

We are back in our Fall sermon series this morning, looking at the 10 commandments in Deuteronomy ch. 5. These are words that were given to the Israelites after their exit from slavery in Egypt, and they are now being reiterated by Moses just as they're about to step into the promised land, the land of their inheritance, the land that God had promised to them through Abraham.

And these commandments are words that God spoke to them from the understanding that He is their King and *will be* their King going into this new land. He's giving them words of wisdom by which they can organize themselves in this new "kingdom" that they are being given to steward.

But even more importantly, He is giving them words of wisdom that speak to *who He is* and that He has drawn them into a *shared identity* with Himself. Because everything that they do going forward is to reflect who their God and King is.

Everything is about identity. We cannot read these words and *not* understand that this is about God's shared identity with the people of Israel. Because we'll go way off track and conclude far too many of our own assumptions if we stray too far from the original understanding.

This was all about God's shared identity with Israel. As you go into the land, "Remember who I am and remember who you are and me."

Read Deuteronomy 5:1-8, 11.

Now, before we make assumptions about what this commandment is saying, there's four things that I want to address that will help to shape our understanding of this passage.

First, when we look at this third commandment, we have to recognize, again, the shared identity between Yahweh and the Israelites. When the Lord says in verse 11, "*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God,*" it wasn't just His glory that was at stake but also His identification through Israel. What Israel said and did directly impacted how they and others viewed their God.

Let me give you an example to clarify this. There's a scene in a very serious movie called, "The Princess Bride," where a character by the name of Inigo Montoya is on a mission of vengeance to do away with a man named Count Rugen, a man who murdered Inigo's father and stripped away his family's pride. So throughout the movie, whenever Inigo Montoya comes across Count Rugen, he repeats the same phrase.

"Hello, my name Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." It's probably one of the most quoted lines of any movie in history—in large respect because of how the actor says the line. It's very memorable. But also because there's something in that line that captivates us. You did this terrible thing that dishonored my family name. I must now avenge my family name.

Now, we'll talk about murder in a few weeks, but I think we can all relate to that feeling of wanting to protect our family name—and especially those of us who come out of honor-shame cultures. The idea of dishonouring the family name is even more real.

Many of us here in the West think about name and reputation as much more individualistic. But almost 80% of the world's population lives in an honor-shame culture, where a person's worth is directly tied to their family standing and reputation. In honor-shame cultures, how you speak and act and strive and achieve for your own reputation is *also* for the reputation of your entire family.

And this understanding of communal reputation is much closer to what we see in Scripture than our own context.

Having your name injured or misused in the ancient world was a big deal. Names and reputations were everything. The most noble thing you could do was to establish a 'name' that would last. It's why women were under such pressure to bear a son, because sons carried on the name of the family.

It's why Jacob says to the sons of Joseph in Genesis 48: *“May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully... bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth.”*

In other words, in them *let my name be carried on*. They carry the identity of this family forward.

Everyone in the ancient world had this cultural value. Everyone based their understanding of family and society on this assumption. *But not so much with the gods*, interestingly enough. Injuring a god's name didn't seem to have the same consequences, simply because a god's identity wasn't attached to the people in the same way.

So the fact that the God of Israel understood His relationship to Israel in this way makes this commandment really stand out in that ancient context. Because this God *is* identified with the people who call on Him.

So then secondly, with that context in mind, misusing the Name of the Lord must then also involve misusing His identity. If we look at it literally, the commandment says to not 'lift up' the Lord's Name in vanity, or in an empty or deceptive manner. What exactly 'misusing' meant is highly debated in Biblical literature, but we get some clues if we look at other portions of Scripture.

For example, in Leviticus there is a command to not *“swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God...”* (19:12). And then a few chapters later, there's an actual example of the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father who gets into a fight with an Israelite and blasphemes the Name with a curse (24:11).

So it seems that people were inclined to swear disingenuously with the Name or to use the Name to curse someone. And when we think about this being connected to the Lord's identity, both of those situations imply taking God's Name and using God's Name in a slanderous way in the presence of someone else.

