

## Praying as Jesus Prayed On the Mountaintop

Matthew 6: 5-13

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**Text:** <sup>5</sup> "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. <sup>9</sup> "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, <sup>10</sup> your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

The Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples that the very first thing the believer should say when approaching God in prayer...is this: "**Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name...**" Jesus was saying first and foremost "Remember...just saying His name is your greatest privilege!" Now...last week we said that God's love for his children in Christ is so great that He runs to meet us when we turn towards Him. So, here is a question: when we pray...can we be formal with God and relaxed at the same time? What exactly is Jesus teaching us at this point? I think he is telling us to remember that God the Father delights to have us come into His presence but...as we do so we must remember who we are...and who He is! We must remember our position before Him. We are to feel welcome but be humble. Invited to speak but only with awestruck respect. Part Two of our series on prayer. Let us think *deeply* today about prayer. But first, let *us* pray.

In the very fine movie called "The King's Speech" we learn the story of King George 6<sup>th</sup>. of England. Living life as the son of a King and the brother to

another King, George ascends to the throne himself. But the prospect is terrifying because he has a serious speech impediment. He stutters. In this true story, his wife Elizabeth likewise becomes an unexpected Queen, but she handles her new role with grace and dignity.

There is one very interesting scene in the film that probably goes quite unnoticed. The King and Queen have gone to the home of his speech therapist and she is waiting for him to finish his session. The Queen is seated at the kitchen table in this modest home when the lady of the house, a “commoner” as they would say...is stunned to walk in and find the Queen in her kitchen! When she recognizes the Queen she is speechless... not certain of what to say. Then the Queen smiles and gently says to her “You may address me the first time as ‘Your Majesty’ and after that...you may call me ‘Mum’.” It is actually quite powerful because the Queen wants to make it clear that she is after all...*the Queen!* And thus she must be held in the highest esteem and not approached casually or carelessly or disrespectfully. In particular, the first time someone speaks to her they must show the proper respect for who she is. How we address someone says a great deal about how we view the other person. How we address someone says a great deal about who we believe that person to be. How we address someone says a great deal about ourselves.

So, with those things in mind, let us consider what the Lord Jesus Christ is teaching us in this portion of God’s Word. Certainly prayer is not to impress others. Prayer is not to impress Heaven with many words. Prayer is not really about giving God hundreds of details that He already knows. Rather, prayer is about fellowshiping with God and understanding who He is and who we are. Think of the very first line of the prayer taught by our Lord:

**“Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name...”**

How unsettling it is to hear people pray at times. It’s fine to be comfortable coming into the presence of God...but casual and even disrespectful is in a way blasphemous! Personally, I cringe when I hear a preacher or anyone open a prayer with “Good morning Father!” As if God just got up and He is looking for His first cup of coffee! I want to fellowship with the Maker of Heaven and Earth and I believe in some way He runs to me with affection...

but He is still God! He is the One the Heavenly Host worships day and night. How shall I approach him except with reverence?

We've been approaching this topic of prayer from an unexpected angle. Last week, we spoke of the underlying importance of seeing prayer as fellowship with God...fellowship that He desires! Today, let us consider a second underlying reality. Namely, prayer begins when we understand who we are and who God is! In other words, we might say "Oh it is nice that Jesus paused to say to the Father 'Your very name is hallowed' almost as if he was being careful to be polite!" But it goes far deeper than that. What Jesus is teaching in this first portion is that God is Holy and unique in righteousness and we are not! That we are not just approaching the One who is bigger than we are and far greater than we are! We are approaching the Only One who is inherently and intrinsically and completely GOOD! And we are not good! Little wonder we do well to say "Father...thank you for the privilege of even uttering your name from my lips! Your hallowed and Holy name!"

