

A God who Speaks: The Third Commandment

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 July 2006

Preacher: Desiree Stedman

[0:00] You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for he will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. The third commandment. We are following them week by week throughout the summer.

Take off your shoes, your standing on holy ground, God said to Moses at the burning bush. God then informed Moses that it was he who had been chosen to go back to Egypt and to speak to Pharaoh about taking the Israelite slaves out of Egypt into the promised land.

Moses had fled Egypt 40 years before, and his first task was to go to Pharaoh and to confront him on behalf of his own people.

Moses is stunned by the request and asks God to tell him his name so that he, Moses, can verify it with his people when he goes back to Egypt and prove to the Israelites who God is.

So God reveals for the first time his name to Moses. I am who I am. The closest we can come to the actual Hebrew is the word Yahweh, the verb to be.

[1:29] God's name is the embodiment of beingness. He is the one from whom all beingness flows. Everything else from galaxies and interstellar space to microorganisms and subatomic particles derive their existence from him.

His name speaks of his utter transcendence. In himself, he is beyond all attributes of language and beyond any defining description.

He is holy and his name is holy. The children of Israel did not speak his name for fear of inadvertently blaspheming.

And so they had many substitutes for God's name, such as Adonai, which means Lord. Elohim, which means God.

Hashem, which means the name. These alternative means of referring to God and addressing him meant that the number of occasions on which the name would be uttered would be reduced.

[2:39] And uttering God's name was offensive enough, but to swear by it falsely was worthy of extreme punishment. There's an incident recounted in Leviticus 24 where a young man is overheard blaspheming.

The man is put into custody until Moses goes by himself to consult God. God's instruction was to take the young man outside the camp, and those who had heard him blaspheme were to stone him to death.

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

For all the many faults of the Jews at this juncture in their history, they did understand the holy and the sacred. They understood what it meant to be in fear and awe and to have profound respect for the living God.

Concepts we have totally lost in our modern Canadian society. I was reminded of this this morning when on my way here, I happened to stop by Tim Hortons, and a young man was coming in as I was leaving, and he looked at me and he said, Oh my God, it's Sunday.

[4:05] I suppose it was the clerical caller. I have no idea. Nor do I know what it meant for him. He said, I totally forgot. So, we leap a thousand years or more to the announcement of the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah prophesied that he would be called the son of the most high God. He shall be holy and shall be called wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the prince of peace, and of his kingdom.

There will be no end. In these words, the birth of the Messiah, the one who is to become the savior of the world, is foretold.

The son of the most high God is to have a name, and it is to be Jesus, a derivative of the name Joshua, which means God saves.

This is a fairly impressive list of titles and names to give a newborn. One who lies in bed as weak and helpless and dependent as any human being ever.

[5 : 12] But this is no ordinary infant, and his task which lies ahead of him is no ordinary task. And so kings and shepherds alike kneel before him, and he is given the name, which we will learn later is the greatest of all the names.

How does Jesus deal with the third commandment during his time on earth? He honors it, and he strengthens it.

He honors God the Father by being in harmony and unity with him, always setting his own preferences aside and yielding to the wishes of his Father.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before the crucifixion, when Jesus prays that the suffering of the cross might be removed from him, but immediately yields with the words, Not my will, but thy will be done.

He honors his Father by strengthening, not weakening the commandments. So, for example, Jesus says in Matthew 5, Again you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths that you have made to the Lord.

[6 : 37] But I tell you not to swear at all, either by earth or heaven, for it is God's throne, or by the earth, for it is his footstool.

Simply let your yes be yes, and your no be no. This is just an example of one commandment being strengthened. But overall, Jesus adds weight to the importance of the commandments, and the necessity to adhere to them always, when he says in Matthew 5, Do you think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets?

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.

Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. There are three distinct ways in which we can bring dishonor to the name of the Lord our God.

One is through breaking an oath. Our courts of law still produce a Bible for the majority of citizens, upon which a hand must be placed, and the individual must say, I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

[8 : 14] Jonathan Aiken was a distinguished journalist and politician in the United Kingdom. He is in fact the son of Lord Beaverbrook, Max Aiken of Canadian notoriety.

