

God's Holy Name

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[0 : 00] Okay, please turn back to Leviticus chapter 24 as we continue our series in the book of Leviticus. Just to update you as to that announcement that Steph made about the baptism, it is likely actually that we will have the baptism earlier than September.

So if you are interested, please speak to Jeff as soon as possible so you don't miss that date. But there should be an outline as well with some additional verses for tonight.

So please, you might want to make reference to that as you listen along. Well, we all know how important it is to have a good name.

That is a good reputation associated with that name. Those who own businesses will understand this. Whether you are a dentist or a lawyer or accountant, you need a good name so that customers can trust you, have confidence in your work.

And this name can be diminished or enhanced by a business's association with other people. So we have things like sponsorships and endorsements.

[1 : 19] So when there is a successful athlete, for example, Roger Federer, even though he is retired, everyone still wants to be associated with his name.

But if they then fall from grace, let's say there is a drugs or sexual scandal, then the companies are very quick, aren't they, to disendorse them for fear of their good name, their company's good name, being tarnished by association.

Well, today we want to consider God's good name, or rather His holy name. But before we get to our incident in the passage, I want to take a brief history of God's name with Israel to this point.

And so in the outline, you'll see a number of passages. But in Exodus, when Israel was still in slavery, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush.

And when He did, Moses requested for God to tell him His name, so that when He returned to the people, He might explain to them who had just appeared to Him. And amazingly, God does that.

[2 : 31] So God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. I am, that's my name, 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, 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. And so from that point on, Israel, God was no longer a generic deity to Israel.

He had a name. Israel is able to address Him specifically and personally. And also from that time, God's identity and character associated with that name is beginning to be revealed to them.

And of course, together with this, God enters into a covenant relationship with them. That is an exclusive relationship because from here on in, He is now the God of Israel.

God has tied His name, associated Himself, to the people of Israel. And so it was important for Israel to honor that name.

[3 : 42] How they lived reflected their God. And so in the book of Leviticus, there are commands to be holy because the Lord their God is holy.

They were to keep His laws because these laws reflected who God is. And within these laws, there were specific commands to revere the name of the Lord and not misuse it.

So the most obvious of these is in the Ten Commandments, which is on the next slide in your handout as well. Exodus 20, verse 7 says, You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name.

Now this is not, as some people may think, primarily about using God's name as a swear word.

Rather, as we saw in Leviticus 19 a few weeks ago, it's about not swearing falsely by God's name, which means taking oaths in God's name and then telling lies instead of telling the truth.

But also we see in the laws in Leviticus 18 to 22 that there were certain sins that explicitly led to profaning God's name.

[4 : 55] And if you look, I've got a list there in the outline, five of them. And the bottom three relate to those that the priests were expected to obey. And right at the end, the priests actually had a general instruction to keep all the commands because breaking any of them would lead to profaning God's name.

And so it appears that the priests were held to a higher standard than the general population. And we can see why because although Israel, all of Israel, represented God to the nations, the priests in particular were God's representatives to the people.

Their job tied them closely. There was a close connection with what they did and who God is. So this idea of representation representation is, I guess, not a new one, is it?

Because, not an unfamiliar one, should I say, because we have that today as well, don't we? So take, for example, the school uniform that some of you used to wear.

Teachers and principals always want their students, don't they, to behave so as to be a good representative of their school. But especially when you were in your uniforms, right?

[6 : 14] When you're on the tram or the train, don't, you know, make all these sort of sexist chants or whatever that gets onto YouTube. Now, the name of the school may not be on the uniform per se, but the school crest is.

And whatever they did in their uniform was seen by others as a reflection of their school, right? And so that's the idea then of Israel not profaning God's name because they represented God to the nations.

And so we come to this incident here in Leviticus 24. And so let's pick up the story and let's see what we can learn from it. So verse 10, Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite.

The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the name with a curse, so they brought him to Moses. Moses. His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.