We need to address God as the One whose very name is hallowed...totally Holy! Being intimate with God does not mean being careless and casually familiar. We must approach God as the One whose very name is sacred! The words we use...matter! Consider how important words are and the lesson Jesus taught one day to a man who approached him. We read:

**Luke 8:18-19 (NIV) <sup>18</sup> A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>19</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone."**

That might seem a strange rebuke to a fellow who was just trying to be polite. Jesus is short with the man. To be sure, Jesus is not saying that he himself is not good. Rather, Jesus is saying that God alone is good. Perhaps Jesus is asking the man "Do you know who I am?" But in any case, if we assign inherent goodness to man then what distinguishes man from God? Of course, relatively speaking we are "good" .... We may be very good in fact when compared to some very bad people. But in order to understand where we are relative to God, we need to kill off our pride and get this straight: at my very, very best and most generous and kind, I am still a self-absorbed and sinful man whose goodness when compared to the true goodness of God....is not goodness at all! My goodness when compared to God's

genuine goodness is like the small flame of a match compared to all of the stars in a billion galaxies! So, Jesus is saying since only God is good you should really come very, very humbly into His presence.

In order to worship God in his goodness, we must not misuse the Divine name. The ancient Jews tried to avoid even saying the Divine name! Actually, Jesus himself taught that the very name "Father" is to be reserved in spiritual matters for God alone! Jesus said:

**Matthew 23:8-9 (NIV) <sup>8</sup> "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.**

These titles are reserved for the Triune God who alone is good and exalted! Man is not to be exalted. Yes, we call our clergy "Pastor" and that seems appropriate because it honors a role or a function. And yes "Father" is used for fathers of children and that is fine in the family. But "Father" used spiritually is over the line because only God is our spiritual Father. I've known and respected many Catholic Priests but I always call them Pastor. And there have been Godly men who've served as Popes but I totally cringe when I hear them referred to as "Holy Father!" That is the title Jesus used for God the Father! So, we must be very careful with how we address God. Again, consider what our Lord says:

**"hallowed be your name..."**

"Hallowed" is the way we translate the Greek word "hagi-odd-zo" meaning "Holy" or "Sanctified" or "Set Apart!" Jesus is saying the name "Father" is set apart for God the Father when addressing spiritual issues! Just remember friends...when you walk into the presence of a President or a King or Queen or the General over your division...you must address him or her in a way that honors their position. If we do not, we are saying "We don't really respect you!" That's how we are to come before God....as welcome and prepared to please Him with our fellowship but always...always...with respect. "Thank you Father that I may even say your name!"

Allow me to suggest something else. We live in a casual and disrespectful age. If we do not hold God in awe and respect His Holy name, we are showing pride in ourselves and even arrogance towards the Kingdom of God! Let me put it this way as an illustration...during the Civil War, President Lincoln became very frustrated with the leader of the Union Armies under General George McClelland. Never did a General do a better job of training troops than McClelland. He just had no interest in fighting. And the man was arrogant. One time, Lincoln was out of patience so he actually went to his headquarters and waited to talk with him. When McClelland arrived he walked right past Lincoln and went upstairs to rest... ignoring the President. Why did McClelland do that? Because he held both the President and the Union in contempt! By failing to respect the President, McClelland showed his contempt for the people who elected him.

Let me gently offer another thought. Over the years I've received criticism that is usually polite but sometimes contemptuous. Just recently I wrote to someone whose words were vicious because of our upcoming creation seminars. While this is not about me, it is about my office and this person's words were very, very disrespectful. When I responded to him I said that you are judging not just me but the church and its Elders who continue to approve of me as the Senior Pastor. If half of what you're saying about me is true, they the Elders should be removed along with me immediately. My point is that when we address someone, we are addressing all of those that they represent!

God the Father is unique in that he represents the Kingdom of God and all that is Holy! **But He is the Kingdom of God!** He is the eternal God who is beyond our judging! He is the sovereign God who knows from eternity when the underground earthquake will erupt and cause the tsunami and leave thousands dead! In fact, He is the impossible- to- figure- out- God whose ways the Bible says are not our ways! As we watched the news on Friday with those films of the catastrophic devastation in Japan and elsewhere, we were reminded that God knew it was coming and God could have stopped it...and God did not! The God of the Bible allows things that in our hearts we are sure He should not allow! Let's be honest! We would have stopped it! He had the power to do so and He did not! We've asked this question before: do we want to worship the God of our imaginations or the God of the Bible? Because the God of the Bible is very, very hard to understand and

filled with mystery...and everytime I say His name is hallowed and Holy I am saying that I worship Him despite the fact that I can't figure Him out!

