

“Father, Make Your Name Holy”

Matthew 6:9d

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Matthew 6:9-13

"This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’”

Is God necessary?

Many in our world and even in our community would say “no”.

There is no evidence that my neighbor ever even thinks of God.

My neighbor and I both live in adequate homes.

We pull out of our driveways in the morning both going to
satisfying jobs.

He enjoys his family and days off, as I do.

He manages his way through hard times as I do.

He goes on with life after the death of loved ones.

His cars break down no more than mine do.

His kids get sick no more than mine do.

He expects to die someday and knows that will end it for him, but he
will enjoy life while he has it.

While he would be sensitive to my feelings, if I asked him, I’m
certain he’d say he has no need for God.

From every appearance, God is, to him, completely
unnecessary.

What about for you, is God necessary?

Those who claim to be Christians don't live any longer than others.
 In fact I think I'm correct in saying that the Shintoists of Japan live longer than others.

Christians don't have a lower mortality or morbidity rate than others.
 The children of Christians don't get sick less often.

Christians who have daily devotions don't find premium parking places downtown more often than others do.

Your employment or the profitability of your business is just as tied to the economy as anyone else's.

For every testimony I've heard of a miracle, I've heard just as many of happy coincidence.

Is God necessary?

I am guessing that my question is confusing for some of you.

You are being led by the way I'm asking the questions, to say, "No, maybe God is not necessary."

But at the same time you are searching for a way to refute that.

Something inside you says that can't be right – of course God is necessary.

But in what way is he necessary?

It's fairly self-evident that he isn't necessary like food or sleep are necessary.

I think I've already demonstrated that in that sense people can live without God.

Those of us who are part of the evangelical tradition might quickly say, "Well, maybe you don't need God right now, but a day is come when you will. When you face the judgement of God, you'll need him then!"

"If you died right now, can you say for certain that you'd go to heaven?"

Is that all we mean when we say we need God – that we will need him at the end - we need God like we need our membership card to get into the health club or our passport to reenter the United States?

We can frighten people into thinking that way, but is that what we mean when we say we need God?

Have we reduced God to a “sugar-daddy” or “rabbit’s foot” in this life and a ticket to heaven at death?

No, God is not necessary, “God is more than necessary.” (Jan Lochman The Lord’s Prayer 30)

Luke 7:1 “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’”

These men had been taught to pray from childhood.

Something about the way Jesus prayed captured them.

And Jesus taught them the prayer we have in our text from Matthew 6 where we read: “This, then, is how you should pray...”

What follows is an appeal, a call, a request to be heard, “Father”.

It is the invocation, invoking God’s presence and attention.

It is much more than that, as I hope last week’s sermon communicated, but it is at its simplest our mouth to God’s ear.

What follows are six requests, six petitions.

1. Hallowed be your name
2. Your kingdom come
3. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
4. Give us today our daily bread
5. Forgive us our debts (sins)
6. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

The first three are about God and the last three are about us.

Jesus is not suggesting that we say this prayer and only this prayer, in these words, in some strict, legalistic way.

He neither encourages nor discourages the repetition of these very words.

He is not suggesting that prepared prayers are better or that extemporaneous ones are better.

Instead, here he gives us a model for prayer, or what Fredrich Bruner called “a kind of handrail along which to proceed in forming our own words.”

Of all the things for which Jesus could have prayed, do you think he carefully chose those six?

Of course it did.

He is teaching about prayer even as he prays.

And what request he makes **first** would seem significant: “Hallowed be your name”.

Please notice this is not a “throw-away line” like some, in ancient times, might use when approaching a king: “O King, most gracious and understanding, most worthy, all-powerful, and did I mention good-looking.”

As if by piling on all these positive adjectives, the petitioner might ingratiate himself to the king and more likely get his requests met.

The text here does not say or mean, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed or holy IS your name.

Notice the sentence is not a statement but **a request** – “Hallowed BE your name.”

He’s not saying, “Your name is holy” he is asking, “Father, make your name holy.”

Now please bear with me to see if I can explain this.

Let’s start with the word “name” – “hallowed be your **Name**.”

I know of a woman whose name is “Precious”.

I don’t mean she has a precious name, I mean when you call her you say “Precious”.

That gives you some idea of what her parents thought of her.

But usually we are more casual about naming our children.

