

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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HALLOWED BE THY NAME

Matthew 6:9c

We will continue today our study of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9. In the second part of Matthew 6:9, we read that the Lord Jesus asks us to pray to God this prayer, *Hallowed be Thy Name*.

Sanctifying the name of God?

In the original text, the word 'hallow' is the Greek word *hagiazo*, which is translated more often by the word 'holy', or 'sanctified'. So if we want to be literal and use modern English, *Hallowed be Thy name* can be translated by *Holy be Your name*. It is a petition in which we ask God to sanctify His name. Now, as you hear me say that, immediately you feel a bit strange. And the puzzling issue is this. Everywhere in the Bible, we are told about a God who is holy. For example, you all know the statement 'Be holy for I am holy.' It is found both in the OT and in the NT. So if God is a holy God, what is the point of praying that the name of God be holy?

Blessed are you if you know that God is holy. The Spirit of God has revealed that to you at one point in your life. But the world that lives in the darkness does not know that. People think of God in the strangest ways, but not as a holy God. Therefore, the prayer is, 'Let the world know, O God, who You are. Let Your mighty power be revealed. Let the whole world know that You are God. That your name be exalted.' That is what the prayer is about.

By this, you see that *Hallowed be Thy name* is very close to 'Glorify Your name.' In this sense, the prayer is, 'Glorify Your name in a particular way. And that particular way being that Your name may be so glorified that people may realize that You, O God, are holy. That you are utterly different from anything in this world.'

In other words, we are asking God, 'Reveal Yourself to the world that they see who You are, holy, different from any of the concepts of God that they might have, if they have one.' This is quite equivalent to the statement that we read many times in the OT, *Then the nations will know that I am God*, when I do this, when I do that. And we are going to see in a moment what God does to make this happen.

Man's part

I think all this is easy to understand. But I want to pursue the matter further because there is much more to learn from these words, *Hallowed by Thy name*. And I want to go deeper by asking this question. Seeing then that we are praying that God may glorify His name by revealing His character to be holy and utterly different from what is in this world, how is this going to be done? How is God

going to make His entrance into this world with this truth about Him? What exactly are we praying for?

This is where the action begins for us. If God is going to do this thing, He is going to do it in us. God is going to reveal His name to be holy through His people. This is the point that I would like you to remember in this lesson. God's holiness is going to be revealed in you and in me. Nowhere else. That's the Scriptural teaching.

Let me read to you in this context a very important verse in the OT. And that is in Ezekiel 36. You will see that Ezekiel 36:23 is very close to the verse that we are studying now. In fact, it virtually sums up the whole of this teaching. In Ezekiel 36:23, God says this to Israel.

*Ezekiel 36:23. 'And I will **sanctify** My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD,' says the Lord God, 'when I am **hallowed** in you before their eyes.'*

Notice how close these words are to the words of Jesus in the Lord's Prayer. What is God saying through Ezekiel? 'I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations by you. You, Israel, have profaned My name.' To profane is the exact opposite of making holy. And these words apply just as much to us today. By our sinful way of living, we have profaned His name. We have dishonored, we have degraded His name.

But God says also this in Ezekiel. 'That the nations will know, when I have vindicated My holiness, that I am the Lord. And it is through you, you the very people through whom My name has been profaned, that I am going to do a work such that I will vindicate My holiness before their eyes, the eyes of the world.'

Now you can see that this is exactly what Jesus has in His mind in the Lord's Prayer. God is going to hallow His name. God is going to glorify His name to be holy, and He wants all the nations of the world to see it. And this will happen through you and through me. That's the way God works. The same people who dishonored His name, He is going to do a work in them in such a way that they are going to glorify His name. That's what we are praying for when we say, *Hallowed be Thy name*.

Separation and transformation

How then is God going to do this? Well, as we read on in Ezekiel, we find the answer. Ezekiel 36:24-26.

