

TAKING HIS NAME (part 2)

We have looked at the names and the titles that we are given and those we give ourselves. We have seen that as Christians, we come in the name of the “name above all names”. We are ambassadors for Christ, and we speak with His authority the Good News of His Kingdom. We should therefore do as He does and say what He says. To not do so may bring His name into disrepute. As “Christiani”, when we mis-represent Jesus in the world, we give people a poor view of who He is. You only need look at how people sometimes respond to comments about the church / Christ, often shutting down the conversation citing historic sexual abuse within the church. Often a person’s experience (or knowledge) with Christians taints their considering Christ. This brings me to this week’s topic. Let’s look at what God says about the use of His name;

“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God...” (Ex. 20:7a)

Taking the Lord’s name in vain (KJV) is the 3rd Commandment given to Moses. (This is sometimes called Blasphemy) So what is the misuse or taking of God’s name in vain? To the Hebrew nation, this commandment was primarily to do with oaths and cursing. To the keepers of the law, they were forbidden to make flippant oaths, using God’s name as witness to the oath. They were also restricted in the way they pronounced blessings and curses in the name of the Lord.

The Israelites were so strict in their observance of this law, that God’s name was eventually almost banned from use. The Teachers of the Law were so fearful of breaking this commandment that they would almost never even utter the holy name of God. So much so, that the actual pronunciation of the revealed name of God is unknown to us today. (We render it as Jehovah, but an in-depth study will reveal that this is most unlikely.)

So what does this commandment say to those of us in Christ? Well, one thing that is always sure to cause debate is when we bring up the relevance of the law to the Christian. The argument is as old as the 1st century church and we do not have space here for an in-depth study. However, let us let the Scriptures, and Jesus Himself, clarify the situation.

Firstly, it is important to state from the beginning that we are saved “by grace...through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God.” (Eph 2:8) The Law of Moses was only a shadow of things to come. It had its purpose for a time, to exercise faith in God, but it was in essence unable to save mankind, as

sinful man could never really save himself by keeping the commandments given him. However, it was advantageous to the Israelites as a tool for declaring their faith, making them different to the tribes about them and these laws served as a spiritual protective cloak against the effect of sin. (ie, keep the commandments, you protect yourself from the adverse effects that not keeping them will bring!)

So, we are not saved by keeping commands, we are saved by faith in Jesus’ sacrifice for us. But this great revelation has caused many in the church to disregard the Law altogether. However, Jesus showed great respect for the law. He came to fulfil the law, and said that not until heaven and earth pass away, will a single letter or stroke of a pen be removed from it. He went on to say that anyone who breaks the law and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. (see Matt 5:17-19)

Note Jesus says that the law will remain until the end of time. That tells me that the law still has relevance to the Christian and to the world. You should also note that those that break it (or teach others to do so) will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Not cast into hellfire, but *least* in the Kingdom. The Christian is saved by grace (absolutely!) but the crowns and position given to us once we enter His kingdom are subject to what we have done with the message and life His death won for us. There are natural and spiritual ramifications to not ‘following’ Jesus in word and deed.

Like the Israelites, keeping God’s commandments will set us apart from the world and protect us from the results of sin. For example, being sexually pure will protect you from sexually transmitted disease, unwanted pregnancy, and difficulties in your marriage, whether future or current. It will also protect you from allowing the devil to gain a foothold in your life (see Eph 4:27). Satan, called the accuser, loves to remind us of our failures. Seeing weakness, he will tempt and try to draw us away. And in the process, declare to the world the ‘worthlessness’ of the Christian faith.

If you are still not convinced, when we read on in Matthew 5, Jesus tells His followers that not only is murder the taking of life, but for His disciples, so is anger at each other. Adultery is not just sexual impurity but looking lustfully at a person. Why the higher standard now? In part, Jesus’ words cut to the heart of the Law...They are not lines on a page, but attitudes of Love...Love for God and love for your neighbour, upon which all the Law and Prophets hangs.

But there is more. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, He paved the way for the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and write God’s law in our hearts. (Heb

8:10) Unlike the Israelites, we have the Holy Spirit in us and when we learn to be counselled, led and guided by Him, we are convicted of sin *before* we act. He empowers us to keep God's commands, rather than being compelled by written law and the rituals of priests. Therefore, we are gifted to follow God's commands, so the expectation (or maybe more accurately, our ability) is actually higher under grace, not less.

