

Bearing God's Name

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: 05 November 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Does everyone know what day it is this week? The horse, yeah, cup day, yep. I think I may have mentioned to you before, I can't remember, but I was actually born on cup day, 76, and apparently a journalist burst into my mother's room and asked if she'd remembered to place a bet.

And then the journalist asked my mother whether she would name me after the winning horse that year. The winning horse was a horse named Vanderham. So standing before you today could have been Vanderham Price, which is actually better than being named after the 1985 winner.

That horse's name was What a Nuisance. Thankfully, though, my parents opted for Andrew. But names actually matter, don't they? A person's name carries with it a person's reputation, their character, their identity.

And when you think of a person's name, you often think of who they are, whether good or bad. So sticking with the cup theme, if I said the name Farlap, it would immediately, for many of you, conjure up a famous racehorse who won lots of races.

But it can also work negatively, too, can't it? If I said the name Hitler, it would conjure up for you a certain character, reputation, identity, wouldn't it? In fact, some names are now banned because of the identity they carry.

[1 : 26] So after 9-11, a Muslim family living in Germany wanted to call their son Osama bin Laden. And the German government would not let them register that name because that name carried a particular identity, doesn't it?

You see, names carry with them a person's identity, therefore their character and reputation. And we even have sayings and laws that demonstrate this. And so if you drag a person's name through the mud, you're really dragging their character through the mud, aren't you?

We even have defamation laws. If you make offensive comments about a person's name and reputation, you can be sued. Well, today we come to the third commandment, which is all about God's name.

Exodus 20, verse 7. For those visiting us, we're doing a series on the Ten Commandments, or the Ten Words, which God gave Israel. And I should point out that these commandments are like topics.

So we're not, over the next few weeks, not going to be able to do our usual practice of just working our way through a passage. Rather, we'll have to look at lots of different verses to build a picture.

[2 : 39] I mean, after all, our commandment today is only one verse. And so that's why your outline is rather full today. But don't worry, we're going to move reasonably quickly.

I also need to remind you that Israel was to obey these Ten Commandments in response to God saving them from Egypt. And that's why the Ten Commandments begin with a reminder about God bringing them out of Egypt.

Chapter 20, verse 1. People still today, when I talk to them, think that becoming a Christian, having a place in God's kingdom, going to heaven, you have to be good and obey God to earn a spot in God's kingdom.

And people still think that way. And yet that is not how God operates, is it? He saves us when we trust in Jesus, because he knows we'll never be able to earn a spot in heaven.

We'll never be good enough. We'll never obey enough. He saves us by his generosity, his grace first, just like he did with Israel. And then in response to that, we are to obey, just like Israel.

[3 : 49] Of course, when it comes to God's laws, including the Ten Commandments, we know that for us, Christ has fulfilled the law. We saw that a few weeks ago. And that means we no longer have to fulfill or keep the law.

So at one level, you know, we're set free from the Ten Commandments. But Jesus, as I pointed out, also came not to abolish the law.

And so it still has a place for us. As I said a few weeks ago, it teaches us three things. One, it teaches us about God, his character. Two, about Jesus.

You know, his work on the cross as a sacrifice for sin and a priest. We get a better understanding about that from the Old Testament law. And thirdly, it teaches us how to love God and our neighbor. And so even though we've been set free from God's law, we can still apply it to ourselves to help us love God and others. And you might remember I gave you four questions and we work through those questions with some examples to teach you how to do it for yourself.

[4 : 50] And so our outline today will follow those questions just to remind you, although the last two I've combined. So we're at point one. So who does this law, this third commandment, help us to love?

Well, clearly it's God, isn't it? Because like us, God's name is also tied to God's character. Let me show you this from Exodus.

So if you've got your Bibles open, just turn with me back to page 58 to Exodus chapter 3, verse 13. Israel is in Egypt and God is about to send Moses to rescue them.

And Moses is making all sorts of excuses. And this is the next one, verse 13. Moses said to God, well, suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask, what is his name? Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites.

[5 : 51] I am has sent me to you. And God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

This is my name forever. The name you shall call me from generation to generation. Now, there's two things to notice about this passage here.

First, God's name is given in verse 15. And it is the Lord in capitals. This is the name that Israel is to know God by from generation to generation.

But the word Lord in our English Bibles really represents the name Yahweh. That's actually God's name. So what do our Bibles have Lord in capital letters?

Well, it's because the Jews never actually said out loud Yahweh. They're actually too scared of breaking the third commandment about taking the Lord's name in vain.

[6 : 51] So they just thought, well, we just won't ever say it out loud. Instead, they would say Adonai, which means Lord. Hence, we have Lord in our Bibles.

