

Don't take the Lord's name in vain

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[0 : 00] Father, you are holy and your name is holy. And as we are here gathered this morning, Lord, would you give us a deeper awareness, a deeper sense of your holiness and how your name is set apart. Lord, would you be glorified in this time where we hear your word. And as your word is read and goes forth, Father, would you allow your word to be planted as a seed to bear much fruit. In Jesus' name, amen.

One of my most vivid memories of being in kindergarten was when some of my friends and I got into a fight. And it wasn't like we weren't fighting like that, but we were fighting with our words. And this looked like saying to one another, my dad can beat up your dad. And then the other kid would go, no, my dad is stronger than your dad. He can take your dad down.

And we go back and forth for quite a while. And what was happening there is that for the first time in our lives, we realized that we are not the most important person in the world.

There are other very, very important people in this world. And because we grew up in the house, you know, growing up and we're nurtured and we're loved by our parents. And we finally arrived to the conclusion when we get to school that these people as well got loved by the, received love from their parents and so forth. And so in feeling this threat that we're not the most important person in the world, we try to call the strong arm, the strong man to take down what is threatening us, what is causing this fear in our life. And so in preparing this sermon, I was wondering, is this how we are treating God? Is that how we relate to God? Is he the strong arm that's going to come and defeat what threatens our preference, our image of the good life?

So if you can turn to your Bibles, we'll look at Deuteronomy chapter 5. And we're going to look just through the beginning of the Ten Commandments and going all the way down to the Third Commandment. So starting in verse 6 in chapter 5.

[2 : 14] It says, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

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. So here we are in a series where we're looking at the Ten Commandments.

We've gone through the First Commandment, which talks about the importance of God in our lives. It talks about now that we're in this relationship with God. God has saved these people from Egypt. He saved them from slavery to himself. He saved them from slavery to freedom.

And now, in order to preserve that freedom of what it really means to be human, it means to have this relationship with God. God is the most important in our life. We direct our lives through this compass, which is the reality that God is the God of all creation, and he's the God who loves us and who has saved us. And so that's the First Commandment.

Second Commandment, now we need to have a right perception of God. We don't create our own image of God. We don't create God in our likeness. God has created us in his likeness. And so we want to preserve his essence. God is a God who is transcendent and cannot be contained. And now we're at the Third Commandment today, which talks about God's name, taking God's name in vain.

[4 : 06] And I think what we're going to look at is that if we're going to take God's name in vain, his identity is what is not necessarily at stake, but that's what we're looking at here when we're thinking of God's name. So in the context of a relationship, we see here that Israel has a new relationship with God. God is their God. They are his people. And so they're taking on a new name.

The God of Israel is saving them, and he's sharing his identity with them. Just yesterday, I went to a wedding. My cousin got married, and it was very exciting. Great ceremony and everything. We had a wonderful time. And what happened there is they came together. They decided to come together in a covenant that will last until their death. And that means that their old relationships, like their families, their immediate families with their parents, those are not the sources of their identity anymore. They're coming together to form a new identity.

Okay, so this is very similar to the image here of Israel and God, is that they're coming together to form a new identity. And in the structure of relationship, God is the king. God is the creator of all things, and he created humanity in his image. So they are the ones who are going to reflect God's character.

Another example of that is just a few years ago, I moved to Montreal to do my undergraduate studies in music. And the students, we loved to just, you know, explore the city a bit. It was a very lively city.

And part of being a Montrealer is that you love the Montreal Canadiens. And I found myself loving the Montreal Canadiens and just kind of being part of the crowd and everything, right?

[5 : 53] And a lot of my friends, because it's an international school, we had a lot of American friends who came, and they've never watched hockey in their lives. But all of a sudden, they start coming out to the place where people watch hockey games. And we enjoyed the hockey games together.

