

Hallowed Be My Name

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[0 : 00] of the living God. And as we come to them, please keep that page open, and we'll pray that we hear his voice now together. Let's pray. Lord, our prayer this morning is simple.

Please speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. Teach us, Lord, for your people are following. We pray and ask in your precious name. Amen. Well, we're back this morning in the Sermon on the Mount. It's the first of five blocks of teaching, Jesus' teaching in Matthew's Gospel. So, what have we learned so far from the one who teaches us with supreme authority? Well, he has taught us who he is. He speaks as only God gets to speak.

He does what only God's king gets to do. People were amazed. Their minds were blown because he didn't simply quote what other people had said. He spoke on his own authority.

You have heard that it was said, but I say to you. And what he said mostly is who we are now, if we're his followers, our new identity. He said those who come to him are those who are poor in spirit, knowing their need of forgiveness, but who would turn to him for mercy and find to our eternal amazement that when we do, we receive God's blessing, blessed others, his delight, his favor.

[1 : 55] So that when we come to King Jesus, it's as if God, our Father, stretches his loving rule over our lives, his kingdom, and takes us, his rebellious children, into his arms and says, you're back home now, you're never going away again. And he's taught us that that new relationship with God, it makes us completely different, distinct in all the world, that the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a new identity. And he's taught us, therefore, to live out that new identity identity, so that others can see the change in us now that we are part of God's kingdom and give glory to our Father with us. And so last week, Jesus taught us how we live that new identity out by keeping God's commandments. And we saw we cannot, we cannot get into his kingdom that way. We break God's commands every day. Every day, we need Jesus's obedience on our behalf to enter God's kingdom.

But when we come into his kingdom by putting our trust in his obedience, even to death and death on the cross, then he gives us a new heart to obey God's law out of a new love for him and a love for others, so that our righteousness really does grow into something that is more than just superficial box ticking or religion. But rather, it goes deep in our hearts and flows out of us in a whole new way of life, so that we and others around us can see one another and say more and more, like Father, like Son, like Father, like daughter. So that if we follow him, Jesus has given us the promise of change in the day-to-day roller coaster of our inner life, our lying and lust and anger and love, and the promise even of ultimately being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

But this morning, he threads that teaching back through our hearts and says, now you know how to live as my followers. Well, don't forget ever who you're living for, who you're living for.

A passage this morning contains, surely, the most ever prayed prayer in the history of the world, what we call the Lord's Prayer. We prayed it together a moment ago. But what that prayer does is drive a stake through the heart of our need to be recognized.

Whose name is it that we want to be heard and celebrated? Who are we living for? Well, in these verses, Jesus is holding a dagger to the throat of the part of us that wants to pray, hallowed be my name.

[5 : 26] You can't please the Father, says Jesus, if you want to steal his praise. Jesus is putting the motivation of our hearts under the x-ray this morning.

So let's listen to his words. Firstly, whose praise are we living for? Jesus says we can spend our lives looking for praise and recognition in one of two places.

Do you see that in verse 1? See if you can spot them. Jesus says, Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.

If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. Where do we go looking for praise and recognition?

Either we want it from people to be seen by them, or we want it from God to have his reward.

[6 : 36] And notice that it is either or. Jesus leaves no room for both and, does he? If we try to live in Jesus' way so that everyone notices and tells us what a good person we are, well, we will have no reward from our Father in heaven.

Two ways to live. Two rewards. Jesus says our lives are either driven by the approval of others, or the approval of God.

Now that's not to say that if someone happens to thank you or show you appreciation, that you have to stick your fingers in your ears, otherwise you're going to lose your reward.

It's good for us, isn't it, to show gratitude to each other, and to encourage each other, and point out where we're following Jesus in a really good and a right way.

But if that is why we're trying to live for him, so that other people thank us, or shower us with praise, or look up to us, then, says Jesus, that is all you will get.

[7 : 50] If you're living for human praise and recognition, human praise and recognition is all that you will be left holding before God's throne on the last day.

