

'Hallowed be your name'.¹ Bethesda Bible Teaching. 31 October 2010.

Our reading for this morning consists of just one verse, Matthew 6 verse 9.

'In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name'.

This morning, we are not concerned, either with *the relationship which God confers* (namely, of children to a Father) or with *the residence which He occupies* (heaven, presumably the heaven of heavens, the third heaven), but with *the reverence which He is due*.

I should be rather surprised if anyone here is familiar with the name Eugene Nida. And yet Doctor Nida probably did more to influence the translation of the Bible than any other man in recent centuries. Doctor Nida worked for the American Bible Society for almost 50 years and was a founder member of Wycliffe Bible Translators. But his real claim to fame is that he developed the approach to translation which has become known as dynamic (or functional) equivalence – which attempts to convey *the thoughts* contained in the original languages rather than to render the text more literally. The approach developed by Doctor Nida has – for better or for worse – helped shape not only many popular English versions of the Bible but also translations into over 200 other languages.

A few years ago, Doctor Nida was interviewed by the Editor of the Christianity Today magazine.² When asked, 'What do you consider your most important contribution to Bible translation?', he replied, 'To help people be willing to say ... not what the words are, but what the text means'. And then he added, 'For example, "Hallowed be Thy name" in the Lord's prayer. I have not yet met one English-speaking person who can tell me what that means!'³

Hardly an encouraging start you may think to our study this morning. But I can only assume that Doctor Nida, although then well up in his eighties – hadn't looked very far.

But before we consider the meaning of our text, I need, as it were, to clear the decks a little. For we need to know what the word translated 'hallowed' means, and whether there is any significance in the fact that our Lord spoke in terms of the Father's 'name', rather than the Father Himself, being hallowed.

What then does it mean to be 'hallowed'. Put at its simplest, the word means properly to be sanctified, either to make or to regard something or someone as holy.

You may be wondering if the word 'hallowed' has any connection with the word 'Halloween', which is how my calendar labels today. Well, there is a connection, but it is very indirect. The roots of Halloween lie in an ancient Celtic festival,⁴ during which the Celts believed that the border between this world and the other-world became thin, allowing the souls of the dead to pass through. This pagan superstition was later tagged on to the evening before a Catholic holiday known as 'All Hallows' Day' – 'Hallows' being the old word for 'Saints'. Hence 'All-Hallows-Evening' or 'All-Hallows-Even' for short ... later shortened again to Halloween.⁵

But to return to our word, 'hallowed', which can mean, I say again, either (i) to make or (ii) to treat something or someone as holy.

When God sanctifies ('hallows') us it means that He actually *makes* us holy.⁶ But for us to 'hallow' God means that we treat and revere Him as holy. For God is already and altogether holy. We certainly do not need to pray – or to do anything – to make Him more holy. What is needed is that others – that God's creatures – come to recognize and acknowledge His holiness. But this in turn raises the question, 'what are we to understand by God's 'holiness'?'

We will let the Bible itself answer that question.

The Hebrew words translated 'holy', 'holiness' and 'hallow' (or 'sanctify') in the Old Testament all come from a root which means 'to cut' or 'to divide' – and the idea underlying holiness is therefore that of separation and of setting apart.

The word 'holy' originally referred to that which was marked off and separated from ordinary use. It occurs first in the command of God to Moses at the Bush in Exodus 3; 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is *holy* ground'.⁷

It was in a similar way that 'the Commander of the army of the Lord' spoke to Joshua just before Israel's assault on the Canaanite city of Jericho. The incident is recorded in Joshua chapter 5. The Lord appeared to Joshua with a drawn sword in His hand, and we read that 'Joshua fell on his face to the earth ... and said to him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?' – expecting no doubt to be given the plan of campaign to defeat the fortified city. 'And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua', the story continues, 'Take your shoes from off your feet; for the place where you stand is *holy*' – which Joshua promptly did – perhaps keeping his watchful eye on the sword!

