**Sticks and Stones**

September 5-6, 2015

Exodus 20:7

How great it is to be here with you today! It may be hot outside, but it is cool and comfortable in here. I am blessed to see you here, with so many enjoying the great outdoors at the campground. I hope you came for worship because our worship times are so inspiring, but when it’s this hot out, I suspect you may have ulterior motives.

But no matter why you’re here, I am delighted to see you and be with you to worship.

Today is the second in our sermon series: Big 10 plus, the Ten Commandments Playbook, as we explore the commandments and what they mean to each of us as in our daily lives. We need guidelines and God has given us some non-negotiable standards. It is so hard to get them all right, but as followers of Jesus Christ, we are committed to strive for a perfect record. The problem is that the more deeply we understand them, it seems the harder it is for us to live up to them.

So, let’s begin with a prayer. Say after me…

*I love you, Lord…*

*God of us all, thank you for bringing us here today. Please guide my thoughts and words, open our hearts and minds, and fill us with your heavenly Spirit today. Help us to always respect and revere you, using your name only in ways that bring you honor and glory. We pray it in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Today, we talk about names: God’s name and our names and the way we use them with each other. We know what God expects of us, sort of. Wrongful use, though, can be a little tricky. Sounds easy, but understanding what “wrongful use” is may not be quite so straight forward as we think.

To begin with, take our names. When you have three first names, like me, it’s easy for folks to get confused about what to call you. Douglas. Harry. Dean. I like being called by my first name. When someone calls you by the first name, it says, “I know who you are.” I know you well enough and like you well enough to remember your first name and use it to acknowledge you.” That’s kind a good thing.

Names are interesting. They can be used all kinds of ways.

They can compliment: “Ahh, Douglas!”

They can command: “Douglas Harry Dean!”

They can recognize: “Reverend Douglas Dean”

They can connect: “This is my brother Doug.”

Names can also be used to hurt. When I was in high school, I was walking home from school by myself one day. A little kid was on the other side of the street and he saw me coming. “Hey, fatty,” he yelled at me. Now, I wasn’t fat back then. I wrestled, I lifted weights. I’d played all sorts of sports. I had been running couple of miles a day, getting ready for try-outs with The Ohio State University Marching Band… which, by the way, I didn’t make. I was fine with the marching, but I flunked the playing part, which apparently, was very important to them. But this kid had called me fat. Maybe I was particularly sensitive. Maybe I was just in a vulnerable mood. I don’t know. But here I am, over fifty years later, telling you that I remember this insult hurled at me from across the street by an unknown kid. It hurt and I remember the hurt.

“Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me.” My mother said that to me that whenever I came home with an injured spirit. But you know what? She was wrong. Names can hurt. Names do hurt. And there are lots worse ones than “fatty.” Lots worse. We could name some, couldn't we? I bet you have a choice one or two that you were called at some time. And accurate or not, I bet they still sting when you think of them.

See, here’s the thing: names define us. Names imply character, relationship, mission. It is often by our names that we are recognized by others. They are the titles that stick with us for most of our lives. Sometimes we add additional things, like doctor, or lady, or sir, or master, or captain, or officer, or a hundred other things. But they are names by which we are ranked and recognized.

Some of you will remember WKRP in Cincinnati, the TV show. One of the characters was a weird guy named Les Nessman. He was kind of scrawny, nervous, socially awkward. One day a big, strapping, handsome guy swept into the radio studio and was introduced all around. He said, “I like to think that a man’s name says who he is.” And he turned and stuck out his hand and said, “My name is Steele. What’s yours.” And Nessman replied, “Les.”

I looked up on the web what my names meant. Douglas Harry Dean means “black blue army ruler from the valley.” But I happen to be one of those people who has two sets of names. Those are my adopted names. I also have names that were given to me by my birth mother when I was born. She named me Terrance Richard Clark. It means “brave ruling priest.” I have to admit that I’m a bit uncomfortable with both sets. Not into the ruling thing so much, either as an army leader or as a priest. I do like the idea of the bravery, though. My wife, Carol, would agree that I am a brave spider killer. I lead the “spider patrol” at our house.

But both sets of my names are better than Dr. Suzanne Allen, who is “graceful lily by the little rock.” But then, her “doctor” trumps anything I’ve got!

