

Honoring the Name
Exodus 20:1-2, Exodus 20:7
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Good morning Columbia Presbyterian Church, friends, and family. I hope you are enjoying this beautiful snowy Sunday morning in January. We are finally getting our first snowstorm in quite some time. I hope you are able to be with your families today either enjoying it from the inside or playing outside. I'm glad that you are able to join us, and I hope you don't mind a little bit of me making things up as I go this morning as I'm having to record this from my home.

This morning, we are in God's word together as we continue in this series as we look at God's law and consider the ways He wants us to live. This morning, we're looking at the third commandment, honoring the name of the Lord. Hear now God's word as it is given to us in Exodus 20:1-2 and verse 7.

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Pray with me this morning.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the beauty of this day. Father, we thank you for the ways in which you continue to demonstrate to us your beauty and creativity, the ways in which you've given us the wonderful changing seasons that remind us of your creative power. Father, we give you thanks and praise this morning for the ways in which you have displayed your wonderful works. Father, we ask that you would be present with us now as we consider your word. Lord, I pray you would help me in a very different environment to spend this time in your word with your people in a way that gives you honor and praise, that helps all of us grow deeper in what it means to walk in discipleship with you, with the Lord Jesus. Thank you for meeting us. We pray for the work of your Spirit. And I ask you as always, O Lord, help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Pastor Kevin DeYoung in his book on the Ten Commandments considers the ways in which we can remember that the moral law of God wasn't just meant for the Old Testament people of God for Israel, but it is a reflection of His eternal nature. It is a reflection of who He is. And it is God's purpose and God's desire that as we understand and enjoy His redemption and salvation, He has left us with the word to tell us how we ought to live. In considering the Ten Commandments, Pastor DeYoung says these things regarding the third commandment, "If we're honest though, when we come to the third commandment, we feel like we can let our guard down just a little. Watch what you say. Don't swear. Be careful with your OMG's. Got it. The third commandment feels less like a bedrock principle and more like a good reminder."

I think he's right. I think in many ways we consider the third commandment in our own minds, either in our memories or perhaps in our present, the way in which we would define, how do we apply this very commandment? Does it simply call into question my speech and how I use the name of God? Or is it much larger than that? As you might imagine, I would suggest that God's word clearly teaches us it is not just a good reminder. It is in fact a call and a reminder of the bedrock principle of the name of the Lord Himself.

This morning as we look at this together briefly, I want you to consider two questions. First, why is the name of the Lord so important? Secondly, what does it mean to take the Lord's name in vain? Why is the name of the Lord so important? What does it mean to take the Lord's name in vain?

When God speaks through His servant Moses here in Exodus 20, He is declaring even as He states these things why His name is so important. First, it is a declaration of who He is. Consider just what I've

read already. "And God spoke these words, saying, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'" So we hear just in those words that He's saying I Am, meaning I am exalted. I am sovereign. I have providential power over all things. He's not one among many gods. He's not one to be compared to others who would vie for that moniker. He is.

And He also says that not only is He God, but He suggests that His very name speaks to who He is and what He has done when He says I have "brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." To ask the question why the name of the Lord is so important, it is to first establish it says who He is. He is God. It encompasses His entire being, not just a name. It's not just something that can be scribbled on a piece of paper or something uttered with our mouths. It represents His very character and His being. We can take all of the attributes of God, every single one of them, all of His promises, all of His actions fit within the name. And so to speak the name, to act in the name is to invoke all that He is.

It's important for us to remember this, of course, because the scriptures testify and declare this very truth. Consider Psalm 8:1, "O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens." There again, the name refers to His character. Psalm 29, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness." We give God honor by offering Him worship that is holy because He has told us who He is and how we are to approach Him. Consider the words of Jesus as He instructs us how we ought to pray. "Pray then like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." The very Son of God who acted and did the work of the Lord demonstrated not only His divinity but demonstrate that He, too, bore the name, that the name of Jesus is the same thing as we consider the name God.

We know this because of what we learn in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." And that is the name of Jesus, again, declaring who He is but also what He has done. Consider the words of Paul when he declares in Romans 10:13, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." There, Paul makes the connection for us. It isn't just for the Old Testament people of God as they considered the name of Yahweh, but also His character and also His servant in the way He has revealed Himself in His Son Jesus who, as Paul declares, is "Jesus Christ the Lord," and to acknowledge Him as such and to utter Him as such is to be to the glory of God the Father.

