

Three!

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: 24 September 2023

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] We all love to be on a throne. We love to be in the center. We love to be in that zone. And on that throne, it's a great place to be for us because it's a place where we can judge other people.

And we like to think that we have the measure, I think, of other people. We weigh them up and we judge them. And by so doing, we maybe come to the conclusion that they're worth our time or not.

We learn facts about people and what we don't know or what we can't know, we make up. And we then put everyone's character into a box and we close the box and we put our name over it.

And that becomes that person. Their name identifies them. It identifies what we've learned about them. It identifies what we think we know about them and identifies their character to us.

Their name becomes them for good or for ill sometimes, isn't it, the case? And sometimes we have very long memories when we open that box to some of the things that we're not so keen about in other people.

[1 : 08] So we associate someone's name with the character that we've learned about them that we've put into this box. And so we bring the two things together and that's quite important.

It's a bit like when we say, as we've said over the last few weeks here in church, it's a lot of new faces in church. Now what we don't mean by that, we don't mean there's lots of disembodied faces, what, come floating into the church on a Sunday.

But we associate the face with the person in the same way that we associate a name with a person which is important.

So I guess an extreme example of that was that not many of us, I don't suppose, would call our child Adolf. Just because we associate a name with a character for good or for bad, or sometimes we hear a child's name and we think, wow, not so keen on that name, not because of the name itself, but because of the association of that name with a teacher, maybe that maybe used to belt us in school, showing certain age here, obviously.

But it may be that that's the case. It's why we feel embarrassed when we forget people's name, because personhood is associated with names.

[2 : 21] And to dehumanize someone, we take away their name from them and give them, for example, a number as often been done to torture or dehumanize people in different contexts.

So short and simple tonight, what about this commandment, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. What is it saying? Well, it's reminding us, I think in the first place that God simply is.

God simply is, we shall not take His name and all that that means and the character that's behind it, we shall not treat it like something that's empty of reality and empty of truth.

And that's because He's revealed who He is. So we don't get to choose who God is because He's revealed Himself in His character through His name. We know about Him because of what He's revealed.

It's like someone telling you who you are. You know, if someone's, oh, I meant, yeah, that's that guy with long, long, blonde, flowing hair, he's 36 and he owns a BMW Cabriolet.

[3 : 31] Now, I might want that to be true, but it's not true and of course, it becomes far worse if it's libelous or slanderous. And yet we do that with God all the time.

We tell God who He is or we tell God who we think He is when He's revealed Himself to us. And what He's saying here is He is the Lord. Do not take the name of the Lord in the small capital letters reflecting this covenant, salvific name of God, Yahweh, that we know about from the Old Testament.

It's the same name that He revealed Himself with to Moses at the burning bush. He said, who will I say that has sent me to redeem the people from slavery?

And He says, tell them that the Lord has sent you, that Yahweh, that I am who I am, has sent you. This revelation of God's character, the type of God He is, the redeeming, saving God who will take His people out of slavery into the promised land.

A name that's used 700 times in the Old Testament of God. It's eternal God of creation who reveals Himself as the one who seeks out His people to rescue, redeem and love and be with Him.

[4 : 47] This judge of all the earth, this uncreated one, this great, all-powerful one who brooks no rivals. Because there aren't any rivals to this one God.

I mean, we've already looked at that a little bit as He's set the scene with command number 1 and command number 2, haven't we? His name as it were in this third command is copyrighted.

He's copyrighting His name. He said, you can't take my name and just append anything to it. You can't just make up the God that you want from using my name. We can't defame or libel God by just ignoring His own revelation of Himself without consequence.

And His name, the opposite of being vain, which is empty, spoken of here, His name is full. His name is weighty, it's glorious.

It's awesome because He's awesome. It's a name that we see revealed throughout the Old Testament in His acts of mercy and grace and judgment. But it's fulfilled and it comes to its fullness in the person of Jesus Christ, where Jesus Himself takes the name, this great name from this great commandment, verily, verily I say to you or truly I say to you, He answered when He was speaking to Pharisees Abraham.

[6 : 11] Before Abraham was born, I am. It wasn't grammatical mistake. At this, we're told the religious leaders picked up the stones to stone Him, but Jesus had Himself slipping away from them in the crowds.

They knew that it was a blasphemous claim, and Jesus is taking upon Himself this great name because He is, Hebrews 1.3 tells us the exact representation of the living God.

And in Philippians 2, we see explained by Paul that this great name is given to Jesus because of what He has done on the cross, having humbled Himself and emptied Himself and given Himself to death for our sins.

He said, therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and in earth and under there.

And every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God. So we have this great fullness of who Christ is and who God is as He has revealed Himself.

[7 : 20] And yet as I say my own name, you can say your own name, say your own name tonight to yourself and say, I like to be on the throne. I actually prefer to be in that place.

