

Matthew 6:9 "This, then, is how you should pray... hallowed be your name,"

Dear Fellow Americans, fellow Christians,

There are lots of reasons to be proud of our nation. Even as many bemoan problems they see in the US, we can praise God for the freedom we enjoy. One radio host who is frequently critical of much in the US still likes to say, "Still the greatest nation on God's green earth." As Christians, we should be thankful for the freedom we enjoy in this nation. I can say, we should even be proud of it. It's a matter of honor.

I don't know if you ever watch soccer. I'm guessing many couldn't care less about soccer. But one thing that has made me most proud of being an American over the years is the American soccer teams. First of all, the women's team has medaled in all seven World Cups to date. No other team has half that. Second, while the men's team has not come close to a medal since 1930, I can say that I always felt proud of the US men's team. I don't know if you know what "diving" is in soccer. When a soccer player "dives", he pretends that someone else fouled him, but actually nothing happened. Most international teams do this all the time, dozens of times every match. The United States team always made me proud because they refused to engage in that sort of deceptive, cry-baby behavior. They may not be the best, but they are the most sportsman-like. They bring the US honor.

IT'S A MATTER OF HONOR

Last week the disciples looked at Jesus and said, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" So he taught them the Lord's Prayer which begins by calling on our heavenly Father. We pray to God as confidently as a child goes to a loving father. We have a loving, strong, dependable Father in heaven. Today we continue that study on the Lord's Prayer.

Honor—that's what Jesus was talking about in our reading today. When he taught his disciples these four words of the Lord's Prayer, "***Hallowed be thy name,***" he was teaching them a matter of honor, God's honor.

What about Two Lord's Prayers?

But here I am going to take a small detour to mention an important point. Not so important for this reading this week, but in general. Last week, when we started the Lord's Prayer, we read from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11. This week, we read from Matthew, chapter 6. Maybe you noticed, maybe not. If you put the two Lord's Prayers side by side, you will notice that they are slightly different. The one in Matthew is the one we pray in church. The Luke prayer has a few minor differences. Which might raise a question. If it is in two places, which one did Jesus really pray? If they are slightly different, which is the right one? Good question, especially for people like us who believe that the Bible really is *God's Word*.

This is where the doubters come in and say, "Look, the book of Luke and Matthew don't agree. It just goes to prove that you can't trust the Bible."

Well, they intentionally misunderstand things. Remember that Jesus preached and taught, daily, for three years. Do you think that Jesus taught each bullet point only one single time? In a time before Wi-Fi and cellular data; before television, radio or newspapers; back in a time when any book you owned was hand-written and the only way to remember what people said was to commit it to memory, does it seem unreasonable that Jesus might just have repeated one or two of his lessons?

In fact, when you read the two Lord's Prayers, you find that Jesus taught this prayer at two different

times. In Luke, Jesus is alone with his closest disciples. He teaches them the Lord's Prayer at their personal request. The Matthew setting is the much famed "Sermon on the Mount." In Matthew Jesus teaches a great crowd of believers numbering in the thousands.

I point this out because then any potential conflict between the two accounts disappears like morning mist. Jesus taught this Prayer at least twice. It's like any college professor who repeats himself in the course of a semester, not because he's absent-minded, but because he wants the point to stick. It's like the way that professor might change his wording to fit whether he is talking in a classroom or a coffee shop, to high schoolers or post-graduate students. Jesus molded his prayer to fit the time and place and people.

I simply point out that there is no conflict. But now, to our Bible reading, the four words, ***"Hallowed be thy name."***

I. Honor We Have Failed to Give

It starts off with a doozie. "Hallowed." As a kid I always had a mental picture of a log lying in a forest that is hollow in the middle. No, no, no. Not "hollowed", "hallowed be thy name."

"Hallowed" means "May it be holy." When we say, ***"Hallowed be thy name,"*** we are saying, "Dear Father, may your name be set aside as a special name, special to all people." Special to us, to this community, to this entire world. You see, It's a Matter of Honor, God's Honor. Which brings us to a problem.

One of the fringed benefits of being a pastor is that most people, even in this day and age, generally try to watch their language a bit around a man of the cloth. I appreciate that. But you know what? I am not the one who judges. It is God who judges when his name is dishonored. And whether someone let's a bad word slip in the presence of a pastor, or whether someone is cussing a blue streak with a friend in a bar, or whether someone is simply texting those three letters of profanity in a text message, the One who judges is there. And you are dishonoring his name. And he holds you personally accountable.

