



The Name

SERIES: *The Good Life: Finding Freedom in the Ten Commandments*

Today we're on our third sermon in a series on the 10 commandments. Imagine if everybody on the planet obeyed the 10 commandments. In a matter of weeks we'd see that our world is a much better place. There would be no stealing, no murder (the 6th and 8th commandment). There would be no adultery, marriages would remain faithful (the 7th commandment). Children would honor their father and mother (the 5th commandment). We would all be truth tellers (people, the media, businesses, leaders, etc.). There would be no bearing false witness (the 9th commandment). And the 10th commandment, which reads: **"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field...or his donkey."** That's contentment!

But what about the 3rd commandment? Would keeping the 3rd commandment make any significant difference in our world? Would anyone notice or care if we ignored this commandment? Isn't this commandment the weakest one of them all, the *accessory* commandment? In English it's 27 words; in Hebrew it's 17 words. **"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain"** (Deuteronomy 5:11).

This is a massive commandment. I know what you're thinking, "This is a small commandment, this is an easy commandment, it just means that I never say 'Oh my God.'" No, this is no easy commandment, this is not a small matter. This is big. This is a weighty commandment. This is a wonderful commandment. It might be that obeying the 3rd commandment would make the most significant impact on our world. It would make our world a better place. I think obeying this 3rd commandment could radically change your life for the better, perhaps more than any other of the commandments. Next Sunday you'd be a different person if you took this commandment seriously.

Alan Cole said, "The whole of the 10 commandments are really the explanation of God's name." The whole of the 10 commandments are really the explanation of the 3rd commandment: God's Name.

I. The Power of a Name

What's the big deal about a name? A name's just a

name, right? In Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet says, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet." In other words, it doesn't matter what you call something or someone, the name doesn't matter. What matters is the thing—the flower or the person represented by the name, but not the name itself.

In the Hebrew culture, a name was everything. A name represented the very essence and presence of a person. A person's identity was bound up in their name. A name contained power. Nothing's changed. Names still hold power today. What comes to mind when I say: Barack Obama. Mother Theresa. Adolph Hitler. Steve Jobs. Names are changed because of what they say about the person. Marian Michael Morrison became John Wayne. Why? You can't be a cowboy with a name like Marian!

Without a name, you're not a person. You get your identity from a name. Why did your parents choose your name? Who would you be without your name? Who would you be if no one knew what to call you, if you didn't know what to call yourself, if you didn't know your own name? There's a world of difference when you say, "Hey Mary" instead of "Hey waitress" or "Hey Joe" instead of "Hey Officer."

In the ancient world, when you called on the name of a god, you wanted a specific response from that god, a response that reflected the identity of that god. Baal was the god of the rain. You called on his name "Baal" if you wanted rain. Asherah was the goddess of fertility. You called on her name "Asherah" if you wanted a fertile harvest. When the ancient Israelites used, when we use, God's name, the name of the Lord our God, we're accessing, we're calling upon all of who God is. The Hebrew people understood that when they used God's name.

Remember the context of this commandment: Exodus and the Promised Land. The Lord did something *for* the people before he asked anything *of* the people. The Holy God of the Universe makes a covenant with sinful man! You'd think it would be the other way around, us reaching up to make a pact with God, but he reaches down and makes a pact with us. In the strength of his name God takes action and rescues his people, then he asks them to honor his name. It's all about his name. Exodus 9:16: **"But for this**

purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

II. The Misuse of God's Name

Now we understand the power of a name. We understand what a name is, just how significant God's name is. What exactly does this commandment mean? How do we misuse God's name? What does it mean to take God's name "in vain"? "Vain" in Hebrew means "worthless purposes." Unworthy use. The ancient Israelites took God's name in vain whenever they flippantly used God's name in making an oath/promise that they didn't keep, whenever they mixed their worship of God with worship of the false gods that surrounded them, whenever they used God's name for their own gain—to get ahead.

How about you? Do you take God's name in vain? Do you use God's name for worthless purposes? Do you violate the 3rd commandment? There are many ways you and I misuse God's name. We could talk about all of them, but let's talk about just three of them.

The ancient Hebrews would never have dreamed of how God's name is misused in our society; they carefully guarded how and when they spoke the name of the Lord. Stephen Carter, author of *Taking God's Name in Vain*, says, "In truth, there is probably no country in the Western world where people use God's name quite as much, or quite as publicly, or for quite as many purposes, as we Americans do—the Third Commandment notwithstanding. Few candidates for office are able to end their speeches without asking God to bless their audience, or the nation, or the great work we are undertaking, but everybody is sure the other side is insincere...Athletes thank God, often on television, after scoring the winning touchdown, because, like politicians, they like to think God is on their side [Kurt Warner]. Churches erect huge billboards and take out ads in the paper...God's will is cited as a reason to be against gay rights. And as a reason to be for them...Everybody who wants to change America, and everybody who wants not to, understands the nation's love affair with God's name, which is why everybody invokes it."

One of the main ways Americans use/misuse God's name is by using it essentially as a cuss word. This is the first misuse I want to talk about, and this is what most people think about when they think of breaking the 3rd commandment. Do you do this? When something disagreeable happens to you, do you blurt out God's name as a cuss word? "God!" "Oh my God!" "God damnit!" "Jesus Christ!" Would you do this with your mom's name? You wouldn't do this with your mom's name, so don't do it with God's name. Christian, this is the name that saved you!

Matthew 12:36, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak."

The first way we violate the 3rd commandment is when we use God's name like a worthless cuss word. The second way we violate this commandment is by building up our own name. Instead of living for and building up God's name, we live for and build up our own name. A spotlight is designed to shine on and highlight something other than itself. God designed humans to live for God's name. You and I fulfill our God-given design when we shine towards God, when our lives build up his name and his fame. The builders of the tower of Babel designed the spotlights to turn inward. Genesis 11:4: "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves.'" This ended in disaster, it didn't work.

