

Hallowed Be Your Name

Matthew 6:7-9

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⁷ *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

If prayer is having an audience with God, being in the presence of God or having the awareness that God sees you when you pray to Him, what does prayer actually look like?

The disciples of Jesus wanted to know what should they say in their prayer.

In our teaching from last week, Jesus taught his disciples how not to pray.

Do not pray so that you may be seen by others. Don’t pray to be recognized for your piety.

The Pharisees prayed lengthy prayers. But their motive was different from the impression they gave others. Some were greedy. Others were self-centered. In Luke 18, Jesus mentions the prayer of one Pharisee that was so full of self-entitlement. This man was thanking and reminding God that he was better off than others. The apostle Paul gives a response to this kind of thinking *“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned”* Romans 12:3. In Jesus’ evaluation, the Pharisee was thinking too highly of himself.

Prayers are self-disclosures of what is in the heart.

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” Luke 6:45

And today in our passage our Lord continues his teaching on how not to pray.

And then he teaches on what to pray.

Let’s first see our Lord’s negative instruction.

⁷ *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

If the previous passage Jesus taught on how not to pray like the scribes and the Pharisees. Here our Lord teaches not to pray like the Gentiles. Who are the Gentiles? Gentiles are non-Jewish people. The nations around Israel. The phrase “heap up empty praises” is also translated “babbling” or “vain repetitions”.

Sadly, this is how some people pray today, even in some Christian circles. Repeat the same word or phrase several times and God will hear. That's the belief of some.

Jesus says praying with repetition and babbling is all in vain. Why?

Because they *think* they will be heard for their *quantity* of words not necessarily for the *quality* of their words from the heart. (Verse seven).

Charles Spurgeon said "*Christians' prayers are measured by weight, and not by length. Many of the most prevailing prayers have been as short as they were strong*".

Those praying like the Gentiles think they can inform God or remind as if God needs a reminder. Some pray to a god of their imagination.

Surely, that was the case in the book of 1 Kings. There were four hundred fifty prophets of the storm god Baal. And just one Prophet of God. Just one.

What do the prophets of Baal do?

"And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. ²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention." 1 Kings 18:28-29

And how did the Prophet Elijah pray? Long prayers? No. Repetitions? No. Babbling? No. Empty praises? No.

What does Elijah's prayer look like?

"Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."" 1 Kings 18: 36-37

Just one short powerful prayer. Not like the prophets of Baal.

How did God respond?

"Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." 1 Kings 18:38-39

This Lord is the God we worship. The One and True Living God. What a great privilege to petition the God who hears prayer.

And why did God answer Elijah?

At least two reasons:

1. It bought glory to God. God's name is to be praised.
2. Elijah was a man holy to the Lord. Elijah was appointed by God Himself and Elijah feared the Lord.
 - a. In Psalm 66, the Psalmist writes that cherishing or harboring sin in the heart can block your prayers to be heard. *"If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. ¹⁹ But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer."* Psalm 66: 18-19.
 - b. Proverbs 28:9 says it even stronger. *"If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination."* God is not obligated to hear the prayer of someone who refuses or neglects His Word.
 - c. The Prophet Isaiah said to the people of Israel. *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; ² but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."* Isaiah 59:1-2. The problem is not with God's saving power or his readiness to answer. It's with those who sins who have created a distance from God.

That is why Jesus teaches to not be like the Gentiles. Because God already knows your need. God is already capable.

So far, we saw at least two negative instructions from our Lord:

1. Don't pray like the Pharisees just to be seen and heard.
2. Don't pray like the Gentiles with vain repetitions or empty praises.

Now, what are we to say in prayer?

Let's look at verse nine.

⁹ *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

Notice, Jesus does not say, "pray exactly this prayer". Pray then like this. The key word is "like this" meaning "in this manner" or "in this way".

Jesus teaches just two simple but very profound elements about prayer in verse nine.

1. First element in prayer – address God as Father.
 - a. This is wonderful! When you address God as Father, Jesus assumes that you know God as a relational God. God is high in heaven for sure. *"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! ⁵ Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high"* Psalm 113:4-5. *"To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because*

he is strong in power, not one is missing.” Isaiah 40:25-26. Surely God is high and mighty and yet God is also relational, near and tender as a father is to his children. And not all can call God as Father. Only the Holy Spirit gives that understanding. In Ephesians 2:18 Paul says, *“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father”*. James Montgomery Boice has a great observation about the word “access”. He says it is literally the word “introduces”. The Holy Spirit introduces us to God the Father. You find a similar echo in Galatians 4:6 *“God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”*. See what Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians chapter two – *“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace”*. (Verse 16). So, when you pray, address God as “Our Father in Heaven”.

- b. The second part of the prayer is “hallowed be your name”. This can also be translated “let your name be treated as holy”. This is a weighty statement. Have you wondered what the word *holy* means? Many people might say holiness is associated with purity or chastity. That is the case for sure. RC Sproul in his book “The Holiness of God” says purity is surely included in the meaning of the word *holy* but that is secondary in the meaning of the word. The primary meaning of the word *holy* is “separate” or “set apart”. The first time you see the word *holy* is in the book of Genesis chapter two. God made everything in six days and rested (meaning withdrew from creating) and blessed the seventh day and made it *holy*. And as you read through the Old and New Testament, you will see a number of references to the word “holy”. Holy Sabbath, holy ground, holy land, holy assembly, holy place, holy garments, holy bread, holy oil, holy incense, holy offerings, holy convocation, holy gift, holy contributions, holy faith, holy scriptures, holy people, holy bodies and many more. In all these instances, the word means separate or dedicated in some way shape or form. And the word is derived from God who is most Holy. RC Sproul writes about God’s holiness this way, *“God’s holiness is more than just separateness. His holiness is also transcendent. The word transcendence simply means ‘to climb across’. It defined as ‘exceeding usual limits’. When we speak of the transcendence of God, we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us. Transcendence describes His supreme and absolute greatness. The word is used to describe God’s relationship to the world. He is higher than the world. He has absolute power over the world. The world has no power over Him... He is an infinite cut above everything else.”* RC Sproul. This is how Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. Pray to God as your Father and give Him honor as the highest and most Holy of all beings.

Some people ask if God is so relational and loving, why will he not appear to me. A famous atheist was asked the question, “what would you say to God if he appears to you?”. He said he would ask God, “Sir, why do you hide yourself?”. The problem with that question and answer is that no one can see God and live. God is holy but God is gracious. God spares us from being consumed. Isaiah had a powerful vision of God and was miserable. God spares us from not revealing Himself in His majesty. So, God is Holy. Isaiah says God is Holy three times.

So, Jesus teaches that we should pray *relationally* but with utmost *reverence*. Relationally and reverentially.

And there is no else who prayed with such reverence to God the Father other than our Lord Jesus Christ. *“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”* Hebrew 5:7

“let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 12:28-29.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Hallowed Be Your Name.** Matthew 6:7-9

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What is the other way Jesus teaches not to pray? Why? What are the two elements Jesus teaches in his model prayer in verse nine? John 14:6, Romans 8: 14-15, Galatians 4:6

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. How is God a Holy God and yet a relational God at the same time? Go around and share. Exodus 15:11-13, Isaiah 6:3, Luke 1:46-50, Revelation 4:8, 1 Chronicles 29:10, Isaiah 63:16, 64:8, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: In light of this passage, how do you see yourself praying to God? Same way as before? Differently?