

Word #3: Bearing God's Name

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[0:00] Let's pray one more time. Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing today in your sight, my Lord and my Redeemer.

! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now, I'm sure you all know who Alexander the Great is. Unlike me, he's an absolutely brilliant and ambitious guy.

This, after all, is the person who conquered the Eastern Mediterranean and Persian empires before he was even 32. And there is a story of a young soldier who had deserted in battle being brought before him.

Now, typically, such deserters would be executed. But this time, Alexander unexpectedly spared him. But before letting him go, Alexander asked him his name.

Oh, I'm Alexander, the soldier replied. The king looked at him again and repeated, Sorry, what did you say your name was?

[1:15] Alexander, sir. Same as yours. The king just stared at him and thundered, Well then, either change your conduct or change your name.

Now, whether every detail of this story is historically accurate, I'm not completely sure. But it doesn't matter because we all instinctively understand the point, don't we?

We know a name is never just a name. No, a name carries honor, reputation, identity, responsibility. That's why if a video of a student vandalizing a bus stop goes viral, their school desperately hopes the logo of the uniform is obscured.

Because they know that the moment the school's name is revealed, people are not just thinking, What an unpleasant teenager this is. No, they're thinking, Oh, so that's what students from SM so-and-so are like.

[2:21] That's how names work. It's something Alexander understood very well. Now, did you know God has a personal name as well?

And no, it isn't Mr. G-O-D. Often when we hear the word God, we tend to treat it more like a job description. We think, Oh, the guy in charge of everything.

Or the CEO of the universe. But that isn't how the God of the Bible introduces himself. He doesn't give you a business card.

He gives you his name. That's certainly what Moses experienced back in Exodus 3. You might remember the story.

God has just appeared to Moses in the burning bush and called him to go back to Egypt and lead Israel out of slavery. It is an overwhelming assignment.

[3:24] So naturally, Moses wants to know who he is being commissioned by. That's why, verse 13, he asks, Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you.

And they ask me, What is his name? Then what shall I tell them? And amazingly, God tells him, I am who I am, he says.

Or in Hebrew, four consonants, Y-H-W-H. Yahweh. But what a puzzling name it is, isn't it?

It makes you think. Unlike a name like John or James. Please accept my apologies today if that's what your name is. And that is the point.

By stating his name this way, God is hinting at the sheer bigness of who he is. He is the one who is uncreated, who from the beginning is eternal, who owes his being to no one.

[4:36] And did you know how the Jewish people treated that name? They stopped saying it. They came to regard it as so holy, so weighty, that when they read the scriptures aloud, and came to those four letters, they would substitute another word entirely, rather than let that name pass their lips.

So why did they treat it with such seriousness? Well, to answer that, we need to turn a few pages on to Exodus chapter 6, our Bible reading today.

Now, by this point, things have gone badly wrong. Moses has done what he was told. He's gone to Pharaoh, asked him to let God's people go, and Pharaoh has laughed in his face.

Worse than that, Pharaoh has retaliated. He is now working them harder and even beating them up more often. So by the end of chapter 5, Moses is bitterly complaining to God.

Why did you send me? Didn't we just make things worse? Well, listen to how God answers Moses, Exodus 6 verse 6. Therefore, say to the Israelites, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

[6:03] I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

Then you will know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians, and I will bring you into the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord. Now, do you see how this section begins and ends? It begins with, I am the Lord, capital letters, which means Yahweh.

Yahweh, and it ends with, I am the Lord, Yahweh again. The whole thing is bracketed by God's name.

And what sits inside those brackets? One promise after another. I will bring you out. I will free you.

[7:07] I will redeem you. I will take you as my own people. I will be your God. I will bring you into the land. I will give it to you. In other words, God is saying, do you want to know who I really am?

Well, watch what I'm about to do. You see, that's what my name is also all about. It is shorthand for everything I have promised to be and to do for my people.

To call God Yahweh is to say, this is the God who saw us in our misery and heard us and remembered his covenant and came down and got us out.

So now that we have all that background, come with me to Exodus 20. Do you remember how the 10 words begin?

Listen to verse 2. I am the Lord, capital letters, so Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

[8:21] Did you catch that? It begins not just with a recollection of God's rescue, but more than that, with the Lord's name.

Before God tells Israel what they must do, he reminds them that he has kept the promises tied to his name in Exodus 6.

Which means that when we arrive at verse 7, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

We are not simply talking about getting some abstract title or theological concept wrong. No, we are talking about how we treat the name of the God who comes looking for the oppressed and enslave.

We are talking about the name of the God who has redeemed his people and bound himself to them in covenant. So no wonder he says, don't treat the name by which you've come to know me, the name that tells the story of your salvation, as something empty.