And not God's recognition and reward. That's the big point of this whole section. Jesus repeats it three times, so he's sure that we've got it.

Picture three scenes, he says. Scene one in verse two. When you give to the needy. If you make a big song and dance of it, so that people say, look what a generous person that is, and look how compassionate they are, and how much they care for people.

In other words, to be honored by others, truly I tell you, says Jesus, they have received their reward in full. Then scene two.

When you pray, verse six. Well, if you do it in a way that leaves people thinking, you know, what a religious and holy person that is. You know, how close to God you are.

[9 : 01] I wish I could be as spiritual as you. In other words, to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Finally, scene three. When you fast, later on, verse 16. Well, if you go about complaining about how hungry you are, and reminding people how long it's been since you last ate, eight, eight hours now, nine hours, getting a bit peckish, to show you are fasting, truly I tell you, says Jesus, they have received their reward in full.

What is the full reward in each of those cases? It is only the recognition and praise of other people.

And let me say, brothers and sisters, that it is nuts. It is crazy for us to live our lives for that.

Because, do you know how long that reward lasts? Before people lose interest, or get fed up of you, or move on, or see your flaws and failures.

[10 : 21] You're living for the praise of our friends, or family, or people, boys and girls in your class, or people that you work with, or even people in our church family, the people sitting next to you.

If you get your worth, from the way that the people sitting next to you, see you in life, if that is what you are living for, well, it's like living for a heat wave in Aberdeen.

It might happen once or twice, you might get a bright week, but people's responses to us, is as changeable as the weather. And our praiseworthiness, our deserving of being praised, is even less reliable.

There is nothing more tragic, than the idea that someone might live their whole life, for the appreciation of other people, get to the end of their life, and only have that record, of patchy love, and people's thanks to show for it.

And people say at a funeral, don't they, look at all the lives she touched, and look at the legacy of his love, what they don't say is that even that will be forgotten in time.

[11 : 38] And truly, I tell you, says Jesus, if that is all he or she wanted, well, that is all he or she has.

They're incredibly sobering words. But they get to the very heart of why we live, and what we're living for. Whose praise do we really want in the end?

Is it whatever praise we can give each other here and now, or is it to hear God say to us in the end, well done, well done, good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of your master. Because that's the alternative, look, three times again, to make sure that we get it. The same three scenes.

But when you give to the needy, verse three, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

[12 : 44] And when you pray, verse six, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your father who is unseen. Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

But when you fast, verse 17, put oil on your head, wash your face, so it won't be obvious to others that you're fasting, but only to your father who is unseen. And your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

What is he saying? Live to receive the father's praise and recognition, and you will have it.

Serve so that only he can see the full scope of your love, and the full breadth and depth of your obedience to Jesus, and you will have his rewards.

You might never, ever be thanked for your love for God here and now. No one might put your name on a plaque for how much you've given, or how much you've served, or how often you pray, but they don't need to.

[13 : 56] The one who we should care most what he thinks of us sees what we do in secret, behind a closed door, and he does not miss a thing. Now, as I say, it's no bad thing, is it, to thank each other, forgiving and serving, encourage each other in our prayer and devotion, but if we love God, that is not why we do it.

And we would carry on doing all those things and more, with or without thanks, with or without recognition. See, it's worth saying before we move on, this doesn't mean that we don't also love God in ways that other people can see.

Right? Jesus has already said in 5 verse 16, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. See, it's not so much the location.

It's not simply doing things in secret. It's the motivation. Are we letting our light shine, in inverted commas, so that we are honored, or so that our Father in heaven gets the glory?

Jesus promises that God will publicly recognize and reward your love and faithfulness on the last day, however much or have a little human appreciation or recognition or encouragement you've had along the way.

[15 : 32] I've chatted with a couple of people recently who are considering following Jesus, and they've both told me separately, you know, one of the things that attracts them to Jesus is what is different about Christians.

Just something different, they said, that you just don't see in other people. And I hear that as a Christian, and I want to say, what's different?

