

Wearing and Bearing God's Name

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[0:00] Well friends, let's pray. Father God, we pray that as we look at the scriptures tonight, particularly as we look at this issue of your name, we pray that you would help us, be at work in us, that we might be hearers of your word and doers of it as well.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's find where I am and we'll be right. Okay.

Friends, I want to start tonight by getting you to think about some names. Well in fact, we'll think about it this.

As I read a set of names to you, what I want you to do is think about what those names mean for you. Do they mean anything for you? What associations do they draw out?

Is the name that I read to you positive or negative? How do you know that name? And so on. Okay. So just a whole list of names. Some of them you won't know. Some of them you will.

[1:10] But as I read the names, think what connotations do these names have for you? Gallipoli. John Lennon.

Pol Pot. Adolf Hitler. The next one we could do with at the moment, Donald Bradman. Julius Caesar.

William Shakespeare. William Shakespeare. The Titanic. Apollo.

Mao Tse Tung. Azaria Chamberlain. And Pearl Harbor. Now names are interesting things, aren't they?

And I chose them reasonably at random. But names are really interesting things. They're sort of names, I think, are a little like buckets that you can hold a whole lot of other ideas in.

[2:14] Or they're like clothes pegs, if you like, that you can hang a whole lot of ideas on. Names, in so many ways, capture events. They encase reputations.

They're a sort of grab bag of an entire network of ideas. And tonight's sermon, Bible talk, is about names. And about one particular name, that is God's name.

It's about how we view God's name and how we use God's name. It's about the third commandment. And in the third commandment, God says to his people, Israel, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Now, let's have a look at that commandment. Let's see what we can make of it. And let's start this way. We'll do a bit of background work. You'll need to look at two passages with me.

I want you in your Bibles. Open your Bibles at the book of Exodus. Easy to find. It's the second book in the Bible. And I want you to look at Exodus chapter 3. So Exodus 3.

[3:21] Just a bit of background. In Exodus 3, Moses is out in the wilderness tending the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. And while he's there, he comes across a bush that is burning.

And he's intrigued with it because it's burning, but not being consumed, not being burnt up. And as he takes a look at it, God begins to speak to him. And in the course of the conversation, God reveals his name to Moses.

Look at verses 13 to 15. Moses said to God, Suppose I go to the Israelites and I say to them, The Lord your God, the God, sorry, the Lord, the God of your fathers has sent me to you.

And they ask me, what is his name? Then what shall I tell them? And God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites.

I am has sent me to you. God also said to Moses, Say to the Israelites, The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

[4 : 24] This is my name forever. The name you shall call me from generation to generation. Now there are a number of things to say here. First, I need to introduce you to a common convention that is used in most English Bibles.

And it is this. In most of our English Old Testaments, you'll sometimes notice that the word Lord is set entirely in capital letters. You've got an example of that in verse 7.

Now, this practice of printing the word Lord in capitals is a way of telling you that if you could read Hebrew, we would find ourselves reading a four-consonant Hebrew word.

And the four consonants would be the equivalent of our Y-H-W-H. Okay, so the Hebrew equivalents of that. And although we can't be certain, scholars have estimated that those four consonants probably had a vowel A between the Y and the H and a vowel E before the W and the second H.

Okay, so if you put that together, you'd probably have a name that was pronounced Yahweh. Okay, we're not exactly sure, but we think that's probably what it would sound like.

[5 : 33] Now, this word Yahweh was the Jewish special word for God. It was a special name they had for God, a name that God himself had given them to identify him.

It was a name by which they knew God. And what this passage does is it gives us a sort of interpretation of the name. You see, the phrase I am who I am or I am who I will be sounds very similar to the word Yahweh.

Okay, so this is a sort of definition of the name Yahweh. My guess is that the phrase used in the verse probably means I am who I will be or I will be who I will be or something like that.

Okay, so what's happening in this verse here in Exodus 3 is that God is saying from now on when you use this name Yahweh then you should understand that it means something.

And it means that I am the God whose nature can be known by what I'm about to do in Egypt. by the rescue I'm about to enact in Egypt. So who I am what my name means will be clear by what I do.

[6 : 43] So when Israel hears and uses the name Yahweh they should understand that its meaning should be filled with the knowledge of his acts in delivering them from Egypt which is what he's about to do.