But God's name is actually Yahweh. And the second thing to notice is that his name represents who he is. So back in verse 13 there, Moses asks for God's name.

And God doesn't say Yahweh straight away, does he? He responds by saying, I am who I am. That's a strange answer, isn't it? But you see, God wants Moses to know a couple of things.

One, that he will be with Moses. But two, that his name represents who he is. It's as though God says, I'm going to tell you my name, but my name represents who I am.

You see, God could have chosen any name for himself. He liked. He could have chosen Andrew, actually. But he didn't. He chose the name Yahweh because in the Hebrew language, the Israelites' language, the name Yahweh is very similar to the word I am.

[8 : 06] You see the point he's making? My name represents who I am, my very character. And so later on, on the next slide, in Exodus chapter 34, we read, Now do you notice there that as God proclaims his name, Now do you notice there that as God proclaims his name, he also proclaims his character, doesn't he?

Why? Well, because his name represents who he is. He's character. It's kind of like those mugs with your name and the meaning on it. Have you seen those novelty mugs with different people's names on them?

So I think I've got one on the next slide. I was Sharon, who's actually not here this morning. I thought she might be. But Sharon means princess. Now, isn't that right, Kurian? Good answer.

Yes. And then afterwards, it has this little poem. It says, You truly possess a charm, special and rare. You can hold your head high.

You have a special air. I think if Sharon was here, she'd be going, But names have meanings. And then underneath, you've got this description of their character. Because a name carries a person's

character.

[9 : 36] And so the next slide, I found one for my name. I couldn't find Andrew, but Andy. And apparently means strong. And it says, a description of your character. You're self-confident, totally secure.

You've got inner strength. And you will endure. Your admirers think you've got macho appeal. My wife laughed too. Now, if God had a mug on the next slide, it would be the Lord, meaning Yahweh. And then his description underneath, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. You see, like us, God's name is also tied to his character.

And so as we come to this third commandment, it's very important about his name. We are to love God. How? What does this principle point to?

Well, by not misusing his name. For to misuse his name is to defame his very character, his self, because the two are tied.

[10 : 45] But this included much, much more than simply using God's name as a swear word or something like that. In fact, the first part of the commandment can be translated different ways. So on the next slide, it's you shall not take the name of Yahweh.

And the word take can mean lift, carry or bear. So you should not take the name of the Lord Yahweh, your God in vain. And vain can mean false or empty.

Like a vain hope is an empty hope or a false hope. And as we look at the Old Testament, the examples we find seem to fall into two main categories. The first is lifting up God's name to justify false speaking, vain speaking.

And the second way is bearing God's name with empty, vain living. And the first way, lifting up God's name to justify false speaking, is seen in different ways.

So, for example, it was used in making an oath that people then broke. So on the next slide, God says in Leviticus, do not swear falsely by my name, because if you do, you're going to profane the name of your God.

[11 : 56] Or down the bottom there, Jeremiah 5, the Jews would say, as surely as the Lord lives, I will do dot, dot, dot. But then they wouldn't.

And so God says, you're still swearing falsely. You see? They're breaking the promise. And as they break the promise that they have sworn to keep in God's name, they're so profaning it.

They're taking God's name in vain. Some also lifted God's name falsely, not just by making a false oath, but by making a false prophecy. So in Ezekiel 13, on the next slide, we read, say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination, hear the word of the Lord.

This is God speaking now. This is what the sovereign Lord says. Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. Their visions are, notice, false, and their divinations are lie.

Even though the Lord has not sent them, they say, the Lord declares and expect God to fulfill their words. You see what's happening?

[13 : 08] People would declare things in God's name that God never said. They were lifting up God's name, you see, to justify a prophecy, a false prophecy. And so the Jews would use God's name in false oaths and false prophecies, and sometimes even as a false charm.

So on the next slide, we read from Jeremiah. It says, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, reform or repent your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place.

Do not trust in deceptive words and say, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. There's your little chant, if you like. You see, Israel, I would just leave that up for a moment.

Israel was, they were mistreating each other and God says, look, the way you're treating each other is against my law and if you keep going, I'm going to send you off to exile.

What you need to do is repent and love each other and follow me. But instead of repenting, they would kind of just use God's name in a kind of lucky charm, like a lucky rabbit's foot, if you like.

[14 : 22] And so when Jeremiah said, look, Israel, judgment is coming, so repent, it's as though Israel would respond and say, oh, we'll just chant temple of the Lord three times and we'll be safe.

You see, they lifted up God's name as a false charm of protection, you see, when really they needed to repent and believe. You see, taking God's name in vain is much more than just using it as a swear word, isn't it?