[9:35] Don't treat it as something trivial. Don't regard it lightly. Do you see now why the Jews handed that name so carefully?

It wasn't superstition. It was because they knew whose name it was and what he had done. And I hope you now see why this commandment has been included in the ten words.

But what is this commandment actually about? Is it about not swearing? Growing up, I suspect that's how many of us learned it.

Don't use God's name as a swear word. Don't say, oh my God, when you drop your phone, watch your mouth. And so we found our little workarounds instead.

You know, we say, oh my goodness, and we feel relieved that we haven't broken this commandment. Now, as we will see later, there is something right about that. How we speak God's name does matter.

[10:41] If everything we've just seen about God is true, then of course we shouldn't fling it around as a throw away exclamation. But can I suggest, if that is all this commandment is about, something doesn't quite add up?

Look at the warning attached to verse 7. For the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

That's pretty severe, isn't it? In fact, of all the ten words, this is one of only two that comes with an explicit warning attached.

God is saying, if you get this wrong, expect to be prosecuted to the fullest extent. It won't be overlooked.

So, when you hear that warning, is it really believable that the main thing God has in mind is someone blurting out, oh my God, after stubbing their toe?

[11:46] That's irreverent, certainly. But to say he will feel the full force of the law? It feels like using a sledgehammer to crack a peanut.

Either God is being wildly disproportionate or we've misunderstood what he is precisely prohibiting. So, let's re-examine this verse.

Let me just read it from the ESV, which translates this verse a little more word for word. It will be on the screen as well. 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.

Now, what does the Hebrew word translated here as take mean? It is the Hebrew word *nasa*, and it means to live, to bear, or to carry.

It's the word used when the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant, for example. So, if we wanted to be very literal or wooden in our translation, we could say, you shall not carry the name of the Lord your God but hang on.

[13:06] But hang on. How do you carry a name? That sounds strange to us. And because it sounds strange, many people have tried to make sense of it by connecting it with our speech.

After all, *nasa* can also mean live. So, they understand the commandment to mean something like, you shall not lift the name of the Lord onto your lips in vain.

That's probably why many of us, consciously or subconsciously, have assumed this verse is mainly about swearing. When we read, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, as in the ESV, or you shall not misuse the name, as in the NIV.

We instinctively think, oh, this must be about what comes out of my mouth. But what is one of the golden rules of Bible interpretation? Answer, context.

So, we should ask, is there anything in the wider context of Exodus that might help me understand this command? As it turns out, there is.

[14:22] So, turn with me to Exodus 28. Now, at first glance, this chapter doesn't look like it has anything to do with our commandment today.

After all, it's all about clothes, the kind of garments the high priest wears when he goes into God's presence. But look at verses 9 to 12.

What does God tell Moses to do? He has to take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and to fasten them to the shoulders of the priest's garment.

And as he does that, what is he actually doing? Look at the end of verse 12. Aaron is to bear the name on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord.

That's our Hebrew word. *Nasa*. Aaron, Shah, bear their names. Carry their names. It's the same story if you look down later to verse 29.

[15:32] So it turns out you can carry a name. Exodus itself shows us how. So here is the picture. Every time the high priest walks into the sanctuary, he is not doing so alone.

Rather, he walks in wearing the whole people of God, their names on his shoulders, their names over his heart. In other words, as he bears their name, he is representing them.

But there is another detail we need to observe. The priest doesn't just carry the people's names. Rather, in verses 36 and 37, God says to make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it holy to the Lord, holy to Yahweh, and fasten it to the front of the turban on Aaron's forehead where everyone can see it.

So look at this man. On his forehead, blazing in gold is the name Yahweh carried before the people. Not only does he bear Israel's name to the Lord, he also bears the Lord's name to the world. Now, you might be thinking, okay, fine, but that's the high priest.

[17:05] What's that got to do with me? Well, do you remember what God said to the whole nation right before giving the ten words? you will be for me a kingdom of priests, Exodus 19, verse 6.

In other words, all of you, not just some of you, will bear God's name. The builders, the farmers, the mothers, the whole covenant people will walk around with the name of Yahweh on them. not literally, but truly. Indeed, later on in Numbers 6, verse 27, when the priest blessed the people, God says so directly, my name will be on the Israelites, he declares.

So, do you see, this is not first a commandment about your vocabulary, it is a commandment about your identity.

God is saying, I have put my name on you. You wear it like that student wears the school uniform, like that soldier bore the name of Alexander.

[18:25] And as you do so, the watching world will draw its conclusions about me from what it sees in you. So, don't carry my name emptily.

Don't wear the name of the God who redeemed you and live as though it was nothing. That's the gist of the third word. Right?