One scholar said it's similar to the idea of identity theft. It would be like somebody coming up to you and saying, "Hey, can I borrow your credit card, driver's license, and social insurance number, just for a day or two? I just need to do a few things."

You would be well-in-your-rights to question their motives. What are you going to do with my identity? What are you going to do with *my* name? Who will be hurt or what will be damaged because you've done something *with my name*?

The third commandment is speaking about a kind of divine identity theft. Do not steal God's identity. Don't take His Name and use it for your own purposes or your own gain—either to give a false word to someone or curse them or whatever.

Israel's shared identity with Yahweh implied that they represented Him appropriately—like a family. He was saying to them, "You are not to use my Name in any way that misrepresents me, because *you* are supposed to represent me."

So the third implication here, then, is that His Name needs to be represented. And to do that implies using His Name and speaking it in such a way that speaks to who He is.

But then why is it that we don't see His Name written in Scripture? Why do all of our Bibles have 'LORD' typed in capital letters anytime the Name is mentioned? As a replacement? It's why we never see 'Yahweh' in Scripture. But why would He give the name to Moses and want the Israelites to represent His Name, and then not allow anyone to use it?

This is an important piece of history to realize. Because somewhere along the line, as Darrell Johnson put it, strict Jews stopped uttering the sacred name. They believed that this was what the commandment was asking for, and so they removed any option to ever utter the name. And Christian tradition has honoured that effort by keeping LORD in our Bible translations.

But what's of course been lost is the ability to lift high the Name that God wished to be known by. Yahweh—as best as we understand it—*is His Name*. And He wants to be known by His Name.

To protect His Name from being spoken was never the Lord's intention. He gave Moses His name at the burning bush because He *wanted the Israelites to know exactly who He was*. In fact, Israel *needed* His Name to represent Him well. To speak His Name, to proclaim it, to adore it, to let the other nations know of it, was always a part of the plan. Because what then happened?

What happened is that the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God would give His servants another name, a new name connected to the one true God. A Name that the angel gave to Mary.

The Name Jesus. In Jesus, we see clearly what God's intention was from the beginning. That His Name was to be recognized *and spoken* because it is a Name that is for the healing of the nations. A Name that is a light to the Gentiles, to the outsider, to the foreigner, to the forgotten.

Wasn't it Peter who declared that a man was healed because of faith *in the Name of Jesus* (Acts 3:16)? Wasn't Paul chosen to carry *the Name of Jesus* before the Gentiles (Acts 9:15)?

Did not Jesus say that whoever receives a child *in His Name* receives Him (Matt. 18:5)? And that where two or three are gathering *in His Name*, there he would be (Matt. 18:20)?

Wasn't it the disciples who ran to Jesus, declaring, "*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name*"? Wasn't the Spirit sent to the disciples *in His Name* (John 14:26)?

Is not Jesus now the 'Name above all names' (Phil 2:9), the name 'before whom every knee will bow' (Phil 2:10)?

We are now associated with *that* Name. The Name of Jesus is the name that we are identified by. We have a shared identity *with* Jesus. We are His body; He is our Head. *Both* sons and daughters of God now carry forward *this* Name.

Is not your identity to be a 'Christian'? Is that not who you are and why you're here today? Whose name do you claim by being a "Christian"? And is not the reputation of *that* Name based on how *we* collectively carry that Name?

We now carry this family Name and reputation *without the baggage of an honour-shame framework*—because He has wiped away our shame in His death and given us honour through His resurrection. We have a Name that is of much greater significance than the name on our driver's licence, because it's a Name that cannot be stolen or removed.

You were *baptized* into His Name. You have the Name of Jesus branded on your forehead. When we understand this, this commandment has so much more relevance for us today than we realize.

We believe that the Name of Jesus is now the name that the Father wants us to know. But the most obvious problem, of course, that we face today is how often we hear the name of Jesus Christ spoken in everything but a worshipful way. Much of the time, when we hear the name, "Jesus Christ," it's in anger or as a kind of curse towards oneself or someone else.

