

Spit, spit, spit—pardon me, I'm still trying to get the taste of soap out of my mouth. I don't know what I said, but it must've been a real humdinger because my Mom gave me the full treatment. No, it wasn't Lifebouy like Ralphie in "A Christmas Story"—we were more of an Irish Spring family. But I was about the same age when I got my mouth washed out with soap.

When we hear the Second Commandment, that's the sorta stuff that comes to mind. We think of bad language, four-letter-words, things you mustn't repeat so you have to use symbols instead—y'know, those pound signs, ampersands and asterisks, dollar signs, and exclamation marks. And while it's probably best we keep that kinda talk out of our vocabulary, God actually means something entirely different by this commandment. See, even more than raising eyebrows or getting the censors all up in arms, God is deeply concerned about His *own good name*. He doesn't say, "You shall not cuss," but says, "You shall not misuse the *name* of the Lord your God." It's His name that's at stake here.

What's in a name, after all? If you're Shakespeare, then you'd say, "A rose by any other name still smells just as sweet." In other words, you might think names are arbitrary, their only purpose is to know what to call something. But if you're a Hebrew, then you'd say that names are much, much more.

Hebrews don't just name someone something because they think it has a nice ring to it—oh, I like how Crystal sounds, or isn't Cordelia such a pretty name! No, if you're a Hebrew then you know that names define who a person is, give a backstory about how they've come to be, or predict who they will become. For example, Abram became Abraham, Jacob became Israel, Saul became Paul, because who they were had changed. Isaac means "laughter," because the thought of Sarah bearing a son at her ripe old age was laughable. Moses means "drawn from water," because Pharaoh's daughter found him floating in a basket. David means "beloved," because he was a man after God's own heart. And today, well, we come to find out God's own name, which—even more—will tell us *who* He is.

There was Moses, just minding his own business, when he looked up and saw quite a strange sight. Squinting, he made out a bush that looked to be on fire, yet wasn't consumed. Curious, he went to investigate and found that in that bush was none other than God Himself. From that point, a conversation ensued—God calling Moses to lead His people out of bondage; Moses politely declining; then God not taking no for an answer. Finally, Moses says, "Okay, okay, I'll do it. But if the people ask who sent me, what should I tell them?" And that's when God flashes His name badge right in our faces—"I AM WHO I AM," He says. "Say to them 'I AM sent me.'"

Now, this is big stuff—God saying that "He is," is like saying He *always has been* and *always will be*. He is the one who was, who is, and who is to come. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's the God of their grandparents; He is their God, and long after they're gone He will still be the God of their grandchildren. Because this unchanging God took care of their ancestors, they can full-well expect Him to take care of them too, as well as generations to come.

So, with a name like that—so rich, so powerful, so holy—it's no wonder God doesn't want it getting dragged through the mud. But, as I'm sure you all know, it still does—we've all heard it tossed around before as if it were worthless, meaningless, a dirty word even. We call that profaning God's name—to profane means to take something sacred and make it common. But, not only does God want His name treated with respect, but He's also concerned about His name being stamped on anything bad or false. If we swear to God, make an oath in court for example, we better be willing to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help us God. Or if we ever teach from the Bible, the very book God authored, then we'd better make sure we don't misquote Him. And never should we say *goshdarnit*—only I don't mean *goshdarnit*—because that's like taking God's place as divine judge and calling on Him to rain down damnation. With so many ways to misuse God's name, you might think we've covered everything now, but there is just one more thing.

Do you remember Latrel Spreewell? Well, back when he was playing for the Golden State Warriors, he found himself in hot water for trying to choke his coach. Because of the "morals clause" in his contract, the team immediately tried to

terminate his \$32 million contract for violating that clause. See, a morals clause prohibits conduct that is scandalous, contrary to community standards, or that brings the athlete's team into disrepute. And by Spreewell—one of their own—acting that way, it hurt the team's good name. Well, as church people, by identifying as Christian, it's as if you and I are wearing jerseys with Christ's name printed on them. How we conduct ourselves, everything we do, represents Him. So then, let me ask you, have you misused God's name?

Now, after that, am I the only one worried about *my own* good name? With the way we've tossed God's name around like an expletive, sworn by it, cursed with it, defamed it with our bad behavior, it's easy to see how we've dragged our own names through the mud. I mean, we couldn't blame God if He wanted to terminate any contract He has with us. If we found a mirror, would we see ourselves stripped of our jersey, kicked off God's team? Would God even have a new name tag for us—"profaner," "blasphemer," "sinner"? Maybe He'd say *goshdarnit* about us—only I don't mean *goshdarnit*? It's just as well anyway—you and I showing our true colors and all. But as we approach our reflection in the mirror, we come to find out that we couldn't be more wrong.

