and then he immediately goes to request. I'm thankful for that. He immediately goes to asking God for things, and we do need to acknowledge it—it is good and proper and right for us to ask God for things.



lincolnberean

But Jesus here in this teaching, in this form of prayer, is certainly challenging the way we are inclined to pray. He's bringing God to the forefront from the very beginning, saying, "Father, may your name be hallowed."

So now, what does that mean? What do those 2 words, *hallow* and *name* mean? And we need to talk about *name* a little bit. First, the word *hallow*. Maybe a show of hands if you've said the word *hallow* ever in your lifetime. No? A few. Other than when you prayed this prayer? *Hallow* is an interesting word. Pretty old-fashioned word. Now, interestingly, it is a word that is a translation of a Greek word that is very common in the New Testament. This word is used, I think, something like twenty-nine times in the New Testament, but all the times in the New Testament, except two, it is pretty much always translated as *sanctify*. Sanctify.

Now we're familiar with that word. We talk about sanctification, so that helps us understand a little bit of what this word *hallow* means. The only two times it's translated as *hallow* is in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, and then in the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11—translated as *hallow*. But we could also say sanctify your name tells us something about what this word means. Here's what *hallow* is. Here's what sanctify is. *Hallow* means to make something, to declare something, to honor something or someone, as absolutely *holy*. Holy beyond comparison.

Now, when we talk about sanctification, we're talking about the work that God brings about in us of making us holy, setting us apart for his use, for his purposes, unique under him. When we talk about God's holiness, we're talking about the fact that there is no one like him. Incomparable. No one more glorious, no one more holy than God. And so this word *hallow* refers to honoring God as absolutely holy. That's the formal definition.

Let me give you a few other words that I think are helpful. To *hallow* something is to cherish it, to treasure it beyond anything else. It's to be filled with admiration, with respect, with reverence, with awe for something. To *hallow* is to essentially look at something and say nothing else compares. Nothing else compares. That's what we mean when we say something is hallowed. Now specifically, Jesus says, we are to ask that God's name be hallowed. That his name be hallowed.

And I do want to talk about names for a second because, although names are very common—we all understand what a name is. We all have one. God has one. In the Bible, we just need to understand, *name* doesn't refer to letters, it refers to the reality. When we talk about someone's name, God's name, we're ultimately referring to God himself, we're referring to God and his character and his reputation.

Our names are very similar in that way. Our names refer to us. They tell someone about us. I didn't like my name as a kid. Didn't care for it at all. I thought it was a fine kid's name, but I didn't know any "Grandpa Ryans." And I thought to myself, I can't grow old with this name. I don't, how does this represent me when I'm older? And so I still have to figure that out. I'm getting older, but I still have to find a Grandpa Ryan. If you're a Grandpa Ryan, introduce yourself.

Our name, your name, refers to who you are. And of course, if someone disrespects your name, that means something, not because you're particularly concerned about the bad things they said about your formal name—that refers to you. Your name is a reference and a representation of who you are. Therefore, when we think of honoring God's name, what we're talking about is honoring God himself, to refer to his character and his glory and his honor and his reputation and ask that it be more honored than anything else.

And so, putting all this together, when we say hallowed be your name, we are coming to God. And we are saying to him, "Lord, may you act in such a way that your name be praised more and worshiped more each and every day. May more people increasingly honor you as God. May more



lincolnberean

people around the globe, here in our city, in my neighborhood, in my life—may more people lift your name up as holy and acknowledge there is no one like you. Lord, may your name be hallowed. May people see you as you truly are, and as a response to the reality, the glorious reality of who you are, may they be turned to praise.” That is what we’re praying.

This prayer, this prayer ultimately comes out of a place and a heart that so adores God that when we look around our world and we see him both dismissed and rejected and maligned, we are shocked and saddened. We love our Father. We know there’s no one like him, and so we turn to him and say, “Lord, let that not be the case. Let your name be lifted up. I know people that don’t respect you to be the good God that you are. Let your name be praised and honored. Let that be so because you are worthy of it. But let it also be so because if these people, these creatures of yours, would honor you as God and creator, their life would start to turn right and our world would start to be transformed. So, Lord, let it be so. Let it be so.”

Ultimately, this is a request to let God’s fame go everywhere, and that God would have more and more worshipers. Have you ever prayed that? Lord, let your name be more magnified today. Let your name be more magnified this week. Let your name be more hallowed than it currently is. I ask you, I beg you, because I know you, you are my Father—there’s no one like you, let it be so.

Now here’s what I want to challenge you with on this phrase. In fact, on the first three phrases that we’re going to look at each week, I want to challenge you to think of these phrases when we pray them, when they are our heart’s cry—this is us joining in to the echo, the chorus of heaven itself. We live in a world where God is not fully seen, and therefore, because he’s not fully seen, he is rejected. But there is a place where God is fully seen and praise goes out to him constantly—it never stops. That place is called heaven. And in the heavens, the praise for God erupts constantly, not because he demands it, but because he is worthy of it. When you see God and his goodness and beauty and glory, you cannot help, when you see God, but praise his name.

That’s what we join in. We get to join in with the angels and the archangels and all the living creatures that are around the throne praising his name and we say, “Lord, let that be so.” It’s true in heaven, let it be true here on earth. Now, here’s how we know that is what’s taking place in heaven right now, even as we stand and speak and sit right here. We know this is happening because God gave his disciple John a glimpse of it. Do you remember God opened the heavens? Revealed to John what was always there, but is not seen to us in this unseen realm that is the reality of God in his heavens? He is constantly being praised, and when we pray that his name be hallowed, and then when we hallow his name ourselves, we join in the chorus. We join in the chorus.