God was telling both Moses and Joshua that the ground on which they stood was different – it was set apart – on account of His presence.

The word 'sanctify' ('hallow', 'make holy') is found only once in the book of Genesis, when 'God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it'⁸ ... when God, that is, set the day apart from the other days of the week.

It is clear from these early references that something was holy when it was marked off as different from that which was ordinary and common.

When used to describe the character of God, the attribute of 'holiness' draws attention to two very different features of His person.

It sometimes draws attention to His purity. For example, in chapter 1 of his book, the prophet Habakkuk, having asked, 'Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?', immediately added, 'You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity'.⁹

But, for the most part, God's 'holiness' speaks of God's utter uniqueness, emphasising that He is 'distinct' and 'set apart' from everything else which exists. In her prayer-song of joy in 1 Samuel 2, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, celebrated the fact that 'There is none holy like the Lord, there is none besides you'.¹⁰

God's 'holiness' stresses for us then that He is totally separate from all of His creation ... that He is 'wholly other' to everything and everyone else ... that He alone is God, transcending and towering over everything He has made.

The word 'holiness' appears first in the song of victory which Moses and Israel sang in Exodus 15 after they had crossed the Red Sea; 'Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious ('magnificent') in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?'¹¹ ... where again, the stress is on God's uniqueness and pre-eminence, as witness the repeated question, 'Who is like you . . . ?'. God's intervention in mighty power had proved Him to be unequalled and supreme 'among the (so-called) gods' of Egypt.¹²

We certainly cannot, by prayer any more than by deed, make God more holy than He is. Nor, for that matter, can we make His 'name' more holy than it is. And I have in mind the words of Psalm 111 verse 9, 'Holy and awesome is His name'.

All we can do is that which our Lord intended ... to seek that God and His name be *recognised* as holy ... be regarded with due honour and reverence.

We can well understand why, in this sense, *God* Himself should be hallowed, but why does Jesus refer here specifically to *His name*?

By and large, to us a name is simply a label, a term by which persons, places or objects are identified and distinguished from others.

But it was very different in Bible lands and in Bible days. There and then a name meant much more than that. When it came to a person, for instance, a name often served to remind others of some particular event or circumstance connected with that person,¹³ or as expression of faith on the part of a child's parents.¹⁴

Again, in many cases, a name was intended to indicate something of a person's nature, character or attributes.¹⁵ And it often did. Think of the words of Abigail concerning her husband Nabal in 1 Samuel 25: 'As his name is, so is he: Nabal (meaning 'fool' or 'foolish') is his name, and folly is with him'.¹⁶

Put simply then, often when scripture speaks of *God's 'name'*, this is a way of referring to God Himself – to His person and His attributes. Take, for example, David's desire, 'May the name of the God of Jacob defend you' in Psalm 20;¹⁷ David clearly means 'May the God of Jacob defend you'. Again, take Solomon's words in Proverbs 18, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe';¹⁸ Solomon clearly meant that the Lord Himself proved to be a strong tower of refuge for the righteous man.¹⁹

To speak of God's name then is often equivalent to speaking of His person ... to speaking of what God is. Indeed, I suspect that when, following our Lord's prayer, 'Father, *glorify your name*', in John 12, 'a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both *glorified it* and will glorify it again",²⁰ this meant much the same as His (our Lord's) words in chapter 17, 'I have glorified *you*'.²¹

You may well recall that, having been told in Exodus 34 that 'the Lord descended in the cloud ... and proclaimed the name of the Lord', we then read that 'the Lord ... proclaimed, "... the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth', and so on. That is, (i) God's name on the one hand, and (ii)

God's character and attributes on the other were in effect one and the same. If I may apply the words of Abigail to the Lord Himself, I may say that 'As God's name is, so is He'.²²