So, let's look again at the 3rd commandment, not misusing His name. Using the same yardstick Jesus used when He spoke about what the commandments meant to His followers, then the misuse of his name moves from being just a command relating to oaths, blessings and curses and extends to an even broader meaning. I put it to you that we as Christians, who come as ambassadors in His name, take that name in vain when we declare that we are Christians, but do not do as He asks.

He told His followers that "If you hold to my teaching, you are my disciples." (**John 8:31**) "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (**John 14:15**) "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love." (**John 15:10**). " During this discourse, Jesus regularly makes mention of the Holy Spirit's role as counsellor, in reminding us of His words, leading us into all truth and as a testimony of Christ. So we are not left alone to fulfil God's commandments, He Himself empowers us to live upright lives and therefore bear witness of His saving power. But we are expected to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit and let him ring in the changes. And as Christ's commands, (though not a yoke we cannot bear thanks to the Holy Spirit), are actually at a higher level than strict observance of the law, then every believer should take care as to what he does with the grace given him. As John also declares... "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands" (**1John 5:2**)

So as Christians, known by those around us – called to bear witness of Christ - the world is watching. Yes, watching us, but even more so, watching to see "who is this Jesus we speak of". We should be aware that taking on the name Christian, being ambassadors for Christ, also brings with it great responsibility. That just as an ambassador that came in the name of a king in biblical times was expected to represent his king truthfully and with honour, so too we should come to the world, doing the works of Him who sent us, lest we 'misuse His name'. When we blatantly sin, whether specifically one of the commandments, or are given to road-rage, or simply rudeness...when we do that which is not consistent with the representation of the one perfect God, it is then that we misuse His name, taking it in vain. Does this mean we will always get it right? Certainly not! But should this thought lead us to repentance when we do sin and greater desire to represent

Jesus in a more favourable way. You bet! To not do so *is* blasphemy! Let us not misuse the name we bear. The precious name of Jesus! The beautiful name that is above all names!

Tanya Riches wrote "Jesus, what a beautiful name!" She goes on to write, Son of God, Son of Man, The Lamb, Joy, Peace, Strength, Hope, Grace, Truth, My Future, Healer, Love, Freedom, Life, Rescuer, Stronghold, Security, Power." The name of Jesus is considered the name above all names, and these tags are just a small list of the names associated with the name of Jesus. Others will include Lord, Immanuel, Redeemer, Sovereign, Living Word (Logos), Saviour, the Christ.

So now let's turn our attention to His name and what that means. Jesus was a fairly common name at the time of Christ's coming. It was similar to the name Joshua (Yeshua) and meant, 'The Lord God Saves'. Yet the name is called the name above all names, and the name at which every knee shall bow. So, what is it about the name of Jesus that makes it so special? It has nothing to do with the utterance of the words, but the person and divinity behind the name. For those who come in His name, it is who this *specific* Jesus is and what He did (and does) that elevates the name of *this* Jesus above all other Jesus'. When we look at Scripture, we almost never see Jesus' name used by the disciple's or apostles without a clarifying title. He is called *Christ* Jesus, *Lord* Jesus, *Jesus Christ* or *Jesus of Nazareth*. Where the name does appear on its own, it is usually after a short discourse, leaving no doubt as to whom this Jesus is the text is speaking about.

So, as we go out as ambassadors, it is essential that we know the one in whose name we go. That we are worshipping and representing the true Jesus, and that we establish a close relationship with Him through His word and in prayer, so that we can represent Him in the right light. Going out in Jesus' name is not to be taken lightly. Let's have a look at a couple of Scriptures that explain the need to represent a Jesus that we have a relationship with.

In Acts 19, we read that Paul had been doing miraculous things 'in Jesus' name'. Some Jews tried the same thing, but without knowing the one in whose name they came. The seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out demons in the name of the "Jesus whom Paul preaches." The evil spirit tells them that he knows Jesus, knows *about* Paul, and then asks "but who are you?" He then gives all seven men such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. (**see Acts 19:13-16**)

In this example, the sons of Sceva had no relationship with Jesus, and therefore had no authority over the evil spirit. They did not know *Him*, so they had no authority in *His* name when confronted with what appears to be a strong spirit.

Also note that the demon says, I *KNOW* Jesus, I knows *about* Paul. But when it came to the Sons of Sceva (ie they came in their earthly father's name) they had no authority over this demon. Their lack of relationship with Christ meant they came to this demon in the name of someone they didn't personally know, and therefore they were not acceptable or authoritative ambassadors. The demon did not recognise them as such and therefore did not treat them as ambassadors.