And they started liking hockey and started liking the Montreal Canadiens, because that's what it's like to be a Montrealer. You like the Canadians. And so in that sense as well, we kind of enter into this tribe or this family, any type of group of people to share an identity with.

And now Israel, they're coming together under God and sharing His identity and becoming more like Him. So this commandment is talking about not taking the Lord's name in vain.

So I'll just read it again in verse 11. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. And what it's talking about here in vain? It's talking about just emptiness or futility.

We're reducing God's name to something that it's not. Or even so, we're talking about God in a way that doesn't reflect His reputation.

[7 : 08] And so not taking it in vain is not really about how we understand in vain, how we understand futility, or how we understand a bad reputation. It's starting at God's reputation.

We're starting with God's holiness and God's intentions, God's will in life. So a good example that we see in the Bible is found in Leviticus. I'm not going to read it.

It's very short. It's talking about making oaths. When people come together in the courts and they want to find out what's true. Did this person actually kill so-and-so?

And somebody would, if they want this person to be found guilty, they might use the Lord's name in vain and saying, I swear to the Lord, I'm telling the truth, and then say, this person is guilty.

Okay, so that's taking the Lord's name in vain. But there's also other examples. And just to see maybe a positive example of taking the Lord in an oath is found in Joshua.

[8 : 09] So I'm going to turn to Joshua just for a second. If you have your Bibles, you can turn there as well. It's in Joshua chapter 2. And we'll look in verse 8.

So here the Israelites are coming to the land. They're coming to Jericho. And they're about to take possession of Jericho. And so they enter into this house where there is Rahab, the prostitute.

And Rahab is asking them to have mercy on her and her family. So here we are, verse 8. Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to them, I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you have devoted to destruction.

And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

[9 : 25] Now then, and here it is, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters.

So just here we have a picture of Rahab. In the culture, she doesn't have much standing. She is a prostitute, and therefore she has no way to protect herself.

And so she's calling on the Lord of the Israelites, the God who cleared the waters from Egypt. Egypt was the most powerful nation at the time, and so she's calling on them because she knows that the Lord is powerful.

She mentioned how she knows the testimonies of the Lord and how he devoted to destruction of the other kings. And so her people and herself, they were afraid, they were frightened, because God is a powerful God.

So here's the first point, if we can have that on the slide. By faith, I enter a relationship with God and humbly share in his identity.

[10 : 38] So, so far, we've seen that when we see God's testimonies, when we see that God is a powerful God, he is a God who is safe, and so we come to him in relationship by faith and humbly share his identity.

This is the next step. When we come by faith, we come to share his identity. So some of you are guests here, and so you don't know really who I am. My name is Jonathan.

My last name is Kamiri. Growing up, I got to understand that there are certain expectations in the family that are kind of passed down that Kamiri men should look in such a way.

It wasn't necessarily taught, but it's something that I can observe. So Kamiri men are men who are skillful workers. They work with their hands. They provide for their families. They respect the elderly, and so on and so forth.

They take care of their families, and so this is what I got to see modeled in my family. And so it was expected that I would somehow look like a Kamiri when I would grow up, and I would share in those matters and share in those values.

[11 : 46] And so we see so far in the picture of Jericho and of the Exodus that God is a merciful God who rescues a people who are in slavery.

He's gracious to them. He's abounding in steadfast love. And so his people are to extend that to the world. And so when the Israelites went to Rahab's house, and she asked that she would be protected, they protected her, and they preserved her life and her family.

And so the big picture here is that for Christians, as we are in covenant with Jesus, we are ambassadors for his name. Our allegiance is to Christ.

So let's go back to this commandment, and let's just look at something that I find fairly interesting. So in verse 6, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the houses of slavery.

These Ten Commandments are addressing the people of God. They're addressing Israel. When we think of not taking the Lord's name in vain, we can often think, well, maybe it's like swearing, saying OMG or saying a bad word, and we think of other people, unless you're someone who uses bad words.