If I understand it rightly then, God's name stands for that which can be known of the nature and character of God. I am happy to stand with Hugh Latimer, the 16th century Oxford martyr. In answer to the question, 'What is God's "name"?', he replied, '... all that is spoken of Him in holy scripture, that is His name'.²³ The Father's name in our text stands therefore for all that He had revealed of Himself. Hence our Lord's words in prayer in John 17, 'I have manifested your name to the men whom you have given me out of the world'.²⁴

Jesus taught, I said a little earlier, that we pray that God and His name be recognised as holy ... be regarded with due honour and reverence. And I emphasise that this forms part of a prayer. It is not an exhortation for us to sanctify God's name. It is a petition that *God* should act in such a way as brings about the hallowing of His name.

It is, of course, possible for men to sanctify God's name. This they can do by attributing to Him His true greatness and power, and by making Him the sole object of their trust and reverential fear – an act of faith for which the prophet Isaiah pleaded with King Ahaz in chapter 8 of his book.²⁵ Again, it was, we are told, by disobedience and lack of faith on their part at Meribah that Moses and Aaron failed 'to sanctify' ('to hallow') God in the eyes of the people of Israel²⁶ - which failure cost them both dearly ... cost them their entrance into the Promised Land.²⁷

But as we have noted our text today is not an exhortation for us to sanctify God's name. It is not even a request to God for His help for us to do this. The Lord Jesus made it clear that God Himself is to accomplish the hallowing of His name.²⁸

Over 500 years previously, God had done just that. Earlier still, Ezekiel had foretold in chapter 36 of his book that, because Israel, on account of their sins, had failed to sanctify His holy name – and indeed, as a consequence of their ensuing exile, had caused it to be 'profaned' among the nations – He, the Lord Himself, would act to sanctify His own name.²⁹ And this He did when He made known His power by restoring them to their own land, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

But for what precisely is our Lord asking His disciples to pray?³⁰ Here, alas, I face something of a problem, in that, as I see it, my text is inextricably linked with the following two petitions, and I cannot avoid therefore trespassing to some small extent on territory to be covered in future weeks. Translated literally, the first three petitions run in close parallel, 'Let be hallowed your name, let come your kingdom, let be done your will as in heaven so upon the earth'. That is, if I am right, God's action to sanctify His name is directly related to His purpose and plan to bring in His kingdom, when His will shall be done on earth as it is now in heaven.

And I note that our Lord used the same tense when formulating all three requests – a tense which suggests most strongly that He had a single, specific time of God's intervention in mind.

As no doubt all are aware, in His ministry our Lord taught that there are two main aspects to the kingdom of God. There is the present form, entered by repentance, faith and the new birth, and there is what has been called the 'future outward form'.³¹ These two forms are sometimes labelled the 'now' and the 'not yet' aspects to the kingdom.

The future form of the kingdom, its appearing and manifestation in power, will be established when the Son of man sits on the throne of His glory and takes the reins of universal government. And it is, I believe, this aspect of the kingdom which our Lord has in view here.

That is, I understand our text to refer to the time when, according to Revelation 11, 'the kingdom of the world' becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ',³² and when, by demonstrating His absolute supremacy in this way, God causes His name to be revered.³³

I do not need to tell you that God's name is not revered on earth now. Far from it. Rather, it is blasphemed and belittled. But it will not always be so.

And, if I have it right, when we pray for God's name to be hallowed, we express our heart-felt longing for the time when the dawning of God's manifested kingdom will mean that God's name will no longer be desecrated and dishonoured, but that God Himself will be magnified and revered as the incomparable and transcendent Lord.

Lord, hasten that day!

I said earlier that our text is not an exhortation for us to sanctify God's name. Nor is it.

But you and I are not off the hook yet. And this for two reasons.

First, because we can hardly miss where this petition comes. Yes, it is the first of three which our Lord details before He even mentions our needs – even our spiritual needs ... before He mentions *provision* of food, *pardon* for sin, or *protection* from temptation and the evil one. In a word, God's interests – His reputation, His kingdom and His will – come first.