So why is the name of the Lord so important? It is because it declares who He is. But as I've said, it also declares what He has done. He is the Lord of redemption, mercy, and grace. By that name, He has done great things even as we understand the new covenant and the work of Jesus that He was given the name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins. The name of the Lord is of utmost importance because embedded in it is His character and His actions. And it is exactly what He has told us to do. He has told us in just a small sampling of scriptures why His name is so important. It is because He has said His name is important. "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name."

Therefore, if this is why the name of the Lord is so important, then secondly, what does it mean to take the Lord's name in vain? As a Presbyterian and confessional church, we have with us and for us our confessions, our creeds, our catechisms. Catechisms are the mechanism whereby we use question and answer to teach the nature of who God is and His word and theology. We have for us the Westminster Larger Catechism which is one of the catechisms of our church. In teaching on the third commandment, it says,

"What is required of the third commandment? The third commandment requires that the name of God, his titles, his attributes, the ordinances, the word, the sacraments, prayers, oaths, vows, lots, his works, and whatsoever else is whereby he makes himself known be holy and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing by a holy profession, answerable

conversation to the glory of God and the good news of ourselves and others. The sins forbidden in the third commandment are not using God's name as required, abusing it because we are ignorant of it, using it in a vain or irreverent or profane or superstitious or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using his titles, attributes, ordinances, or works, by blasphemy, perjury, and all sinful cursings."

And it goes in a much longer list, but it is very clear that there are many ways in which we can take the Lord's name in vain.

For us to understand it in a language that we can understand in the present, I believe the catechism teaches as the word teaches that to take the Lord's name in vain, first, we must be careful not to ever use His name in a vulgar or a flippant way. Perhaps this is the way we have understood the third commandment. The vulgar way is obviously using His name or His attributes in a way that would use language which we call cursing. Now, cursing in the Bible is different from the cursing that we understand in modern day Western English. But the same holds true that if we take the attributes of God and the name of God and tie it to the use of language which we call cursing is itself a vulgar use of the name, a way of taking the Lord's name in vain.

To a lesser degree, we also can find ourselves using His name in a flippant way. One of the ways I learned early on walking with the Lord is the way in which I was using His name in prayer even as I was seeking to learn how to pray. I was taught by those who discipled me that it's even possible to flippantly use the name of the Lord if we are carelessly using His name as a comma or a period in our prayers, meaning using His name as we pray to kind of just fill in the blanks and not really knowing what we're saying. So it's a caution to be careful in how we use the name even as we pray. Using it in a vulgar or a flippant way is certainly what I would call the doorway of understanding how we can take the name of the Lord in vain.

But more than that, it is of greater importance when we consider that we take the Lord's name in vain when we use the name by trying to use a presumptive authority. What do I mean? Dr. Phil Ryken, president of Wheaton College, wrote this several years ago.

"A more serious way of breaking the third commandment is by using God's name to advance our own agenda. And some Christians say, 'The Lord told me to do this.' Or worse, they say, 'The Lord told me to tell you to do this.' This is a false prophecy. God has already said whatever He needs to say to us in His word. Of course there is also an inward leaning of the Holy Spirit, but this is only an inward leaning, and it should not be misrepresented as an authoritative word from God."

I want to use an absurd statement that once was given to me many years ago when I was a church planter. A man who had visited our church felt that he needed to come and tell me a word that was important for me. And that word, he said, "The Lord told me to tell you that you need to have more children." Now, that's an absurd statement in and of itself. But it's interesting that this person felt that he had heard some voice from the Lord to tell him to tell me that we should have more children. I stopped him. I said with no malice, "I have no idea what you're talking about. You're not speaking in the authority or the name of the Lord. And I suggest you go and be quiet for just a little while because the Lord has not told me that, and He certainly has not told my wife that."

But I hear this all the time. Christians will say, well, the Lord told me this. And the question is how do you know? How do I know? What is an objective standard by which we understand how God communicates to us? We have only one, and that is the word of the Lord. We must be very cautious of the ways we seek to presumptively use God's name and God's speaking or leading to us as if we can then use that to achieve our own agenda.