Now, I think there are a few intriguing details here. Firstly, this is the only other place in Leviticus where we actually have a narrative or a story.

[7 : 29] The other one was when Aaron's son offered unauthorized fire in the presence of the Lord and was consumed by that fire. So, here we have another serious violation.

Both of them were violations of the law. But, here we know that this man isn't a pure Israelite. He has an Israelite for a mother but then an Egyptian father.

And this may give us a clue as to the nature of the blasphemy. So, perhaps he favored the Egyptian gods of his father rather than the God of Israel. He could also have been treated like a foreigner by the Israelites and maybe, again, that might be the reason for the conflict in the first place.

But, whatever it is, and we're not given much details and so probably not that relevant, whatever it is though, what he's done is that he's turned a fight with an Israelite that is a horizontal person-to-person conflict, he's turned that into a vertical response of blasphemy against God.

It's almost like he's taken out his anger with a human being against God. Can you see? And so, clearly, based on the Ten Commandments, a wrong has been done here.

[8 : 50] Moreover, we are told that the whole affair has taken place in the camp and we all know that the Tent of the Meeting was in the midst of the camp, so he has done this almost in God's presence.

And yet, despite what he's done being wrong, the people seem unclear about what the punishment ought to be. You know, maybe they were thinking, is he to be treated like an Israelite because he's a person of mixed heritage?

Or maybe the laws don't apply because he's a foreigner. So, we read in verse 12 that what they did was put him into custody until the will of the Lord should be made clear to them.

And I think this shows a bit of his restraint on the part of the Israelites or those who were angry with him because they could have just taken the law into their own hands and punished and beaten him up or something.

But instead, they brought him before Moses instead. And Moses himself then sought the will of the Lord on the matter. And that will is revealed to us in verse 13.

[9 : 52] The Lord said to Moses, take the blasphemer, and notice that his name is actually not given to us, he's got no name, take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who hurt him are to

lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him.

Say to the Israelites, anyone who curses their God will be held responsible. Anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native born, when they blaspheme the name, they are to be put to death. Now, notice that each step in the punishment is significant because taking someone outside the camp was an act of exclusion from the people of God. It's excommunication, if you like. So it seems that God was treating this man as one of Israel, his own, by virtue of his mother being a Danite, but also that he was living in the camp and enjoying all the benefits of being in God's presence and being blessed and provided by God.

But next, all those who hurt him blaspheme are to put their hands on him. It's almost as an act, I think, of witnessing, saying that, yes, we heard him say this and he has done wrong.

[11:08] But then, the whole assembly is the one that takes collective, not just those who hurt, but the whole assembly takes collective responsibility to mete out the punishment of stoning this man.

Now, I don't think they're meant to do this out of pleasure or revenge. Rather, this is collective judgment by all the people on God's behalf.

It is their way, I think, of disowning the act of the wrongdoer and saying, we have no part in the blasphemy that was uttered by him. And then lastly, we note as well that God makes no distinction in the laws between the foreigner and the native born.

And I take the meaning of the foreigner to be the foreigner that's living among the Israelites. That is, even if someone who isn't an Israelite is living in your midst, he's enjoying the benefits of living as God's people, being blessed and provided by God and therefore were expected to obey the law given to Israel.

Now, it may seem to you as you hear this that this punishment is overly harsh. Because if you think about it, people nowadays, I mean, they use God's name and Jesus' name as a swear word without much thinking about it, is it?

[12:24] And so you think, wow, if that's happening around us all the time, what if they were living in that era, you know, where all of them have had to be stoned? Seems a bit harsh, isn't it?

Is it that serious that God would punish this way? Well, I think that even in their time, they probably thought that that may have been the case. Which is why I think verses 17 to 22 are there.

Because if you just read those verses by themselves, they seem a bit out of place, don't they? Until you realize that actually there is one key principle behind all these verses, or the verses from 17 to 22.