So now turn in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 9 verse 16. Exodus 9 verse 16 someone finds a page number they could yell it out for me. 54 64 thank you.

Okay this verse comes when Yahweh's battle with Pharaoh is in full swing and Yahweh and Pharaoh they're locked in combat and God is pouring out plagues upon Egypt and Pharaoh is resisting God's call to let his people go and it's into that context that God gives some instructions to Moses and he says this look at verse 13 then the Lord said to Moses get up early in the morning confront Pharaoh and say to him this is what Yahweh see the large letters of Lord there this is what Yahweh the God of the Hebrews says let my people go so that they may worship me or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people so that you might know that there is no one like me in all the earth for by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth but I have raised you up for this very purpose that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth can you hear what is being said here in verse 16

God is saying that through what happens here to you to the Israelites and the Egyptians the whole world is going to know my name in other words I'm about to give my name some content from now on from the time of the Egypt on when my name is mentioned people will think of the events of Egypt and it is true you know when the Lord or Yahweh is thought of people think oh yes he's the one at work in Egypt they will think of a God who saves his people they will think of a God who's victorious over Pharaoh they will think of a God who loves his people and who judges those who set themselves against his people the events of the Exodus will proclaim the nature and the reputation of Yahweh with that behind us now let's have a look at the literal meaning of Exodus 20 verse 7 so keep flipping to chapter 20 now I'm going to read from the version you've got in front of you or in the pews and it reads like this you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God in fact if we were to put it the way we've just heard you shall not misuse the name of Yahweh your God for Yahweh will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name now let me say a more literal translation such as the English standard version would go like this you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain that is you shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain for the Lord will not for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain now in the Hebrew there are two important words that are reflected in that more literal translation one is take and the other is in vain and the NIV bundles them together and says misuse okay but it's take and in vain now the basic meaning for the word take is to lift something up or to bear something it can also have the sense of to carry something in which case it would refer to how Yahweh's name is born or carried or used in a public context the other Hebrew word underlying in vain has the sense of falsity or deception or lacking substance or without good reason and if you go a chapter or two or three further on to chapter 23 one it's actually used listen to it you shall not spread a false report you shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness okay if you look at the context you'll see that what's being talked about is spreading empty reports about someone reports that are vacuous that are not true okay empty so it therefore appears that lifting up the name of Yahweh in vain is referring to the manner or purpose for which you use

Yahweh's name what is being prohibited I think is using his name as an authority when there's no ground for doing so and also when such use is damaging to either him or to others so how much how much you must misuse God's name Yahweh's name in that way well here are some examples you might use Yahweh's name in an oath and then not fulfill it this happens people use Yahweh's name in oaths quite a lot in the Old Testament they say as the Lord lives as Yahweh lives and so on right and if you were to swear an oath saying as Yahweh lives and then not fulfill it you would be breaking this commandment does that make sense so that's one way to misuse it or to take it in vain or uttering a word and stating it from Yahweh when it has no authority from him if you want an example you can look up of that it's Ezekiel 13 verses 2 to 16 or it could be using

[12:29] Yahweh's name in such a way as to harm others such as you if you were to use Yahweh's name in a curse that would be misusing taking his name in vain using Yahweh's name flippantly would be also to take his name in vain or using Yahweh's name in order to validate a particular action that is against God's wishes or God's will that would also be taking the name of the Lord your God in vain so for example the false prophets often use God's name as a means of validating their prophecies so they'd say the Lord is saying something when actually they've just got it conjured it out of their own minds that would be to misuse the Lord's name to take it in vain the Israelites often used Yahweh's name or sometimes used Yahweh's name as though it was a sort of magical charm there's a great example of this in Jeremiah chapter 7 where the Israelites say to each other over and over and over again this is the temple of Yahweh this is the temple of Yahweh this is the temple of Yahweh and what they're trying to do is say you know

Yahweh's committed to us even though we keep on sinning and we'll just keep repeating this to ourselves and this will sort of somehow protect us but it won't because you see the temple was Yahweh's temple it didn't matter they thought if they just hung on to it it would be okay but they're being grossly sinful in each of the cases I've mentioned people use Yahweh's name in association with falsehood well to do that is to misuse it it is to take it in vain it means associating Yahweh himself because his name is identical to him in some ways or identifies him it's identifying him with something false and God will not leave such sin unpunished because God has nothing to do with evil and if you start associating his name with evil you're associating him with evil and he will not have that as Exodus 20 verse 7 says he will punish severely those who treat him with such disdain so let's try and put all of this together it's clear from the two options from the options