What's different? I don't feel different. I look at my life, am I that different? I can't see it. But isn't that the point? That if we're not living to get a well done and a pat on the back from other people, then what is obvious to them won't be obvious to us.

Because for us, we're just going about our new life in obedience to Jesus and for the glory of the Father. And we won't even be thinking about what other people are saying or thinking or how they're responding to us.

because it's all for him. And so Jesus says, there are two ways to live if we claim to be his followers. And he is clear that one of those is a false claim and one of those is a true claim.

[16 : 52] We can put on a mask of goodness and holiness and put on a performance for those around us so that they applaud us and we take a bow at the end.

Or we can take the mask off and not pretend and live before God in a way that he sees and he loves so that he gets all the glory and we get his well done in his kingdom that never ends.

Friends, there is nothing like being a Christian. You can't fake it till you make it. Isn't that one of the things that people outside of the church despise about what they think goes on in a church?

That we're really just doing it so that we get something out of it, right? Or so that we get to look big or important or special or good in front of other people.

Jesus says, there is no faking it till you make it in his kingdom. There is no mask. There is no performance. There's no following Jesus in my way. We either follow Jesus in his way or we don't follow him at all.

[18:13] There's no place for hypocrisy. If we steal the spotlight, Jesus says, we are not his people. If we live to shine the spotlight on him, well, we are children of our Father in heaven.

So then, if that is the big idea, how do we live for the Father's praise? Because Jesus clearly wants us to do something with this, brothers and sisters. He begins in verse 1, be careful.

The point of doing an x-ray is to know if you need treatment, right? If you just get the x-ray, well, you're not going to be changed or healed or transformed. So what do we need to do now to be careful of our motives?

We've seen Jesus press this big idea into three areas of religious life in his day, giving to the poor, praying, and fasting. Now, it helps to know that those were three markers in Jesus' day of being a good Jew.

But they're not necessarily the same markers, are they, of being a Christian today. For example, fasting for the right reasons isn't wrong. It's interesting, though, isn't it, that we're never instructed to fast in the New Testament, whereas we are very much instructed to pray.

[19:38] So I don't think the point is as simple as you be careful how you fast. Rather, what could we say are the New Testament markers or signs of a new identity in Jesus that we are instructed to do?

Now, I thought of six obvious ones. Okay, we're going to go quite quickly through them. Don't worry. And I'm certain that there are others that you could think of. But let's just see how who we want praise from works itself out in these areas.

To start where Jesus starts, then, how do we give for the Father's praise? You're walking in here, there's no way that you could tell by looking how much anyone is giving to the church in the service of the gospel or how much anyone has spent in the past month or the past year on hospitality.

Perhaps we don't even keep track ourselves. Perhaps our accounts don't reflect where that money goes or who it's spent on or the number of times we've opened our homes or what we've given to the various funds of the church to support the work of mission or the outreach of the church or the building up of the church.

But those figures do exist. Much, much giving and spending for others goes on in this church, but only God knows what each person gives or spends for others as a follower of Jesus.

[21:06] Jesus is going to have more to say about money next time, so I don't want to labor this point, but it's important that you know, brothers and sisters, that your Father in heaven delights in secret generosity.

God loves a cheerful giver, and he will reward what is given out of love for him and a desire for his glory.

Money given or spent to advance his kingdom or to reflect the king's generosity to his people and those outside the church, it does not go unnoticed in heaven, even if it goes unnoticed here.

So give freely, though no one might ever find out. Secondly, how do we pray for the Father's praise? Well, there's a big giveaway in this passage, isn't there?

Verse 9 gives it away when Jesus says, this then is how you should pray, and then the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. Now, what's special about this prayer?

[22:16] Well, by contrast with the hypocrites in verse 5, it is a humble prayer of praise, repentance, and faith. By contrast with the babbling pagans in verse 7, it is a simple prayer that recognizes that our Father knows what we need before we tell Him.

