Hallowed Be Thy Name

On the Heart of Flesh, Righteousness Done in Secret, and the De-Escalating Kingdom

Rob Massie

Rob Massie Sermon Collection, Volume 3: The Upside-Down Kingdom, Chapter 3

Sermon preached February 18, 2024

Hallowed Be Thy Name

This morning I want to focus on a single line from the Lord's Prayer, the line we say so quickly that we sometimes forget it is the prayer's opening petition. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. And there is a whole lot behind the hallowing of God's name.

A community of faith is not meant to be an inward-focused, inward-looking body. Our whole purpose for being is so that we would have impact on the people we live and work with in the broader community around us. And the hallowing of God's name, making his name holy in the eyes of the surrounding world, is the work that purpose calls us to. Not principally a liturgical posture inside our four walls. A way of being in the world such that the people outside our four walls see something through us about the God we claim to serve, and recognize him as worthy of the reverence the prayer is asking for.

And the verse that has been stuck in my mind all morning is from *Ezekiel 36*. *Ezekiel was a wild prophet.* If I said half the stuff in this assembly that Ezekiel said, I would clear the room. *Some of his oracles cannot be translated into a children's Bible without serious editing, and the editing would gut what he was actually saying.* But there are times when that kind of direct prophetic speech is exactly what a people need. *It startles them awake.*

Shock to the System

And here is the situation Ezekiel was preaching into. He was writing to a people who had been carried away into exile. They had already been shocked. Let me make this concrete for a contemporary American audience. Imagine, hypothetically, just go with me here, that some foreign power actually managed to invade and conquer the United States. Imagine they came in, scattered the population, separated families, killed some of the men, and carried the rest away into exile into nations where you had no ability to communicate with one another again. Everything familiar to you as an American was somehow lost.

Think about the shock of being separated from family members. Watching some of your family members killed, and the rest carried off into exile in lands you have never seen. The parents you love. The children you depend on. The brothers and sisters who form the texture of your sense of who you are. That is what an earlier exposition this morning from Hebrews 10 was reminding us of, community is what gives us a grounding and helps us through difficult times. What happens when all of that gets scattered, and you no longer have it? You go into shock. The basic systems of survival and meaning-making collapse. You cannot get your bearings.

And Ezekiel had to use language strong enough to break through the shock. It is like the old cartoons where someone is losing their grip on reality, and another character slaps them two or three times to bring them back to themselves. Come to yourself, man. What's wrong with you? That is roughly what Ezekiel was doing prophetically. The exiles were so discombobulated by their circumstances; everything they had thought God was going to do for them was not happening, and they were in a totally different space than what God had promised them, that the prophet had to use shock-language to break through.

And the *diagnosis* Ezekiel delivers, in chapter 36, is precise:

> Therefore I poured out My fury on them for the blood they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it. So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds. When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name, when they said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.' (Ezekiel 36:18–20)

They profaned My holy name. That is the verdict. The exiles had failed to hallow God's name in front of the surrounding nations. Not just by their idolatry in Israel before the exile, but also by their continued unfaithfulness in the very nations they had been scattered into. The watching world looked at the supposed people of Yahweh and saw no Yahweh-like quality in them whatsoever. And God's name suffered for it.

Today's Idols

Now let me bring this into the contemporary moment, because Ezekiel's diagnosis is not principally an ancient-near-eastern problem. *The Israelites in Ezekiel's time had elevated the gods of the surrounding nations*: the gods of Egypt, the gods of Babylon, the gods of Assyria. *They had started making offerings to them. They had thought those gods were impressive.*

We do not think we have the same kind of gods today. But we actually do. I was struck by this watching a recent major sporting event. I love football. I watch the games. But look at the ceremony that has accumulated around it. Look at the religion that has built up inside the modern football game.

Patriotic flags. Military flyovers symbolic of the power of the United States. Songs of liberty and patriotism, sung with hand-over-heart reverence. Big, burly, powerful men literally crying on the sidelines at the singing of the national anthem. And let me be careful here. I love

this country. I think we ought to have loyalty and gratitude for the good things this nation has brought us. But this is a nation. It is not the God of the universe. It can provide certain levels of peace and safety. But it cannot provide what the God of heaven can provide. And when patriotic ceremony reaches the level of religious devotion, when grown men weep at a flag the way Israel was supposed to weep at the temple, something has been transferred from the place it belongs to a place it does not belong.