And it's the principle of what is known as Lex Talionis, which is on the slide there. It's in Latin. I don't know Latin, so I have to work this out. But anyway, it's a phrase which means exact retaliation. So verse 17 actually says this, Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death. Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution. Life for life, and anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same way, same manner.

[13:37] Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death.

You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native born, eye and the Lord your God. So in plain English, this principle is really just the eye for eye principle. That's what exact retaliation is. Exact. That is, the punishment must fit the crime. Not more, not less, but exactly right for the crime. Then it's fair, isn't it?

So we can see, for example, that it's a lie for our life. And if you're the one that inflicts the injury, then the injury is done, the same injury is done for you. Right?

It's a fracture for a fracture. It's not a fracture for a tooth, let's say. Now, why is all this mentioned here in relation to the punishment for blasphemy? I think it's because God is indicating that actually the punishment of stoning for blasphemy is exact retribution or retaliation for the crime.

[14:51] And actually, as I think about it, it's probably lenient rather than harsh. You see, as you look at those verses, the punishments are divided by category, aren't they?

When it says life for life, it's talking about human life for human life. But whereas when an animal is killed, the restitution to be paid is another animal of the same kind.

Like for like, isn't it? And so, if you think about this, animals are one category, humans of another, where would you put God?

If you injured or insulted God, He belongs to a different category, doesn't He, than humans. So what is the proportion punishment for someone who has dishonored God's name, who is actually in a class of his own?

Well, it's clear, really, that no injury or insult to God can really be made up for anything a human can do or give up, no matter how great or no matter how rich you are.

[15:59] The most a human can give is his own life, isn't it? And even then, it's not quite enough, is it? Because a human life only pays for another human life.

But when you're talking about God, what can you do? You can't. You can't make up for it, can you? And so, even though God requires His life, it's not quite enough, even though it's probably better than nothing.

God's name. And that's all rather sobering, isn't it? Because if you recall earlier, and I had that earlier list, there are other ways which God has said Israel or the priests explicitly profane His name.

And for the priests in particular, they had to keep all the commands, otherwise they would have profaned God's name. And so if you think about it, by right, these priests, their lives should have been demanded of them.

Because I'm pretty sure that they can't keep all the commands all the time. And yet, it is probably likely that God spared them. Except for the most severe violations like the one that happened with Aaron's son, they were probably spared.

[17:08] So the example with Aaron and here in chapter 24, I think, shows us again how seriously God takes holiness. And in particular, how important God's good name was for him and is still for him.

And also, the fact that then he chose to allow Israel to bear his name, to represent him, showed really how generous God is. That he would be willing to put his name at risk by choosing Israel as his people.

Because, if you think about it, Israel, from time to time, would let God's name down, wouldn't it? Now, all of this, I think, is merely to prepare us to foreshadow for the coming of the Lord Jesus, because Jesus is actually the true Israel.

And God was pleased for him to bear his name, because Jesus lived up to God's name perfectly, upholding all of God's laws, and perfectly representing God's character.

God's name. And so, if you look in John 5, verse 43, and I know many of the young adults are working their way through John, Jesus said, that I have come in my Father's name.

[18:30] And in all that he does and says, he glorifies God and honors God's name, his Father. And because he's done that, God actually reciprocates and then puts his own glory and weight behind Jesus' name.

And so, again, when you read through the New Testament, and then again in John's Gospel, God chooses only to save and give eternal life to those who believe in the name of Jesus, his Son. All humans honor God the Father only if they honor the Son. They worship the Father only if they worship the Son. And so, again, John 5, verse 23, says, whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

And then John writing in his letter, chapter 2, verse 23, says, no one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Can you see this close association then between God and the Father and God's name, the Father's name, and the Son's name?

And then if we hear from Paul in chapter 2 of Philippians, verse 9, God chose to do this. He exalted him, Jesus, to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, but to the glory of God the Father.

[20:07] And the disciples themselves understood this when Jesus taught it to them. Because when we now look at that reading that Emily read for us in Acts chapter 4, when they were actually threatened by the Jewish leaders, this is what they said boldly, salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name, that is the name of Jesus, under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

And then when the Jewish leaders told them no longer to speak in his name, Peter and John replied by saying, which is right in God's eyes, that is God the Father's eyes, to listen to you or to him.