So, now that we've clarified its meaning, let's spend the rest of the sermon asking, how can we live this out? How can I bear God's name properly?

let me suggest two main ways. First of all, don't empty God's name with our lips. Now, while we've just seen that the third word is more than just about our speech, it certainly includes our speech. So, while the traditional emphasis wasn't the whole picture, it isn't wrong in itself. As his representatives, we must consider how we speak, because that's a big part of how we carry his name.

[19:40] So, if we are to live by the third word, how should we speak? Well, for one, we should never use God's name carelessly.

Look at Leviticus 19 verse 12, for instance. What does it say? Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God.

I am the Lord. In other words, don't attach God's name to a promise you have no intention of keeping. In the ancient world, to swear by someone's name was to appeal to their character as a guarantee that your words were true.

So, to swear by God's name and not mean it is to use God as a prop, to ride on his good name without actually respecting who he is.

It is saying, I want the wake of God's name behind my promise, but I don't actually care about the God whose name I'm using. That's why in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, just let your yes be yes and your no be no.

[21:00] Because God is not looking for clever old formulas. He's simply looking for people whose word can be trusted. Those are the people he wants to bear his name.

And he certainly doesn't want people who trivialize his name or are way too casual about it. Neither do you, I'm sure, if you're a Christian.

After all, is this not the God whom you adore? He's rescued you? He's welcomed you? He's been patient with you?

So of course you don't want to treat his name lightly. You want to speak of him as someone you love, someone you trust, someone whose grace has changed your life?

When God's name is precious to your heart, it will naturally become precious on your lips. People may not agree with everything you believe, but they will find it hard to miss that this God is someone you deeply treasure, someone you care much about by the way you speak.

[22:20] But how else can we misuse God's name? Another way to misuse it is to justify ourselves. Sadly, church history gives us some sobering examples.

curse of him. In Genesis 9, Noah, waking up from his drunkenness, curses his grandson Canaan to be a slave.

Now, if you were to read that passage, you would notice there is not a single word about race or about Africa in there. And yet, for centuries, some Christians claimed that this was God's justification for enslaving African peoples.

They took a curse spoken over one grandson and twisted it into divine approval for the slave trade. They used God's name to defend something completely contrary to God's purposes for human dignity.

But if at this point you're shaking your head, remember we aren't immune either. Because have you ever taken a strongly held political opinion and baptized it in God's name as though our side was unquestionably God's side?

[23:48] Have you ever announced that some decision about your future plans was the Lord's calling in a way that quietly put it beyond question so that anyone who disagreed with you was now disagreeing with God?

Or have you ever ended an argument whether at home or in church by using Bible verses out of context because all you really wanted was to win?

That's doing the same thing. Now sometimes it could be God's calling God's name to God's name to God's name and humble before we put his name to it.

Because the moment we use God's name as a weapon rather than as a name we faithfully carry we are misusing the Lord's name.

But not only can we misuse God's name to justify ourselves even worse we can use it to try to control God himself we try to get leverage over him.

[25:04] In the world Israel live in if you could learn a God's name you could summon him you could ban him to your purposes the name was the handle by which you got control so for example there is an old Egyptian myth about the goddess Isis who schemes to discover the secret name of Reh the sun god why because if she can just learn his real name she can use him that's how the nations around Israel operated say the right name in the right way to make the god do what you wanted but did you notice how Yahweh is different unlike the others our god doesn't hide his name he wants to get personal with us to share himself with us but what he doesn't want when he gives us his name is for us to use it as a tool to manipulate him and yet if we are honest the temptation is there isn't it because sometimes we can subtly move from asking in

God's name in Jesus name to trying to use Jesus name there is a way of praying that treats the name of Jesus almost like a code or a magic spell I claim it in Jesus name I declare it I decree it as though attaching his name to our desire somehow obliges God to give us the outcome we want now I want to say this gently because many who pray this way are sincere believers who love the Lord but we have to ask does this not misuse his name because the name of Jesus is not something we invoke to advance our own agenda in fact some of Jesus strongest warnings were reserved for those who use God's name in precisely this way in Matthew 7 verse 21 to 23 he says on the screen not everyone who says to me

Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven many will say to me on that day Lord Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles then I will tell them plainly I never knew you away from me you evil doers!

did you notice how these people are basically using the name of Jesus as a power they wielded rather than as the name of the master they obeyed?

And Jesus basically applies the third word to them to those who claim to act in his name he says I never knew you you see when you use the name of Jesus without submitting to him you are taking his name in vain you stand guilty so let us not empty God's name with our lips but it's not just about our speech which brings us to our second way don't empty God's name with our lives you see we can also misuse the name of the Lord by speaking holy words while living hollow lives we speak pious platitudes!

