

Most of us are pretty aware of the sufferings of Job. The way the opening chapter reads, it would almost come off as some sort of farce if we didn't know it was true. A sudden storm leaves all his sons and daughters dead in the rubble. Everything he owned is carried off by robbers or destroyed by disaster. Painful sores put him into unrelenting misery. And in the end he sits on a heap of ashes and takes a 40-chapter emotional roller coaster ride with his friends, confused about what God is up to.

But there's a side to his suffering that we don't look at that often. Now, compared to everything else he went through, we might consider it almost inconsequential, but Job laments it all the same. And I only bring it up because it is relevant to what we'll be looking at today in the first petition of the Lord's prayer. You see, Job had not just lost his health and wealth and children. He has lost his good name. A spotless reputation that took a lifetime to build is demolished overnight. Three of his best and brightest friends show up, and they jump to the conclusion anyone at that time would have – that Job must be hiding some secret scandal or God would not have dumped on him like this. Most of their speech to Job is trying to convince him that he did something really horrible to deserve all this. Job himself moans amid tears: **"I have become a laughingstock to my friends."** (Job 12:4). Pitifully he complains: **"Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me."** (19:18). If this happened today, a public disgrace like this would have Job as the whipping boy of the late night comics and the punchline to schoolyard jokes.

This loss of reputation may seem like the lesser complaint in Job's situation, but it's a big deal when it happens to us. We are all sensitive to this, aren't we? There's a reason Solomon wrote that **"A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold."** (Pro 22:1). We talk about someone ruining our good name. We mean our reputation, what people think of when they hear our name. What do we think of when we hear names like Benedict Arnold, Jeffrey Dahmer, Osama bin Laden, or Judas Iscariot? We care about the thoughts people think when they hear our name. All it takes is one comment taken out of context, one half-truth about our life spread all over town, or one stupid sin with no one to blame but ourselves, and the damage is done.

And it's not always just *your* name that gets trashed. Maybe your dad told you at the supper table one evening: "You keep up that behavior and you're going to ruin the family name." What we do or don't do, the good or bad, the truth or lies that others tell about us, doesn't just affect us but those who share the name. Why else would families try to hide those so-called "black sheep"?

But it's not our reputations we're talking about today, it's something far more important. So Jesus begins this prayer that covers our whole life, this template of how to talk to God, he begins it by asserting that we bear the name of God the Father, and the name of Christ himself who teaches us to pray this way. As we come to and pass by that word "Father" at the start, we remember what it means that we can pray to our God, that we can call him Father. We remember that we are his children now, adopted through the blood of Christ and by that blood he hears us.

Adopted as his children in the gospel waters of our baptism, what shall we who now bear his name, ask for? Well, Jesus lays out seven petitions or requests, seven things to talk to our Father about. And the first petition is this: **"Hallowed be thy name."** Now, when we pray together with our fellow believers standing next to us in the Lord's house, we don't get a huge span of time to ponder these words. But when we take our time each day to pray to God, we have opportunity to dwell on what this means for us.

**"Hallowed be thy name."** If I'm going to pray this and remember that this means keeping God's name holy and that means keeping his reputation holy, and if I'm going to then remember that I bear his name and people judge God based on my actions, then I can't pray this petition and not feel a finger pointing back at me, practically laughing at me for how miserably I have failed in this. For all the days I have disgraced my Father's name through my words and actions in the world, and even been embarrassed to mention Christ's name out loud to someone.

So here I ask for God's name to be kept holy, I ask that his truth to be honored by me and others, and I remember at the very start of this prayer how Luther explained it: "God's name is kept holy when his word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But whoever teaches or lives contrary to God's word dishonors God's name among us. Keep us from doing this, dear Father in heaven!"

