

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, May 3, 2009**

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

Isaiah 26:1-13

Probably the best-known part of this passage in Isaiah 26 is found in verses 3 and 4, where Isaiah says:

You will keep in perfect peace
him whose mind is steadfast (stayed on You),
because he trusts in You.
Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

These verses can give us tremendous comfort and encouragement as they remind us of the sufficiency of God and the blessing of fixing our minds and hearts on Him. I urge you to take them to heart in your life.

But today I want to draw your attention in particular to the second part of verse 8, where Isaiah says of the LORD:

Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.

And verse 13:

Though we have had other lords (rulers) rule over us,
Your name alone, O LORD, do we honor.

Regardless of the greatness or infamy of our human leaders, regardless of their goodness or badness, the name of God is to be honored and exalted and revered above all. It was true in the life of God's covenant people, Israel. It has been true throughout the history of our nation. It is true in all the nations of the world. The name of God is worthy of our highest respect and reverence and honor.

Today's message is not an expository sermon on Isaiah 26, but I want you to keep these two verses (8 and 13) in mind as we continue to explore the Lord's Prayer and its lessons for our lives today.

Last Sunday we talked about the privilege of knowing God personally and addressing Him in prayer as "Our Father in heaven." The God of the whole universe, the God who made everything there is, the only true and living God, the One who is sovereign over all things and in all things, is a loving Father who cares deeply and personally about His children – which is what we are through faith in His Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1).

I appreciate what Ray Stedman once said about prayer. He said that when we pray, we are not talking *about* God (emphasis added). We are not engaging in some kind of theological discourse or dialogue. We are not trying to impress God (or others) with our theological sophistication. At least, I hope that is not the case. We are talking *with* God. We converse with Him directly. So it is essential that we understand to whom we are speaking. Jesus gathers it all up in one word and says true prayer must begin with a concept of God as *Father*.

In prayer, says Stedman, we come to a Father who has a father's heart, a father's love, and a father's strength. The fatherhood of God means that He is a Person and not just a blind force behind the inscrutable machinery of the universe. He is not simply an impersonal being, aloof from all our troubles and problems. Above all, as a Father, God is predisposed by His love and relationship to give a careful, attentive ear to what His children say. And to give a reply.

This is how it is with our heavenly Father. And we are blessed beyond measure to be His dearly loved children through faith in the saving work of His Son. If you have not yet come to a place of trusting faith in Christ, if you do not yet know the Lord Jesus as your Savior from sin and God as your heavenly Father, I urge you to come to Him in repentance and faith today. As I said last Sunday, when you take the Son (Jesus), you get the Father. You become a child of God the Father through faith in God the Son.

THE FIRST PETITION

In the Lord's Prayer, there are seven petitions or requests. The first three are centered on God. Each of them has the pronoun "Your" or "Thy":

- Hallowed be Your name
- Your kingdom come
- Your will be done.

The last four are centered on us and our needs. Each of them has the pronoun "us":

- Give us this day our daily bread
- Forgive us our debts (sins), as we forgive our debtors (those who sin against us)
- Lead us not into temptation
- But deliver us from evil (or the evil one).

In these seven petitions, and particularly in the order of these petitions, there is something revolutionary, something that could revolutionize our praying. This is not the way most of us approach prayer much of the time. Our natural inclination when we pray is to begin by telling God all about what we need or want. Our focus is on *us* and our cares, our concerns, our problems and needs. We put ourselves first.

There is, of course, a place in our praying to bring our wants and needs to God. Our heavenly Father wants us to bring our burdens to Him. Nothing is too big and nothing is too small to take to Him in prayer. Nothing. But our "stuff" is not the proper starting point. It is not the

first priority. In our praying we are to put first things first. And Jesus teaches us that the first thing, the first concern, is the hallowing of God's name.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9).

John Piper calls this the most important prayer in the world: “The most important prayer is that the most important person in the universe do the most important act in the universe. God is the most important person in the universe. More important than all others put together [including all the politicians and military leaders and scientists and athletes and entertainers who seem so important and so powerful to us]. The whole-souled act of hallowing God's name is the most important act in the universe.”

But what does it mean to “hallow” God's name? To hallow God's name is to treat it as holy. To treat it with reverence and respect. With honor and glory. In the words of Isaiah, it is to make His name and renown the pre-eminent desire of our hearts.

