

Sunday 1 June 2008

Ten – Three

**YHWH**

**Yahweh**

Do not misuse my name. I am the LORD your God, and I will punish anyone who misuses my name.

Exodus 20:7

*Using God's Name*

## Using God's Name

### i. Recognizing who God is.

Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century world is very different from that of the world of Moses. We live at a time when many gods are worshipped but also when many people would acknowledge that they do not worship a god, or if they do they are not too sure what this god is like.

In Moses's world the worship of gods were commonplace. The Egyptians had their gods that they worshipped and the Israelites were in the process of discovering what the God of their fathers was like. In Exodus 3 when Moses discovers God, firstly he discovered God's holiness. He was told to take off his sandals because the ground where he was standing was Holy. The reason being because that was where God was. Furthermore this God was the God of his ancestors, the Israelites and He had a history. Ex 3.7-8. God the supreme being (Eloheem), was known to the Israelites as Jehoveh, the Lord which was the national Jewish name for God. Here in Exodus 3.14 God introduces himself as "I AM". God by using this name is telling Moses and Us that He is eternal. Out of concern that God's name would be incorrectly pronounced many used the name adonay using just the consonants of the name.

The discovery of God continues throughout the whole Bible, with different aspects of his personhood and character being discovered. It is significant that one of Jesus' favourite ways of introducing himself in John's gospel was as the "I AM". Jesus God incarnate, is the one who helps us discover God in greater measure. John the disciple of Jesus summarises his character by saying he was full of "grace and truth"

So in considering how to use God's name it does help if we know something about Him.

### ii. Being in relationship with Him

The Israelites were not only to discover what God was like but to enter into a relationship with Him. As the beginning of Exodus 20 reminds us God had liberated the Israelites from slavery under the Egyptians, He was calling them to be His people and for Him to be their God.

Exo 20:1-2 God said to the people of Israel: (2) I am the LORD your God, the one who brought you out of Egypt where you were slaves.

It was in the light of this miraculous deliverance that God was calling His chosen people to be in this relationship and to do so God gave them these 10 commandments to help preserve it.

For anyone who is a Christian they too have been liberated, this time from the power of the law and sin and death. The Apostle Paul writes about this in Romans 8.

Jesus says of himself:

"like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people." Mat 20:28.

For the Israelites of that time there was no difficulty in treating God with respect infact they feared for their very lives

(18) The people trembled with fear when they heard the thunder and the trumpet and saw the lightning and the smoke coming from the mountain. They stood a long way off (19) and said to Moses, "If you speak to us, we will listen. But don't let God speak to us, or we will die!" (20) "Don't be afraid!" Moses replied. "God has come only to test you, so that by obeying him you won't sin." Exodus 20.18-20

In considering how the name of God is to be used it makes all the difference when at least in part you know God.

### **iii. Rightfully using God's name.**

- **We need to have respect as we speak of God.**

As Christians it is important that we do not become over familiar with God. It is staggering that through Jesus we can call God "Father" Luke 11.2. Yet intimacy is not the same as being over familiar.

Job having been through intense suffering, encounters God. This is his response

"No one can oppose you, because you have the power to do what you want. You asked why I talk so much when I know so little. I have talked about things that are far beyond my understanding. You told me to listen and answer your questions. I heard about you from others; now I have seen you with my own eyes". (Job 42:2-5)

We also need humility as Christians, there is the danger that when we use phrases such as "God told me" that is very hard to argue with. It is good to remember our humanity!

- **Our lives need to reveal something of His reality otherwise we cheapen his name.**

These commands were given by God not to imprison but to enable His people to live wholesome lives. In rightfully using God's name we will seek to enable our words to match our lives. Jesus speaking to His disciples says that they are both salt and light.

You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden, and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lampstand, where it can give light to everyone in the house. Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven. (Mat 5:14-16)

- **Don't trivialize God's name. We do not need to say I swear this in God's name our word should suffice.**

But I tell you not to swear by anything when you make a promise! Heaven is God's throne, so don't swear by heaven. The earth is God's footstool, so don't swear by the earth. Jerusalem is the city of the great king, so don't swear by it. Don't swear by your own head. You cannot make one hair white or black. When you make a promise, say only "Yes" or "No." Anything else comes from the devil. (Mat 5:34-37)

- **When others misuse God's name we need to find a helpful way to respond.**

Joy Davidman in her book "Smoke on the Mountain" says "Many churchgoers think of the Third Commandment as meant primarily to forbid casual profanity. Yet casual profanity is perhaps the least of our offences against it".

This is not say using God's name casually is good – it clearly is not, yet many people say it without realizing what has been said. Often when others know you are a Christian this can make them think more about this. There is the danger of being too passive as Christians, how God's name is used does matter, but so does how we bring this to someone's attention.

There are of course times when others abuse God's name, they use it to offend, it can be used in occult settings for evil purposes. When someone knows what they are doing and abuses God's name then this is both sinful and evil and far more serious.

- **There is the danger that we do not use God's name**

Returning to the words of Jesus concerning being salt and light it is worth noting that salt speaks of God's invisible presence. How we live matters. Yet as light we are God's visible presence. There are times when it is right to speak God's name. As those who bear the name of Christ, it is right that we speak of Him. Jesus also promises that as we do so others will be able to see something of God's activity within us.

What I believe to be more disturbing than casual profanity is that so many people do not yet know of the true and living God. It is our privilege and responsibility to share the good news of who God truly is.

### **For Small Groups Exodus 20.1-10**

Do not misuse my name. I am the LORD your God, and I will punish anyone who misuses my name. Exodus 20:7

Begin by being quiet and letting the words of this verse roll over in your mind. After a while, share your reflections.

1. What is the significance of God's name?
2. How does God describe Himself and what do you think of by the name God and Lord?
3. This command is about the right use of God's name. How can we do this?
4. How do people misuse God's name and how are we best able to respond?
5. Think of the various names by which we address God, which is your personal favourite and why?

Spend time in praise and worship using God's name, ask for God's forgiveness for the ways in which his name is dishonoured, and pray for shared needs, remembering that we can pray in the name of Jesus.