I want to live my life how I want without reference to this living God. It's good to be in that place of control.

And that's a challenge for us to consider. And as Christians it's a challenge because it should be a battle for us constantly to be dethroned and to allow this living God with His glorious name to be on the throne.

And this God who reveals Himself here in this commandment is reminding us that we are His. He said, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

It's not just a random God, it's just the God of the universe. It's the covenant God of His people and it's the God that we can claim for ourselves. But therefore it's a God we need to know and understand and follow and serve.

[8 : 24] So quickly the command says, frame negatively as we've seen before they've got negative and positive elements. So the negative element, the command does say that we are not to take the name of the Lord in vain.

We're not to take God's name. In other words, His character, His reputation, His being, His work and empty them of any value and make them meaningless, make them worthless, make them of no value whatsoever.

How do we do that? How do we take the name of God and make it worthless? Well, I think we can do so by rejecting His own revelation of Himself by saying, you know, I'm not really that keen on how He reveals Himself in the Bible.

I would rather the God that I would trust in acts like this and does that. We mold a God that's kind of easier to serve, that is much more pliable and much more manageable.

And we know the devil's been doing that from the beginning too. Is God really like that? Is that what God's like? We want Him in the same way. We want Him in a box. We want Him neat and controlled and manageable.

[9 : 34] We can take God in it and take Him out every so often, a sit in the mantle and just look at now and again, rejecting how He's revealed Himself and making, I guess, looking back to the previous commandment, making an image in our own, from our own minds.

But I think we can break this command also by claiming as authority for our own ends. You know, when we claim, take the name of God and append it or use it as a reason for our justification for acting in a certain way.

Well, God told me to do this. This is what God wants me to do. Maybe it's something that's not clear in the Bibles, maybe not revealed. And we have to be careful when we say that because actually sometimes it might just be that we're doing what we want to do.

And we're just using God's imprimatur to make it justifiable and to make it really great. When actually we're not listening to Him and we're not following Him.

And what we're doing might not be particularly loving or gracious or beneficial or good for us in our lives. But I think the commandment also speaks into empty worship and maybe that's the big one for all of us in many ways, and not just about church, but our lives.

[10 : 58] So that our lives are Christian faith, it's as if the lights are on, but there's just nobody at home. See, we say that we're following Jesus, but there's nothing, our prayers are empty of any kind of life.

They make no difference whatsoever as we pray. We're not thinking of the God that we're praying to when we pray. It's a big part in our lives, not a big part in our lives.

The Word is it's read or the Word is it's preached. We have no expect, expectancy of anything valuable happening when we read His Word. No, God is empty.

He's empty of any, He's worthless and cheap. There's nothing really we gain from Him. Abedience becomes a matter of choice and convenience. And we find ourselves creeping back onto that throne of significance and importance and edging God out of the picture.

I think that is taking God's name in vain in our lives because we're emptying it, and emptying Him of who He is and of His glory. Now there's the obvious one I guess as well, is blaspheming.

[12 : 08] We were taking His name in vain, the OMG chorus of a million voices who take God's name and just use it as a turn of phrase.

We're calling out God and Jesus Christ, but it means nothing. And I guess there's a subtle rejection of the God who reveals Himself when we take His name in that way without thinking about who He is.

Yes. The heavenly choir. That's quite all right. Blaspheming.

And the hypocrisy would be the other one that maybe we consider more technically breaking this command where we use the goodness of the name of God to lie, maybe lying under the oath when we claim we're telling the truth in God's name, call God to account, but actually we're using it as a cover for lying.

And that can be true of our Christian lives as well, that we use our Christian faith. And I say, well, I'm a Christian and I go to church and I read the Bible as a mask for an underworld life that is dishonouring to God, a hidden life of maybe lust or greed, a dark web of betrayal that is in our hearts where we're taking His name and calling on His name and calling ourselves Christian, but we're denying who He is.

[13 : 52] Why is it the case that you shall not, these you shall nots, and why is it significant? Well, He says the Lord will not hold Him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

And it's a reminder to us, simple reminder to us that we're accountable to this great and living God. He is the judge of all the earth. He is the judge, not us.

And we will be gone in an instant to meet with Him. And it's coming to the recognition we simply don't fit on His throne.

It's not the place where we're to be. There's no room for us there. And so the command, the word is a call, always a thank for us. His memory is speaking to His own people, to us, a call to repentance, to recognise that we are guilty, very often in our lives, our thoughts of taking His name in vain, treating Him like emptiness and nothing.

Because we choose to be the ones who tower over Him in judgment and make the decisions about what is right and wrong. His is justice and His is judgment, not for us.

