

# Sunday 9th February 2025 - Know My Name: Taking The Lord's Name In Vain

*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: 09 February 2025

Preacher: Ian McKeown

[ 0 : 00 ] Morning everyone. Good to see you. Well as Matt said, we're continuing with our series, Know My Name. I'm going to mix things up a little bit. Oh dear, looks on your faces.

I'm going to mix things up a little bit this morning. I'm going to think about ways in which God's name gets stretched and twisted and sometimes downright misused and misrepresented and what the Bible has to say about that. So let me start by asking you a very important question.

Listen, who likes a splash of ketchup on their chips or maybe on their chops or some other savoury delight? Come on, play along with me. The theological significance of this will become more apparent later on. Okay, but hands up. Who likes a bit of ketchup? Okay, we've got quite a few takers there. Okay, keep your hand up if it's this brand, Heinz. Oh, it's a majority. Okay.

Well, of course, there are other brands. All right. Anyone fancy a bit of... Oh dear. There's a hand up. Oh, well done, Tom. Excellent. There's nothing wrong with the rich, sweet and vibrant flavours of Morrison's best. You know, so don't knock it till you've tried it. But big brand names are incredibly powerful things, aren't they? We might like to think that they don't persuade us one way or the other, but the stats don't lie, I'm afraid. And the UK ketchup market, and there is such a thing as the UK ketchup market, okay, and there's data on it, is worth around £173 million in the UK. So here's another question for you. What percentage do you think does Heinz have of that market? Anybody want to have a go? Just shout out a number. 99%. Oh, 90%. Okay. 54%.

57%. 57%. Oh, very good. I see what you did there. Ah, that's clever. 85%. Anyone else? 93%. And it goes to Jay. Jay, well done. Round of applause. It's 80%.

[ 2 : 44 ] 83% of the UK market, which means all the other brands are getting about 17%. And so just like names, brands and protecting and maintaining those brands, particularly what they stand for, is really big business for the corporates that own them. And they spend a lot of money protecting them.

Let me ask you another question. If I took the contents of this, okay, our tomato ketchup, which didn't seem to go down very well, unfortunately, and I emptied it, okay, into one of these, things. Ooh. Hands up if you think you would know the difference. Hands up if you think you'd know the difference. Oh, yeah. Oh, right. Okay. Yeah. Okay. Which is what I expected you to say. All right. We are not going to do a taste test. Sorry. I did think about bringing the air fryer and doing some chips. And then I thought, oh, scalding hot chips. Someone burns their lips. You know where it's going.

Sorry. So we're not going to do it. So I will take your word for it that you would be able to tell the difference. Names matter. Okay. They really do. And they have a whole series, particularly things like ketchup, of expectations associated with them. Our two boys, when I used to buy, I used to buy unbranded ketchup occasionally, okay, when they were younger. Oh, and they would give me such a hard time.

You know, if I bought an own brand. And inevitably, these things would kind of sit in the cupboard forever, gathering dust. So we have a whole series of expectations associated with them. Now, unfortunately, the name or the brand of the Church of England right now is, as the Church Times, okay, puts it, undergoing something of an existential crisis over safeguarding. I'm sure most of you have seen the newspaper and press coverage. As you probably know, last November, Justin Welby stood down as the Archbishop of Canterbury in the wake of the making report, which highlighted some really serious failures in responding to the survivors of abuse within the Church. And then more recently, the Bishop of Liverpool has resigned following allegations of sexual assault and harassment, which I should say he emphatically kind of denies. And of course, none of us, are we,

are perfect.

[ 5 : 37 ] We're all for sure. But the, I don't know, the optics, to use the jargon, are just not good on this, are they? At a deeper level, there's something, I think, quite unsettling about what's on the label and what's in the bottle. Please kind of hear me when I say, you know, I'm not trying to make a cheap shot at the Church of England. I have a huge amount of respect for the faithfulness and the dedication that so many people that serve within the wider Church. But the problem is, this feeds into a bigger narrative, particularly outside of the Church, which inevitably shapes how people perceive what the Church stands for. And I think there is an expectation on the Church, to borrow the strap line, those of you that remember it from the old Ron Seal advert, that it does exactly what it says on the tin.

Remember that one? Which actually probably isn't fair in terms of the diversity of perspectives in our own theology and how we understand and live out our faith, but probably is fair in terms of the character, integrity, and behaviour of those that bear his name, and particularly those that lead others in the Church.

And I should say that with the caveat, of course, that in God's Kingdom, there is always, always room for forgiveness.

And so, this morning then, I'd like to try and make sense of this through the lens of one of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses. It's probably not the one you might expect, and it's this. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished, who takes his name in vain. It's the third commandment.

[ 7 : 58 ] I think we often interpret this, and in many ways limit this command, in terms of our speech, and the oaths that we make. And clearly, that's important, isn't it?