And then you mix that up with the gladiatorial element. Big, powerful men doing big, powerful things, fighting almost to the death. And we are stirred up. I almost bought a jersey of a player I had no rational reason to buy a jersey of, simply because the spectacle had stirred up something in me that wanted to belong to what I had been watching. That is why we need community. To call us off the ledge before we make the purchase.

And then beautiful people singing beautiful songs at halftime. Dancers and musicians and singers. All the trappings of religion. Everything calibrated to draw our attention toward something outside ourselves that is greater than us, drawing us away from the beauty and simplicity and quiet of a God who lives in secret. That is the diagnostic for the contemporary American idolatry. We worship the spectacle. We worship the nation. We worship the gladiators. We worship the ceremony. And every Sunday's church service has to compete with what every Sunday's stadium has been delivering on a vastly bigger budget and a vastly bigger stage. No wonder so many young people walk away from the church. They walk into a small wood-frame assembly hall on Sunday morning and find something quieter, smaller, less spectacular than what they were experiencing at the stadium the night before. And we have to be honest about what we are competing against. We are competing against a hyper-engineered religious experience that has been calibrated to capture exactly the kind of devotion God is asking for.

Why God Acts for His Own Name

And here is the line that captures everything Ezekiel is going to say next:

"But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went" (Ezekiel 36:21).

God's concern is for his holy name. And here is what is striking about the verses that follow. God does not, in Ezekiel 36, give Israel a ten-step program to recover their faithfulness. He does not give them a self-help manual. He does not tell them to try harder, study harder, do better. He announces that he himself is going to act unilaterally.

> Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord,' says the Lord God, 'when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.' (Ezekiel 36:22–23)

I will sanctify My great name. And the nations shall know that I am the Lord, when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. That is the whole reason for the renewal he is about to describe. Not for Israel's sake. For the sake of his own name, which the surrounding nations have been mishearing because of Israel's behavior. God is going to act so that the world sees him correctly. And what he does next is unilateral and gracious:

> Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I

> will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:25–27)

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes. And cause you. That phrase is the hinge. God is going to perform a unilateral surgery on the interior of his people, replacing the stone-hearted incapacity with a flesh-hearted responsiveness, and depositing his own Spirit as the internal force that causes the new heart to walk in his ways. This is not the people performing their way back into God's favor. This is God performing his way into the people. And the new walking, the new obedience, comes as a consequence of the divine surgery, not as a prerequisite for it.

And Paul picks up exactly this line in Ephesians 2:

> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Saved by grace through faith, not of works. We are his workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works. Which God prepared beforehand. The works come after the workmanship. Ezekiel 36 explains how it actually operates. God works in us, through his Spirit, to develop in us his character, so that we become a workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus for good works that he himself prepared beforehand for us to walk in. The works are real. But they are downstream of the unilateral divine action. And the whole arrangement turns on one thing, believing that the kingdom of God is run by a different set of principles than the kingdoms of this world.

Carry It Two Miles

And here is one place where the *different principles* show up concretely. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 5 about how the kingdom-citizen responds to coercive power:

> But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (Matthew 5:39–42)

Notice the three categories of power-encounter Jesus is naming. Verse 40, if anyone wants to sue you. Verse 41, if anyone forces you. Verse 42, if anyone asks of you. The first two situations are when somebody has power over you. The third is when you have something the asker does not. And Jesus is describing how the kingdom-citizen responds in both kinds of encounter.

When someone has power over you and forces you to go a mile, that is the situation of the conscripted civilian under Roman law. Under the angareia, the Roman legal provision allowed a Roman soldier to compel a bystander to carry his pack a measured distance: approximately one mile, a Roman milion. The civilian was legally required to comply for the one mile, and then the legal obligation expired. And Jesus is saying, when the legal mile is done, voluntarily go a second. Because in that second mile, you are testifying that you are not bound by the Roman soldier's kingdom. The first mile was conscription. The second mile is your own free act, performed out of the will of a different kingdom. And the soldier, who has been operating within the framework of his imperial authority, has no category for what is happening when the civilian keeps walking past the legal endpoint.

