

Pako Evening Service: 26/02/2017

Scripture Reading: Act 19:13-20; Lev 24:10-23; Sermon: The "NAME" above all names.

Congregation, a few years ago we visited the Reptile Park near Gosford, and one lady caused me to think more seriously about what it means to take the Lord's name in vain. Every time she was surprised by some new reptile or even when something else surprised her, she inevitably responded by saying, "Oh my God, Oh my God." It irritated me no end! And what this lady did is just the tip of the iceberg of what means not to take the Lord's name in vain. The third commandment remind us, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." First this evening, let me give you an idea of what we mean by God's name. In Scripture, there are several names for God. For instance, Father, Creator, Adonai, Elohim. However, when the third command speaks about the "NAME" it is referring to "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." In most Bible versions that name appears in capital letters as "LORD" (note 2x in v 7). It is the name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush. "I AM who I AM" [Exo 3:14]. It is a name that Jewish scribes and rabbis refused to pronounce. To this day, Jews do not use the name of "Jehovah" but every time they come to this name in their writings they translate it as "Adonai." Now in Hebrew the name of God comes in two forms. The first is quite familiar to us, although most of us would not be aware of it. Every time we sing the word "hallelujah" we are praising God's NAME. "hallelu" = "praise" and "jah" = "God." The second form has four consonants "JHVH." And when the Scribes added vowels it became "Yahweh" or "Jehovah."

Now a name gives a person an identity and God's name gives Him identity. When God makes His name known to Moses and his people, they could call on Him. And if everything is proper, God listens and comes to their aid. So, it is with us. Those who know His Name can call him 'Lord' and He comes to their aid. So, blessed are they who know his Name. In the OT, Israel became the bearer of God's great Name. They were to make God's Name known to the nations through their obedience! In Deut 4:5-8, Israel is commanded to live such obedient lives that the nations around them will marvel at their great God! When the priests lift-up their hands in blessing, the people are sure of God's favourable presence. "The LORD bless and keep you, the LORD make his face shine and be gracious to you" (Num 6:24ff). Now of course, we live in NT times. And when the time was right, God sent his Son who revealed the Father. In the high priestly prayer, Jesus says, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world..." [John 17:6]. Initially, only Israel knew the glorious name of the Lord. However, Joel prophesied that before the terrible day of the Lord, the Spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh. That happened at Pentecost!

And in this new situation, 'everyone who calls upon the Name of the LORD (JeHoVaH) would be saved' (Joel 2:23). Peter also at Pentecost in Acts 2:21, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." and Paul in Romans 10:13, "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Both announce that this time has now arrived. Everyone who calls upon the NAME of the Lord will be saved. And the NAME that Peter and Paul are speaking about is none other than the name "Jesus". So, the OT Jehovah and the NT Jesus are two of the same. It's important to understand this, for behind that name stands the power of an almighty Triune God! The whole church is baptised into the one NAME but three persons (Mat 28:19). In the NT, the powerful NAME of Jesus heals the lame (Acts 4:10). In Acts 4:12, we are told that "Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other NAME under heaven by which man can be saved." The OT prophet Isaiah prophesies in Chapter 45:23b-24a, "Before me every knee will bow, by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.'" Paul says in Philippians 2:10-11; "...at the NAME of Jesus every knee should bow....and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So, the name of Jehovah (Yahweh) and the name of Jesus are interchangeable. Jesus is to be distinguished from the Father, but never separated from Him, for He is equally God. The true bearers of Jehovah Lord are those who bow the knee before Jesus. Only those who know Jesus truly, can properly confess the NAME that is above every NAME. So, congregation let's stand in reverence and awe of the NAME.

2) What does it mean to abuse or misuse the NAME of God? Well the first thing we shouldn't do is use God's name without reverence and thought. Meaningless use of God's name is an insult to God. This covers a lot of areas. First, for instance, sitting in church here this evening is far less innocent than most of us are inclined to think. Isaiah warns the OT people to stop bringing meaningless offerings, which is the same word used for "vain thing" in the third commandment. When we worship, and offer our offerings, and call upon his NAME then we must do that with reverence and fear. We are not to lift up our hands when they are not righteous, but as Paul says, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing" (1 Tim 2:8). That's why the preacher says in Ecclesiastes 5:1; "Guard your steps when you go to the house of the Lord. Go near to listen rather than to offer sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong"

Second, we also abuse God's name when we intend to do something with it that goes against his will. The Israelites did so when they thought God would win their battles if they had the ark of the Lord present (1 Sam 4). The seven sons of Sceva thought they could just call upon the name of Jesus to master evil spirits, but they lost the battle and their clothes

(Acts 19:14ff). But let's not just leave with the OT church or the early NT church. Some people are good at misusing the God's Name today, even in some churches. I have heard some preachers use the name of the Lord a thousand times in a service, and not magnify the NAME once! I have heard hymns and songs sung with such gusto that it nearly lifts the roof of a building, but it doesn't bring glory to God's NAME. I see people who don't really care about God or Christ, hire or request a clergy for some "God talk" at their wedding or funeral. This is nothing more than misuse of God's NAME. Prominent theologians debate about God as if He wasn't present. The preacher in Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." Proverbs 10:19 reminds us, "When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise."

