



## GUESS WHO'S ASKING FOR PRAYER

*Hallowed be thy name.*

Matthew 6:9

A pastor who was imprisoned during the closing months of the Second World War wrote in a series of letters he sent from prison how surprised he was to find many different types of people asking him to pray for them. He told how men who often boasted to each other about their sexual escapades and who cursed and swore and generally exhibited entirely godless behavior would suddenly change when the air raid sirens sounded. As they scurried past the pastor's cell on their way to their own, where they were kept while the bombs fell, they would ask him to pray for them. "Pfarrer bete für mich." So the pastor marvelled that people who seemed calloused and brazenly faithless asked for prayer when danger threatened.

Yes, it is true that we are often surprised that certain people, from whom we least expect it, ask to be prayed for. This certainly indicates that there is a slumbering sense of the presence of God even in the hearts of those who don't ordinarily want to be associated with religious things. But the greatest surprise of all, when it comes to prayer, is that God asks us to pray for Him. Did you know that?

Now, it seems to me that this is the greatest surprise of all. We don't expect godless people to ask others to pray for them, and we are surprised when they do. But we don't expect strong, healthy, happy, successful, rich, fulfilled people to ask others to pray for them, either. We generally associate prayer with need, and such people don't have many needs. When we think about God, we

would tend to suppose, wouldn't we, that God doesn't have any needs at all.

What does God need? If there is a God at all, then He must be self-sufficient and independent. He can do what He wants. He can have what He wants. Why, there is even a Psalm in the Old Testament that expresses the fact that God doesn't really need the help of people like us. Psalm 50 says: "I am God, your God. . . . If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world and all that is in it is mine" (vv. 7, 12). That's the God of the Bible speaking—"the world and all that is in it is mine"—and He asks us to pray for Him.

But maybe you didn't know that God does ask us to pray for Him. Do you remember, though, when Jesus' disciples came to Him and asked Him to teach them to pray? He did teach them to pray, and He used the words of the perfect prayer, the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. He said, "Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name ..." (Matthew 6:9). Stop. Stop right there. Notice that Jesus taught us to pray that God's name will be hallowed. We are to pray to our Father in heaven and the first thing we are to ask Him for is that His name will be hallowed. We are not to ask, first of all, for ourselves. We are to ask for something for God: "Hallowed be thy name." God, you see, teaches us to pray, for Jesus is God, and when He teaches us, He instructs us to pray first of all for Him, for His name.

Isn't it peculiar that God asks us to pray for Him? And what is just as peculiar, for us today at least, is that He asks us to pray for Him using language we practically never use otherwise. He wants something for Himself that we find very

difficult to understand. • He wants His name hallowed. It is extremely important that we know what we mean when we say "Hallowed be thy name" because the prayer Jesus taught us has been designed to influence all of our prayers. The Lord's Prayer is the model prayer, the example prayer, and it's supposed to make our lives different, and our prayers different. Therefore we must know what we are saying when we say it. We must know what *hallowed* means.

One of the few times we ever run across this word outside the Lord's Prayer is in Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," and his use of the word *hallowed* will help us understand its meaning. Remember he said, "We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. . . But, in larger sense we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground." What Lincoln was saying was that the battlefield on which he and his friends were met had been dedicated, consecrated, made sacred, by the brave men who had spilled their blood on that field. So it was a field to be set apart. It was worthy of the serious, almost reverent attention of those who visited it. The field of Gettysburg was hallowed ground.