The words of one commentator, it is not pretentious, manipulative, or verbose. It does not grasp at or claim glory for us. Now, we looked at the Lord's Prayer with the children at the end of last year. Boys and girls, maybe you remember that, and how we saw that there are six requests in this prayer, and the first three of them are all asking that the Father get the glory.

Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, your, your, your. And the second three requests, well, they are for us, but not for our glory, but to acknowledge our desperate need for daily provision, something as simple as food.

And for the forgiveness of our sins and the power to forgive others, and even to resist temptation and evil, we need our Father in heaven. These are wonderful things to learn to pray for together.

[23:38] And when we take these words home and we pray them ourselves to God in secret, well, our Father is overjoyed. I wonder if we, if we could play back our prayers in this past week, the prayers that we've prayed maybe in our heads or maybe in our devotions, how, how closely would they line up with the priorities of this great prayer, the Father's glory and our humble needs?

Lots of us really struggle with prayer, that's no secret, is it? We struggle to build it into our day-to-day, we struggle to know what to do it, but Jesus is unashamedly teaching us how. In our tradition, we're maybe a little bit suspicious of reciting set prayers. It can become, can't it, mindless repetition of words, then we're right back with the hypocrites and the pagans. It is also a good model or a template that we can build our prayers around. But when we understand the heart of this prayer and what makes it so different from any other way of praying in the whole world, what makes it so unique for Christians, followers of Jesus to say these words, these requests, well, this is a way that we can pray from the heart and a way that we can take into our homes and lives to pray to our Father in heaven and know that he rewards us. Thirdly, how do we, how do we read for the Father's praise? Now, this isn't something Jesus touches on, but it is a marker of Christian spirituality, isn't it, reading or listening to our Bibles? [25 : 26] And much like our prayer life, if getting our Bibles out is only something that we ever do in public, right now at church or at life group or in a prayer meeting, but never in private, just ourselves and our Father, then we need to check our motives.

Is our Bible or our Bible app just a spiritual accessory for others to admire? Or is it the way that you hear from God himself every day as you open it prayerfully in his presence? Does your Bible turn up at church looking a little bit more battered and thumbed than it did the week before? Or is it, you, that we want to look the parts, but when no one's looking, the Bible goes back in its place on the shelf?

If we don't set aside time for that personal devotion and private worship, the practice of reading our Bibles and praying to God, well, our Christianity will quickly become all performance, all for others, but not for God, and with no real relationship with the Father when there's nobody looking. So know again, brothers and sisters, that your Father loves to spend time with you and that he delights to speak with you and to hear from you when it is only you and him listening. [26 : 59] Fourthly, how do we serve for the Father's praise? Now, I actually think this is closer to Jesus' point about fasting for us today.

How does he say the hypocrites fast? Do not look somber as the hypocrites do you. For they disfigure their faces to show others what they're doing. Again, fast if you want to, but when else could we be prone to look miserable for the Lord? Or go around showing others what a difficulty and a burden, how much effort we're putting in. I think we can be tempted to serve like this as Christians, can't we? When we let others know just how tired and busy we are, but we don't want to be seen to be doing less, we make others feel like they're treading on eggshells around our domain. Wherever we ask is another burden. It's not really that we actually want help or all this to do, it's that we want everyone to know how jolly hard we're serving and how thankful and appreciative they should be. [28 : 13] Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we have a major problem with that here, but I am saying as Jesus says, be careful. Be careful because our hearts can easily take something that's meant to please and honor God and turn it into an opportunity for others to please and honor us or think of us as being important.

You brothers and sisters, we serve one another best when we serve our Father first, when it's His recognition and reward we want. Well, we are freed from feeling that we need to get that recognition from other people around us, the people we serve or the people we serve with. And I desperately wanted to give an example. I kind of thought it would defeat the point of the sermon, but there's also so many that I could think of of just that self-effacing service, even in the last week that I've seen in this church. And I'll leave ye to pick an example of that, that you've seen, surely you've seen in the life of our church, just that God-glorifying, self-forgetful service. It's a wonderful thing. And God rewards that and He sees it and He loves it. Fifthly then, how do we care for the Father's praise, our love and support of each other? [29 : 37] That's a mark, isn't it, of following Jesus? But again, how do we be careful to do that in a way that is for the Father and not so that we are seen and recognized by others?

