

## Holy Name

HN 24/04/05 pm

Reading: Leviticus 24, Acts 19:1-20

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:11

Sing Psalms: 8:1-4, 138:1-4, 138:5-8, 72:17-19

What's in a name? Names are important. Our name becomes part of our identity. We answer when our name is called. We do not like it if our name is taken and misused. Some names have become corrupted through misuse – e.g. Gay, Nigel. Tragically the name of our God has become corrupted through misuse in our society. Brown writes in his comments on this text 'I have a teacher – friend who, talking about Jesus to an entrants' class, was politely rebuked by one of her children for swearing. This child had only ever heard the name of Jesus used in swearing, used in blasphemy'.

What a contrast to some Islamic countries where people are put to death for blasphemy. If the name of their prophet is used without due honour charges of blasphemy may be brought. And in other nations to use the name of the king without due respect will incur the wrath of the king. The king's name must only be used with the appropriate title – 'your royal highness' or the like. When an edict is issued in the name of the king it is law. The king can pardon a prisoner by royal decree. His word overrides all other rulings.

*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* God made himself known to Israel by mighty deeds. He showed his power over the creation and over the kings of men. In speaking to Israel and declaring the terms of his covenant with them, he told them to remember this. They must fear the Lord their God and worship no other gods. They must worship God according to his command, without carved images and they must honour his name, the name by which they were delivered from bondage.

In the first three commandments God commands exclusive worship. He is not a God among many. He is not to be represented like other gods in man made images. And his name is not to be brought down and used like the names of other gods. His people are not free to use his name in swearing oaths – his name is above all names – it is like no other name.

Turn to the Lords prayer for a moment to see what Jesus teaches us about the name of our God. *Our Father in heaven, hallowed/holy be your name.* Even as we call upon the God whom we are privileged to call our Father, we are reminded that his name is holy, his name is separate, his name is exalted above all other names. The first thing we must do when we bow in prayer is to acknowledge the Almighty One before whom we come. We do not take his name upon our lips lightly. We do not rush in with 'please God give me this, help me with this'! We pray *hallowed by your name.*

### The name Jesus

We also bring our prayer in the name of Jesus. We close our prayer in Jesus name because Jesus' name is also holy. *Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you* said Jesus (John 16:23). Jesus was obedient unto death, unto death on the cross. *Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of*

*those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth* (Philippians 2). The name of Jesus is great, it is holy, it is powerful. It is the only name by which people can be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ is Lord.

Peter said to the lame man sitting at the entrance to the temple- *in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk* (Acts 3:6). The man leapt to his feet and started praising God. How amazing. There is power indeed in that name, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Jesus the Lord. What would have happened if Peter had said in the name of Peter, or in the name of Moses rise up and walk? Nothing! There is no power in those names.

Furthermore, the name of Jesus must never be used without recognizing who Jesus is. The name cannot be manipulated by men for their own glory. It cannot be used by sorcerers or magicians. We have examples of such attempts later in Acts. One man tried to buy the gift of giving the Holy Spirit from the apostle. Peter condemned him as being bound by iniquity and under the condemnation of God (Acts 8).

Again the seven sons of Sceva took it upon themselves to try and cast out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus. The demon possessed man attacked them and they had to flee naked (Acts 19). The name of Jesus is holy and must not be misused. Those who seek to use this name without believing in him will be severely judged.

## **The name YHWH**

God spoke to Abraham and appeared to him in visions. He became known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But it was Moses who, standing before the burning bush that was not consumed, asked God ‘what is your name, what shall I say to them?’ *And God said to Moses I am who I am* (Exodus 3:14). This is not the sort of name we might expect? It is not even a proper noun but part of the verb to be. It speaks of a God who is self-existent, uncreated and eternal, without beginning and without end. Jesus used the same name in referring to himself (John 8:58).

The Jews were greatly upset with Jesus for using this name. They accused him of blasphemy and indeed it would have been blasphemy for any man other than Jesus the Son of God. The Jews did not like to use this personal name of God, probably for fear of blasphemy, of breaking the third commandment.

What a contrast to our society where people so freely take the name of God, of Jesus, of Christ in their cursing and swearing. ‘Many seldom mention Gods name but in oaths for which the land mourns (Watson). But the Lord will not hold them guiltless, according to this command.

## **Take the name of the Lord**

As we look at this command we might ask – what does it mean to take the name of someone. We immediately think of speaking that name and that is part of it. But to ‘take’ here means more than just speaking. It means to bear or to carry that name. Not only our words but our actions also can bring dishonour to the name of the Lord our God.

But firstly let us see how the tongue can be used corruptly to dishonour the name of the Lord. The tongue, James reminds us, *is a fire, a world of iniquity*. It so quickly and so easily pours forth

profanity. Even the names of dear ones do not escape vain usage. The name of God is so quickly upon the lips of men in their anger and in their cursing. But this must not be so among the people of God. God will not hold such people guiltless. His name is not to be used profanely or 'in vain' as the command states.

The child of God must refrain from swearing or cursing altogether. Let your yes be yes, and your no no, lest you fall into judgment (James 5:12). Anything more is than this is from the evil one said Jesus (Matthew 5:37). What an indictment this is. How evil our hearts must be. How often do we 'have God in our mouth but the devil in our hearts' as Watson says? We must not use the name of God unless he is firstly in our hearts and in our hearts we hold that name high and with great reverence and awe. Let us not take the name of the Lord upon our lips lightly.

We will not be heard for our many words nor for the great profanity of our words. That is what the ignorant and the ungodly think. They speak before they think, they speak what they do not know, they profane the name of the God they do not know. But that God will judge them according to his command. Sometimes that judgment may be immediate as with the son of the Israelite woman *who blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed* (Leviticus 24). Other times the judgment will be delayed – but not for ever.

Some Christians refuse to take the oath upon the Bible in court. They have a point. In fact what is the point? The believer speaks the truth always, or should do, while the unbeliever will not hesitate to lie even after taking the oath.

What about silent witness, silent disobedience of this command? May not our actions bring the name of the Lord into dishonour? Remember what is in a name. A lot, everything, is in a name. The name of the Lord our God is holy. The name of Jesus is holy. They who profess that holy and majestic name, yet by their actions brings shame to that name, will be guilty of breaking this command. Paul told the Jews *you make your boast in the law, but you dishonour God by breaking the law. For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you* (Romans 2:24). Beware of those who honour God with their lips but their hearts are far from the Lord – as shown by their deeds.

Before you take the name of the Lord upon your lips stop and remember all that his name means to you. This is the Lord your God who sent his only son into the world to die for you, to take your sin and die upon the cross. You have the wonderful privilege, the right as an adopted child of God, to call God 'my Father'.

He is the exalted one, whose name is above every name. Do not bring shame upon that precious name by speaking it carelessly or blasphemously as so many do. Have nothing to do with blasphemy. Warn men against offending God in this way. Remind them of this command, and pray that they will turn from such sin and believe in Jesus as saviour and Lord.

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