We might pick a name because it sounds pleasant to the ear.
 We nearly named our youngest daughter "Allison" until we heard "Allison Nelson" and said that is too cute.

We might pick a name because it sounds strong as in "Sam".
 "Here Sam, sit with us." "Sam, we've decided to make president of the company."

But in other cultures and times and particularly in the Scriptures names were often selected for much more significant reasons.
 Eli's wife named one of her sons, "Ichabod" because it meant "the glory has departed" when her husband died and Ark of the Covenant had been stolen by the enemy.
 Isaiah named one of his kids "Maher Shalal Hash Baz" because of the swift judgment of God that was imminent.

A much happier illustration is when Joseph the husband of Mary was told in **Matthew 1:21** "**you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**"
 If I remember correctly, the name Jesus is a variation on Jesuha or Joshua meaning "the salvation of the Lord".

A name was not an arbitrary word attached to a person but the name carried with it the unique personality of the individual.
 The name was not just a label but it symbolized the character and essence of a person - and even more so with God.
 His name is God as he has made himself known to us.
 To speak the name of God is to speak of his character, the essence of God.

Genesis 21:33 "Abraham...called upon the name of the LORD..."
 This certainly doesn't mean he called on some arbitrary name.
 And this is not just a quaint way of saying he called on God.
 But it means he called on the God who is all that his name means.

1 Samuel 17:45 David said to Goliath, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty.

David didn't think any old name would save him.

He knew that the NAME meant a particular name and all that that name stood for – God himself.

John 20:31 “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Exodus 34:5-7 “Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

The name of God is the composite of all those characteristics.

Is it any wonder then that God should say: Exodus 20:7 You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

I was raised with strict warnings against using or misusing God's name – using it in vain, thoughtless, ways such as cursing people by misusing God's name or misusing God's name lightly as an exclamation “Oh my God!”

Even “gosh” or “gol” were suspect because they were known to be variations on the name “God”.

Even saying “God bless you” following someone's sneeze is probably a thoughtless, and thus vain, misuse of God's name.

Some will say, “When I absent mindedly say, “God” or “Jesus” or some other variation as a exclamation, I don't mean anything by it.”

I think that is precisely what the scripture is referring to – you didn't mean **anything** by it – you were taking that name, that name that stands for all God is, and misusing it in the worst possible way – using that most significant, precious name as if it meant nothing.

George MacDonald wrote of the following conversation:

Young Alister promised, "In God's name we will!"

"There is no occasion for an oath, Alister!" said his mother.

But Ian said, "Alister meant it very solemnly."

But his mother replied, "Yes, but it was not necessary... The name of our Lord God should be as a precious jewel in the cabinet of our hearts, to be taken out only at great times and

with loving awe." (Cited in Boers Lord Teach us to Pray 59 from MacDonald's The Highlanders' Last Song 113)

By the Father's "name" Jesus means God's very essence.

God and his name are inextricably linked in Scripture and even become interchangeable.

In one sense God is **his name** and his name is **God**.

So what does Jesus request of the Father about the Father's name?

He prays, "**Hallowed** be your name."

The word "hallowed" is rather uncommon to us but not totally.

We might speak of the "hallowed halls" of our alma mater.

But the word "hallowed" is much more significant than that.

The word means "holy" or "sanctified", set-apart from the common.

So the prayer is, "Father, make your name holy."

Of course God already is holy, so what is Jesus suggesting we ask for?

We are asking for God to act.

We are asking for God to give his name the highest place and honor.

We are asking him to make his name known and experienced by everyone.

We are asking him to make his name honored by us in everything we do.

Several of the commentaries I consulted immediately began commenting on our responsibility to make God's name holy.

But please notice that Jesus does not say, "Father, we know we ought to revere your name. He says, "Father, make your name holy."

The prayer is not first about what we do but what God does.

Why would Jesus find it necessary to ask this?

Because God's name is not made holy in this world.

In heaven it is but not here.

Even we who have been saved by God's grace often take little account of God.

Clarence Jordan said, "We take it (the name of God) and on we go and it means nothing. We keep sailing under the same old banner, living the same old life, having the same old attitudes, walking the same old way. The name has meant nothing to us. It doesn't change us. You don't (most of all) take the name of the Lord in vain with your lips. You take it in vain with your life. It's the people...whose lives are totally unchanged by the grace of God. They're the ones who take the name in vain." (Clarence Jordan

The Substance of Faith 134)

Atheist Fredreich Nietzsche said that he could believe in the redeemer if Christians would look more redeemed.