So we've barely started the prayer and already there's a problem. I have not lived up to the family name. And there are no do-overs. So then maybe the thought strikes me: "Well, I had better whip myself into shape, get at least all the visible parts of my life in order so no one can think less than the best of me! Let's make this display picture perfect so I (and by extension, God) will always be thought the best of." Perhaps I'm not so shallow as that. Perhaps I say instead:

“Time to live up to my name as a child of God. So I will get serious about my spiritual progress, set some spiritual goals for myself, exert myself more, check my progress in the mirror now and then – you know, hold myself accountable.” Or, “My name needs to be in better shape in this dark world. So I will buck up, force myself to smile more, make up some laughter here in the dark, a little whistling here in the graveyard...hey, maybe a few more self-help courses...because I really need to live up to this name that I claim as mine...”

But the storm rolls back over these thoughts. Maybe you’re old enough, you’ve tried enough times to learn this lesson thoroughly, where all these resolutions end up, all this spiritual exertion in the name of God becomes a burden too heavy to bear, threatening to spiral into terrible despair. When I come to see how these half-baked means I came up with have gotten me no closer to my Father, I despair of his love entirely, walk away sad, as that rich, young ruler walked away from Jesus, figuring it’s no use anyway, that the Father doesn’t want me? Or perhaps even worse, I imagine myself more and more measuring up to my Father’s name every day, and I become an intolerable, work-righteous Pharisee, so delusional that I imagine God is proud of the meager and tainted good I do for him?

Yes, when I pray, “**Hallowed be thy name,**” there is a finger pointing back at me in the form of the second commandment which thunders like the prophet Nathan: “You are the man! You are the one who has so misused and abused God’s holy name, his word, his truth all the while wearing his name and in doing so advertising that your failures are connected to him!” But what then? I see what I do wrong, it grieves me how I have hurt God, and I want to not do that anymore. Why does it collapse whenever I try?

Because my own name, my own efforts, my own good intentions can never save me! They were never meant to. Who of us would argue that we do not want to be more like our Father, that we do not want to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we do not want to live up more and more each morning to our station is life as the baptized sons and daughters of the King on whom he has written his very name? Who of us does not want to want what he wants, and to think the way he thinks, and to love what our Father loves, to hallow his name?

But none of this will come by trying to spruce up *our* names. Turning and looking to ourselves is what destroyed us in the first place. It never ends well. What we desire comes only when we hallow *His* name, the name above all names. So said the apostle: “**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**” (Ac 4:12). Here, as the Lord defined for Moses his own name on the mountain, I meet the God who lives up to his name as both the perfectly just God who punishes every sin, and as the perfectly merciful God who forgives every sin. This God did when he punished every sin and forgave every sin on the cross through the blood of his son.

“**Hallowed be thy name.**” We’re not asking here that I may become holier to God. We’re asking that he may become holier to me. Here I am asking for Christ’s name to be hallowed, set apart, made holy in my heart by faith. Here there is nothing about hallowing *my* name more and more. Here we ask only that we can be more a part of *his* name. Like the way a cold stone can become warm lying in the sunshine, in the same way we live under the sunshine of his name, his grace, his love, and so our hearts will become warm. Dwelling with him, we *will* become more and more like him. The way to live God’s name is not to try harder to be better, but to live closer to him. The results will come naturally.

God put his name on you at your baptism. He claimed you as his own. He wants you to be associated with him. This is what we strive for as Christians, to live and breathe in his name, to find not a burdensome obligation but to hear him say to you: “My child, you are mine. I have put my name on you to claim you as my own.”

Did you ever notice how children talk about the things their parents own? A little boy enters into a brand new house with his father. He points to all the new furnishings and gadgets and says to his father: “Is this ours?” The father says, “Yes, this is ours.” “And this...is this ours too?” “Yes, that’s ours too.” The kid never worked a day in his life. But he happily, cheerfully, delightfully assumes that what belongs to his father also belongs to him. After all, he bears the same name as his father, doesn’t he?

“**Hallowed be thy name!**” With these words we confess to our Father just how happy we are that we have his name to honor and uphold, to boldly confess and keep pure, to love it and live my life with his name on each of us. And everything that belongs to the family is ours as well. The perfect life of Jesus is yours as though you lived it. His complete payment for sin as though you paid it. His victory over death just like you won it. And the house. The house of many rooms is prepared for you. God’s name is on you. Everything he has is yours. Dear Father, hallowed be thy name! Amen.