

**Hallowed Be Thy Name  
Matthew 6: 1-9**

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It was Sunday morning and the pastor was asked to teach the boy's Sunday school class. He decided to teach them the Lord's Prayer. To get things started he asked, "Does God have a name?" One of the boys raised his hand and proudly announced, "Our Father who are in heaven Harold be Thy name." From our earliest days most if not all of us have recited the Lord's Prayer, even if there were times when we might have thought that His name really was Harold. The Lord's Prayer has been a part of Christian worship for a long, long time. It's found in two places in the New Testament, the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Luke. In both of them the wording is nearly identical. In Matthew's gospel it is a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, chapter 6, verses 9-13. In the gospel of Luke, chapter 11, verses 2-4, it's the answer to a request, a request from one of Jesus' disciples who said, "Lord, teach us to pray." Beginning this Sunday and continuing for the next five weeks we're going to be taking a look at the Lord's Prayer, using the version that most of us are familiar with, the one in the gospel of Matthew. It naturally falls into six easily remembered refrains. However, to be honest, sometimes these refrains are repeated so repetitiously that we forget about why Jesus gave us this prayer in the first place. The Lord's Prayer is not something that He just wanted us to memorize and repeat. It was given to us as a model, an example, of how we should pray. In fact, a better name for the Lord's Prayer might be the "Disciple's Prayer." It's the kind of prayer around which we should structure our own prayers when we want to speak with the Lord. With that in mind, let's examine each part of this prayer week by week and discover how it can help us to have a more meaningful prayer life.

So let's get started with those first ten words of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." As you have probably already guessed, I'm using the King James Version of the Lord's Prayer. It's the one that I and most of you grew up with and the one which is the most familiar to us. I'll be using it throughout this sermon series. But there are many other translations of the Lord's Prayer and I'll be referring to them as well from time to time. Here's one example of that first refrain, "Our Father in heaven, may Your name be honored." Whether in the King James Version or the more modern one I just recited, there are three words which deserve our careful attention—Father, heaven and honored, or in the King James version "hallowed." Let's take a look at each of them.

There are only a few references to God as our father in the Old Testament. For example, Isaiah 64:8 declares, "Yet, O LORD, You are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter, we are the work of Your hand". Then in Jeremiah 31:9 God promises that He will protect His people because He is "Israel's

Father." The Jewish people held God in such high esteem, so separate and distinct from anything related to this world, that they didn't think it was really appropriate to speak about Him in language that was derived from human relationships. That's why they didn't refer to God as Father very often in the Old Testament. They thought it was better to speak of Him in other ways, like Elohim, the Supreme One, or El Shaddai, God Almighty. However, things began to change when Jesus came along, especially in the Gospel of John. He referred to God as His Father on at least 17 different occasions and there are as many as a hundred different references to the fatherhood of God in the pages of the New Testament. Let's take a look at several of them.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the same place that we find the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us not to worry about the things of this world, like food and clothing because He says, "Your heavenly Father knows that you need them." (Matthew 6:32) Then a little further on He reaffirms God's fatherly concern. He says, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:9-11) And speaking of prayer, just before giving us the Lord's Prayer, Jesus said, "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." (Matthew 6:6) Furthermore, Jesus exemplified that kind of reliance upon the fatherhood of God, when on the night before He was crucified, cried out "Abba, Father." (Mark 14:36) That word "abba" is the same one that Paul uses when he says in his letter to the Romans that we can address God in the same way. Speaking about the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian, he says, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry 'Abba, Father'." (Romans 8:15)

Do you know what that word "abba" means? It's Aramaic in origin, the actual language that Jesus spoke when He was growing up. People no longer spoke Hebrew except in the synagogue. They spoke Greek or more often the everyday language of that day and time in the Middle East, Aramaic. The word means "daddy" or "papa." It's a term of endearment and familiarity, of closeness, warmth and affection. It's the word that Jesus used at that most critical moment in His life, when he was seeking to know the will of His heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's also the word which Paul said we could use when we want to address our heavenly Father. It's a poignant reminder that we have a Daddy in heaven that really does care about us. We can climb up into His lap like a little child and whisper in His ear, "I love You Daddy, and I need You Daddy. Hold me tight." Even when we're tired and weary and have come to the end of our lives, it's good to know that Jesus said, "In My Father's house there are many rooms, many places where we can dwell with our heavenly Father forever."

Speaking of that eternal home, a pastor asked his congregation, "How many of you want to go to heaven?" Everyone raised their hands except for one little boy. So the pastor asked him, "Sonny, don't you want to go to heaven?" "Yes sir," the boy replied, "but I thought you were getting up a bus load to leave this afternoon." Whether this afternoon or many years from now, there is at least one question that we might ask before we leave, "Where is it and what does it look like?" For sure the Bible, especially the New Testament, mentions heaven frequently. There's even a brief description of it in the final chapter in the book of Revelation, a beautiful city enclosing a refreshing river and a garden filled with the trees of life. But in terms of describing precisely what it is and where it's located, there's not a great deal of additional information, except for this one singularly important fact. It's the place where God dwells. It's His home and the location from which He rules and reigns. Furthermore, it's outside our frame of reference in terms of the material universe. Yes, in the past many cultures, including the Jewish one, pictured heaven as a domain in the sky. That's why they chose to worship God on high places like mountains. If you will remember, the Transfiguration, Jesus' meeting with Moses and Elijah, took place on a high mountain. So you could say it's up there, but it's also out there, another dimension of reality sitting right alongside of our own, one which we sometimes catch a glimpse of.

Years ago I visited a man who had a major heart attack. He almost died. In fact, his heart had stopped beating for a few moments. The intensive care hospital staff worked very diligently to bring him back. This is what he said, "During those moments when my heart stopped beating, I was on a hillside looking at a shining city off in the distance. A little girl, one whom I had met and casually knew, who had recently died from a childhood illness, walked up to me. She asked, "Do you want to go on," pointing to the city, "or do you want to go back?" After considering the choice that was being presented to me and thinking about my family, I said, "I want to go back." Instantly I was back in the intensive care unit and in a lot of pain. Heaven is real, nearby and ready to receive us when our lives here on earth have come to an end.

Finally, there's that word "hallowed." No, I'm not talking about Halloween. Hallowed is a Shakespearean rendering of what it means to honor someone, to respect them, to reverence them, to esteem them greatly. God's name is holy, special and should never be abused. That's why it really bothers me when someone uses a curse word and then attaches God's name to their expression of anger. How would you feel if someone used the name of your father or your mother and then declared that they wished your parent would harm and destroy someone or something they disliked? Well, that's precisely what people are doing when they say "God" and then attach those three letters "d, a, m." It's an offense to God and clear violation of the second commandment, "Thou shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). It's a declaration of disrespect that everyone, especially Christians should take seriously. Moses told the children of Israel, "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for

the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name". (Deuteronomy 5:11). The Jewish people took that commandment seriously and in the days of Jesus would not even say aloud God's personal name, the one He had given to Moses on the Mountain.

So when we pray, let's begin our prayers by doing three things. First, let's address God properly and reverently. In fact, let's not throw His name around carelessly even when we're not praying. Second, let's remember that He lives in heaven, a spiritual realm that exists right beside our own and sometimes a lot closer than we would ever imagine. Finally, let's always remember that He is the awesome and all powerful Creator of the entire universe, who nevertheless is willing to be our Father, the One above all others who really cares about us. So let's say it together, "**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name!**"