That is how you take power away from the powerful. Not by resisting force with force, but by serving them out of love and demonstrating, through your serving, that you are operating in a different kingdom whose principles their kingdom cannot reach. The same pattern applies to the lawsuit. When someone sues you for your tunic, give him your cloak as well. The power they thought they had over you through legal compulsion is dissolved by your voluntary giving beyond what the legal compulsion required. They cannot take from you what you have already given them.

And we have absorbed this teaching into ordinary English idiom. Go the extra mile. Now you usually hear it in the workplace. Hey, I'm going to need you to go the extra mile on this one. And the original kingdom-meaning has been lost to corporate-speak. But the substance Jesus was teaching is preserved underneath the idiom. The kingdom of God operates on a different set of principles than the kingdoms of this world. And when those principles get applied in concrete situations, they de-escalate violence, dissolve coercive power, and demonstrate to the surrounding world that another kingdom is operating in our midst.

Beware of Practicing Righteousness Before Men

Now we move into Matthew 6, which Jesus opens with a warning that organizes everything else he is about to say:

> Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (Matthew 6:1–2)

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. The kingdoms of this world are all about how you look before men. Not how you look before God. And Jesus is naming exactly that pattern as the corruption that the kingdom-citizen must avoid.

And here is where this gets interesting, because Matthew 5:16 had said almost the opposite:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works. So which is it? Are we to do works that men can see, or to do works hidden from men? The answer is in the direction the glory finally moves. Matthew 5:16 says: that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 6:1 warns: do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. The crucial difference is what we are doing the works for. Are we doing them so that we will be glorified, or so that the Father will be glorified? The same external act can issue from either intention. And the intention determines which kingdom the act belongs to.

The first-century world was duped by false piety in a way our world likes to think it has moved beyond. People in the first century knew exactly how to look just a little more humble than they actually were. How to speak with a slight quiver in the voice. How to disfigure the face during a fast so that everyone could see the fast happening without being told about it. How to time a public prayer for maximum visibility. That was the operating manual for the first-century pious-appearing person.

And we do not have that today. Except we do. Every social-media platform is calibrated to deliver exactly the same payoff that the first-century synagogue corner used to deliver. Look at what I did for my child. Look at the cause I am publicly aligned with this week. Look at the

colored profile-overlay I have adopted to signal my virtue. Look at the meal I cooked, the workout I completed, the spiritual practice I am undertaking. We virtue-signal continuously, and the platforms reward us with engagement-metrics that feel exactly like the synagogue-corner-acclaim used to feel. That is dangerous. It is dangerous to get caught into that cycle of virtue-signaling. And the Lord tells us how to get out of it, because the virtue-signaling cycle is just the classic righteousness-of-men pattern in contemporary clothing. The righteousness of humanity is, at root, virtue-signaling without substance.

Your Left Hand Should Not Know

> And here is the kingdom-pathway out of that cycle:
>
> But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. (Matthew 6:3–4)

Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. That is a beautiful and impossible-sounding image. How can one of your own hands keep a secret from the other? The point is in the impossibility. Your left hand and your right hand are part of the same body. They cannot, by definition, operate in mutually-secret fashion. The image is hyperbolic. Jesus is saying, keep your charitable deeds so internally hidden that even you barely register them. Do them so reflexively, so naturally, so without self-congratulation that you would have to be reminded later that you had done them at all.

And this connects directly to Matthew 25, the great sheep-and-goats judgment scene at the end of the age:

> Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry

> and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:34–40)

Lord, when did we see You hungry? The righteous in this scene do not remember their own acts of mercy. They cannot recall when they did them. The acts had been so reflexive, so deeply built into their kingdom-formed character, that they had not been keeping a ledger of them. Their right hand had been giving so naturally that their left hand could not produce an inventory. And the King, who had been keeping the ledger, brings them in to inherit the kingdom, and they are baffled by the verdict, because they had not been counting their own merits as the world had counted merit.

Contrast that with the self-righteous of Matthew 7:22:

> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:22–23)

Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not cast out demons in Your name? Did we not do many wonders in Your name? These are people with very long memories of their own religious accomplishments. They have been keeping a ledger. They have been counting

their religious works. They have been documenting their public displays of piety. And the verdict is; I never knew you. Because the works had been about them all along. About their visibility. About their religious standing. About the reputation their works had built. They had been operating in the kingdom of men, with their religious vocabulary borrowed from the kingdom of God. And the Lord, who reads the heart, names the underlying loyalty correctly.