Ezekiel 36:24. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

God is going to take the Israelites out from the nations and gather them to Himself. That's the first step, separating them out from the nations. Then He is going to change them by putting a new heart and a new spirit in them. God's power is going to come into the Israelites and make new people out of them.

Today, God does the same thing with us. The first step of being sanctified, of becoming holy, is that God calls us out to be separate, to be different. In 2Corinthians 6:17, Paul uses a quotation of the OT and says, *Come out from among them* (i.e. the heathen) *and be **separate*** (i.e. be holy)... We have to come out of the world, not physically but in the way we behave ourselves, in the way we

conduct ourselves. And when we respond to God's call, God puts a new spirit and a new heart within us.

Again, using the words of Paul, we have in 2Corinthians 3:3 that *you* (i.e. the believers) *are an epistle of Christ ... written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.* A new spirit, and a new heart. So we see that God is going to answer that prayer by changing us.

This leads us to a very important point regarding prayer. When we pray, 'O God, let Your name be glorified in such a way that the world will know that you are holy', we are saying, 'Let Your name be holy and sanctified in us and through us.' In other words, we are actually saying, 'Lord, change me.' We cannot be sincerely asking God to glorify His name if we don't mean, 'Change my heart so that through this new heart and this new spirit, Your name will be glorified.'

Praying honestly

Now listen. Never recite the Lord's Prayer again if you have no intention to allow God to change you and separate you out of the world. This prayer is not for you. This prayer is only for those people who are willing to follow Jesus all the way. It is only for people who are willing to take up the cross and follow Jesus, who are wholly committed to Jesus and who are saying, 'Lord, let Your name be glorified as holy throughout the world through me.'

That is a basic principle in prayer. That whatever we pray for, if there is something we can do about it, God is going to ask us to do our part. If you don't intend to do anything about it, let me be straightforward, don't pray about it. Don't pray. This comes out very clearly in the petition, *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* If you don't forgive, don't ask God to forgive you. You have no right to ask God to forgive you.

So then, *Hallowed be Thy name. Holy be Your name.* Our calling is to be holy. This is possible by God's enabling power. But it doesn't just happen automatically. We have our share of responsibility in the process. In the book of Leviticus, God said to the people of Israel on five occasions to 'be holy as I am holy' (Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7, 26). He orders the people of Israel to be holy. A command is not a command unless it expects a responsible response.

God is a holy God. We have our share of responsibility in revealing to the world that His name is holy. And failure to do our part in fulfilling that responsibility is not without consequences. Never take lightly the responsibility of honoring His name as holy in your life.

Moses' sanction

Let me tell you why from the example of Moses. Moses was God's chosen and holy instrument, totally set apart for God. He led the people of Israel out of Egypt. He led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. But Moses himself was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land. Do you know why? Because for one instance, in one incident, he did not hallow God's name. The charge born against Moses is exactly what we find in the Lord's Prayer, except that it is the reverse. In one incident in his life, Moses did not hallow God's name. And that cost him the blessing and privilege of leading his people into the Promised Land.

Let me read to you Numbers 20:12.

*Numbers 20:12. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron. 'Because you did not believe Me, to **hallow** Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, **therefore** you shall not bring this congregation into the land*

which I have given them. ' You did not honor My name as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel. Therefore you shall not enter into the Land of Promise.

The same thing is repeated once more in Deuteronomy, with the same emphasis to hallow God's name. Deuteronomy 32:51: 'You will die on the mountain and will not walk on the Promised Land *'because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not **hallow** Me in the midst of the children of Israel.'* 'You did not revere Me as holy. You did not sanctify My name. You did not hallow My name in the midst of the people of Israel. Therefore you shall not enter into the Land of Promise.'

Think about it. This mighty man of God, Moses, was deprived of the blessing of entering into the Promised Land, after all the toil of leading and enduring the Israelites for so many years. What was Moses' mistake? It is important for us to examine this question very carefully because in the context of the Lord's Prayer, it gives us a good illustration of what it means not to hallow God's name.

