

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 18/10/2020

Mini Series – “Making Disciples -Learning to pray”

Part Three - “What does God want us to pray for?”

As you read the passage below, take particular note of the way that the apostles prayed.

Acts 4:23-31 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ -²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

When we start to look at the way people prayed in the Bible, we can see that it is very different to the way most of us pray. A common thread runs through the prayers of Nehemiah, Daniel, the apostles in the book of Acts and Paul in his letters. We have largely drifted away from effective prayer and how the Bible shows us that we are meant to be praying. What is the difference between those prayers and ours?

We can begin to grasp this by looking at the structure of the pattern prayer that Jesus gave us in **Matthew 6:9- 13**.

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Two things stand out:

- The prayer begins with the worship of God
- Half of it is centred on the worship of God

Priority is given to seeking God's glory – the first three requests relate to the honour of God. Jesus teaches us that before we ask anything for ourselves, we should seek to glorify God. Rather than all our praying being about our needs and problems, at least half of our prayers should be seeking God's honour. In fact, all our prayers will come to be concerned with that when we pray rightly, as we will see over the coming weeks.

The apostles' prayer in **Acts 4: 24-30** largely spoke of the sovereign power of God over the nations. What they asked for themselves only came in the last two verses. Crucially, however, having focused on God's honour, they asked for their needs to be met in a way that would honour God.

The secret of effective prayer is to begin with worship, lifting up the glory of God and seeking to honour him.

Prayer meetings here are transformed now that we start them by telling him how much we love him, how much we are in awe of him and how much we want to see him honoured and glorified before we start to ask for anything.

The principle for prayer that we looked at last week was:

We approach God as Father, in the power of the Spirit, through the mediation of the Son.

The second principle is this:

Begin prayer with the worship of God and keep the worship of God as the central focus of your praying.

We are to begin our prayers with what concerns God. Jesus says 'Pray then like this "Our Father in heaven, **hallowed be your name**"

If we are to avoid vain repetition when we pray the Lord's Prayer, then we need to know what the meaning is of the

requests it contains. What are we asking God to do when we pray hallowed be your name?

1) What is meant by hallowed?

The word itself means to make or keep holy, or to sanctify, so the prayer could be translated thus:

Father in heaven, make (or keep) your name holy **or** sanctify your name.

Everything to do with God is already holy, because God is holy, but the way his name is used **isn't** holy. His name is dishonoured not just by people who deny his existence but also by those who claim to believe in him. We are asking:

- that God's holy name might be seen to be holy in the lives of people on earth
- that God would use all his might and power to honour his name as it rightly deserves

So often, when we come before God in prayer, we start with our needs (help in exams, safety as we travel, provision for our needs etc), but Jesus tells us that is not the starting point for true prayer.

The starting point for prayer is not my needs but the honour of God's name

2) What is meant by God's name?

In Jewish thinking, God's name means God himself. The Jews believed they could blaspheme God by saying his name wrongly so they would simply refer to God as 'The Name'. God and his name are inseparable so when he wanted to reveal himself, he did so by declaring his own name. He declared himself to be:

- Jehovah – revealing himself to be the self-existent one. He could say of himself I am who I am
- Elohim – revealing himself as the all-powerful one
- Jehovah Jireh – revealing himself to be the one who provides

When the Bible speaks about God's name, it is talking about who God is in himself.

We need to consider carefully that, when we pray 'hallowed be your name', we are asking for God himself to be glorified for who he is in our lives.

3) What would it look like for God to answer this request?

- a) It would mean him causing change in those who claim to believe in him – it is a request that we might live in a way that honours God as God, bringing him the

glory he deserves. This would mean God changing our disordered hearts so that we:

- Approach God in prayer in the right way, coming before him in humility
- Have a greater desire in our praying for God's name to be glorified than for our needs to be met
- Speak about God in the right way, having our understanding of him formed by the way he has revealed himself in the Bible rather than false ideas we might pick up from others
- Stop using God's name as a form of punctuation in our prayers as some do (e.g. God we thank you, you are great and God we ask you to help us God and God you see us God). He is the God of glory and when we start our prayers with 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name', we will use his name rightly.

When we pray hallowed be your name, are we prepared for God to work so that we come to the place where we are deeply concerned for his glory above all other things, and are no longer living for ourselves but for the glory of God?

This petition is a request for God to use his might, providence and wisdom to change those who believe in him into a people who show him to be holy.

b) It would mean him causing change in those who aren't saved -We are asking that people who don't yet know God might come to know and honour him. The reason for conflict on every level from personal to international is that people don't know or honour God as God. Paul tells us this in **Romans 1:28** And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

When we pray 'hallowed be your name' we are asking God to reveal himself in all his holiness to the world, causing sinners to repent and to acknowledge him as God, so that they live in a way that shows him to be holy.

This is a radically different way to pray – truly asking for God's name to be honoured, before we come to our needs. For us to be able to do this, three things are needed:

1. Repentance – this means a change of mind and behaviour, prompted by a deep conviction that we have failed to put God’s concern for his name above everything else. We must confess that we have been more concerned about our own needs than God’s honour. We need to change the way we pray so that **we begin prayer with the worship of God and keep the worship of God as the central focus of our praying.**

2. Taking time to see God’s majesty – we will never be concerned for God’s glory while God is insignificant in our thinking or we see him as just a means to get our needs met. It is only when we see with the eyes of our hearts how holy, majestic and awesome he is that our desire for his name to be hallowed will be greater than our desire to have our needs met.

That will only happen as we take time to meditate on God as he reveals himself in the Bible.

3. Dependence on Christ – whatever needs are pressing in on you, they cannot compare with all that Jesus knew he would undergo as he faced his coming death on the cross, suffering the eternal wrath of God in the place of sinners so that we could be forgiven. In his hour of need, he prayed “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may **glorify you** – **John 17:1**. Jesus is concerned for the glory of God so he prays for the strength to glorify God in all that is about to happen to him. He is not only our pattern for prayer, but also the means by which we will be enabled to do this. Unless you are united to Jesus by faith, you will never be able to meaningfully pray the words ‘hallowed be your name’.

What we need above everything else is to pursue our relationship with Jesus.

As we truly pray ‘hallowed be your name’, we will come to view our own needs rightly, and find that our prayers become prayers that desire God to be glorified. Then we will have assurance that God will give us what we ask for.

We close with a prayer which encapsulates all the facets of this petition that we have looked at today.

Father in heaven, you have taught us to pray hallowed be your name. In this we see that your great concern is for your name to be honoured in our own lives and in the world. Because you alone are God, you rightly deserve all honour and glory. Indeed, all that you have done, from creation to redemption and into eternity, has been done to put your glory on display. We confess that our hearts are so sinful that we haven't desired your glory as we ought. We haven't been as concerned for your name to be revered as you are. We have been more concerned about our own needs than the honour of your name. We confess this to you and ask that you grant us the gift of repentance. We ask that, in praying hallowed be your name, you change our hearts to desire the honour of your name, opening the eyes of our hearts to see your glory. Work in us so that we live in a way that shows you to be the holy God that you are. We ask that you work in the world to reveal the glory of your grace in Christ, to convict sinners of their sin, and to lead them to come to know you and worship you. We thank you for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who glorified you on earth, and who enables us to glorify you. We pray this in his name. Amen.