[13 : 03] That's between you and God. But we might think it's out there. It's something that happens out there, but it doesn't really happen here. But the commandment is talking to the people of God.

And there's a way that the people of God might use his name in vain. So, why is God talking to his people and asking them to not take his name in vain?

Let's look at our second point for today, Andrew. In my pride, I enter a relationship with God to have my wishes and desires granted.

Now, this is a bit... What's the right word? I'm sarcastic. So, this is really the hidden parts of our hearts.

If you're like me, if you're wicked like me, your prayers usually resemble, God, do this for me. God, do that for me. And we always start like that. And I always catch myself, like, what am I doing?

[14 : 05] God is a holy God. God is a God who is more than just my genie. He's not a genie. God loves to have our requests and have us ask him for things.

But he's much more than that. And so, in our pride, in my pride, I enter a relationship with God to have my wishes and desires granted. Now, I might offend some of you here.

I apologize if Psalm 20, verse 4, is your life verse. Because it's likely taken out of context. It goes like this. May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.

So, does this mean that, you know, I want to have this mansion or I want to have this beautiful car or a trophy wife or whatnot? Does this mean that if I pray to God for those things, he will give them to us because we desire them?

Well, actually, this verse is in the context of a holy war. And it comes after, may the Lord receive your sacrifices. And so, it's talking about the messianic victory over sin and death.

[15 : 14] And so, we have to be careful when we look at verses like these that we don't come to God as one who will be our servant, one who will be our genie, who will do everything that we ask him to do.

And so, I think the big picture here is that the problem of using God's name in vain is to associate him with purposes and powers that are inconsistent with his identity and his will.

So, why does God not hold him guiltless who uses his name in vain? This is what the commandment says. And it might make us feel uncomfortable. Like, aren't we like the people of God? And aren't we, you know, really cherished and loved?

And yes, those are true. And there's also this word here. So, let's look again. Verse 11. He 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.

So, why does the Lord not hold him guiltless who uses his name in vain? Well, there's something special about God's name. There's something very special about it. When my parents named me Jonathan, or they were going to name me Jonathan, my oldest brother said, by no means, don't call him Jonathan.

[16 : 28] And they were like, why not? And he was like, because he reminds me of this weasel kid at school who just bothers me so much. Can't stand him. Don't call him Jonathan. And so, for him, the name Jonathan was so associated with the reputation of this kid from school.

And so, even so, when I think of the name of, say, George, you think of George, you think of the way he laughs and the way he preaches and he goes to Starbucks.

You have all these images that come to mind. And so, when we're thinking of God's name, we're thinking of his reputation, his fame. When Moses went to the burning bush in the cave, he received God's revelation of his name.

God said, I am that I am. Now, that might not mean anything unless you're a philosopher, but what that means is that I am that I am means that he is self-sufficient.

God is self-existent. And that is who God is in his essence, his identity. He does not need anyone. He does not need to be fed or does not need to be clothed to stay warm.

[17 : 38] God is self-existent, self-sufficient. And when Israel would think of Yahweh, the name of God given in the covenant, they would think of the Passover and of the Exodus and how God brought the ten plagues and how he made a covenant with them at Sinai.

And now, when we think of Jesus in our culture, we think of a bad word. If you're going to hear Jesus on the bus, you think, oh, someone's angry or something bad happened somewhere.

And so, we think of Jesus and we associate it badly. But the reality is that when we think of the real name of Jesus is in Hebrew, Yeshua, which means God is our Savior, God is salvation.

salvation. So, as Christians, we're entrusted with that message, that name, that God is salvation, that there's hope in Jesus.

And so, we are expected to resemble Jesus and we're expected to reflect his morals because we're the ones who represent him on earth in all the spheres of our lives. Whether we're at school or at work or at home, everywhere, we're supposed to carry that name of Jesus.

[18 : 49] When we come into that relationship, he seals us with the Holy Spirit, writes his name on us and so now we are his. And we have this mission that we're supposed to create that reputation for him.