Even in the Old Testament, you know, it involved making false oaths or false prophecies or even using it as a false charm. But the second big way included bearing God's name with empty living. I remember, take God's name in vain can mean to either lift it up and speak falsely or it can mean to bear God's name with empty living. And so on the next slide, God says this from Ezekiel 20. He says, As for you, people of Israel, this is what the sovereign Lord says. Go and serve your idols, every one of you. But afterward, you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name. [15:29] How? Well, with their gifts and idol worship. You see what he's saying? Because the Jews served other gods, they profaned God's name.

They belonged, you see, to God. They were his people. Everyone around them knew that this group was the Lord's people. They bore his name. And so for them to go off and serve another god was to profane God's name, was to dishonor God's name.

It was to drag God's name through the mud, which means dragging his very character through the mud. I remember when I was a teacher and we took children on a school excursion, it was very exhausting, taking kids away from structure because they have a tendency to go wild. And you're always worried about losing a child and you're always worried about how they will behave. One year, I remember taking a year six group to a naval museum, which was up in Sydney.

And at one point, the Navy officers took the group to the armory. And then they got out all these guns, handguns, machine guns. There was no bullets in them, thankfully, although I doubt OH&S; would even let us do that today.

[16:45] But I did catch one boy trying to sneak a gun into his bag. Can you believe it? It's always one class clown. And the reason us teachers are so worried about their behaviour is not just for their safety, taking a gun home, but also because they were wearing the school uniform, which has what?

The school name on it. They bore the school name and their behaviour would either bring honour or dishonour to the school they represented. And it's the same here.

The Israelites bore God's name for they were known as the Lord's people, Yahweh's people. But instead of living lives full of godliness that brought honour to God's name, they lived lives that were empty of godliness and so brought dishonour to God's name.

You see, to not take the name of the Lord our God in vain is more than just a swear word, isn't it? It's not lifting it up and speaking falsely, but it also includes not bearing it with empty living either. That's what it meant for Israel in the Old Testament. What does it mean for us, point three? Well, as we come to the New Testament, we actually see similar examples of all these things. So in our second reading, we heard Jesus say not to swear an oath by anything.

[18:00] Do you remember that? You see, the Pharisees, what they would do, they would swear an oath by different things and depending what it was, they'd either keep their word or break it.

Have a look on the next slide from Matthew 23. This is Jesus speaking to the Pharisees. He says, you Pharisees say, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing.

You can break your word. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, well, they are bound by that oath, they have to keep their word. And Jesus says, you blind fools, which is greater anyway, the gold or the temple that actually makes the gold sacred.

But do you see what the Pharisees were doing? You know, they keep their word or not keep their word depending on what they swore an oath by. But Jesus says in our second reading, well, everything is God's anyway.

Don't even swear by one hair of your head because you have no control over it. It's God's. Rather, just let your yes be yes and your no be no. Just tell the truth.

[19:05] I saw a nice summary of this in a church bulletin one time. It's on the next slide. And it says, let your yes mean yes and your no mean no be so trustworthy that no other words are necessary.

That's the application. That's what it means for us today. We'd be known as people who tell the truth and have no need to swear an oath in God's name. Well, the New Testament also picks up the idea of using God's name to justify false prophecy.

So on the next slide, Peter tells us that just as there were false prophets among the people in that day, so there will be false teachers among us in our day. And then down the bottom, he says to Timothy to stay in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines

any longer.

They want to be teachers of the law but they do not know what they are talking about. You see, there are people still today who claim to teach in God's name and yet what they teach does not match up with what God's word says.

It's false teaching. And that's taking God's name in vain, you see, lifting up God's name to justify false teaching. In fact, someone from our 1030 congregation recently visited a Pentecostal church not too far from here and when he came back he said, look, this is what I heard the preacher say.

[20 : 27] The preacher said, if you want God to do something for you, you have to first do something for God like giving money. Now, does the Bible say that?

Not at all. And yet, the preacher was saying, this is what God says. He was lifting God's name to speak falsely. That's taking God's name in vain, you see.

So the New Testament talks about not lifting God's name to justify false oaths and false teaching and even false charms. There's this slightly amusing story in Acts 19.

It's a long reading. It's on the next slide where they used Jesus' name as a kind of lucky charm. It says, some Jews went around driving out evil spirits and they tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon possessed.

They would say, in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, not whom I know, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out. Now, seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this.

[21 : 31] And one day, the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you? Then the man who had the evil spirits jumped on all seven of them overpowered them all and he gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and pleading.

It's sad and slightly comical, isn't it? I guess that's what happens when you use the name of Jesus as a lucky charm. But the same is true for people today who claim to be Christians.

So on the next slide is what I think is perhaps one of the scariest verses, some of the scariest verses in the Bible. Jesus says not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, calls on his name will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, do we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly I never knew you.