Here as we move towards the end of our time, I actually want to invite you just to hear the words of Revelation chapter 4, what John saw. Hear them for the incomparable, almost inexpressible, beautiful, wholly other that they are. And know that when we praise God’s name. when we pray that his name be hallowed, we are joining into the chorus. So now hear these words. This is what John saw.

John says in verse 2 of chapter 4, “I saw a throne in heaven. And something sitting on it. The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones, and the glow of an emerald circled around his throne like a rainbow. Twenty-four thrones surround him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass sparkling like crystal. In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back. Each of these living beings had six wings and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day, and night after night, they keep on saying, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty. The one who always was, who is, and who is still to come. Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne, the one who lives forever and



lincolnberean

ever, the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever, and they lay their crowns before the throne, and they say, you are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and they exist because you created what you please.”

Please. God is fully seen in the heavens. And because he is seen as he is, he is worshiped constantly. That's not so in our world, but we long for it to be so. Like little children who adore our Father, we long to see him respected. And because of that, because he's worthy and because it would reshape our world, we pray hallowed be your name, God. Let it be so.

Prayer's an interesting thing. It's good to learn about prayer, but the interesting thing about prayer is ultimately the best way to learn about prayer is by praying. I once read a book and I was like, Lord, I just want to go deeper in prayer, and that was the first line. The only way to learn about prayer is by praying. And I wanted to throw the book across the room. That's what I'm trying to do here, but ultimately, we learn to pray. We learn to talk with God by talking with God. And in light of that, we want to make sure our study together of this prayer this summer is not merely an academic study.

It's good to know the details, the technicalities, of this prayer, but ultimately what we're praying is that our very life of prayer would be shaped, that we would pray differently in August with more fervor than we do right now. And so in light of that, I'd just like to pose to you three practical questions to close. Three questions that ultimately, to me, feel like they are prompted by this request, this petition, hallowed be your name.

The first question is this: where do you turn? When you see in your world people dismissing and rejecting God, I think it's perfectly appropriate in that moment for us to be shocked and saddened and even angry because God is worthy. But I want to encourage us to consider that Jesus tells us to turn to God in prayer. And to say to God, “God, hallowed be your name. Let it be hallowed. Your name's not being respected. Lord, I long for it to be respected. So would you let it be so?” To bring all of those emotions, all of those frustrations we have, and not stew on them, but come to God and say, “Lord, Lord, let it happen because you're worthy. They don't even know what they're doing. Let it happen, I pray”—to be shaped by the one who is teaching us to pray.

See, I believe as we are with Jesus, learning from him in the school of prayer, we will start to be more inclined and we will think like him, and we will be prompted to ask for the things that he tells us to ask for. And so our priorities will change. And our first priority, our first inclination, will be to turn to God when we see him disrespected and say, “Lord, may your name be worshipped. May your name be worshiped and glorified right here.”

Now the second question I have is: what might it look like if God would answer this prayer? And that is an interesting question, and I think actually the answer is also a little interesting. Because I think if God answers this prayer, it will first be most clearly evident in the life of the person that prays it. It'll be evident in my life as I start to come to God and say, “Lord, may your name be hallowed.” The first place of application is right here in my life right where I am, where there are places where I do not worship and honor and glorify you, Lord—come in, invade. Take over my life, shape me into someone who, with every breath I take, I am hallowing your name. Let that be true in the world, but Lord, start right here, start with me. Make me someone who glorifies you by the way that I live my life. Not because I'm doing anything in my own strength, but because you have taken over. May your name be hallowed right here in my life.”

Now leads me to our last question. Knowing that the important first step forward is we need to ask, we bring this request to God. We need to ask that he would change us. My question is: as he starts to prompt change in us, is there anything that we can do to cooperate with the work of shaping



lincolnberean

us? And I would say to you, yes. In fact, we're doing it right now. We're gathering together with a community of believers. Coming together to know Jesus, to be shaped by him. We do that when we open God's word. We do that when we pray. Ultimately, I think the ultimate act is when we come together to worship and we declare these words to God, we say, "Lord, you are holy." And as we do that, we also offer up that declaration as a prayer. "Lord, you are holy. And I pray that you may be more known as holy still. Lord, you are hallowed. There's no one like you. But may that be more true in my heart. And may it be more true in my world." We can sing these words and we can also pray them, cooperating with the very thing that God desires to bring about in us.

In just a few minutes. We're going to sing "joyful, joyful, we adore thee." As we sing, let us sing it, but let us also pray it, "Lord, let that be so. Let that be so in my life. Let it be so in Lincoln. Let that be so in Lincoln, in Nebraska—let it be so in the world. May your name be more honored and glorified." Imagine with me...imagine with me what God might do if we as a people would commit together to say, "we are going to pray this prayer we are taught to pray, we're going to come before the Lord and ask, Lord, may your name be more honored and worshiped and glorified in our body and in our community and in our world."

What might God do if we would commit to that? There's only one way for us to find out. Will you join me as we pray it to our Father now?

Our Father, we come before you and we do acknowledge there's no one like you. And Lord, here's what we ask: may your name—in our lives, in our families, in our neighborhoods, at our workplaces, in our city, in our county, in our state, in our country, in the world—may your name be more honored and glorified. Because you are worthy. And we know, Lord, that that's the way you wired us, and so it is our heart's deepest cry and deepest need. And so we pray that you would let it be so. May you be glorified. We pray these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

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