Whose name are you living for? Whose name are you building? Where's the spotlight turned? Don't build your own name. Don't worry about building your own name. You're a spotlight. And the only way you discover what's unique about yourself, the only way you discover your true identity and name is by building God's name, shining on him. That's what you're designed to do. Imagine how much better a place our world would be if all of us spotlights quit worrying about our own name and were united in shining on and building up God's name.

You violate the 3rd commandment when you use God's name as a cuss word, when you build your own name and, third, when you read this command simply as a "no-no," rather than a "yes-yes." All of the 10 commandments can be stated in the positive. The big idea of the 10 commandments isn't to avoid a few no-no's; these commandments affirm life—they're a roadmap to a new, full, wonderful way of life. Don't misunderstand the 3rd commandment as simply a no-no: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." GOD WANTS US TO USE HIS NAME!

There's one thing you can't do with God's name: you can't misuse it, you can't take it in vain. But there's 100 things you can do with God's name! *God's name can be:* Spoken, Worshipped, Trusted, Celebrated, Adored, Shouted, Whispered, Honored, Cherished, Exalted, Enjoyed. *In the name of God you can:* Pray, Heal, Protect, Preach, Baptize, Hope, Rejoice, Love, Rest, Wait, Move Mountains. *And God has many names:* Almighty, Everlasting, Shepherd, King, Rock, Healer, Provider, Holy One, Creator, Redeemer, Most High God.

Psalms 8:1: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

Do you know that you have it backwards? You see your problems as infinite and see God only as big as your fist.

But God is big, he is infinite. Compared to who he is, our problems are the size of a fist.

III. The Penalty of Misusing God's Name

ABC's Ted Koppel at Duke University's commencement ceremony said: "What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the 10 Suggestions." As his people, God expects us to obey his commandments, to obey this 3rd commandment by making good use of his name. But we fail. We don't keep the 3rd commandment. We don't use God's name the way he commands us to use it. It would seem that you and I are unable to keep the 3rd commandment. We can't do it. And breaking this commandment comes with a consequence, a penalty: **"for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."** This was the worst punishment imaginable: the guilty verdict! We know the meaning of this penalty—being guilty before a holy God: wrath. What we do with God's name will determine what he does with us. If we take his name in vain, he won't take us. If we take his name in faith, he will take us in grace.

IV. Jesus & the 3rd Commandment

You can't do it. I can't do it. But there is somebody who obeyed the 3rd commandment perfectly. There is somebody who never took God's name in vain. There is somebody who lived his life and went to his death perfectly honoring God's name. *His name* is Jesus. And Jesus changes everything. Jesus transforms the 3rd commandment, Jesus makes this commandment new to us. Throughout his ministry, Jesus always called God "Father." But one time, at the darkest hour of his life, Jesus couldn't call God "Father." On the cross, bearing the sins of the world, bearing the guilt of 3rd commandment breakers, Jesus looked up to heaven and said: **"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"** Forsaken by the Father on the cross because he was shouldering the punishment we deserved, Jesus opened up the way for us to call God by a new name: "Father."

Many people say that they know God, but do you know him by name? Do you know him as "Father"? Long ago Moses said to the Israelites: "Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." Today, Jesus says to us, you can call God by a new name, this is how you should address him: "Our *Father* who art in heaven, hallowed be your *name*." This is what separates Christianity from all other religions. The God of the Bible, this Name who we worship, he's not like any other god. He doesn't wait for us to reach out to him; he reaches out to us. This is the God who out of his great love for you sacrificed his only Son in order to make you his son, in order to make you his daughter. The Father and the Son planned it so that through his work on the cross Jesus would accomplish Isaiah 43:6&7: **"...bring my**

sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." This isn't just any God, this isn't just any name, this isn't just any Father. If you've trusted Christ, he's your Father.

The 10 commandments don't just tell us what to do, they tell us who we are: children of God, sons and daughters of the Father. Jesus has taken away the frightening penalty of the 3rd commandment, he's taken away our guilt, and he calls us towards a fulfilling life of honoring and enjoying our Father's name.

V. How to Keep the 3rd Commandment

So how do we do it? We still have a commandment before us: don't take the name of the Lord your God (the name of your Father) in vain. Stated positively: honor this name. How do we do it? I've been thinking about this question all week: what's the one thing we could do to best honor his name? There are many ways of putting this commandment into action, but I don't want to overwhelm you, I want to help you.

Bank on the name. TRUST. Bank on his name. Bank on your Father. We live in uncertain times: Wall Street had the worst January ever. The one thing/name you can be certain about is *the name*... This bank never fails. Your Father is working out his perfect plan for your life amid all the difficulties and uncertainties. Do you believe that? Edmund Clowney said: "...we cannot understand the mystery...We only know that God used the cross, the greatest crime of history, to bring redemption, and that no suffering enters our lives that does not bring with it grace now and a weight of glory in the future."

For a decade I've been preaching God's sovereignty, but only in this difficult season of life am I finally learning to live as though this is true. Bank on the name. This week, shift where you place your trust. Let the Psalms be your tutor, Israel's prayer book of banking on God amid uncertainty, fear, doubt, and pain. What got me through yesterday was Psalm 84:11&12: **"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!"**

Basically, you keep the 3rd commandment when you act like a son or a daughter, when you live like you have a Father who knows you and loves you and has detailed oversight of your life. Let's keep the 3rd commandment together. Let's live like sons and daughters of the Father. Let's bank on God in 2009. Let's bank on *his name* this week, no matter what threats come our way. He won't let us down.