There is nothing we can do to make God or His name holy. He is already holy. “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty” was the cry of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3. But not everyone acknowledges His holiness. Not everyone treats Him as holy. Not everyone treats His name with reverence and honor. When we pray “Hallowed be Your name,” we are asking God to cause His name to be treated as holy, to be given the honor and respect He deserves. As Saint Augustine wrote 1600 years ago: “This is prayed for, not as if the name of God were not holy already, but that it may be held holy by men; [in other words] that God may so become known to them, that they shall reckon nothing more holy, and which they are more afraid of offending.”

There is nothing more holy than the name of God, for the name of God reflects the character of God, and God is holy – both in the sense of His moral purity and by virtue of His being set apart from all of creation in His power and love and purity. God's name stands for His person, just as your name represents who you are. And reverence for God's name is reverence for God's person.

That is why the hallowing of God's name is such a big deal. And why it ought to be a big deal in our lives.

It is intuitively obvious to the most casual observer, as my old geometry teacher used to say, that we human beings have a natural tendency to put ourselves first. To look out for our own interests. To make a name for ourselves. We live in a culture of celebrity – a culture that celebrates those who make a name for themselves. Often in all the wrong ways and for all the wrong reasons. But even the desire – and for some, obsession – to make a name for ourselves shows the idolatry of our hearts. We are like the men of Shinar (Babylonia) in Genesis 11, who began to build “a tower that reaches to the heavens” as a monument to their greatness (the tower of Babel), in order to make a name for themselves in the world. But God foiled their plans, and the Bible does not record the name of a single person involved in that effort to make a name for themselves.

The chief end of life is not to make a name for ourselves. It is to hallow the name of God by giving Him the glory and honor and reverence which are rightly His.

Are you with me?

APPLICATION

So, how do we hallow God's name in our lives?

First, by keeping the Third Commandment. Exodus 20:7 says: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name" (NIV). In the old King James Version it says: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain." *The Message* says: "No using the name of GOD, your God, in curses or silly banter; GOD won't put up with irreverent use of His name."

It is a serious thing in God's eyes to misuse or blaspheme His name. It is a serious thing to use the name of God in an insincere or frivolous, irreverent or unholy way.

We do not hallow God's name – we do not treat it as holy or give it the honor God deserves – when we use His name as a swear word, as an expletive, or to curse someone in God's name. I know it is commonplace, even pervasive, in our culture, but I hope you will refrain from doing it. There is no place for it in the lives of God's people.

We do not hallow God's name when we use it as a kind of everyday exclamation, sprinkling our conversations with "God!" or "O my God!" You may not think it is a big deal, because so many people do it. But it is a big deal. You may be desensitized to it because you hear it so often. Maybe it has seeped into your subconscious and unintentionally become a part of your vocabulary. If so, I urge you in the name of Jesus to repent. It is a violation of the Third Commandment. It cheapens the dignity and honor of God.

To hallow God's name, get rid of all irreverent, careless, disrespectful, inappropriate use of the name of God or Jesus Christ.

Second, we hallow God's name by giving Him worship and praise. In both public and private. The Bible is full of exhortations to praise the name of the Lord and to give Him the glory due His name. Worship is not an optional extra in our all-too-busy lives. It is what we were made for. If we neglect the opportunity to worship with God's people, or if, like the hard-hearted people of Israel, we go through the motions and honor Him with our lips but shut the door of our hearts to Him, we will not fulfill our chief end in life. And we will be the losers in the end.

Third, we hallow God's name by living a life of willing surrender and glad obedience to Him. Do you want to hallow God's name? Then live your life "in a manner worthy" of the One who called you to Himself in faith (Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). In your manner of life, in your conduct, in your witness before others, in both your words and your actions, make it priority one to bring honor to His name.

How?

By an unwavering trust in His love and faithfulness, even when life is hard.

By reflecting the character and values of the Lord Jesus, even if you pay a price for it.

By letting your light shine before others so that, seeing your good works, they may glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

By making God's name and renown the pre-eminent desire of your heart.

There is an old story you may know about Alexander the Great, the Macedonian king and world-conqueror in the 4th century BC. On one of his military missions, a young deserter from his army was brought before him. The king asked the young man: "What is your name?"

Timidly, the deserter replied: "My name is Alexander"

Furious at this, the king asked him again: "*What* is your name?"

Again came the reply: "My name is Alexander."

To which Alexander the Great said: "Then change your conduct or change your name."

Dear friends, if we who claim the name "Christian" do not hallow God's name in the way we worship, speak and live, may we change our conduct or change our name.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Lord, let it be so in us, today and always. Amen.