Compare this story to Jesus' words in Matthew **7:21-23**. Here Jesus opens with the words, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of Heaven." He adds that these people will argue that they did cast out demons in His name, as well as prophesy and do the miraculous (or at least it seemed to them that they did these things). He says that he will then tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

In this example, these so-called disciples had the outward appearance of the power and authority of Jesus' name. Somehow it appears that the miraculous was evident in their lives. Yet Jesus tells us that due to them not becoming 'true disciples' they were excluded from the kingdom. They had the appearance of being 'Christian' but did not act as such – no fruit of righteousness. Jesus points to their lack of obedience to God's will as the root cause of this, calling them evildoers, and explaining that He never *knew* them.

In both examples, it is the relational aspect that is emphasised. Especially in the 2nd story, the people thought that they were 'part of the group'. They believed themselves to have made Jesus Lord, but this was not evidenced in their life, not in the way they represented Christ, nor in their relationship with Him. They recognised Him, but Jesus did not recognise them. To represent Christ, we must know the message and works of Him that sends us, and faithfully follow His example. This comes about through spending time in prayer (listening as much as asking), and time in His word. 'Feeding' the Holy Spirit within you and then allowing Him to lead you into a right life.

These stories emphasise the need to be proper ambassadors for Christ and to come in His name. Jesus' name, when represented by true disciples, has incredible consequences for the believer, and the world around them. Though we will look at the individual characteristics of both Jesus' name and the names of God

in coming weeks, let's finish this week's study with a short list of what the bible says can happen 'in His name'.

Firstly, only in the name of Jesus can anyone be saved. Paul writes "...Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (**Rom 10:13**) Peter, when speaking to the religious leaders after Jesus' resurrection said, "Salvation is found in no one else... no other name...by which we must be saved." (**Acts 4:12**) It is then into this name that believers are baptised. "...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (**Matt 28:19b**)

Then for true disciples, come promises. Jesus said "...where two or three are come together in my name, there am I with them." (**Matt 18:20**) "In my name they (believers) will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and they will drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." (**Mark 16:17-18**) "I will do whatever you ask in my name" (**John 14:13a**)

So clearly, Scripture reveals great responsibility, power and authority for the believer in Jesus' name. Before Jesus spoke the last of the above Scriptures, He told His disciples that they would do *greater* things in His name. True disciples or ambassadors *will* do great things in His name. However, immediately after this, Jesus begins to talk about the disciples' love for Him and showing it by obeying His words. It would appear that Scripture is continually telling us that we have a responsibility to 'do what Jesus does and to say what Jesus is saying'. Then we are true ambassadors, with all the benefits, power, authority and responsibility that the name of Jesus and the term Christian bears with it.

Study 2 – questions

1. What does **Eph 2:1-9** (saved by grace) mean to you? Search the internet / Scripture (or your own words), what is grace?

2. **Read Matthew 5:17-22, 27-28**. How can we hope to fulfil Jesus' commands? How can we reconcile His words with those of Paul in Eph 2:8?

3. Read **John 8:31-32** and compare this to **14:15-17a**. What 'truth' does obedience in discipleship bring? What does this truth set us free from?

4. Read **1Corinthians 3:10-15**. What do you think this Scripture is saying about the value of our service in the Kingdom of God, especially if we are in error?

5. Compare this with Jesus' words in **Matthew 5:19** (least in the Kingdom). What does these Scriptures say about Christians who don't do the right thing, but believe?

6. What does it mean to 'give the devil a foothold' (Eph 4:27)? What causes this?

7. Read the first few verses of Paul's letters, from **Romans – Philemon**. What do you notice about Paul's opening lines, and why do you think he begins this way, before instructing those that received the letters?

8. What do you think the story of the seven sons of Sceva tells us about the difference between knowing *about* Jesus and knowing Him?

9. Read **Matthew 7:15-23**. The people did miraculous things, yet Jesus rejects them. What fruit do you think Jesus is looking for?

10. The Great Commission is found in **Matthew 28:18-20**. What steps does Jesus say we should take to make disciples? What importance is there in following these commands?

11. Read **Matthew 18:19-20 & John 14:12-15**. What do you think it means to be gathered or to ask "in His name".

12. St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel at all times, sometimes you may have to use words." What do you think he was saying?

13. Read **Colossians 3:12-17**. How does this Scripture teach us to approach all that we do?

*9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

(Philippians 2:9-11)