And isn't it just so devilish that the *one name*, the one 'religious figure' whose name is regularly thrown around in vain and in empty and deceptive ways is the name of Jesus? It feels so evil, not simply because it's 'wrong' or profane, but because it's misusing His identity.

Again, it's like someone hacking into your CRA account and deleting all your information. All of Jesus' identity, His reputation, His authority is thrown out. It's just a name without substance.

Of course this matters to us, because as 'followers of Jesus,' that Name is directly connected to who we are. We have a shared identity with that Name. That Name, as we've spoken about in previous weeks, is connected to the God who wants to be everything to us. Who is jealous for us. Who doesn't want anything to be put in His place.

So then what's the solution? We can't control all the ways that others misuse the Name of Jesus—which are many. We can't even control how other Christians use the name of Jesus for their own purposes. We can only control how *we* will use it.

And I will say this: to not use it at all is *also* to misuse the Name. Because the Name was given to us not so that we keep it private but so that we proclaim it.

I wonder, then, if the way that we can respond to this third commandment is actually by *re-committing* ourselves to the Name of Jesus. To counter the misuse of His Name with proclamation of Name. To not be afraid to say His Name and identify the power of His Name.

I read an article this past week about a stabbing that took place on a FlyDubai airplane on Wednesday. Two hours into the flight, one of the pilots stabbed the other in an attempt to seize control of the flight, and thankfully the injured pilot was able to get the cabin door open so that passengers could come assist him.

One of the passengers, Adam Polovincik, described how the whole situation unfolded, and how the safety of everyone on board relied on that one event—of the captain getting the door open. And he said this: "I'm not religious, but I can't escape the feeling that it was the hand of God... that had put the pieces on the board in the way that they did."

That struck me. Because if a *non-religious* person can look at a situation and stamp the Name of God on it, how much more then can we as Christians boldly and unashamedly stamp the Name of Jesus onto the blessings in our lives—in all their forms? How much bolder and more unashamed could we be to reframe people's understanding of who Jesus is in how we use His Name?

Do we believe that the Name of Jesus has power? Not a power that we can manipulate but a power that He has freely made accessible by the Holy Spirit? Do we feel free to identify that power when we see it? And to pray our King's Name boldly over *everything*?

For example, as Christians, we don't believe in coincidence, right? We believe in the Name of Jesus.

As Christians, we don't believe in fate, or misfortune, or luck. We believe in the Name of Jesus.

As Christians, we don't believe in nihilism or despair. We believe in the Name of Jesus.

You know how many people in North America today are a slave to nihilism, the belief that there's no intrinsic meaning or purpose in life? According to a quick google search, online forums for nihilists skyrocketed following the pandemic. And this new thing called "optimistic nihilism" has generated hundreds of *millions* of views on social media platforms.

In other words, people are looking for a way to cope with their despair because they haven't heard of or found any other belief system that has more power than the one they're stuck in.

We carry the Name that has the power to save people from this. Just this last week, I again had an encounter with someone who is grieving the loss of a family member, and they said, "I just can't imagine how people do this without Jesus."

But that's just it. They don't. They don't manage it without Jesus. They avoid. They distract. They cope. *Because there isn't an answer to despair apart from Jesus.* And if they don't know His Name—or only hear it spoken on TV shows with profanity—then what's going to change?

Christian, know thy mission. We don't misuse the Name of Jesus Christ because we know that it is the only Name by which we are *free*. So often we're afraid to say His Name because we're afraid of what people think. But we don't realize how much people need His Name.

Ask yourself today, what does the Name of Jesus mean to you? What does it mean to you that your identity is shared in Him? That what He's done for you has made that shared identity possible? Do you believe that His Name has power?

These are worthwhile questions to ask. Because this is who we are. His reputation is now known through us. His Holy Spirit power is known through us.

In Deuteronomy 16, the Lord commands the Israelites to sacrifice "*at the place the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his Name.*" With the Israelites He chose a temple. He wouldn't allow for an image to be placed in the temple, as we talked about last week. But His Name was there. Everyone was to come and rejoice because His Name would dwell there.

The LORD chose a place for His Name to dwell. In Christ, His Name now dwells in us. May we use His Name to His glory.