No, today, God has already shown us what we are to Him. To Him, we are no profaner, no blasphemer, not even a sinner. To Him, we have nothing to fear. See, the great "I AM" shares with us another name of His this morning. It is a name that is above every name; at this name every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth, and under the earth. It is a name that doesn't just have a lot to say about God, but says even more about *us*. We heard this name just moments ago, maybe it's still ringing in your ears:

*Jesus! Name of wondrous love,
Name all other names above,
Unto which must ev'ry knee
Bow in deep humility.*

*Jesus! Name of priceless worth
To the fallen of the earth
For the promise that it gave,
"Jesus shall His people save."*

*Jesus! Only name that's giv'n
Under all the mighty heav'n
Whereby those to sin enslaved
Burst their fetters and are saved.*

Yes, like Moses, there was God's Son, just minding His own business in heaven, when God the Father called Him over. From that point, a conversation ensued—God calling His Son to lead His people out of bondage, and with no hesitation, the Son gladly obeying. Finally, the Son asks, "Of course I'll go, Father. But if the people ask who sent me, what should I tell them?" And to that, God says, "Your name will say it all. It will be Jesus, which means 'I AM saves.'—'the Lord saves.'" But it was when Jesus came down to earth, that He looked up and saw quite a strange sight. Squinting, He was able to make out people like you and me, a whole lot of folks who've sullied God's good name.

But what made it so strange was how Jesus didn't see the likes of us as a bunch of profaners, blasphemers, sinners. No, He didn't swear an oath to avenge His Father's name. He didn't call down a curse on us for breaking His commandment. He didn't do anything that might drag our names through the mud. No, what Jesus did was erase any trace of our names from our personal sins. Taking a permanent marker, Jesus instead has written His own name on them. And in making them His own, He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried in our place. Truly, Jesus has lived up to His name—"The Lord saves"—by clearing our names. *You and me*, "The Lord saves" you and me.

We'd be wrong though to stop here—to think that's all the Second Commandment's about. Sure, it's about refraining from *misusing* God's name, but, even more, it's about *using* it. See, looking in the mirror, you and I find that the name badge we wear is still none other than Jesus' own. Which means that we are the Lord's saved people, yes, but it also means that you and I we have nicknames, like "Holy," or "Perfect," or "Blameless," or "Spotless," or "Righteous." After

all, any of us who have been baptized in the name of Jesus, always bear His name. But it also means that we've been given special access, privileged status.

Trading places with Jesus, Him standing in our sinful shoes and us standing in His own sacred shoes, we couldn't be in better standing before God the Father. He treats us like family, because now that we're in the place of Jesus, we are all as sons of God. And as God's children, we can ask anything of Him just as a son or daughter asks their daddy. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name," says Jesus, "He will give it to you. . . Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." And so it's Jesus' name that we borrow, praying in His name, confident that God will hear us as if it's His own Son asking. Now, just think about that, having the ear of the great "I AM" anytime you want! Imagine, the Lord of the Universe is at your every beck and call! But that's just what He wants—that's using God's name, and using it well.

A few years ago, my family and I vacationed in Florida. No matter what, we knew it was gonna be fun, but we had absolutely no idea. When we got down there and met up with my Dad, he had some great news. Apparently, my cousin's father-in-law worked at Disney World and was able to get us in. In true Lutheran fashion I asked, *what does this mean?* As it turns out, tickets for my whole family were completely comped. Not only that, but they were park-hopper passes, which means we could go back and forth between any of the parks we wanted! But not only that, they were also fast-passes, which means we could jump to the head of the line on all the rides. I believe we also had some free meal vouchers and even special access to some restricted areas. All of that, a cost we never possibly dreamed we could afford, was made ours for the price of nothing. Well, the next morning, as we waited outside our resort hotel, this guy drove up in his car, loaded us all in, and then he got us all into the park . . . under his name. It pays to know people.

I'll tell you what, Jesus gets us full-access, full-benefits, full-everything under *His* name. Gifts, provisions, blessings beyond our wildest dreams! And Disney world, well, as great as it is, that's nothing compared to the places He'll take us. It pays to know people—it pays to know Jesus. So, this week when you're working really hard not to *misuse* His name, make sure you don't forget to actually *use* it. After all, He's not called "The Lord saves" for nothing.