Away from me, you evil doers. You see, it is possible for people to claim they believe in Jesus name, to even do things in Jesus name, to help the poor, to give to the needy and the like, and yet not truly trust Jesus as their Lord, their King and Saviour, to not follow him.

[22 : 55] Take someone who came to our church one Easter two years ago. They spoke with me at the door after the service and they wanted to know why we didn't have communion on Easter Sunday. And I explained that well, Good Friday is the day we particularly remember Christ's death and so communion seems more appropriate for that day.

And they responded by saying, I've come to this church every Easter for the last 20 years and have never missed communion once. It doesn't feel right. Now, I don't know their heart, only God does, but I do know they call themselves Christians and yet I've only seen them at Easter and Christmas time.

And for them, what's important is not doing the will of Christ, but doing the ritual, the sacrament of communion. Communion on Easter Sunday, you see, had become like a lucky charm for them. And so I'm worried for them because I can sadly imagine them saying to Jesus on the last day, Lord, Lord, did we not go to church at the important times of the year? And did we not always have communion in your name, except for that one time the jolly minister changed it?

But Jesus will say, you trusted in the wrong thing. You trusted in communion instead of the person that communion points to, me.

[24 : 18] Away from me, you evildoer. And that would be sad, wouldn't it? You see, it's still possible to lift the name of Christ as a false charm. In the end, of course, speaking false oaths or speaking false teaching or using false charms, they all really fit under the last category of bearing God's name with empty living.

You see, God spoke about people from all nations who would one day bear his name. So on the next slide, the apostles quote from the Old Testament in Acts 15, where God says that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name.

See, as Christians, we bear God's name. And in particular, we bear the name of Christ. I mean, the word Christ is in the name Christian, isn't it? And so we are not to bear it in an empty way by claiming to be Christian and then living lives that are empty of godliness, that don't even seek to try and follow him.

Rather, we are to live lives that are full of godliness, lives that seek to bring honour to his name. And so on the next slide, Paul says that he's praying for the Thessalonians that they might live good lives.

Why? Well, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you. And down the bottom there, he says to Timothy, all who are under the yoke of slavery, so he's talking to slaves, should consider their masters worthy of respect.

[25 : 45] Why? So that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. slandered. Do you see? We can bring honour or dishonour to the name we bear.

On that second quote down the bottom there, Paul is directing it to those Christians who were slaves and slavery in Paul's day was a type of employment. It's different to the Wilber Wilberforce type of slavery.

And so this verse certainly applies to those of us who have jobs and work for bosses or masters, but the principle here really applies to us all. we can live in a way that either honours or dishonours God's name, can't we?

We can live in a way that brings glory or defamation to Christ's name. Like the school kids who bore their school name on their uniforms and represented their school, their behaviour could either bring honour or dishonour to their school.

And it's the same for us. We are Christ's representatives. We bear his name. And so the way we live and relate to our bosses, our neighbours, our friends, our family, will either make Christ look good or bad.

[26 : 49] It will either bring Christ's honour or dishonour. It will either lift up Christ's name or defame it. I remember as a teenager driving with a friend, we were on our pea plates, young and foolish.

He had his parents' car and the car had one of those Christian fish stickers on the back of it, like on the next slide. I think I've got a picture. Have you seen those ones on cars? And we've got this car bearing this Christian sticker on the back and he and I would hoon around in this car and drive rather poorly.

And so what we were doing was bearing the name of Christ but then dishonouring by the way we were driving. Of course one solution was just to remove the fish sticker. Problem solved.

And I must confess that was my first thought as a young teenager but the real solution is to drive in a way that honours the name of Christ. Isn't it? That's the real solution because to live in a way that dishonours his name, fish sticker or not, is to take the name of God in vain.

And that's not loving God, is it? So as you can see this commandment is much, much bigger than not using God or Jesus as a swear word. It includes that but it's much more than that.

[28 : 08] It's speaking in a way that does not defame Christ's name but lifts it up. It's acting in a way that does not dishonour God's name but honours it even in sickness and troubled times.

Especially in those times. I know of people and many from our church who have suffered greatly and yet they continue to honour Christ's name which they bore. And it was a powerful witness to their non-Christian family and friends and even to the nursing staff in the hospital they were at. God. This is what the commandment means. To honour God's name. And so perhaps we could ask ourselves does my life make Jesus look good to my work colleagues, friends, family, neighbours or does my lifestyle make Jesus look bad?

And then thank God that he always forgives us when we do make him look bad. But do pray that his spirit might work through our conscience to help us love God with this commandment.

How? By living lives that honour the one whose name we bear, Jesus. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father we do thank you that you have saved us and made us your people who bear your name.

[29 : 26] And so father help us by your spirit through our conscience to live lives that bring honour to this name. For we ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.