Casually invoking God's name, whether it's for emphasis or as a profanity, isn't something I think that we should take lightly. But I'm not convinced that this third commandment, this is what it's addressing, this idea of profanity.

Take this emoji as an example. Maybe you've used something like it, I don't know, without the OMG. It's an expression, isn't it, of surprise or wow.

And if you did use this particular one, does that mean you've broken the third commandment? You know, the one that sits alongside do not murder.

I don't know, for me it doesn't really seem proportionate. And technically, the word God is not actually God's name. It's a title.

[ 9 : 13 ] So whilst I'm not necessarily condoning this, I think the third commandment is speaking to something much, much more significant than this. So if it's not primarily about profanity, what is it about?

Well, when something or someone is vain or exhibits vanity in the context of this command, it means that it is empty or worthless.

So there we are. Dictionary definition there. So the common understanding is that we shouldn't be saying God's name in an empty manner or in a meaningless context.

In fact, the Israelites were so worried about mistakenly using the name of Yahweh in a trivial way that they stopped saying his name entirely, rather than risk transgressing this third commandment. Instead, they chose to use alternative titles like Elohim or El Shaddai or Adonai to express the different qualities of the holiness of God.

[ 10 : 30 ] And so when God told Moses that the Israelites should not take his name in vain, God didn't use the generic title that he has of God. He used his personal, intimate name, Yahweh.

And of course, Hebrew spelt Y-H-W-H. And it's interesting because this literally sounds like breathing.

It's a... I don't think that's an accident. Every breath we take into our lungs is a breath of the living, sustaining God.

You know, it's the first breath we take as we're born, and it will be the last breath we take as we depart this earth. I don't think this is just about respecting a powerful being or kind of, you know, using God's name in a trivial way.

I think it was about understanding that God has a name. God has a name. And that his name has a deeply, deeply significant meaning for us.

[ 11 : 50 ] And by taking on that name, these faithful people were showing that they wanted to truly align themselves with him, you know, to be part of the family.

And so that's, I think, why in Exodus 34, when God declares his name, he doesn't simply say, you know, his name, my name is Yahweh.

Rather, he says this, he says, and obviously in the Bible, we know that the Lord is reinterpreted into Yahweh. Okay, so it says this, Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. His name is intimately woven into who he is. And so God's people, made in his image, have a responsibility as his representatives here on earth.

And so taking the Lord's name in vain is really about misrepresenting him. Also, the language of taking here, the name, so taking the name of God, is a little bit misleading.

[13:23] There are different translations, obviously, in different versions of the Bible. But the verb here actually means to bear, to carry, or even to wear. So God is present amongst his people, and we are, if you want to think of it in literal terms, to be clothed.

Okay, to be clothed in him, to bear him. And so the responsibility then, on us, is that we extend his presence, his reputation, into the world.

Well, sometimes we do, and sometimes we don't, if you want the honest truth. But when Jesus came, finally, a human, a son of man, bears the name of God so faithfully, so completely, that he was able to pray these words the night before his crucifixion.

This is taken from John chapter 17. I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world.

They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.

[14:53] Jesus bears the name of God perfectly because he is one with the Father. Fully human, fully divine, his presence amongst us now through the Holy Spirit, the covenant renewed.

God's name dwelling with us and among us as he dwelled among the Israelites in the tabernacle and in the temple. Only now, our bodies are the temple.

The disciples, of course, would have already known the name of God from their scriptures. Okay? So clearly, when Jesus prays, I have revealed your name, he means he has represented God to them truly, fully, and perfectly, showing them through his life, his words, and his actions what God is really like.

Okay. So what does taking the Lord's name in vain actually look like in practice then? Well, here are four images, okay?

Four ways to maybe think about this. The late German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, some of you may have read some of his work, coined the phrase cheap grace.

[16:26] You may have heard it in a book that he wrote called *The Cost of Discipleship*. It was published in 1937. And he describes cheap grace as the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.

As communion without confession. As discipleship without sacrifice. A faith without a cross.

And it still resonates almost a century later. We can't just skip over the tough stuff to get to the good stuff.

Sacrifice, doubt, lament, all these things, confession, repentance, they're all part of the journey from brokenness to humility to transformation.

And I think to present our faith as anything less is misleading. It doesn't count the cost of discipleship. Here's another image.

[17:45] Who, in their right mind, thought that it was an appropriate thing to put on a baby grow? It is a complete distortion.

Okay? Weaponising and co-opting the Bible as a thin cover for coercion or hatred and endorsing violence as a way to resolve conflict.

But unfortunately, it symbolises what is becoming a more prevalent and sort of fundamentalist attitude in parts of the church right now and particularly in America.

Is that the message that God wants to give? Imagine the picture of an elderly widow.

She lives alone with few outside friends sending quite large sums of money which she can't afford to a religious TV channel. And the motive for this giving, which is consistently reinforced by the TV evangelist, is that this money is a kind of seed which will grow and provide her with an abundance of blessings, both material and spiritual.