And what about the area of blaspheming? Often, we understand cursing as the thoughtless or malicious profanity of the average citizen. But it's more than that. Lev 24:10-17, the son of an Israelite blasphemed the "Name" of the covenant God, with a curse and was sentenced to die. But the death penalty is also mentioned for breaking the first command of not loving God as the only true God (Deut 13:5), and the fifth command, of not honouring your parents (Deut 22:21), and the sixth command against murder (Lev 24:17) and the seventh about committing adultery (Deut 22:22)! Congregation it is unfortunate that the names of God and Jesus Christ are as light as breath to many in the world. People use the name at the footy, when they express surprise, pain, anger, indignation, whatever and whenever they use the NAME. It is a sinful outrage. However, this kind of swearing arises mainly from ignorance. They do not appreciate or know the NAME they abuse, because if they did they would stop abusing and start praying. Their swearing offends God, it offends us, but it also accuses us. For today some of our friends and neighbours still don't know about who the NAME is! Perhaps we should be bolder in defending the honour of God's name. Not as the Muslims do when they try to up hold the honour of Mohammad's name, but winsomely. Perhaps when we hear God's name or our Saviour's name taken in vain, we should respectfully ask them not to do so for it offends us. We live in such a 'politically correct, pluralistic world' and sometimes, just saying what they are doing offends us and our God, is enough to curtail God's name being taken in vain. Perhaps it's an opening to explain to them the meaning of the name and what the Name means for us and in turn what it can mean for them.

3) Lastly, can we or can't we say an oath using God's name? The Bible says we can. The debate originally began with the Anabaptists who said that for Christians their 'yes' should be "Yes" and their 'no' should be "No" (Mat 5:33-39; James 5:12). The Anabaptists forgot one thing. They forgot that just because a Christian belongs to Christ does not mean he is free from sin. Sin has affected everything and it has poisoned the way we communicate. When someone says something we may have to ask whether it's true? Do they know what they are saying? Have they thought it through and are they aware of the implications? Is it bias in one way or another or slanted towards a particular goal as we so often see in newsprint and advertising and political speeches? Trust, the beautiful basis of human society, is ruined by distrust, and yet without distrust we would be victims of deceit nearly every day. So, amid all this distrust, the oath is a light of God's grace. What happens when we swear an oath? We make a confession that we are unreliable, and we place ourselves before the ultimate face of Truth, the one who cannot lie! When we make an oath, we stand in God's presence, the One who has the power to banish untruth and punish the lie, so help me God! Trust was destroyed the day sin entered the world. The only foothold we have is God and his Word. As Paul says, "let God be true and every man a liar!" (Rom 3:4). God did not forbid his people to swear an oath. He commanded them to swear by his name.

The bible records the oaths sworn by Abraham (Gen 21:24), Jacob (Gen 31:53), Joshua (Josh 9:15) and others. The high priest placed Jesus under oath and Jesus testified under oath (Mat 26:63-64). God even swore an oath to himself, which was not necessary for he is totally reliable, but he did it so that we may be greatly encouraged (Heb 6:18). We can use oaths when they promote God's glory and our neighbour's good, or when the government requires them. But an oath is abused in the service of self. We must be used by God but never use God by taking his name in vain. We must not swear by saints, or by the last dollar in the bank, or by anything else that is created. All of this is idle talk and improper for Christians. Having said that oath taking is a light of God's grace in this dark world, it is nevertheless only a temporary help, an emergency bridge from the present reality of distrust to the everlasting God who is truth. For Christians, speaking the truth is not dependent on oath taking. We live in the presence of God all the time and at all places. Our thinking should be obedient to the Word of God, and all we have and are is the territory of our Saviour. Our lives have been redeemed from destruction. Our tongues are now under the control of the Holy Spirit. So, our "yes" should simply be "yes" and our "no" simply "no".

And if we have a need to constantly reinforce speech with strong and emphatic words it shows that in general his or her tongue is still ruled by the devil. Congregation the third commandment speaks about not misusing the name of our God who saved us from hell to eternal life. It's a NAME too glorious to describe, too majestic for sinful man to comprehend, and far too magnificent to misuse and abuse. May we bring glory and honour to God's name by the way we use his Name. Amen.