**The Majestic Holiness of God**

Text: Exodus 15:11

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**Scriptures:** Luke 1:46-55; Matthew 6:9-13; Exodus 15:1-18

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 359, 236, 164, 180

**Series:** Heidelberg Catechism (LD47)

**Theme:** Moses and the people of Israel sing of the Lord’s majestic holiness in His victorious deliverance of His people and express their hope in the future He has secured for them.

**Proposition:** Brothers and Sisters, we confess the majestic holiness of God when we pray ‘Hallowed be your name’.

**Introduction**

There are some words in the English Bible that we never say in everyday conversation. One of these words is “Hallowed”. We read the Words of Christ as recorded by Matthew in his gospel "*Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name*." (Matthew 6:9) The Greek word translated ‘hallowed’ means to set something/somebody apart from the ordinary. To regard as holy, sacred, consecrated, greatly revered, honoured, respected, admired, blessed, venerated, worshipped.

In Biblical terms, a name conveys the very essence of a person or object. To pray that the name of our Father, who is in heaven be hallowed is to express our heartfelt desire that the Lord God Himself be regarded as holy, sacred, consecrated, greatly revered, honoured, respected, admired, blessed, venerated, worshipped. Moses and the people of Israel ‘hallowed the name of the Lord God’ after they had crossed the Red Sea, having been delivered from their oppressive captivity in Egypt. They sang a song, a poem, of joyful praise to the Lord their God who alone is ‘majestic in holiness’ (Exo 15:11). We are going to focus on the majestic holiness of God under three headings this afternoon:

1. God’s supreme perfection
2. God’s essential holiness
3. God’s moral excellence
4. **God’s supreme perfection**

There are two questions in Exodus 15:11: "*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*” The straightforward answer to both questions is ‘Nobody!” The Lord God is unique. There is no one like Him. There is no other being in the universe who could have supernaturally caused the waters of the Red Sea to miraculously part so that the people of Israel could walk on dry ground, with walls of water to their right and left (Ex 14:22). Just as the waters which were first created by God and then separated by Him at the beginning (Gen 1:6) so, water and every other aspect of this universe remains under His supreme control. There is no one else who could have brought the waters back at just the right time so that all the Israelites escaped but none of the pursuing Egyptians made it across the Red Sea. As the song recalls: "*Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone”* (Ex 15:4-5).

There is no one else who loves the people he has redeemed with a steadfast love which never ceases (v13). There is no one else who is strong enough to guide His people and to bring them all the way to His ‘holy abode’ (v13). There is no one else who reigns as Supreme Ruler ‘forever and ever’ (v18).

We confess the supreme perfection of God when we pray the first petition of the Lord’s prayer, as Hannah did in her prayer, recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-2: "*My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. "There is none holy like the LORD; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God*”.

The absolutely excellent surpassing perfection of God contrasts with the arrogance of Pharaoh who showed himself to be neither supreme nor excellent, as the song of Moses recalls in verse 9: “*The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.'”* How then can imperfect human beings who are naturally proud, and have hardened hearts like Pharaoh escape the fury (v7) of the Lord God who is described in this song as ‘a man of war’ (v3)? How can we be spared the trembling which seized the inhabitants of Philistia (v14), the dismay of the chiefs of Edom (v15), the terror and dread (v16) of God’s enemies?

The answer is revealed in Isaiah 57:15: “*For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite*”.

When people are confronted with the supreme power and perfection of the Living God, they either deny the reality of who He is: as Pharaoh did when He repeatedly resisted the declared will of God communicated to him by Moses. Or else, people experience a powerlessness, an impotence, a sense of great unworthiness before the perfection of the One God who is like none other.

Isaiah encountered the reality of God’s supreme holiness in a vision of the throne room of the Lord where angelic seraphim were singing to one another: *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"* (Isaiah 6:3). The prophet responded to this revelation of God’s supreme perfection with humility, a ‘contrite and lowly spirit’, saying: "*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*" (Isaiah 6:4).

We express our own humility before the supremely perfect person of God when we pray the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “*Forgive us our debts*” (Matt 6:12). Confessing that we are not naturally holy, as the Lord is in His essential being, which brings us to the second point.

1. **God’s essential holiness**

Moses and the people of Israel sang of the ‘majestic holiness’ of God. Majesty is ‘dignity’; the authority of sovereign power. Majesty is ‘stateliness’ or ‘grandeur’. God’s will is that He be praised for who He is: the Glorious, Majestic, “Wholly Other” Being who is like none other. This is why Jesus taught His disciples to pray “*Hallowed be your name*”. To recognise and declare the essential holiness of God is His divine will for all those made in His image.