And so the saint who has been a long while in the faith often says, I wish I had done more. I have not done enough. I have not transformed enough. Do you know why they say that? Because their acts of love have been done in secret, even from themselves. Inside their interior is a life of grace and goodness and blessing, and they do not even know it. They do not even know how much they have been feeding, clothing, visiting, comforting. Their right hand has been doing what their left hand does not register. And when they stand before God, they will say, I didn't think I did enough. How did I get here, O Lord? And God will say; I saw you on the job. I saw you with your children. I saw you with your grandchildren. I saw you in the small places where no human eye was watching, and I was watching. You did it to Me.

When You Pray

And Jesus continues the same pattern with prayer:

> And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matthew 6:5–6)

Go into your room. Shut the door. Pray to the Father who is in the secret place. The kingdom-citizen's prayer is calibrated for a single audience. The Father who sees in secret. Not

the synagogue. Not the street corner. Not the social-media platform where the prayer's existence can be advertised. The room with the door shut. Where only the Father is listening, because only the Father needs to hear.

And Jesus continues with a warning about *the manner* of prayer:

> And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. (Matthew 6:7–8)

Vain repetitions, as the heathen do. The Greek word translated vain repetitions (battalogeō) is itself an onomatopoeia, a word that sounds like the thing it describes. Bat-bat-bat-bat-bat. Like the Romans called the Germans barbarians because the German speech sounded like bar-bar-bar-bar-bar to Roman ears. The Greek word for vain repetitions sounds like what it is, the meaningless escalating syllabic repetition of pagan prayer-formulas. And the pagan logic underneath the repetition was that the gods had to be convinced. They had to be exhausted into compliance. The more times you said the formula, the more likely the deity would be to act.

I have appreciated, over the years, contemporary author Rob Bell's framing of this. Bell has noted that the ancient religions almost universally believed that the gods had to be placated through escalating sacrifice. If vegetables were not enough, you offered a chicken. If the chicken was not enough, you offered a goat. If the goat was not enough, you offered a bull. If the bull was not enough, you offered your firstborn child. And the entire religious psychology was built on the conviction that the gods needed to be appeased, escalated, exhausted into helping you. Bell has noted that this is precisely the religious logic the Hebrew prophets repudiated, and that Jesus's teaching in Matthew 6 places squarely in the rear-view mirror. The Father knows what you need before you ask. The escalating-sacrifice logic of pagan religion has been definitively

dismantled. I do not always agree with everything Rob Bell teaches, but on this particular framing I have found him substantively right.

The Father knows what you need before you ask him. That single line dismantles the entire pagan-religious psychology. Prayer is not the manipulation of an indifferent deity into reluctant action. Prayer is the conversation of a child with a Father who already knows. And the conversation matters not because the Father needs information he does not have, but because the child needs to be formed by the act of asking. The asking shapes the asker. The Father has already been positioned to give.

The Lord's Prayer

And then comes the model prayer itself:

> In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9–13)

Walk through this slowly. Our Father. Not my Father: our Father. Even in the secret room with the door shut, the prayer Jesus teaches is communal. It is the prayer of a community uttered in solitary chambers. Every individual believer praying alone is still praying as a member of the body whose corporate identity the prayer presupposes. That is significant. The kingdom is not a collection of disconnected individual relationships with God. It is a single community whose members each have access to the same Father, and whose prayers together form one woven offering.

Hallowed be Your name. Exactly the Ezekiel 36 vocabulary. The same word, the same petition. Sanctify, make holy, hallow. And the petition is that the surrounding world would come to see God's name as holy, through what God will do, partly through the lives of those who pray.

Your kingdom come. The rule of God in full display. And the kingdom was, in some real sense, right there with Jesus, beginning to be manifest in the present moment that the disciples were standing in. The kingdom is partly here. The fullness is coming. And we pray for the coming.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the place. This is all we have, in this present age: earth. And there is an atmosphere of heaven we are already in, partly. But the petition is that God's will would be done here as it is done there. The earth is where God means us to dwell and have dominion and reign and do what he has called us to do. The petition is not principally a request to escape earth and go to heaven. It is a request that heaven's will would be enacted on earth: that the gap between the two would be closed, gradually, in the direction of earth's transformation rather than earth's evacuation.

