

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Back in 1977, something very unusual happened the day of Jimmy Carter's inauguration. As his motorcade was travelling from the Capitol to the White House, he got out and walked the length of Pennsylvania Avenue. This had been billed as the "People's Inaugural," and getting out there with the people was important to the new President. However, I think it is fair to say that only one person was allowed to run up and hug him and hold his hand, and that was his daughter, Amy, who was 9 years old at the time. No Secret Service agent was about to prevent Amy from jumping into her father's arms.

Think for a moment how remarkable it is that the Almighty, All-Knowing God wants to be known to you as Father. That's how His Son Jesus teaches us to pray. He invites us to think of ourselves as children who should not be afraid to run to the most powerful being there is; to be an 'Amy Carter' holding Daddy's hand fearlessly. With two words—Our Father—Jesus gives you family-level access to the God who set galaxies spinning through the universe; the God who created gravity and DNA and language; the God whose love for broken people is unstoppable. Jesus says, when you pray, go ahead and call Him "Father." Hold his hand as you walk. It's OK. He wants you to.

Martin Luther said it like this: "God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may with all confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." Step one of reinvigorating our use of the Lord's Prayer is to allow ourselves to be stunned by this. God wants to deal with you in a father-to-child relationship. What a gift of grace that is!

It is such a gift of grace that we may have trouble believing it. It can seem too good to be true. It's human nature to doubt that our Father in heaven has our best interests in mind. Can you imagine if a man took his little daughter into a Toys-R-Us, or better yet, an American Girl doll store, and took her around and said, "look at that doll, honey; do you see that outfit there? Do you like that? *You'll have none of it.* I am going to spend all of my life doing everything I can to keep you miserable and to keep you from having any of it." Now what would happen to that little girl? How distorted her view of the world would be and how distorted her view of her own self would be. If she can't trust her father, she can't trust anything.

The Bible tells us that at the beginning of time, something happened: God put two people in a garden and said: "You can have everything but that one tree. And I want you to not eat of it just because you love and trust me." And a serpent came up and said, "Do you see that tree? Do you know why God won't let you have that tree? It's the best one. Because won't let you have everything, that proves that he doesn't really want you to have anything. You can't trust Him." That lie slipped into our hearts, and our entire view of the world and ourselves is distorted, because we think that He has said what that father said to his little girl in the American Girl store.

But let me tell you something: if you can't praise God, you won't be able to praise anything else. If you don't trust God, you won't be able to trust anything else. Jesus teaches us to

begin prayer and to begin everything trusting and praising and adoring God.

Jesus invites you to stand next to him in prayer and call God "Our Father," granting you incredible access to the Holy One. What he says next is very intriguing. He teaches us to pray "Hallowed be thy name," which is another way of saying "Your Name is Holy, and will always be holy." Jesus is shaping our prayer life here, steering us to stay focused on our Father's face. When you pray "Hallowed be Thy Name" to your Father, you are doing far more than just stating a fact about Him. You are acknowledging that your Father's Name is set apart; it is absolutely special and extremely powerful. And, you are also saying that His name is sacred to you and ultimate to you; that you are seeking the Father as the all-important One. God's Name is an extension of himself. One real-life example of that is baptism. When you were touched by baptismal water, you were also touched by a Name. You were baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that Name carried all of God's blessings to you. That Name gives you a status that is greater than if your name was Rockefeller or Murdoch or Gates. Do you understand? God's Name Does Things. This is the God, after all, who used words to create.

Jesus teaches us to pray first for what we need the most. And what we need the most is for the holy name of God to attach itself to us; to define us; to tell us who we are. How does that happen? It happens when God's Word is opened and read from. It happens when God's Word is taught and preached and sung, and people like you take it to heart, and you believe it and live by it. The holy Name of God goes to work when you are confronted by your unholiness and convicted of your guilt. It goes to work when you are moved by the Spirit to turn away from soul-crushing sin, and you are led to the name that is above every name; Yeshua; Jesus; the Lord saves. God's Name Does Things, and nowhere is this more true than in the name of God's only Son. Jesus saves us from our self-destructive choices. Jesus saves us from trying to pathetically justify ourselves before our Father. Jesus saved us from an eternal godless prison by becoming a prisoner, and dying in that lonely place, completely separated from His Father. Jesus earned the right to forgive you every last sin, and not only earned the right, but he has exercised that right, and has charged His church with communicating that in His Name, your sins are forgiven; there is nothing standing in the way of a relationship between you and his Father; there is nothing preventing you from joining the eternal Feast. When you speak the name Jesus, this is what you unleash. Over and over again, Satan and the world have tried to silence that Name from being spoken, and I guess you can see why. God's Name Does Things, like decisively defeating evil and bringing life where there was only death.

Jesus teaches us to pray "Hallowed be Thy Name," not as if speaking the words repeatedly somehow adds to God's holiness, but as a reminder that the way we act does have an effect of how He is perceived. These words can serve to remind us that we are ambassadors of a holy God! More than that, we are His children, and we have His good Name to uphold! We are to let our light shine before people, and that includes our language and, in particular, the way we use God's name in everyday conversation. I'm talking about your speech, yes; and I'm talking about a whole life response to God here, not a holier-than-thou life that turns people off, but an open life that shows the holy things of God are still important to you.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name." Jesus welcomes you into a

child-parent relationship with your Creator, and bids you to seek him as the all-important One. The Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit has attached itself to you and with it comes the holiness that Jesus bought and paid for on the cross. You can navigate each day in full trust of your heavenly Father: when His answer to you is "no," you can accept His wisdom; and when His answer to you is "yes," you can celebrate with a grateful heart. What could be better?