God is not holy because of what He does, He is holy by nature. To be holy is who God is. There is a sense in which the holiness of God is His central characteristic as revealed in His Word. God’s Holiness is strongly emphasized through the literary device of three-fold repetition in Scripture. We were reminded of this from Isaiah 6:3 and we find this also in Revelation 4:8 “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*".

There are many other revealed characteristics, or ‘attributes’ of God which are revealed in Scripture, but we never read that God is

Love, love, love or

Merciful, merciful, merciful or

Just, just, just or

Wise, wise, wise or

Good, good, good or

Righteous, righteous, righteous or

True, true, true, or

Almighty, almighty, almighty

God is holy, set apart, in His love – He loves like none other .

God is holy, set apart, in His mercy – He is kind like none other.

God is just, set apart, in His justice – He is fair like none other.

God is wise, set apart, in His wisdom – He is understanding like none other.

God is good, set apart, in His moral excellence – He is alone is truly awesome.

God is righteous, set apart, in His righteousness – He is pure like none other.

God is true, set apart, in His absolute authenticity – He is honest like none other.

God is almighty, set apart, in His sovereign power – He is powerful like none other.

When we pray the words which the Lord Jesus has taught us: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name’ we express our heartfelt desire that the Lord God Himself be regarded as holy in His being; set apart, excellent in all that He is. We ourselves ‘hallow” His name when we “bless, worship, and praise” Him for His essential holiness in the perfection of His almighty power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy and truth. We turn now to God’s moral excellence.

1. **God’s moral excellence**

God’s essential, majestic, holiness ‘shines forth’ from His works. Moses and the people of Israel, standing safely on the other side of the Red sea, having watched their enemies perish by the great power of the Lord, worshipped and praised Him for His power, wisdom, kindness, justice, mercy and truth. Having been confronted with the holiness of their God, they ‘*feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses*’ (Ex 14:31). They had witnessed the power of God as He parted the waters. They had seen the wisdom of God as He dramatically separated His chosen people from their oppressors. They had experienced the kindness of God as He had saved every single one of the Israelites and freed them from their enemies. They had beheld the perfect justice of God who had brought judgement upon the Egyptians. They had received the mercy of God who had heard the cry of His people and seen their oppression (Ex 3:9). They had heard the promise of God through Moses: '*I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians*” (Ex 6:6-7).

Now they knew that God’s word was trustworthy and true. They knew that God was not like any other being. He is majestic in holiness. Because God is holy both in His essential being and in all that He does, He is entirely separated from sin.

Sin is a lack of love – for God and often for others.

Sin is a lack of justice – it does not give to God the glory He deserves.

Sin is a lack of wisdom – it never delivers the lasting satisfaction it promises.

Sin is a lack of goodness – it is evil.

Sin is a lack of righteousness – it is immoral.

Sin is a lack of truth – it denies the holiness of God.

Sin is everything that God is not (Job 34:10). As Habakkuk declared: “*You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong”.* God’s moral excellence is revealed most clearly in the person of the Jesus Christ who is the ‘*Holy and Righteous One*’ (Acts 3:14). As God’s Son, Jesus is supreme in His perfection, holy in His essential being and morally excellent in all that He does.

As adopted sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we are seen by Him as though we also are completely holy like Jesus. He declares us to be a ‘holy nation’ of saints, set apart ones. We are called to live as the people we are in Christ by proclaiming his majestic holiness in every aspect of our lives. The Heidelberg Catechism, A122 expresses it this way: “*Help us to direct all our living— what we think, say, and do— so that your name will never be blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised*”.

As we pray the words of the Lord’s Prayer, and we make the first request “Hallowed be your name” we are askingthat the majestic holiness of our God be regarded as holy, sacred, consecrated, greatly revered, honoured, respected, admired, blessed, venerated, worshipped. We are praising and worshipping God for His supreme perfection, His essential holiness and His moral excellence. We are expressing our desire that He direct us to live in such a way that our lives are reasons for others to honour and praise our Heavenly Father.

Jesus said of his disciples, including us brothers and sisters, "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:14-16).

How much this dark world needs the light of Christ. Will you then pray with me the first eight words of the Lord’s Prayer: "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*”?

AMEN