[29:10] to cover a hardened heart Jesus warned about this kind of hypocrisy quoting Isaiah he said these people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far away from me and that danger is still with us today it is the parent who demands their child say sorry but is never ever willing to say sorry themselves it is the cell group member who prays beautifully in public but never seeks God in private it is the usher who welcomes!

everyone at the door with friendly greetings but moments earlier was harsh and impatient with the people closest to them brothers and sisters every time we pretend to be righteous or devout while resisting God's work on our hearts we are bearing the Lord's name in vain and that is no small thing because imagine what the people around you are thinking as they watch you say one thing while doing another they are likely to draw the conclusion so that's what their God is like and that would be tragic wouldn't it it would make us guilty of the charge that the apostle Paul once flung at Israel God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you he said we would have defamed God's reputation like it or not our lives either point people towards him or make it harder for them to see him that's why Peter encourages us instead to live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us the goal is not merely that people would say what a good Christian the goal is that

through our lives people would say what a great God and when you show integrity because you won't inflate the invoice when you show patience with the tantrum of the child when you are treated unfairly but you don't take revenge you are bearing the name of God in such a way that people will see who he truly is!

perhaps right now you are feeling a little defeated you are asking how can our lives ever match up to God's name that there's just too big a gap will take heart you see back in the Old Testament God's people indeed did mess up over and over and over again dragging his name through the mud and God could so easily have given up but did he do so no instead he made a promise in Ezekiel 36 verse 23 he declares I will show the holiness of my great name which has been profane among the nations the name you have profane among them then the nations will know that I am the Lord declares the sovereign Lord when I am!

holy! you before your name but how will God do that? Enter Jesus here is someone who indeed bears the name of God and shows the holiness of his name perfectly in John 12 verse 28 when he cries out Father glorify your name we know that's exactly what he himself does but Jesus did not just bear God's name in a way no one else did he also did something else no one has ever done to bring this out I want you to come back with me for just a moment to Exodus 28 and I want you to notice one more detail look at verse 38 speaking of the gold plate Aaron carries God says it will be on

[33:55] Aaron's forehead and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate so that they will be acceptable to the Lord there is that word again NASA to carry to bear but this time what is being carried is not just the name but the guilt all so that a flawed people bringing flawed gifts could still be accepted and isn't that what Jesus did he doesn't just wear the name of God's people he bears their entire guilt as 1 Peter 2 verse 24 puts it Jesus himself bore!

our sins in his body on the cross and if you call on his name you will be safe every careless word every hollow prayer every hypocritical action will no longer be held against us you are declared guiltless and now you get to wear the name Christian not because you did anything but because you have received Christ by grace and grace alone Christ bore your guilt and gave you his own name to bear but here's the thing grace doesn't simply remove our guilt it restores our calling for this word doesn't just leave you forgiven but recommissioned you see because God has raised Jesus and exalted him and given him the name that is above every other name every knee should bow at the name of Jesus in other words Jesus is just not saviour not just saviour but Lord and because Jesus is Lord that's why those who bear his name should live for the honour of his name that's why Peter takes the very words God spoke to Israel at Sinai and applies them to the church but you are a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation God's special possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light do you see the calling Israel received at Sinai now rests on you and me the difference is you now bear the name of the son who has already borne your guilt that's why as

Colossians 3 verse 17 puts it whatever you do whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him you can live for Jesus and bear his name with much joy and thanksgiving because you know what is already done and wants to do through you and unlike the Jews you don't have to keep silent but you can praise and worship and honor the name of the Lord as you speak and live for him because you know where the whole story is going last week do you remember why we don't need to try to make images of God because Revelation 22 verse 4 says one day we will see his face and today why should we not misuse the name of God well in the very same verse because his name will be on our foreheads just like in Exodus 28 the servants of God will bear his name except this time the name is not written on a plate that can be taken off rather it is worn by a people who will never ever ever take it in vain again and that is the end of the story the forehead of Exodus 28 becomes the forehead of every child of God what Aaron carried for an hour you will wear forever but in the meantime what can we do to help us bear that name well we pray the prayer Jesus taught us our father in heaven hallowed be your name that is the third word turned into a request it is a prayer that ask

[39:03] God to do two things may your name be honored in what I say and may your name be honored in who I am so brothers and sisters do not misuse the name of the Lord your God but bear it in such a way as to give him all the glory so as we end can invite all of us to stand now and let us pray the Lord's prayer let's pray together the prayer Jesus taught us our father in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us today our

daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debt lead us not into testing but deliver us from the evil one for yours is the kingdom the power and the glory forever and ever amen