You be the judges, as for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. In other words, Peter and John recognized that they were obeying God the Father by speaking boldly in Jesus' name.

And so when we come to today's passage, the application is not so narrow as to just say we better not use God's name as a swear word. Now certainly let's not use God's name as a swear word or Jesus' name, but it's much more than that, isn't it?

Because all our lives, whether in word or deed, we either honor or dishonor God's name in what we say and do. And for a start, we need to see that God's name is now tied to the name of his son, Jesus.

[21 : 34] If God had a marketing strategy, then Jesus is his one and only brand endorsement. God promotes himself exclusively through his son, Jesus.

And so that's why when we do outreach and we tell people about God, we need to speak of Jesus. It's not enough just to tell them to believe in God. They need to believe in the name of Jesus.

Hence, the evangelism campaign that we're part of this year is meet Jesus. If your friend or your family member is seeking after God, they need to find Jesus.

But secondly, when we then believe in Jesus, that is when we become Christians, we then become ambassadors for Christ.

Our brand name is now Jesus. Whether you like it or not, once you become a Christian, you bear Christ's name. And what we say and how we live is seen by others as a witness to who Jesus is and by extension who God is.

[22 : 43] And so even though we often don't do it perfectly, we ought to strive by God's spirit to be a witness that brings honour to Jesus' name.

And by that I don't mean to put a lot of pressure on you that say, oh, that means I need to be perfect, a do-gooder, people need to see that I'm holy and I've never sinned.

That's not what this is all about. Because even when Jesus was on the earth, that was not actually people's impression of him, was it? Jesus wasn't treated like a saint because the religious leaders accused him of being a sinner.

He ate with the prostitutes and the tax collectors, didn't he? They even said that he cast out demons by Beelzebul. So Jesus did not come across as a saintly type figure.

Instead, Jesus' actions and words reflected grace and truth and exemplified humility and compassion. And so that is how we ought to reflect and honor Jesus' name.

[23 : 51] Not by being sinless, we should obviously try to not sin, but it's not the impression of sinlessness that actually most glorify his name.

Instead, it's when we are wrong, being the first to say sorry. That's humility. When there are, there's conflict and competing interests, it's being quick to consider the interests of others ahead of our own.

It's when instead of grumbling and complaining about our lives, and I know, you know, nowadays in the media it's always about cost of living, and then, you know, when people grumble about that they start complaining about the government, because it's always their fault.

But instead of doing all that, we ought to instead be thankful to God for his provision, glorify his name, because even in the midst of life's challenges, God has blessed us with salvation, forgiveness, he's blessed us with his spirit, all these things.

And of course, thankfully, when we do slip up, and we bring God's name into disrepute, we can take great comfort that actually, the person that was sent outside the camp wasn't us to be stoned, but instead, God was even at that point gracious enough to send his own son, who did go outside the camp, outside the gates, to die on the cross, name, even though he perfectly upheld the father's name.

[25 : 29] And it wasn't the one life for one life, but his one life was able to substitute for the lives of all of us, in fact, for the lives of the whole world.

And so, if we believe in Jesus, then we should be all the more eager to honor that name, the name of the person who gave his life for us, to proclaim and magnify that name, and then hopefully, praying that as we do, more people whom Jesus has died for would also come to believe and follow us in honoring the name of Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, worthy is your name to be magnified and praised, and we are sorry that we often do and say things that bring shame to your name.

We may not literally curse or blaspheme your name, but we do let you down by our actions and words. Please forgive us. Thank you that in your son, your son has succeeded to do what we have failed.

So help us now to proclaim his name for your glory, and by your spirit to live our lives so that we can be worthy of our calling as Jesus' disciples.

[26 : 51] And so in the name of Jesus, his perfect, mighty, and glorious name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.