So we approach Him as the only good God and the One whose very name is hallowed! Thus...when Jesus prayed on the mountaintop, he knew those things to be true so Jesus used that dramatic phrase **“<sup>10</sup> your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** We could talk about the state of the world and how much it needs the second coming of Christ. And we could talk about the mystery of the future Kingdom where only God's will is to be done...perhaps even right here on Earth! We could talk about how badly our politicians grieve God by advocating gay marriage and making it legal to put so many unborn people among us to death. We could talk about God's will not being done...yet...out there in the world. But let's get much more personal and immediate about it. Let's talk about our own lives in Christ.

We will look more closely later in this series at the need to accept God's will. But let's consider for a moment the pain of unanswered prayer. A fine young Christian person spoke with me recently. She has endured a brutal divorce and there are many things yet to be resolved as the fallout with children and her “ex” is very complicated. So, she has been praying. A lot! She has been asking God to remedy her situation. She has been like the persistent widow of Luke Chapter Eighteen who pleaded for justice against her enemy! And you'll recall that finally even the unjust Judge said “All right! I'll do as you ask!” And Jesus said our Heavenly Father when approached in persistent prayer will give justice to His children who cry out day and night! And He will act quickly!” And so this young woman has been praying...but this injustice has gone on and on and God has not been quick at all to answer her prayers. And so she came you me to ask...why?

I hope you can imagine my answer. “Why has God not yet answered your perfectly reasonable and persistent prayers? I do not know.” But I am quite certain of one truth that we've examined from this pulpit. One truth that actually interfaces dramatically with prayer, especially unanswered prayer or at least not answered yet. Here it is: **the deepest Christians are those who have learned to love God unconditionally, and unanswered prayer is a great fertilizer for that process!**

What God wants to do in your life Christian is bring you to a point where you love Him with all your heart even if He breaks your heart! What God wants to do in your life Christian is bring you to a point where you love Him with all your mind even if your mind aches with confusion and pain. What God wants to do in your life Christian is to bring you to a point where you say His name is hallowed even when saying his name has not given you what you want. So, Jesus said:

**"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, <sup>10</sup> your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

I think the most important part of the prayer that Jesus taught was in these first few words. Yes, he taught them to pray for their daily bread and yes he taught them to plead for the Kingdom to come on Earth. But Jesus first taught them to be humble before this name above all names...this name of our Heavenly Father. "Hallowed be your name." Actually, it is a name that opens doors. I'll move towards closure with a story...a true story.

A few years ago, a very good Christian friend of mine learned that I was going down to Phoenix for a few days to visit our son JJ. He is a Detective on the Phoenix Police Department but at that point he was a new graduate of the Arizona Police Academy. So, my friend said I should take my son and his two roommates, also newly minted policemen, out to dinner at the best restaurant in Phoenix and he would arrange it. And he did! All I had to do was arrive there and say this man's name and they took us to our table and we had an absolute feast! It was a real blessing!

You see, that is all that God is saying to us. His name need only be said at the Door to Heaven and we will be seated for the feast! His hallowed name will always open doors! In fact, I sometimes wonder if we have totally misunderstood some of the things about the end times. Consider what our Lord said:

**Matthew 24:40-41 (NIV) <sup>40</sup> "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."**

We always think that is a reference to the Rapture when God takes His own children out of the world. But I'm wondering if the ones taken out are the weeds so that God can have His Kingdom here on Earth with the redeemed in Christ! So, maybe when we pray <sup>10</sup> " **your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...**" we are really praying "Please remove the godless from among us!" Because those people who do not love Him do not use His name! Those who disdain God and who live in the pride of their own accomplishments do not call upon Him in the power of His name! If they do use His name they do not consider it hallowed and sacred!

But the Lord Jesus Christ said there is going to be a great feast!

**Matthew 8:11 (NIV) <sup>11</sup> I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.**

And because of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father has made reservations for us at that great feast and we need only say His name...that hallowed name. And every time we pray while we are still here on Planet Earth, we are rehearsing for that day when we say "My Father whose very name is hallowed has made a reservation for me!"

Let us pray.