[ 19 : 14 ] In reality, this is a process of seduction and at worst, it's grooming. The presenters with their sort of pseudo-intimate ways become important to this lady.

And over time, they become her fantasy friends and attract a kind of brand loyalty. And once they've been hooked by the fantasy that they actually care about them personally, well then, the purse strings open.

You know, I think at some level, I suspect, that those pushing this prosperity gospel have convinced themselves of their own rhetoric and interpretation of the Bible.

But the harm and the spiritual abuse that they do to people caught up in this deception and the damage they do to the integrity of the Christian faith is massive.

this is taking God's name in vain. Okay. Last one. Mmm.

[ 20 : 33 ] Where are you going with this, Ian? Do you know, in parts of America now, the election of President Trump is increasingly being cast in an almost apocalyptic light, both within parts of the church in America and a good number of his supporters, likening him to a biblical figure.

Okay. There are, you know, a number of people who are sort of starting to call him the new Moses. The evangelist and popular evangelist Hank Kuhneman has publicly declared this as a battle between good and evil, saying, there is something on President Trump that the enemy fears. It's called the anointing. I think his track record would suggest otherwise. But politics aside, since the assassination attempts on his life, Trump has increasingly aligned himself with the kind of staunch evangelical riot in America and framing himself as this martyr figure.

Take a look at this clip. It's from the New York Times. They followed him at some of his rallies prior to the election. Thousands of people have been lining up for hours to get inside, showing the endless devotion that these supporters have for the former president.

One of the more striking ways we see this impassioned loyalty from Trump fans is at the end of his rallies, where there's a sudden shift in tone, where it goes from very high energy into almost a solemn church-like atmosphere.

[ 22 : 22 ] Where Trump gives a 10-15 minute sermon, preaching to his crowd, his faithful flock of supporters. three years ago, we were a great nation, and we will soon be a great nation again.

Initially, his supporters greeted this moment by holding up an index finger into the air, signaling QAnon, the movement of conspiracy theorists, even though the Trump campaign has distanced itself from that movement.

In its place, what we see are people almost in prayer. The net effect here is Trump has turned the Republican Party into something resembling the Church of Trump.

There are a couple of reasons why Trump is doing this. One is to deflect and distract from the 90-some charges he's facing. You know, he's portraying himself as a persecuted political martyr here, as someone who is being targeted because of his supporters' beliefs and not because of anything he's done wrong.

And in the end, they're not after me, they're after you. I just happen to be standing in the way and I always will. Now, there are some that are courageous enough to call him out on some of these policies and parts of the Church that are as well in America.

[ 23 : 39 ] You may have seen recently the coverage of the National Prayer Service as part of the inauguration of Trump. And in the service, Bishop Marion Boode here, who's obviously on the right-hand side there, delivered a sermon in which she appealed to Trump to be merciful to minorities, you know, some who fear for their lives after his election.

As she said, in the name of God, I ask you to have mercy on the people in our country who are scared now. Most immigrants are not criminals. They pay their taxes and they're good neighbours. Well, you know, unsurprisingly, Trump kind of hit back on his social media platform. Now, you might be thinking, Ian, this is politics and you shouldn't be talking about this.

It's not the right place. Well, let me just say this. When politicians start packaging up faith as a form of Christian nationalism, the alarm bells should start ringing because that is taking the Lord's name in vain and to remain silent on that is to be complicit with it.

We are image bearers. Okay, it's right there at the beginning in the Bible, in Genesis 1 and with that comes great responsibility.

[ 25 : 16 ] You know, someone, I think, that truly understood the significance of that, who's, in his own life, clearly embodied this idea of wearing or carrying God's image was this man, the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

affectionately known as the Arch, he was a warm-hearted, good-humoured, sometimes cheeky, rabble-rouser for peace and forgiveness, playing a significant role in dismantling the apartheid system in South Africa and subsequently leading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Now, it's a wonderful country. I was very fortunate back in 2012 to actually get out to South Africa and I spent some time in Soweto. One of his talks, or at one of his talks, speaking to Christians and Muslims and Jews on ethnic conflicts, raging at the time, he said this, we are all God carriers, God's stand-ins, God's viceroys, and we don't remember it.

Each human being, no matter what colour of skin they have, is created in God's image. Therefore is a peace of God, therefore is holy, and therefore deserves respect, dignity, compassion, and love. Would we kill one another? Would we hate one another? Would we destroy one another if we truly believed the words of our traditions? Would we kill others if we believed it was killing a part of God every time?

[ 27 : 05 ] What do you think? For me, it makes so much more sense on these big, big issues that this third commandment, do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, is right up there with do not murder, because the stakes are so high.

God's name is intimately woven into who he is, and who we are called to be. His living presence dwelling within us.

I suppose the question then is this, what will we choose? Are we honouring our commitment to live in a way that's in harmony with God's name and his values, living with integrity, with kindness, willing to forgive, and actively seeking to live in peace and unity with others.

Amen.