He had been a backbencher in the parliament for 18 years and then became a member of the Privy Council, which is a much higher privilege than it is in Canada.

He was given, eventually, a cabinet post. He brought a libel suit against the Guardian newspaper for defamation of character when the newspaper publicly accused him of selling arms to Arab nations in the Middle East.

Included in the accusations made by the newspaper about him was that a particular Arab prince, with whom Aiken was friendly, had paid his bill in a hotel when both of them were visiting some European city, thus demonstrating publicly that Aiken was very close and under the influence of Arabs.

In fact, this accusation was true. But Aiken perjured himself on this one and very minor point.

[9 : 34] The hotel bill had amounted to just under \$1,000. The truth emerged about his perjury just toward the end of the trial and the whole case collapsed in a heap of disgrace, family bankruptcy, and finally a prison sentence.

The libel suit was valid, and Aiken ought to have won the case. But because of his mockery of his oath and subsequent perjury on one small point, everything ended in a very public humiliation.

The Aiken case in the United Kingdom is more recent, but it is a real parallel to that of Charles Colson at the time of Watergate in the United States.

And Aiken, like Colson, came to saving faith in Jesus Christ as a result of this experience. His autobiography is tellingly entitled *Pride and Perjury*.

As Christians, when we swear officially or unofficially to do something or to tell the truth, we must always follow through.

[10:49] It is as simple as that. We need no human witnesses to verify our intention, for God knows our hearts. When we swear an oath, we do so with God as our witness.

And when we fail to keep that oath, God is still the witness. The second way in which we can dishonor God's name is to use it as a curse or a swear word.

Let me ask you a question. When was the last time you heard anyone curse using the name of Muhammad or Allah or Buddha or any one of the millions of Hindu gods?

My guess is you haven't. And I want to look at why. In Philippians chapter 2, Paul includes a hymn that was well known to the early church.

It may have functioned a little like our creed does today as a succinct statement of faith. It is pure poetry. It lists all that Jesus did by setting aside his glory and coming to earth in humility to the point of dying on the cross for us.

[12:05] It then says that he has been given the highest place in heaven and the name that is above all names so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

So, there is real and unique power in the name of Jesus to which no other god spelled with a small g or prophet comes close.

That is why it is the most common curse. People who use it profanely haven't a clue what they are doing or saying. You hear the name of Jesus being used everywhere by everyone today.

It is horrible to listen to it. And whenever we are presented with it, we ought to speak up and ask people not to do it. Our request will probably not have any effect, but it might make them think about what they are saying.

The use of the name of the Lord in vain ought to offend us. If it does not, we have to ask why. And then there are the derivatives.

[13:24] This is where you and I are much more likely to fall down or trip up. Jeepers Creepers, Gee Whiz, G's, Cripes, Jiminy Cricket, which I have heard some children say, all used in the context of swearing means more than what people think.

And of course, there are many, many more. The thing is this. If we love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and if he is first in our lives in every possible way, then there's little or no chance that we can take his name in vain.

The third way of taking the name of the Lord in vain is through empty use of the name of God in the course of everyday language. Now, this is not cursing.

In this instant, it is spoken more as an exclamation point. Quite possibly, this is the one that was originally meant by vain.

So, your sentence will run, oh God, no, I have to go to the shop again. Seems very innocent, but it isn't. Another is to alter the name of God as he is revealed to us.

[14:48] The newspapers reported that the new presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States prayed upon her election in gratitude to Jesus, our mother.

This is not only sacrilege, it is shattering God's third commandment. You can't do this to someone you love. If I tell you my name is Desiree, then that is what it is.

If you call me Jane and I don't respond to you, it's not because I don't want to, it's because I didn't recognize the fact you were speaking to me.

So, we must not do that to the Father, nor to the Son, nor to the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught us that when we pray, we are to say, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Hallowed means holy. We must hallow his name in word and deed. May God grant us the grace to do so. Amen.

[15:58] Amen.

Amen. Amen.