While not ruling out our material needs as too trifling to pray about, the Lord Jesus insists that our first and principal concern should be that our Father's reputation be honoured and acknowledged here on earth. This, our Lord made clear, should be at the very top of our prayer list!

And the second reason we are not yet off the hook is that God requires us – in this particular instance as with all our prayer requests – to live in a manner altogether consistent with that for which we ask Him. As Thomas Watson the Puritan expressed it when commenting on our text, 'If we do not magnify His name, we contradict our own prayers'.³⁴ We do well to keep in mind the words of another Puritan, Thomas Manton, 'Prayer is preaching to ourselves in God's hearing'.³⁵

And we make a mockery of our own prayers if we have no intention of striving to live in harmony with them – in this case, if we show no concern for our Father's reputation here and now.³⁶

We sang earlier about God's holiness. According to the Old Testament, the seraphim in God's heavenly temple/palace cry, 'Holy, holy, holy', and, according to the New Testament, the four living creatures in the midst of God's throne and around His throne 'cease not day and night saying, Holy, holy, holy'.

We do well to remember that the One who once addressed God as '*Abba, Father*'³⁷ had, on another occasion, addressed Him as '*Holy Father*'.³⁸

On Friday, when preparing for this meeting, my computer suddenly thrust at me that morning's extract from C. H. Spurgeon's devotional 'Morning and Evening'. I could hardly believe my eyes. There in front of me, courtesy of Mr. Spurgeon, was the statement, 'The child lisping, "Abba, Father," grows into the cherub crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy".'

Oh, that I might ever enjoy the intimacy of a child/Father relationship with God without slipping into an irreverent familiarity.

I close by quoting an ancient Jewish prayer – known as the 'Kaddish' (meaning 'holy' or 'sanctification', and dated by some as far back as the days of Israel's exile and restoration) ... 'Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom ...'.³⁹ To that I say, 'Amen!'

Footnotes

¹ See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1252765/The-man-carved-Lords-Prayer-head-pin.html>.

Also http://www.solomon.utvinternet.com/20_09_98.htm;

http://www.egrc.net/articles/director/articles_director_0504.html; and

<http://www.enjoyinggodbministries.com/article/65-15/>

² 7 October 2002.

³ http://www.rrb3.com/bibles/spnbibl/nida_interview.htm ... and <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2002/october7/2.46.html>

⁴ The Celtic festival of Samhain.

⁵ First, and more accurately, written as 'Hallowe'en'.

⁶ See, for example, 1 Thess. 5. 23.

⁷ Exod. 3. 5.

⁸ Gen. 2. 3.

⁹ Hab. 1. 12-13.

¹⁰ 1 Sam. 2. 2.

¹¹ Exod. 15. 11.

¹² Psalm 135 verse 5 also proclaims 'our Lord is above all gods', Psa. 135. 5, just as other psalms proclaim Him to be 'above all the people', Psa. 99. 2, 'above all nations', Psa. 113. 4, and 'above all the earth', Psa. 97. 9. The prophet Isaiah had a great deal to say about the incomparable majesty of God. In chapters 44 to 47, for instance, no less than sixteen times we come across expressions such as 'there is none like to you', or, when God Himself speaks, 'there is none beside me'. It is hardly surprising therefore that Isaiah employs 'the Holy One of Israel' as his favourite and distinctive title for the Lord – using it almost 30 times. God's challenge through Isaiah in chapter 40 says it all: 'To whom then will you liken me, or to whom shall I be equal?', says the Holy One', Isa. 40. 25.

