

### **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020 – Just 10 #3: Don't misuse God's name**

Thanks to a very moving letter from the footballer Marcus Rashford, last month the Government was forced to do a U turn and provide free school meals over the summer holidays. My wife Mims and her colleague were tasked with making sure the families at their school would all get the correct vouchers. After a lengthy wait in an automated queuing system they finally got through to the voucher company hoping to speak to someone who could access the system make some adjustments. The lady on the end of the line was great and promised to sort everything out, but as they were finishing the call Mims was waving to her colleague on the line: 'Get her name! Get her name!' Thankfully she had a very memorable name so Mims was assured that she would be accountable for her promises and all would be well. Maybe you have had the same experience when speaking to a call centre but sometimes quoting the right name at the right time can be such a powerful thing. Names are powerful!

Yet as the third commandment tells us, using someone's name can be used for good purposes and also for ill. Exodus 20 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.

When I was young I used to think this commandment was just about swearing or saying 'Oh my God' in a disrespectful way, but now I realise it means so much more than that. The word 'Misuse' in the Hebrew here is *Shav*, which means for evil or deception is from the root word *Sho* which means destruction, desolation, or ruin. In other words do not use the name of the Lord Jehovah for lies, evil or destruction.

The first two commandments are about keeping God as our priority, the third commandment is about not misrepresenting him to others.

Some of the most heinous villains in history have been those who claim to be acting in God's name yet wreak havoc on innocent people causing desolation and destruction. In the early days of Nazism during his election campaign Hitler once claimed to be a Christian, but expounded the view that the reason Jesus went to the cross was because he was an Aryan opponent of the Jews.

In Africa the so-called 'Lord's resistance army' stated it wanted to create multi-party democracy and rule Uganda according to the Ten Commandments, but in practice it has been accused of widespread human rights violations, including murder, abduction sex slavery and forcing children to act as soldiers. Its leader Joseph Kony claimed to be a spokesman for the Holy Spirit but he is wanted for war-crimes and currently still at large.

Perhaps these examples are extreme, but let's recognise it is all too easy for any one of us to misrepresent God's good name and character. Anyone can hold up a bible and claim to represent him but do we sometimes misrepresent God's name to others? If we get angry does it reflect Godly anger or is it actually rooted in selfishness? When we want people to behave in a certain way is that the Lord's heart for them or is it actually about our own power and control? If we are known as a Christian, are we seeking to live a Godly life and follow the way of Jesus?

Colossians 3 v 17 says '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.'

But how do we do this on a day to day basis and avoid misrepresenting God?

Well the way to approach it is to recognise that Jesus is the exact representation of the Father. If we know Jesus, then we know the Father as well. In John 14 after the disciple Phillip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.'

If we ask for anything in the name of Jesus he will do it for us? Wow that is an amazing promise – but what does it mean to ask in his name? Well if we take into account the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment it certainly means avoiding misrepresenting Jesus, or thinking that we know better than the Lord how to do life.

In our reading from Matthew 5 Jesus said 17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."

Jesus didn't simply dump the Old Testament laws and commandments: He breathed new life into them and enlarged upon them. Where most of the 10 commandments are framed negatively, for example: 'You shall not have other gods before me, do not steal, do not covet etc.', Jesus refreshes and reframes the commandments positively: Love God, love your neighbour, love one another...

Now this is great because love is very popular. 'All you need is love', 'love makes the world go round' etc.

But we need the rest of the bible to show us what God's love truly looks like. We can say that we feel our action or attitude is loving when it might actually be misrepresenting the true love of God.

1 John 4 says 'God is love'. But sometimes that love is tough. That love took Jesus to the cross. His teaching on the true love of God so challenged and exposed people's selfishness, that he was betrayed and killed for it. Love's intolerance for sin and hypocrisy challenges us to the core of our being and we end up with no valid excuse to cover our shame.

But thankfully, love does not condemn. When we admit our need, and admit that we fail to act according to perfect standards of God's love, then that is when our recovery begins and we can step into salvation.

On the first Pentecost Sunday when the Apostle Peter addressed the crowd in Acts 2 including some of the very people who had called for Jesus to be crucified just weeks before, he concluded with this amazing phrase: 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

So *Everyone* who believes and calls upon the loving forgiveness, perfect justice and generous mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, healed and delivered. The name Jesus literally means 'God saves'.

As fallible human beings, we all will certainly misrepresent God's character and corrupt his image as a loving Father, but thanks be to God, Jesus came to forgive and erase our sin and enable us to begin each day with a clean sheet, if we will call on his name and all it means. Instead of misusing God's name for our own ends, we hand over control and trust in the Lord's name and authority instead.

Just as getting the name of the call centre handler who made a promise to help is a great source of reassurance, when we call upon the promise and good character to Jesus to sort out our mess and make things right, we receive grace and assurance that all will be well. Our souls can rest easy.

Once we are in that secure place of reliance on the name of Jesus, that's where life begins. The last line of John's gospel says this: 'Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' Let's pray.