But that is only the beginning. Even misrepresenting God is dishonoring his name. When we voice religious opinions which do not agree with the Bible, do you know what we are doing? We dishonor God's name. Just like a false witness in a courtroom dishonors a defendant.

If we don't speak the name of God accurately, people can't know the real God. He is the God who takes sin seriously. He condemns the sinner, the adulterer, the homosexual, the hateful bigot, the academic cheat, the athletic cheat, the gossip, the overbearing husband or wife, the rebellious child, the corrupt politician, the dishonest boss, the lazy worker, the free-loading citizen, the self-righteous goody-two-shoes. God condemns them all. And every single one of them, God declares, deserves to suffer in the fires of hell. And if you don't make that known, then you have not honored God's name.

But that isn't the end of it either. God's name and honor are not just what we believe and say.

There was a professor at a Christian institution who told his students, "If you want to put one of those Christian symbols on the bumper of your car, think twice. Think about what kind of driver you are. Are you the sort of driver who usually drives well over the speed limit? Do you get angry behind the wheel? Are you a reckless or inattentive driver? When people see you drive and they see that fish symbol on your back bumper, what are they going to say about the name of God? ***Hallowed by thy name?"***

Just recently there was a Christian pastor who made the news because of a criminal investigation. Then he made the news again because he killed himself. What happens to God's name then? And what about the times our co-workers, who well-know that we are Christians, watched us meltdown in a seething rage? What then? Not just our words, but our actions can dishonor God's name.

It's like taking a beautiful new automobile—and I'm not talking about a second hand car—but a real new car that you have saved up for, and will be paying for for the next five years. The first morning after buying it you wake up and see that someone practiced their graffiti skills on your new pride and joy—ugly red and black letters sprayed all over it. That's what we do when we misuse God's name. That which was to be so beautiful is trashed. This first petition of the Lord's Prayer is a matter of honor, God's honor.

II. The Greatest Honor of God's Name

Can we ever be careful enough? Can we ever say that we have hallowed God's name like we should? Have we been a beacon drawing people to the name of their Savior? Or have people been disgusted and thought, "If that's the God you worship, I want nothing to do with him!"?

If it only takes one cheat at the Olympics to stain the reputation of a nation, then how can God's name truly be hallowed? Every single one of his people has dishonored his name.

Which is exactly what the Apostle Peter was realizing after he had disowned Jesus those three times. He had brought shame to the name of Jesus. He had dishonored Jesus' name, and the only thing he could do was weep. He was more truthful than we usually are. He didn't try to make excuses. He had failed. He could only throw himself on the mercy of God. And Jesus did forgive him. He won that forgiveness on the cross. A few days later Jesus personally assured Peter of forgiveness on the shores of the Sea of Galilee – even the one who had so dishonored his name. Yes, forgiven.

This same God also looks upon all who realize their own daily sins of thought, word and deed. And to those who despair of ever being good enough to deserve God's favor, and who cast themselves on the forgiving mercy of God in Jesus Christ—for those he wipes the record clean. Debt paid, time served, by Jesus.

That is the best thing about his name that we should proclaim loud and clear. A sinner I am. But there is another name. It is a name of mercy and hope, forgiveness and life. The name of Jesus. ***"Hallowed be thy name."***

III. Let Us Hallow God's Name

There sure is a lot in these four short words, ***"Hallowed be your name!"*** There is more. We do not simply want to avoid dishonoring God's name. We pray that we would actively honor his name.

The only way we learn to hallow the name of God is to do what Samuel did in our reading. Do you remember? When the Lord spoke to him, what was his answer? *"Speak [Lord,] for your servant is listening."* We listen to what God's Word says. Not even to what the pastor says, but to what God's Word says. We must inform our faith and actions.

Let our attitude be that of Mary, sister of Martha. She didn't turn on the television to hear what the slickest looking preacher with the best sounding Gospel choir behind him said. No, she went for the message. She sat at the feet of Jesus himself.

When we pray, ***"Hallowed be thy name,"*** we are asking God to teach us to honor him in word and deed. And here is something else we pray. We pray that people would take all that we say and do in the kindest possible way. We pray that God will help people look beyond our failings to see what is good. When we pray, ***"Hallowed be thy name"*** we ask God to work beyond our abilities, that his name is honored.

That is why we pray, ***"Hallowed be thy name."*** We want people to know the great goodness we have experienced in our God. That they look beyond the distorted pictures people paint of God and to see the true God. A God of holiness and sinlessness, yes. Also a God of love and forgiveness.

Yes, Father in heaven. ***"Hallowed be thy name."*** Amen.