Well, I think there's something here, isn't there, around what Jesus says about things done in secret. Lots of Christian caring does need to be shared.

That's why we have the pastoral care team and the deacon's court. But not everything needs someone else to know about it, right? And sometimes it's right to keep your love and care for others between yourself and God.

The classic example of this is in a kind of group prayer time, isn't it? And somebody says, what can we pray for? And we're so slow to ask for prayer for our own heart and our own needs or expose our own weakness.

And we're so quick to jump in with what that person's struggling with and what that person's going through, the needs and the struggles that they have.

[30 : 41] And don't get me wrong, that can come from a good place of wanting someone to be prayed for. But it can also turn, can't it, into an opportunity for gossip and one-upping each other and how well we know that situation or how much that person has confided in us.

And again, I'm not saying that we need a big intervention or stop everything we're doing. But I am saying be careful. Be careful.

Way up. Who needs to know? Often someone, very, very rarely everyone. But who will always know and reward your loving care?

Your Father in Heaven. Sigh. It's been a while since we had a sigh. But this is the last one. How do we worship for the Father's praise?

This is really a summing up point because everything we've been thinking about is really part of how we worship God as followers of Jesus. There's giving, praying, reading, serving, caring.

[31 : 50] As I say, there are more. And I would love to know or I'd love to hear that you're speaking about other areas of life, how this big point maybe presses into other parts of our Christian life, our life together as a church.

But really, the big take-home message is this. The old self, who we were before we came to Jesus and entered his kingdom, the old me and the old you is still around.

And that old part of us is a hypocrite who wears a mask and wants other people to thank us and praise us and recognize us and put us on a pedestal.

But Jesus says, friends, be careful. Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. because when we do that and we live out of that old self and not our new self in Christ, we're just indulging our pride and feeding our ego and turning the spotlight away from God and onto us.

And that is not good. And it does not please God. And in the end, it is incompatible with following Jesus. He says it's either or.

[33 : 17] Now, if you're anything like me, this will have been a challenging and a searching bit of teaching from Jesus. But brothers and sisters, don't let's just have the x-ray.

Let's have the treatments. Search your heart. Regularly pray that he would point out where you're tempted to steal the show and learn to live and worship instead for his eyes only.

That might take some big changes. It might take some minor tweaks. But let's not go from here having just had the x-ray and not the treatments. And if you do that and you find out that your worship is actually all for show and that when nobody's looking, actually, the Bible does go away and the prayers dry up.

And when nobody's thanking you for your service, you don't do it. and when nobody's encouraging you to come to church, you don't come. Well, you actually need something deeper. Not a minor treatment, but a whole new heart.

You need to turn to Jesus and begin to follow him probably for the first time. Friends, there is nothing like being a Christian.

[34 : 37] So whoever you are, brothers and sisters, friends, stop acting and drop the mask and come back to Jesus empty-handed and empty-hearted and receive his grace and his kingdom and be a child of your Father in heaven who sees what you do in secret and rewards you for it.

Let's pray for that together now. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, how we thank you for Jesus.

Lord, our hearts are exposed by him and there's nowhere for us to hide under his gaze. Father, we thank you for the goodness of that even though it pains us.

And Lord, how we pray by your spirit, do you search our hearts and test our thoughts. Lord, we pray that each of us would go from here not having just heard words but having heard words of eternal life and transforming words.

Lord, pray that we would grow ever more into your likeness and that you would get the glory more and more. Lord, help us to point one another to you and not to us because it is not to us but to you that the glory belongs.

[36 : 11] Lord, lead us, we pray, teach us and sanctify us by your truth. And Father, if we are indeed living just for ourselves and for our own recognition, Father, by your spirit, please convict.

Please draw us to the Lord Jesus. Give us a new heart. Take away the heart of stone and give a new heart of flesh. This we pray in his name.

Amen.