Give us this day our daily bread. That future world that is coming, with the fullness of bread that will be in it; let me eat of that today. That future. That age to come. Let me eat of it now. And this does not discount the natural bread. The natural bread is also in view. But there is something about bringing forward into the present age the bread that belongs to the age to come. The kingdom is partially future, partially present. The prayer asks that the partially-future kingdom's resources be deposited into the partially-present moment.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. The mutual forgiveness is built into the petition. We ask the Father to forgive us as we have already forgiven those who owe us. The conditional structure of the petition is not accidental. The petition is structured as a logical if-

then: if we forgive those who have sinned against us, then we are positioned to receive the Father's forgiveness of our sins. Hold that. We will come back to it.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. The Greek verb here (eisenenkēs) can be read as do not bring us into testing. And the petition makes more sense once you remember Matthew 4, where Jesus himself was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus knows what it is to be led into testing. The petition asks the Father to spare us, where possible, from the kind of testing that Jesus himself underwent, and, where the testing is unavoidable, to deliver us from the evil one whose work in the testing is to destroy.

Compare this to the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24–26).

Keep you. That is the same idea as deliver us from the evil one. The Father's keeping is the petition's substance. And the closing doxology, For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, returns the entire prayer to the Father's name and the Father's reign, which is where the prayer opened. Hallowed be Your name. Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. The whole prayer is bracketed by the doxological focus on God himself, with the petitions for daily bread and forgiveness and deliverance nestled inside the bracket.

Forgive as You Have Been Forgiven

And immediately after the prayer, Jesus circles back to the forgiveness petition:

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15).

If-then. If you forgive others, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. In computer programming, this is called an if-then statement. If this condition is true, then this action takes place. And Jesus is structuring the conditions of our reception of the Father's forgiveness around our extension of forgiveness to others.

This is the kingdom of God, and it is different from the kingdoms of men. The kingdoms of men have always operated on an escalation logic. The Hatfields and the McCoys. The Montagues and the Capulets. The blood-feuds that have defined every century of human history. You take my sheep, I shoot your bull. You shoot my bull, I kick your kid. And it escalates. That is the kingdom of men.

But the kingdom of God is a de-escalating kingdom. De-escalating violence. De-escalating offense. De-escalating the rightful claim. Someone hurt my cousin? Father, forgive them. Someone hurt my brother? Father, forgive them. That is how Jesus ends his own life, from the cross, with his final breath: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34). That is the kingdom-pattern at its full extension. And we are called to imitate it.

And Matthew 18 spends almost an entire chapter unpacking this same teaching through parable. The unforgiving servant who was forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents (an unimaginably large sum) and then refused to forgive a fellow servant a debt of one hundred denarii (a small sum), and was condemned by his master for his refusal (Matthew 18:21–35). That parable exists to illustrate exactly the if-then structure of the Lord's Prayer's forgiveness petition. The forgiveness that flows in, requires the forgiveness that flows out. The two are linked. We cannot receive what we will not extend.

When You Fast

Jesus then closes the section with the same pattern applied to fasting:

> Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matthew 6:16–18)

Anoint your head. Wash your face. Do not appear to men to be fasting. Same pattern. Same diagnostic. Same kingdom-pathway. Do your righteousness in secret, and the Father who sees in secret will reward you.

And when we do that, when we do righteousness in secret and do not care who gets the credit, something remarkable opens up. It has been said: It is amazing how much can get done if no one cares who gets the credit. And the kingdom of God will do remarkable things if we operate as people to whom nothing sticks. Teflon people. Everything gets redirected to the One who is the source, to the single act of grace that has set all things right through Jesus Christ. And the name behind that grace is the only name in heaven or earth by which we can be saved. The name Jesus means God saves. God's deliverance. Just as Joshua led Israel out of the wilderness and into the promised land, the second Joshua, Jesus, leads us into the fulfillment of every promise God ever made. The kingdom of God has been established in him. We do not yet see all things put under his feet. And that is exactly why we have all these commands about how to live as kingdom-people in the midst of non-kingdom people.