We may feel guilty about this but something in us says we are powerless to do much about it.

That is why we pray – God you do it. God act.

Prayer is rebelling against the status quo!

Isaiah rebelled against that.

Isaiah 64:1,2 "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! ... come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!"

This is the prayer for revival.

Jan Lochman wrote, “It is an appeal to the power and faithfulness of God, that he will make a breach in the regime of ambivalence and desecration... Only with his intervention can we really overcome the tragic temptation of pride and apostasy or sloth and dissipation. (Lochman 41)

Father, make your name holy!

God is now doing that very thing.

He makes his name holy by disciplining his own children.

Ezekial 20:9 “But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations they lived among...”

He makes his name holy by punishing others who oppress his people.

And most significantly he makes his name holy by putting a new heart into his people.

He has placed his Spirit in us and is transforming us – oftentimes through pain for a very specific purpose:

Ezekial 36:22 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.

God be yourself, God reveal yourself.

God, do what it takes to make us and everyone else be aware and respond to the fact that you are God, you are life.

We can't make that happen God, you must do it.

Only if you are God can we be your children.

Only if you act according to your character can we have the relationship we desperately need.

I began this message by asking if God is necessary.

We often pray and think mostly of our own needs.

We judge most things by how well they serve our needs.

We even pray most intensely about that which most directly relates to us.

If we perceive that a prayer doesn't benefit us directly, we judge it irrelevant.

BUT please note that while we pray for things **that we see as essential** to our existence **we often miss the most essential**.

We think of the superficial and the temporal most often.

Jesus knew that the very existence and glory of God was far more significant not only for God but for us.

God is not necessary, "God is more than necessary." (Jan Lochman The Lord's Prayer 30)

Jesus' prayer begins at the most fundamental level, the most basic level, the most important level.

If God's name is not hallowed, all else is for nothing.

If God is not God, we are nothing.

"Oh God, make your name holy!"

The opening petition puts everything in perspective.

The prayer begins by putting God in first place – He is first and foremost.

It puts God in his rightful place and reminds us of our place as beneficiaries of his grace and servants of his purposes.

He is God.

Psalm 73:5-6 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 84:2 My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

God, you are complete, you are whole, you are not corrupted and helpless as we are.

You are the source of life – without you in your perfection we would all be hopelessly lost.

There would be no future worth living for
Without a “God who is there”, our lives have no meaning.

One author wrote, “We are dealing here with our human condition. In many respects we human beings are creatures of necessity. We are dependent on nature, limited and shaped by our psychological makeup, entangled in complicated relations of culture and history, and conditioned by structures and pressures of economic and social destiny.

“Yet, in fact, are we only that? Hardly anyone who has self-awareness will agree that we are.

“We want to remain “we” in life **and death**... We are not just the human world. We are more than an ensemble of social relationships... We are made in the image of God...(and) related even in the midst of necessity to what is more than necessary.” Lochman

The Lord's Prayer p32

When Jesus teaches us to ask the Father to make his name holy, (“Hallowed be your name”) he is talking about our basic condition, our great need for God which is also our deepest need.” Lochman 32

Only because God has a name can we have a name.
Because God has made himself known in His holiness, we don't dissolve into namelessness.

Oh, how desperate we become in seeking to make a name for ourselves, to become something, to be different than the masses!

Remember that at the tower of Babel their intent was “to make a name for themselves”.

People will do almost anything to accomplish this even at the expense of others.

What people think of us, our image, becomes more important than reality.

But if this is all we achieve, it is smoke and mirrors and has no substance – it won't last.

Recalling God's name is what saves us from that.

We don't have to make a name for ourselves.

God is there and he has a name and he has given us a name.

- We are known.
- We are loved.
- We are not exchangeable with anyone else in God's eyes. (idea from Lochman 36)

Isaiah 43:1b-3 “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you...For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;”

Yes God, make your name holy!

As the Apostle Paul said, “In God we live and move and have our being!”

God, break through all my pretenses, all the facades erected in life.

Break through the systems of belief that refashion you into what you aren't.

Break through the busyness that crowds you out.

Break into my life, into our lives, with a lively sense of your holiness.