So when we pray that the name of God will be hallowed, we are praying that the name of God will receive the glory and the praise, will receive the holy, reverent attention of all men everywhere. This is a prayer for the glory of God—that God may be glorified by all men. Why is the glory of God the subject of the first request of the prayer

which Jesus taught us to pray? It is because the glory of God must be our primary concern, our central interest. What are human beings for? An old catechism raises the question, "What is the chief end of man?", and answers this way: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever" (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. & A. 1). And the Bible underscores the fact that we must be concerned about the glory of God when it declares: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever" (Romans 11:36). Corinthians 10:31 says, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

So then, you see, the point of view of the Lord's Prayer is totally different from the ordinary point of view that prevails in our world. Many people believe in God, but for them God is an after thought. They pay attention to Him when they don't have much else to do—possibly when they are sick or possibly when they are old and there are few people to talk to. That's all right, but the Biblical view of man is that human beings are supposed to be thinking about God all the time, and they are supposed to be doing everything in order to bring honor and praise to God. Just think how our lives would be changed and the quality of our society would be improved if more and more of us would think about God first of all, and dedicate ourselves to praising Him with our lives.

When Jesus tells us to pray that the name of God will be hallowed, He is telling us to pray that the great revelation of God be proclaimed and published everywhere. The idea of God's name as it appears in the Bible is directly related.



to God's great revelation of Himself. Throughout the Old Testament era, God revealed Himself to His chosen people, the children of Israel, by using special names that expressed certain elements of His character. The most profound and marvelous name of God found in the Bible is Jehovah which God used when He revealed His willingness to enter into a loving, saving, covenant arrangement with His people. Exodus 6 shows how the revelation of God expressed in the names He used finally came to fullest power when He told Moses His servant that His name was Jehovah. We read: "And God said to Moses, 'I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord, [Jehovah], I did not make myself known to them' (v. 2, 3). The name Jehovah revealed God's great willingness to save His people from eternal destruction.

Ultimately the name of God is revealed fully in the name that was given to the person who taught us the words of the Lord's Prayer. His name was Jesus Christ. The name Jesus Christ is itself a marvelous revelation of the gracious character of the God whose name we pray will be hallowed. When Jesus was about to be born, an angel messenger appeared to Joseph His adoptive father and said, "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). And the name *Christ* that Jesus carried was simply the Greek form of the older Hebrew word *Messiah* which meant *the anointed one*. For Jesus Christ had been anointed by the Holy Spirit of the living God to perform a work of redemption that is perfect and effective. The name of God is in the final analysis the revelation of this salvation.

Isn't it absolutely astonishing that God asks us to pray for Him? God wants us to pray that His gospel may be heard throughout the world and that all men everywhere will turn to Him in faith and will live each day in His service. Do you realize that if you pray this prayer and you really mean it and really understand it, it can revolutionize your life? Understanding this prayer, "Hallowed be thy name" can turn your life right side up. It can give you new freedom. It can give you new purpose. It can give you new happiness. I'll tell you how this happens.

First of all, those who pray "Hallowed be thy name" and who really understand what they are talking about, are people who themselves have a living relationship with the God who asks them to pray for Him this way. If one prays sincerely that God may be glorified and praised and hallowed, he must be a person who has himself already made God the center of his life. After all, this prayer means that I, if I pray it, want God to be the center of my life and I want to live so that I serve Him all the time.

And so before going any further, I want to invite you to be the kind of person who can pray this prayer. This means that you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. The name of God is hallowed by those who have seen the fullness of His grace and love in the Lord Jesus Christ who reveals God perfectly. He, as the only begotten Son of God who was in the bosom of the Father and who now rules with Him at God's right hand, is the person who must become the center of our attention and worship. Without Jesus Christ, the word *God* becomes empty and meaningless.

Thoughts about God that are not centered in the Lord Jesus Christ are not worth anything. Jesus is the one who has proclaimed the name of God to the people whom He invites to address God as their Father in heaven. We read this about Him in Hebrews 2, - "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren in the midst of the congregation and will praise thee (v. 12).

Nothing is more "life changing" than to know that one has been saved through the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before we can pray "Hallowed be thy name" meaningfully, we must glorify God by keeping His greatest commandment: we must believe in His Son as our Lord and Savior. We cannot honor God unless we honor His Son with our faith. Jesus Himself has said: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father: he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 5:22, 23). So, you see one cannot really pray, "Hallowed be thy name" unless he has confessed his sin and asked God to forgive him for Jesus' sake.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever confessed that you are a sinner? Do you know that what Jesus did on Calvary where He was crucified is sufficient to pay for all your sins? Believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again for you. Honor the Father by believing in His Son. When you do that you will be hallowing the name of God in your own life, and then you can pray that His name will be hallowed in the lives of others as well.

