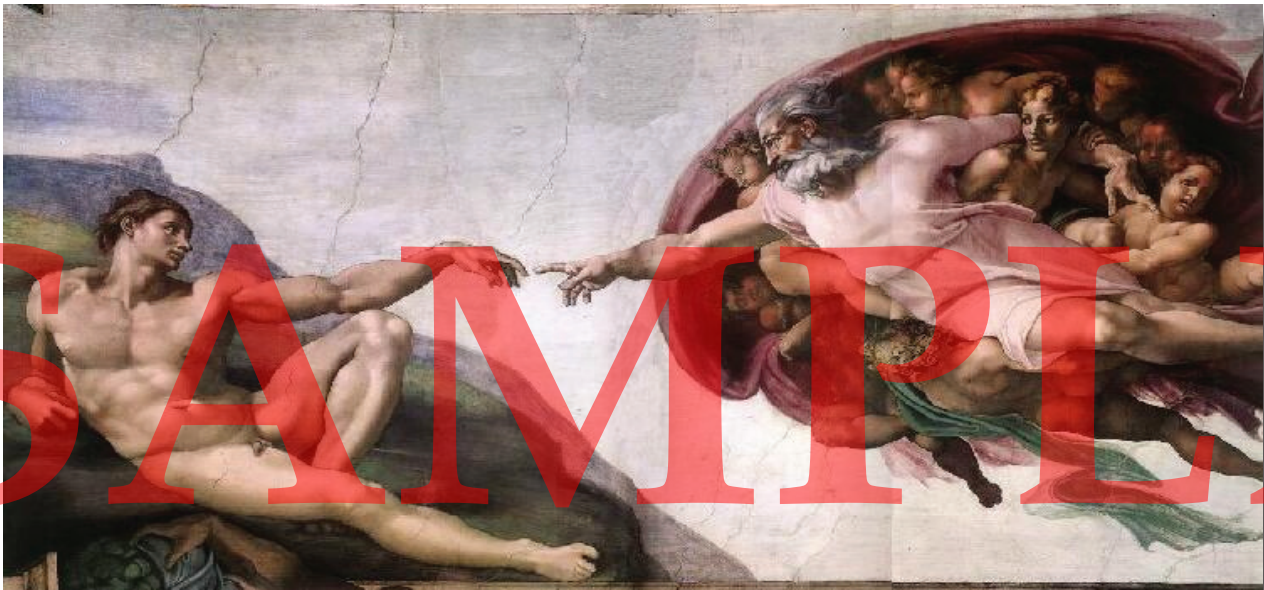


Study Two

Hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come...



The fifty or so words that Matthew gives us for the Lord's Prayer are packed full of good things. In this study we're going to concentrate on how Jesus draws us into considering the spiritual realm.

We live in a scientific age which demands proof before belief can happen (if we discount the quasi-scientific editorials that appears in our newspapers under the guise of proven science) and that can cause problems for many, for although as Christians we know there's more to life than the mere physical, it's not something that we can prove empirically. It's a faith thing, and that's why one commentator calls this the disciples prayer, it can only be meaningfully spoken by someone who is a disciple of Jesus.

The spiritual realm

'Hallowed be your name' means acknowledging that there is a spiritual realm. 'Hallowed' is not a word that is in common usage, so it is worth putting it both into the

context of Jesus' words and also bringing it into our own experience. It is a word which has within it the Old Testament concept that the name of God is tremendously powerful. In Hebrew a name is not just the word by which someone is called, but much more - within it is the very nature and personality of that person insofar as it is revealed.

Hallowed as a word comes to us in the Greek from a word translated as holy (*hagios*), but can mean separate or different. So putting these two ideas together we can maybe get closer to what the early Christians would understand by 'Hallowed be your name'. It means something like 'May we give you the unique place in our lives which your nature deserves and demands'

If we were going to use one word to express this phrase we might use 'reverence'. To reverence God means that we not only acknowledge that he exists, but that we know something of his character; his holiness, love and justice, and most importantly that we

acknowledge his presence in the world. That God is with us when we wake, when we walk out of our front door, when we eat in MacDonalds, when we sit at our office desk, when we lay our head to rest. That is what brings us, either physically or metaphorically to our knees in reverence to God, and in submission and obedience to Him.

