

“Out of the House of Bondage II”
 Sermon for 10 July 2016
 Texts: Exodus 20:1-21

We have arrived as far as verse 7: **You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.** Let’s explore this idea. What does it mean? The literal translation is “You shall not bear up (or lift up) the name of the Lord your God to falsehood, to vanity, or emptiness.” I do believe that this relates to swearing and cursing. Cursing is empty speech, it is pure ventilation—people are well aware that you are upset *but what you are uttering is unrelated to what it is that has upset you. The vulgar, empty syllables might as well be non-verbal language, might as well be a gesture.* God doesn’t want us talking like that; it coarsens life, it only makes a volatile situation more volatile. It’s indecent. Another sense of this prohibition relates to swearing so as to make one’s claims more believable. To the informed they do no such thing. When Jesus said, **Let your yes be yes and your no be no—anything else comes from the devil,** He put this whole oath making business in perspective. Liars who invoke God’s name to make themselves sound credible in up making God look false. Command #3 makes it crystal clear, God doesn’t dig this sort of thing at all. *Therefore, God is interested in guarding the honor of His name—any speech, action, or attitude that brings dishonor on God is forbidden.*

The word for falsehood here, the vanity and emptiness, is used to describe false gods (Ps. 31:6; 119:37; Jer. 18:15 and Jonah 2:8)—meaning idols, idolatry. God’s name is not to be associated with false religion, with paganism with heathenism. *Do not even think of using His name in false worship.* Now one language barrier we have here is that we think idols are simply figurines. Fetishes, or objects used in targeting curses, or asking for favors from the gods. We think of smoke, incantations, sprinklings of chicken blood and primitive religion. Well, that is unlikely to be part of our experience; but if it is, it is probably time to make your way to the exit. Idols also designate anything that we look to instead of God for our source of salvation, security or blessings—for meeting our needs, physical and spiritual. *It is using God’s name in pursuit of something that you want.* It is, less obviously, worshipping God’s gifts rather than Himself—it is wanting something for ourselves. This is rather like using a Sherman tank rather than a fly swatter to eliminate a bothersome fly at the breakfast table . . . a swing and a miss and the kitchen’s a mess!

What’s in a name? Juliet poses this question in the play “Romeo and Juliet!” No, I am not going there. However, suppose that the name of someone you love is slipped into a wicked accusation? Suddenly, the name is really

important. You are offended that the reputation of your loved one has been slandered. (And so you should be.) Although if I were to press this farther and propose that the name of God has been slipped into some of the most ghastly accusations and slanders, I am afraid we are rather inclined to shrug it off. What does that say about your love of God? Or how about I don't believe in a God who would _____? Do we jump to God's defense by saying, "You are so right . . . I don't believe in a God who would say, or do, or allow that either!" And then rush to explain what a good, great God we have—unlike that monster! We are to cover God's good name as quickly as our own, or as of our loved ones! *God's reputation is infinitely important to God.* One way in which to frame Jesus' ministry is that He came from heaven to earth to vindicate His Father's Name.

His Name is Yahweh. I AM WHO I AM. God is the one thing we need to know and fear and love—no one else satisfies our soul. He is the One we were made to live for. He is the independent, self-existent, self-sufficient God—free and sovereign who inhabits eternity and the heart of the lowly. Freedom is His idea for us . . . He makes known His love for His people in real time and space. Jesus is the great I AM. (And He says so repeatedly in the New Testament record.) Jesus is the Name above all names, the crown jewel of names . . . He is the fullest, freest and final revelation of God . . . the radiance of the glory of God. His name delivers us from all guilt, cancels all our shame. He is the embodied grace of God, our Salvation . . . Christ in us, the hope of glory!

When we entrust ourselves to Him, He answers our deepest longings (He does, not the man or woman of our dreams, not the latest Tesla, or I Phone). When we abandon all pretense at saving ourselves and when we realize that our righteousness has nothing to do with our performance, when we only lean on Jesus' Name, we begin to live the truest, freest and highest life that can be lived. He is our escape from idolatry, and, knowing this, we cannot just use His Name any old which way—not any more. Then we are keeping the third commandment from a heart of gratitude. Jesus is a name for praise, a word for worship.

When I am in trouble, when I am in distress, when I am frightened, this is the Name I call on. When I am about to slip into my default mode, my self-worship, it is His Name that calls me back. All we need to know is that when this happens, when we are at risk, all we have to do is call upon His Name and He, the God who hears, hears. God has over a hundred names in Scripture—anyone of them will do if they are uttered in faith and not in vain. If we were calling upon His Name in ways that enlarge His significance, if our lips were more full of His praise and expressive of our gratitude, if we were ascribing to Him worth and

wonder and awe—if we appreciate the relationship for what it is instead of what we want to get from it, our lives would be substantial—we would be tuned into His purposes. If we were more about His business and this were our normal way of doing life, we would find the reason for so many, many names of God. I leave you with this: the reason for so many names is that there is so much more to praise God for than to ask God for.

Amen