Praying "Hallowed be thy name" can revolution-

ize your life ... it can give you motivation. Here's another way it can revolutionize your life. When a person begins to realize that God actually teaches him to pray for God's cause - that God asks us to pray for God - he begins to see how important a person he is as a human being. Christianity is a religion totally different from all the other religions of the world in that it talks not only about how great God is, but it also talks about how great man is. Now, if God is as great as we assume He is, He is as great as the Bible says He is - remember Psalm 50 which we noticed a few moments ago, the Psalm in which God says that if He were hungry, He wouldn't task us for food because everything belongs to Him - if God is really that great (and He is), then why in the world does He ask us to pray for the hallowing of His name?

The answer to that question is this: God created man in His own image. He made man great. Apparently (and we have no explanation for this) God wants man to be a part of His great work. God, therefore, wants nothing more than to receive the glory and the praise that He deserves from His creation, but He wants to receive that glory and praise as a result of the prayers of people.

God invites us to pray for and to work for the hallowing of His name. Yes, to work for it, too. For, after all, prayer and work always go together. What God asks us to pray for He also wants us to work for, there is no question about that. To people like us, who are but dust and ashes who have surrendered all right to His favor, has

been given a concern and a task so exalted it is almost overwhelming.

It is a glorious thing to be a human being. An. it is because God invites common ordinary people like us to make our lives expressions of praise to Him. The Bible reveals that there is honest human activity too small that it cannot be rendered to God as a sacrifice of praise. Book of Colossians in the New Testament says this: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ" (3:23, 24). Once a person sees that God is inviting him to be a part of God's own great work in our world, his life becomes glorious and every day becomes sacred. Those who pray and work for the glory of God actually discover that their lives are exalted in the process.

Praying "Hallowed be thy name" with understanding and faith can indeed revolutionize one's life—it can bring salvation, and it can provide us with exalted interests and concerns and it can, with all this, lift us out of ourselves. This the third way it revolutionizes us.

When we come to Jesus and ask for instruction in prayer, we generally come with a ~~lot~~ of concerns and worries and needs and they are all legitimate and understandable. But this is what we are thinking about first of all when we ask how we must pray—we want to find a way to get God to supply us with what we need or think we need. How surprised we are when God answers our request for instruction in prayer by telling us that the first thing we are to pray for is that God

it is maybe glorified. We're astounded. Doesn't God understand? He doesn't need our prayers. And we don't have to learn how to pray like that. We need this and we need that and we need something else. And then suddenly we see that when the glory of God becomes our first concern everything else falls into place.

The reason many of us are so frightened and concerned and nervous and tense nowadays is that we have never heard about the glory of God and those who have, often put it last. When men turn away from God and turn in upon themselves, their spirits die and they become so dissatisfied and unhappy they would just as soon die all the way. Some of them succeed in getting a lot of things for themselves. But life is like a sack of sawdust.

Once a man begins to pray and work for the hallowing of God's name, he's delivered from bondage. He becomes free. He is free from the most wretchedly mean and cruel taskmaster there is—himself.

It's so very simple. Jesus said, when you pray, begin by asking God, "Hallowed be thy name." Start by asking that you and all men will learn to know Him and honor Him. Guess who's asking for prayer. God is. And if you learn to pray for Him first, your prayers will be beautiful. Your life will be magnificent.

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The message printed in this pamphlet was heard  
Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every S  
co-operation with the Christian Reformed Chu  
America in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria,  
Tasmania and Western Australia and by shortwave  
throughout the world.

P.O. Box 108,  
SUTHERLAND, N.S.W. 2232.

P.O. Box 15392  
New Lynn  
AUCKLAND N.Z.

Printed in USA 2-20-27

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