Moses' mistake

So what is the mistake that Moses made at the waters of Meribah Kadesh? Let's go back to Numbers 20:2. And here is the context. Numbers 20:2-3.

*Numbers 20:2. Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.
3 And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: 'If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!'*

There was no water and the people were beginning to murmur.

*Numbers 20:6. So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them.
7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
8 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.'*

Moses was ordered by God to bring water to the complaining people of Israel. He was ordered to speak to the rock and command the rock to bring forth water. Now look at Moses' reaction.

*Numbers 20:9. So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him.
10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?'
11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.
12 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'*

Notice again what Moses says in his anger to the congregation. *Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock? Must **we**?* Who is this 'we'? Moses and Aaron? Only God can bring water. Not Moses, or anybody else.

Moses was ordered to speak to the rock. He did not speak to the rock but he did express his rage. He struck the rock twice. In utter frustration, he burst out against the Israelites and called them 'rebels'. Moses' mistake was his anger and the rash action that he showed. And that's the conclusion of the psalmist. Let me read to you Psalm 106:32-33, a passage that refers directly to this incident.

*Psalm 106:32. They angered Him also at the waters of Meribah, so that it went ill with Moses on account of them;
33 because they rebelled against His Spirit, so that he (Moses) spoke rashly with his lips.*

You see, God was going to do a tremendous and amazing work in front of all the people, a work in which His name will be hallowed in the eyes of the people. What work? The people were thirsting. Their lips were dry. Moses was going to stand up before this great multitude upon the rock, and he would speak to the rock in God's name and say, 'Let water come out of this rock.' And having said so, the water would come out of the rock. Then the people will see the glory of the Lord appearing to them. The name of God would be hallowed in the midst of the people.

But Moses didn't do that. He did not speak to the rock. In his anger with the people, he did not sanctify God's name. He just took the rod and dashed it upon the rock in frustration. The water came out, all right. But not in a way that would have fulfilled the purpose of glorifying God. All that the people saw was Moses' anger, and nothing else. The whole message was lost because of his anger. God's name has not been hallowed through Moses.

What about us?

Here is a lesson for us. In the eyes of men, Moses did not commit any serious crime. In a way, he was right to be angry with the people, and they had to be provoked. But in the eyes of God, Moses was wrong because he did not hallow God's name in the eyes of the people. He did not speak as God's representative to show the glory of God to the people.

My friends, that is also our responsibility and function in the world. That when people see us, they will say, 'These Christians, they are really different. They stand out in the crowd. If that is to be a Christian, I want to be a Christian too.' God expects that we hallow His name in our life wherever we are. In our family, in our workplace, in our school, on the street.

This is our high calling. Let us realize the heavy responsibility that is laid upon us when we pray, *Hallowed be Thy name*. It is primarily the Lord's work, but not without our contribution. If sanctifying God's name is only a matter of God's work without engaging our responsibility, then it would have been unfair to punish Moses for not sanctifying God's name. But even with all our imperfections, God enables us to be holy as we obey Him day by day. Without the Holy Spirit, no one can live the Christian life that God expects from us. When we allow His power to be active in our lives, we can say like Paul, *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13).

The name of God glorified as holy in our lives

So in conclusion, let us be what that prayer means. '*Our Father who is in heaven, may Your name be glorified as holy in my life so that a multitude of people may be drawn to you.*' That is my prayer. What is my motive for glorifying God? Because He loves me so. What is my motive for sanctifying God? Because the people in the world cannot know God except through you and through me.

Remember that the message of the gospel comes out more powerfully through your life than through a multitude of words. Remember also to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Never try to live God's Word in your own strength. You will never make it. This is a prayer that He will do it in me. And He will do it. Allow God to come into your life in the fullness of His power and He will do it. He will change you and make you totally different. So that wherever you go, people will notice that you are different. And they will ask you, 'Why are you a Christian?' Then, you can tell them. And many will be drawn to God because you would have hallowed His name in your life.