Again, I would consider these ways. When we claim divine authority from our own human plans, or we claim divine authority for our own human decisions or even our opinions, we violate the third commandment because we are seeking to elevate our own desires by leveraging God's name which is holy and unique for authority to boost ourselves. And as Kevin DeYoung says, in doing so, "We are manipulating others, and we're seeking to manipulate God for our own selfish ends."

We must be careful when there is something that we feel so passionately about and claim that we can then attach God's name to it and then go out and have others hear us as if God is speaking. God has spoken, and He has given us His word. Therefore, we must be very careful that we do not take His name in vain by presumptively using that name for our own agenda, our own decisions, or our own opinions.

Finally, I would have us consider this. The final way in which I want us to consider the ways in which we might take the Lord's name in vain is this. It's living the name. It isn't just using His name in a vulgar or flippant way or even presuming upon His name because we desire to pump up our own weakness and look for authority for our own agenda. Most importantly above all, it is living the name, how we live as those who claim the name, who bear the name and carry it with us. In our life and words, in our decisions, in all that we do, we are bearing the name.

This is what we hear the word of God tell us as God instructs His people in Ezekiel 36.

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like unclean actions. So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of his land.' But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came." [ESV]

This is God speaking through His prophet Ezekiel saying to His people, the way in which you're living among the nations, your actions, your thoughts, your words, and your doings, these things are a reflection of my name because you bear my name.

More than that, we consider this when Jesus taught to those who would claim Him as Lord in Matthew 7:21. Jesus says,

"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" [ESV]

Here, Jesus directs His attention to those who would use the name, even to do things in the Lord's name, but whose lives demonstrated not trust and faith in His redemption or in His righteousness, but rather in their actions or their words. They were using the name and yet living in completely different ways. Yes, "Lord, Lord," but their lives demonstrated trust in themselves and not trust in Him.

Consider the words of Peter when he writes in his letter of 1 Peter 2:11,

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they

may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. [ESV]

Here, Peter is writing that the lives we live by bearing the name of Jesus, if you are a believer, matter as we live out into the world. In so doing, the way in which we live will invite the world either to see the glory, the majesty, the beauty of His character, and they will seek to honor the name of the Lord, or it may lead them astray to not see Him at all. And maybe all they see is our hypocrisy, or they may only see us and our opinions.

It's a very humbling reality, is it not, when we see that taking the Lord's name in vain is far more than the way in which we use our words? It covers our actions, our thoughts, our typing. It's a wonderful reminder that if we call on the name of Jesus who is given the name that itself points to His redemptive power on the cross, His redemptive power in His resurrection, His redemptive power that would bring into existence the called-out ones, the church, the body of Christ, that the body of Christ corporately and individually bear this name that we go out in our actions and in our words. Whether it is into the streets, in the marketplace, or on social media, we bear the name.

How do we treat others who are different than us, who believe different than us? How do we respond to those who disagree with us? Even in the house of God, how do we treat one another when we disagree? Do we treat one another as those who bear the name, or do we treat one another as enemies? Let us be careful by God's Spirit guided by His word and enveloped by the power of His name remember that as we bear the name, we live the name. Let us move towards one another in humility and honor within the house of God to love one another, and by that love, the world will know that He is true as He prayed in John 17.

More than that, as we go out into the world, we live out that name before the nations, not for our glory but for His. What is beautiful is Jesus said to even love our enemies. Even the way we respond to those who are our enemies is a declaration of His name. And as a people who would call on His name, let us remember while we were yet sinners, while we were yet His enemies, Christ died for us that we might have life.

Therefore, as we move out into the world, brother or sister in Christ, neighbor or colleague, or even someone who would consider us an enemy, or someone whom you would consider an enemy, how can we bear the name to the glory of His name, to the honor of His name that we might show forth the love of God in Christ. May the Lord do this today. May the Holy Spirit tame our tongues, shape our hearts, and change our actions that we in our living, our doing, and our speaking would honor the name. Pray with me.

Father, we thank you for this morning. We again thank you for the beauty of this day. Thank you, Father, that we've been able to spend a few moments in your word. I pray that we would be able to relish and rest in the name of the Lord our God, that that would be our hope, our conviction, our strength, our power, and our rest. And out of that rest, in the name of the Lord, may we would go forth in a way that glorifies and honors you. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.