So, so far we've talked about a lot of things that the commandment covers but we haven't really talked about the elephant in the room. We talked a little bit about it but you might be wondering when is he going to talk about swearing and saying bad words.

There has to be something connected, something related with the third commandment. Well, let me talk just a bit about when people say oh God or oh my God or Jesus in associating with something bad.

I'll just talk briefly about that. It's kind of similar to when we say thank goodness. It's kind of like that we're not affiliated with Jesus or God but we're thankful to something that's greater than us because we have in us a sense a real deep sense that there is a God who is greater than us and so we just say thank goodness even if there's no one at the end of our thankfulness to receive that thankfulness and so when we say things like OMG or we slur God's name in such a way we show that we subconsciously believe in God's existence to blame him for bad things yet we suppress his existence when good things happen it's very rare that we'll hear someone say or use God's name badly when something bad happens but when something good happens sorry I might have said that wrong okay it's very rare that we'll hear somebody say

God's name badly and then also say and thank God when things happen well okay so it's either you believe that God exists and you stop blaming him for the bad things or you believe that he does exist and you start thanking him for the good things here's the third point it's easy to blame God when bad things happen and uncomfortable to thank God when good things happen the Bible tells us that worship is marked by thanksgiving when we thank God and so here's the question is thankfulness to God part of your life see when we look at a commandment like this it's talking about not taking the Lord's name in vain there's also a positive implication so that's kind of like a negative implication but if we kind of flip it around are you using God's name to bless are you using God's name to encourage because there's still power in the name right so are we able to speak God's name in a way that builds up people that provides hope in the midst of despair now just in a bit of an aside here because we're talking about speech and using God's name we should talk about speech in general just for a moment

[21 : 51] I think that we should consider repenting for pessimism and unfounded optimism I think those are two things that are marking us a lot that when we carry God's name that if we're overly pessimistic and optimistic in a way that's unfounded in reality it's not bearing witness we need to be realistic yet hopeful I think that's where the tension is it's not being pessimistic or optimistic or both it's being realistic about the events of life and being hopeful at the same time so what does realistic yet hopeful look like where do we start the fourth slide please the name of Jesus is above every name in heaven and on earth he subdued the old creation to make all things new this is where the rubber hits the road God has revealed himself and he's revealed himself in Jesus his son that he sent for us and when

Jesus lived the perfect life he fulfilled all the commandments and Jesus was crucified on the cross and when the cross came and Jesus was crucified on the cross he split time in two there was the old order of things where things were going towards curse and sin and destruction and decay and the cross came and he broke that flow of history and brought in a new creation so that when we think of Jesus we think that Jesus is the name above all names he's the name that God has given him the name that is exalted above every name so that every knee should bow at the end and confess that he is the Lord to the glory of God the Father and that is the end of history that's what it's going to look like and so for us as Christians as we bear the name of Jesus we bear the significance of the Messiah which means new creation which means hope and so this is why I am pleading with you we are the witnesses of Christ we bear his name in our workplace in our homes in school and so to be a

Christian is to live out in humility before God is to be a people is to be the people of salvation the people of forgiveness the people of love of mercy of new creation as ambassadors for Christ this is the name that we are articulating to people in the way that we act we are articulating it or explaining it to people what it means to be a Christian as Christians we are those of Christ that's what Christians mean so this is the call to be a Christian and so as Christians do we properly carry the name of Christ to his glory let's pray father you've given your son the name that is above all names and lord you call us to relationship with you you call us to love you into a covenant where you bestow to us that name of Jesus that we are Christians now and lord help us each day to reflect the image of Christ to bear his reputation to create this reputation in those who don't know

Jesus so that they will know the name of Jesus as savior as merciful as loving as gracious lord would you pour out your holy spirit upon us and press in our hearts the goodness that we taste and see in Jesus help us this day help us this week in Jesus name amen