That's quite a lot of meaning packed into a few words - but then, that's the way Jesus taught.

The physical realm

And then the spiritual connects with the physical in 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

The Kingdom of God was central to the message of Jesus; we find numerous passages in the Gospels concerning the Kingdom. Luke 4:23 begins "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God..." and Luke 8 begins 'After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.'

We have several of Jesus' parables concerning the kingdom. There's the mustard seed (Mark 4:29-31), the sower of seed (Mark 4:25-27), yeast (Luke 13:20-21), a banquet (Luke 14:14-16) and others. They talk about growth, opposition, apathy and the whole range of human emotions, and they emphasise that the kingdom is about real people and their relationship to God.

The Kingdom of God is not something that we just saunter into. "The time has come," said Jesus. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus challenges us to believe it, live it and preach it, because at its heart is our relationship with God and with our neighbour.

Jesus also spoke of the kingdom as existing in past (Luke 13:28; Matthew 8:11), present (Luke 17:21) and, in this prayer, future.

Prayer may not change things for you,
but it for sure changes you for things.
~Samuel M. Shoemaker

The best way of understanding the phrase 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' is in the context of the Hebrew style of writing, called

parallelism. You find it throughout the psalms. A verse divides into two where the second half repeats and brings out the meaning of the first half.

If we apply the same idea to the Lord's Prayer we have 'your kingdom come - your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

If the second half explains and amplifies the first then we have a definition of the kingdom of God - it is wherever on earth God's will is done as it is in heaven. To be in the kingdom is to submit to and obey God's will. And that goes back to Jesus' summing up of the Law in his 'Jesus Creed' - Love God, love your neighbour. Everything else flows from this.

Living the Jesus Creed is living in the Kingdom!

Life in the Kingdom

That's why God's kingdom can span past, present and future at the same time. Anyone at any time in history who has submitted their life to God's will was living in God's kingdom.

'Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.'" (Luke 17:20-22)

Jesus started his ministry by talking about the kingdom, and calling people to repentance. The apostles, as they started their ministry continued the pattern of preaching that Jesus had started. They did not just preach about Jesus, but by their lives and their words they found receptive hearts in those who were prepared to turn their lives around and become citizens of God's kingdom.

'But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.'
(Acts 8: 12)

Looking to the future

But of course we also look to the future. We do not live in a perfect world at this moment in time, but one full of injustice, lacking in love, morally lacking despite glimmers of goodness and love. The vision that the Bible gives us is of a time when everything and everyone will be subject to God's will as his kingdom is revealed in all its glory and Christ returns again.

'To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn
because of him. So shall it be! Amen.'
(Revelation 1:5-7)

FF Bruce comments '*When the Kingdom is fully come, God's will shall be done on earth even as it is in heaven, but those who do His will to-day belong to His Kingdom here and now; they anticipate spiritually the conditions which are to appear universally when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14)....*

'Thus in every Christian sphere to-day, be it the Christian individual or the Christian Church, the Christian home or the Christian business-house, those qualities ought to be seen which are to characterise the golden age for which all creation longs.

'And the existence of such qualities in these spheres is a divine guarantee that justice and mercy, peace and truth shall yet reign universally and bring the joy of heaven to every corner of earth, when at last "the kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev.11:15).'

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- 1 Bearing in mind the phrase 'Hallowed be your name' and the thought behind the words, can you think of a more contemporary phrase which encompasses the truth of these familiar words, and which non-Christians might better understand.
 - 2 How would you describe the kingdom of God to a non-churchgoer? How different should life in God's kingdom be compared to the 'kingdom' under which we currently live? Is there anything we can do to bring a little of God's kingdom into our working and everyday life?
 - 3 In Jesus' parables the kingdom is described as a small seed that grows into a large tree, or a small quantity of yeast that is mixed throughout some dough. Can we relate this to the idea of mission, and as a church how could we engage with this?
 - 4 'Practical prayer is harder on the soles of your shoes than on the knees of your trousers.' (Austin O'Malley) How does this quote relate to life in the kingdom of God?