¹³ For example, the name of Isaac, "Laughter", recalled the laughter of his aged parents when they first heard that they were to have a child, Gen. 17. 17, 19; 18. 12. See too 'Esau', Gen. 25. 25. Jacob's name pointed to his having grabbed the heel of Esau, Gen. 25. 26; cf. Gen. 32. 28. See too 'Seth', Gen. 4. 25; 'Ishmael', Gen. 16. 11; 'Samuel', 1 Sam. 1. 27; and 'Ichabod', 1 Sam. 4. 21.

¹⁴ For example, 'Judah' means 'may he be praised'. See too 'Seth', Gen. 4. 25.

¹⁵ For example, 'Eve', Gen. 3. 20, and 'Solomon', 1 Chron. 22. 9.

¹⁶ 1 Sam. 25. 25. 'Nabal' is one of several Hebrew words for 'fool' or 'foolish', and Abigail's word 'folly' translates the related Hebrew word '*Nebalah*'. Frankly, I find it hard to imagine any parents in their right mind giving their little baby son the name 'Fool'. Not, I suppose, that we can altogether rule this out because some parents choose mighty 'strange' names for their offspring. I think it far more likely, however, that 'Nabal' was in fact a derogatory nickname given to him by others in later life, as being an accurate description of his known character and conduct.

¹⁷ Psa. 20. 1.

¹⁸ Prov. 18. 10.

¹⁹ God's name is said to do what God does ... for example, dwells in a sanctuary, Deut. 12. 5, 21, and comes from far, Isa. 30. 27.

²⁰ John 12. 28.

²¹ John 17. 4.

²² 1 Sam. 25. 25.

²³ The full quotation is, 'Marry (an archaic word introducing a solemn statement), 'all that is spoken of Him in holy scripture, that is His name'. Latimer's entire article on 'Hallowed by Thy name' can be accessed at ...<http://www.katapi.org.uk/LordsPrayer/LatimerLP/Ch2.htm>.

²⁴ John 17. 6.

²⁵ Isa. 8. 12-13.

²⁶ Num. 20. 12

²⁷ Num. 27. 13-14.

²⁸ In all probability, the passive form of the verb ('hallowed be') is a circumlocution for naming God. I am happy therefore to describe this, not only in terms of the disciples' desire, but in terms of their request and petition.

²⁹ Ezek. 36. 22-23.

³⁰ Certainly not in acting as, by misinterpreting Lev. 24. 16, the Jews. For they came to treat *Yahveh* (Jehovah) as *taboo*. They employed it only in the Temple services. In those of the synagogues they used *Adonay* (Lord) alone. See references in Schürer. In common life, they spoke of "the Name" (Aramaic: *Shema*). In the Tosefta "Sanhedrin" (xii. 25) we have, "He that pronounces the *Tetragrammaton* has no part in the future world." Cf. Joseph. "Antiquities" ii. 276.

³¹ David Gooding, *According to Luke*, page 300. See Mark 9. 47; Matt. 25. 34; Matt. 7. 21-22; Mark 14. 25; Luke 21. 31.

³² Rev. 11. 15.

³³ We might well apply to that time words spoken by the Lord through Ezekiel of a still later occasion, when God will act decisively to quash the final Satanically-inspired uprising against 'the beloved city', Jerusalem: 'I will magnify myself and sanctify myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord ...', Ezek. 38. 23.

³⁴ Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, The First Petition. This can be viewed at ...

http://www.fivesolas.com/watson/prayer_i.htm

³⁵ Thomas Manton, *A Practical Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, Sermon 5. The Exposition appears in Volume 1 of Manton's works. This can be viewed at ... <http://www.newblehome.co.uk/manton/sermonLP.html>

³⁶ The title 'Caring for our Father's reputation' comes from ... http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/Our-Father-Enjoying-God-in-prayer-ourf_1037/

³⁷ Mark 14. 36.

³⁸ John 17. 11.

³⁹ In full, 'Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen. May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity. Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honoured, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen'. Apparently, the Kaddish did not become prominent in daily synagogue liturgy until the close of the Talmudic period in the 5th century CE.