Fixtures of Piety

And let me say something pastorally important about the permanent position of piety that Jesus warns against. The hypocrites loved to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners. That is a permanent position of piety. And we cannot have fixtures of piety and authority in our churches the way the traditional model has often delivered them. Do we have gifts? Absolutely. But do we have fixed positions of permanent piety and authority? We should not. And the reason it is dangerous to have them is because of what the surrounding world's wisdom has already taught us: power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Give a person enough time in a fixed position, and they will come to think they deserve the authority they have been entrusted with. They will come to think the position belongs to them rather than to the kingdom they were appointed to serve. And the position will, slowly, begin to function as the very thing the kingdom warned against: a fixture of piety, drawing attention to itself, gathering reverence that was meant to go elsewhere.

I will be honest about my own struggle here. When I am done preaching, I sometimes find myself thinking, well, that was pretty good. Or, on a bad day, what did I even say? Was anything I said coherent? And in both cases, the underlying psychology is the same. What do they think about me? To be seen of men. To have the applause of mankind. We do not always realize what is in our hearts. Let us just be who God has called us to be, and let us slowly shed what does not belong. It takes a lifetime. And even at the end of our life, we will be saying, when did I? Have I done enough?

I Wish I Had Another Life to Give

When I was sixteen years old, an elderly saint in our assembly passed away. We called her Aunt Elvy. And one of the things Aunt Elvy used to say, repeatedly, in her last years, was, I

wish I had another life to give. I wish I had another life to give. Most of what was behind that refrain was the regret of not having done more. In her own mind, she had not done enough.

And that is the diagnostic for kingdom-formed character. The saint will always say; it is not enough. I did not do enough. I could have done more. That is the same line you hear from the protagonist at the end of Schindler's List, the man who saved over a thousand Jewish lives during the Holocaust by hiring them into his factory, and who at the end of the war grieves over the lives he could have saved if he had liquidated more of his property and bought more workers. Could I have taken just a little more from my manufacturing plant and saved one more person? That grief is exactly the grief that the kingdom-formed conscience produces. Not the satisfied tallying of accomplishments, but the perpetual recognition that more could have been done, that the field of need was wider than the contribution.

That is the character of God worked in us. He is constantly extending himself, despite us turning our hearts away from him over and over. And as his character is formed in us, we begin to wear his perpetual extension as our own posture. Did I do enough? I wish I had another life to give. I wish I could have reached one more person, fed one more hungry one, visited one more sick one, sat one more time with one more lonely one. That refrain is the signature of kingdom-formed character at the end of a life.

And God's response, to all of it, is what Ezekiel 36 promised. I will act for My holy name. I will wash you. I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you. And I will cause you to walk in My statutes. He keeps coming back. He keeps acting. He keeps washing away the impurities the long life has accumulated. He keeps writing his laws on the tables of our heart, even as we keep needing the writing to be redone in new places we had not previously

offered him. That is the God we serve. And the kingdom he is building. And the long arc of formation he is patiently working out in every life that has been given to him.

Take a Breath

And so, brothers and sisters, I want to land this chapter on a single pastoral word. Breathe. Take a breath in your faith. Are you not yet where you want to be? Take a breath. Be easy. There is a God in heaven who loves you like a child, loves you more than any earthly father could possibly love you. Every good gift is yours. He is going to lead you where you need to be led. He is going to give you the strength you need.

And I am telling myself this as much as I am telling you. Because I am looking at my own week ahead, and I literally have an interior trembling in my nerves that I cannot get control over. Have you ever had an interior trembling in your nerves that you simply cannot get on top of? That is where I am right now, as I am preaching this. When I look at everything coming this week. And what God is saying to me, and what he is saying to every one of us, is take a breath. Do what comes next. Be his child. Take a step tomorrow. And at the end of this journey, he will say: well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many. Enter into the joy of your Lord (cf. Matthew 25:21).

God is going to help us be who we need to be, when we need to be it. The heart of stone is being replaced. The heart of flesh is being installed. The Spirit is being deposited within us. And we are being caused, by a divine action we did not initiate and cannot fully comprehend, to walk in his ways, doing his judgments, hallowing his name before the watching nations, until the day when our hallowing of his name becomes the universal hallowing of all creation singing the song the angels have been singing since the foundation of the world. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. Amen.