[15 : 00] So we are to be those who cry out in an ongoing way for His beautiful repentance and forgiveness that He promises. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And we're to continue to be a people who are continually looking at His own self-revelation and reminding ourselves of where we fall short so that we can know newness and freshness and vibrancy and joy in His presence.

And briefly as we conclude, the positive side of that is that in Christ we genuinely see Him for who He is and we remind ourselves of what it means to call on the name of the Lord and who this Lord is and how He is to be reflected in our lives.

Remember He carries us on eagle's wings to Himself. Remember that's the precursor, that's the verse before these Ten Commandments. He talks about the people as He took them out of Egypt, that I carried you on eagle's wings to myself.

A beautiful, gentle, intimate picture of His grace and love. And our relationship with the Father through Christ is a relationship that transcends anything that the world can offer.

[16 : 21] And we are made to worship Him, we are made to allow Him to sit on His throne and to be the center of the universe and allow ourselves by His grace to be reborn with a different love and a different spirit which reflects the name of God and which reflects His character and to live in His presence as believers.

And so positively, I think the reminder of the command here and indeed all the commands is we need the gospel every day. We don't mature beyond the gospel.

The gospel is not just for beginners and then we become experts. We constantly need the gospel because that is the character of our God.

He's a rescuing and a redeeming God. We constantly need His relentless peace and forgiveness as we return to Him. As we recognize failure happens in our lives, we fall short.

But don't ignore that or suppress that. Take it to Him and know His forgiveness and grace because I genuinely believe that every repentant prayer makes you more alive.

[17 : 35] Every repentant prayer makes you more alive, makes you more like who you are created to be because you come to Him and allow Him to remold you by His grace and by His goodness.

And it enables us then to give Him the glory because He deserves that glory in our lives because His name is worthy, is not empty, and we hold Him up in our lives and we allow Him and His transformation to be at the core of our beings.

And we make His name great and we honor Him and we make His name full, not empty, by a relentless and a sacrificial obedience of love.

We want to serve Him because He's worthy of that and because He's good, not because we're grumbling and complaining and wishing we were unbelievers.

I always think it's that amazing verse in the Old Testament which speaks in the Numbers, speaks about the Israelites when they were in the desert for a little while and they've been rescued from the desperate slavery they were in and they were being given manna to eat.

[18 : 48] And all of us started grumbling and saying, gee, we're back in Egypt, it was great, we had melons and cucumbers and pomegranates and they kind of make up this absolute make-believe world that they had back in Egypt as if they were in the Pharaoh's palace, eating all these things.

They were dying by the day because they were being, they were enslaved to build and weren't being given the resources in order to build and they were being whipped and beaten and enslaved.

We make His name glorious and it's not empty in vain when we share His generous love in our lives with the lost, the lonely and the least.

Because that's who we are without Him, that's what we do, the lost, the lonely and the least. We're sharing His glory and His love. And I think we're making His name great and we're able to, down a bit, down a bit, we're able to know that transforming power of the Spirit who blows away the cobwebs of ordinariness and routine and having a small God when we are making His name great and we're depending on Him in the Spirit.

We pray in the Spirit, we pray with the living God in our hearts and lives and we should pray with the expectation that that brings to us.

[20 : 17] And we make His name great, I think, just as we rely on Him, as we gain His wisdom and as we become the unique and beautiful people He created us to be in a broken and in a lost world where suffering and pain will be our lot at some point.

But we know that He will never leave us or forsake us, like He promised on His own name and His own character.

Right from the revelation that He gave His name to Moses, He said, I will always be with you. And we need to remember that and we need to remind ourselves of His great and glorious love.

Don't live on empty. It's easy to live on empty and it's easy to make God empty and meaningless in our lives by draining His revelation from Himself and putting in our own understanding of who we think God is, He's far too great for that.

And each day we're called to make a new start, recognizing His revelation of Himself and molding our lives towards that because He's good and holy and He loves us and He will never leave us.

[21 : 42] And if you're not a Christian, that's the great encouragement to recognize that while His justice is great and we will all stand before Him, His mercy is glorious and He has taken our sins and our feelings and He has paid the price on His own shoulders so that we might live and know fellowship and friendship with this sovereign Yahweh Lord.

Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would teach us your way. Guide us in your truth, guide us to understand and know you.

And in these 10 words that we're looking at to see your character reflected, to see the great person of Jesus who perfectly fulfilled this command and who honored your name and who yet was emptied himself of His glory in order to be a redeemer and our Saviour, whose name was hidden as it were so that we could be saved.

So we pray that we would know and understand you better. Encourage us, fire up our prayer lives, we pray, as we think of the one to whom we pray. Give us expectation, give us trust, give us reliance on you, we ask, and help us to know the beauty of the name of Jesus in our hearts and lives.

We ask it in His precious name. Amen.