I've given you that this commandment can mean a broad range of things in my view we should opt for the broadest possible range of meanings let me explain as we've looked at the background to this passage the book of Exodus has a lot of things to say about God's name as we saw in Exodus 3 it's in the book of Exodus that God gives his name to his people and reveals its meaning in chapter 9 verse 16 he tells us that one of the purposes of his actions for his people is so that his name might be proclaimed in all the world and we can see from this that God's name is very important to him he is concerned that people know his name hear his name and that his name when heard has an appropriate effect he wants people to hear his name know his name and be drawn to his name his purpose in his world is that people come to know his name and that it's welcomed and honoured and associated with good things and that's what I think this commandment is about

God is saying that he has called his people to be his people they are people associated with him and therefore associated with his name he has joined himself to them and he's given them his name and in doing so he's placed his name or his reputation at risk for his people wear his name they carry his name they take up his name and they can do that in positive ways can't they you see the people of God can honour his name they can proclaim his name they can live in a way that enhances God's reputation they can praise his name they can use his name in prayerful dependence we saw an example of these sorts of things in those verses that Gillian read to us from Psalm 145 they can adorn God's name with their words and their deeds in other words you see the people of God can so act and speak that when people see them they're reminded positively of God of the Lord and whenever that happens the people of God fulfil God's purpose in reaching the world however

God's people can also bring God's name or reputation into disrepute as people who wear God's name they can by their words and their deeds dishonour him can't they by wearing his name they can speak or act in a way that causes the world to shun him and demean him to do that is to treat the gift of salvation with disrespect the gift of being his children with disrespect it is to disrespect God his name his person it is to misrepresent him to the world and Paul talks about this in Romans chapter 2 verses 17 to 23 where he says that the actions of Jews throughout history has caused God's name to be blasphemed through all the nations among the nations you see Israel's sin has called people has caused people to blaspheme God it's a shameful thing they have taken the name of the Lord their God in vain in that sense so as you can see I think that the meaning of this third commandment is very broad

[18:21] I think God is telling his people that they should not lift up his name in a way that misrepresents or diminishes him in his world and they can do that in a multitude of ways and that would include false oaths or promises it includes using his name in an inappropriate way but it also includes many other things let me tell you friends I don't think it is just simply about using the name of God as a swear word I think it may involve that sometimes but I think it's far richer and deeper than that let's turn now to the New Testament it seems to me that there are at least two prominent echoes of this commandment in the New Testament and interestingly enough both of them appear in one of the first extended teaching events in the life of Jesus that is in the Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5 to 7 we've got a page number for Matthew 5 968 now if you've read Matthew 5 you'll notice that there are lots and lots of echoes of the Ten

Commandments and the verses that appear to have echoes of the Third Commandment are verses 33 to 37 so I'm going to read them 33 to 37 Jesus says again you have heard that it was said to the people long ago do not break your oath but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord but I tell you do not swear at all either by heaven for it's God's throne or by the earth for it is his footstool or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king and do not swear by your head for you cannot make even one hair white or black simply let your yes be yes and your no no and anything beyond this comes from the evil one now although Jesus doesn't quote the Third Commandment he does echo one of the clear interpretations of that commandment given in Leviticus 19 verse 12 Jesus seems to hone in on oath taking and what he says is that oaths are inappropriate anyway you see

God's person doesn't need to use God's name in order to make his word more respected God's person is to be so honest that their word is their word and it doesn't need to be strengthened by validating it using God's name that's the first echo of the Third Commandment we hear about in the Sermon on the Mount by the way if you are using you know you're in oaths and you've got to use God's name to validate it what does it say it says whenever I use God's name I'm telling you the truth and when I'm not using God's name I'm not telling you the truth does that make sense so it's better not to use it at all and just let your yes be yes and your no no anyway the second echo is in a strange place it's in the Lord's Prayer that we read in our second Bible reading look at verse 9 in chapter 6 so Matthew 6 verse 9 Jesus says pray then like this and I'm reading for a slightly different translation 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 forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil did you notice the first line of the prayer our father in heaven hallowed be your name the echo of the third commandment is in the mention of

God's name to have God's name hallowed means to give the honour that is due to it it means to give God the honour that is due to him now in the Old Testament God often speaks about how the people of Israel dishonoured his name among the nations instead of keeping covenant with God they rejected covenant their unfaithfulness their ungodliness had been displayed among the nations and what Jesus is saying is that people should pray for the situation where that is no longer the case that is where people no longer dishonour God's name and thus dishonour him they should pray for a situation to come about where God's name will be hallowed or honoured where God might be known for who he really is and what he's really done where God might be praised and blessed and proclaimed and glorified and where his name and his reputation might no longer be slandered because of the actions of his people that's what

God wants that is what his people should pray for and that is what his people should live for now what does this mean for us as Christians well if we're Christians it would be helpful for us to consider what application this commandment might have for us now as we do this I should say that I don't think as I've said already that this commandment is fundamentally about using God's name or the name of Jesus as a swear word now using the name Jesus as a swear word may rightly offend us you know it might rightly disturb us we might rightly say I don't like you using the name of my God when you you know as a swear word I just don't like it like I wouldn't like it you know the same as I wouldn't like people using someone that I loved name as a swear word and especially my God so it may rightly offend us for these things to happen but I'm not sure that's what the commandment is about however I think and I think if you just use

[23 : 59] Exodus 20 verse 7 for that you won't get the full thrust of it you see it doesn't mean it's not relevant for it I think this commandment is very significant for us think about it we who are Christians have the name of Jesus in our own name don't we we are followers of Christ we are Christians we have the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in our identity I am a Christian I am a follower of Christ and when people think of us they associate us with our Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ in other words friends if I can put it this way we lift up carry wear the name of Jesus and there are many positive ways in which you can do this for example we wear it positively by being people who speak and act in a way that God gives God glory and gives the Lord Jesus Christ glory we wear it positively when we proclaim what

Jesus has done for us in saving us we do this when we live in a way that enhances his reputation as our Israelite forebears did in Exodus 15 we can wear or lift the name of Jesus in our songs as we sing songs of praise that are full of his person and his deeds then we lift up the name of Jesus and we don't use it in vain we can also do it when we call upon God in prayerful dependence through Jesus Christ or when we submit to baptism in the name of Jesus in other words as we Christians wear the name of Jesus we do well we Christians wear the name of Jesus whenever we act and speak in a way that people are positively reminded of him then we don't take the name of the Lord our God pointlessly or in vain then we don't misuse it but I need to say at this point that I think it is also possible for us as

Christians to take the name of the Lord our God in vain for example we might do this when we are both openly Christian and openly sinful or when our name is publicly associated with things which Jesus would have no association with it is also possible that this commandment is broken in this sort of case when a pastor invokes the name of God for his particular church proposal or when a well-meaning Christian unequivocally declares in the name of Jesus or of God that God will heal a person of a terminal or congenital illness I think there's a real risk that they're using God's name in vain because I don't know that they can have any assurance that that is going to be the case from scripture I think it's entirely possible to be misusing God's name in doing that now let's not think in the abstract or the third person though when we began our examination of this commandment we noted that names capture events encase reputations and tie up whole networks of ideas they cause associations to be conjured up with this in mind it's helpful for us to think about our relatives and our friends and how they might react to the name of Jesus because of their association with us does that make sense that is has our bearing the name of

Jesus made any difference to their attitude to Jesus has it had a positive impact or perhaps a negative impact it's possible to have a negative impact that's you know still a good impact but it can be a negative impact that's not a good impact so if it's negative then is it because they don't like the truth about Jesus or is it because our words and our actions have been such that they have betrayed the character and deeds of the Jesus we worship see I think it's entirely possible sometimes that that's the case in other words have we worn the name of our Saviour with honour or without substance that is pointlessly if so here's the word friends don't forget the second half of this commandment God treats this very seriously please repent do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain don't wear it in vain don't bear it in vain

God takes it very seriously when you do so if you have then repent of it let's pray father we pray that the name that your name and the name of your son might be honoured by us may your name be hallowed in the world but it may also be hallowed in our lives for father we joyfully and gladly bear the name of your son please may we live in a way that honours him and brings his name no shame father we pray this because we know you want your son to be glorified and that you are glorified when he is glorified so father please help us honour your name by honouring the name of your son and by bearing it well we pray this in

[29 : 47] Jesus name amen