Names define us. And they can diminish us. They can be used as weapons of character assassination. They can be criticisms of our physical appearance. They can denigrate our relationships. They can strike us in a million different ways. And those who love us best know how to hurt us most deeply.

In the Bible, names connote things, too, especially when they are used in connection with God. You will remember this passage…

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,* ***27*** *to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.* ***28*** *And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."* ***29*** *But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.* ***30*** *The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* ***31*** *And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,* ***and you will name him Jesus.******32*** *He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.* ***33*** *He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." — Luke 1:30-33*

Did you hear the names? Names of connection: house of David, house of Jacob. Name of status: great. Names of relationship: Son of the Most High. Name of identity: Jesus.

The name Jesus is derived from the name YHWH, or Yahweh, the name the Hebrews used for God. Those who came to know Jesus would have understood that his name meant that he had a special relationship with God. No other person in the Bible shares that name.

There are lots of “-el” names in the Bible. The “-el” ending in a name refers to God. In the scripture above, it was the angel Gabri-el, who brought the news to Mary. His name means “Strong Man of God.”

Another angel, named Michael, or Micha-el, means “Like God.”

Nathani-el means “Given from God.”

Othni-el, “Strength of God.”

Samu-el, “God has heard.”

Dani-el, “Judged by God.”

Ari-el, “Lion of God.”

Beth-el, “House of God”

Emmanu-el, “God with us.”

Ezeki-el, “God strengthens.”

Gamali-el, “Benefit of God.”

And so on.

But even more important is when God changes someone’s name. We see it in a few places, a few instances.

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.* ***2*** *And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous."* ***3*** *Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,* ***4*** *"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.* ***5******No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham;*** *for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. — Genesis 17:1-5*

Here, God has indicated a change in Abram’s status. God is making a covenant with him. Abram has been chosen for special mission. And so, with his new status he has been given new name: Abraham. The name Abraham means, “father of a multitude.”

Not long after that, in nearly the same breath, God addresses the situation of Abraham’s wife:

*God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai,* ***but Sarah shall be her name****.* ***16*** *I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."*

*—Genesis 17:15-16*

Sarah means “princess.” And now her status has been changed, as well. She has been unable to conceive, but now God says she will bear a son and God will bless her and she will be the mother of a great people.

Change in status, change in name.

*God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him.* ***10*** *God said to him,* ***"Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name."*** *So he was called Israel.* ***11*** *God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you.*

*— Genesis 35:9-11*

Change in status, change in name. Israel, Isra-el, means “contended with God.” You remember when Jacob wrestled with a stranger and the stranger threw Jacob’s hip out of the socket. The stranger, we have come to understand, was God. Now, after the struggle, God chooses to bless Jacob and so changes his name.

*[Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"* ***16*** *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* ***17*** *And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.* ***18******And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church****, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.* ***19*** *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." —Matthew 16:15-19*

Simon claims Jesus as Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Change in status. And Jesus changes Simon’s name to Peter, and promises that Peter will be the foundation of his church. Change in name.

Changing of names is important. It indicates a change in the person, or a change in their status or mission. This is God making a point. God is memorializing a spiritual accomplishment, or spiritual potential, and blessing that movement.

When we baptize, we give names to our children. We say “through baptism, you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God’s new creation and made to share in Christ’s royal priesthood.” Then we give the child their names, offering them to God, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Often, we say their name and then, “you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

Change of status, change of name.

So, what’s the big deal with God wanting us to be careful how we use the name of God? Well, you’re probably getting it now.

*“Then God spoke all these words:* ***2*** *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery…I the Lord your God am a jealous God…*

*“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.”*

— Exodus 20:2, 5, 7

As Suzanne told us last week, it’s all about our relationship with God. Do we approach God with respect, honoring God? Do we hold that relationship as precious? Do we embrace the character of God and the life of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the foundation of our life here on earth? Do we recognize God’s power and strength, God’s control of the universe we inhabit? Do we let God set our mission? Is God our identifier? When we are asked who we are, can we honestly reply, “I am a cherished child of God?” It begins with our relationship with God and ends with the way we live our lives, the values we choose, the path we walk. Our character.

Swearing by God’s name:

Oh. My. God. These days, it’s abbreviated so it can be used with just a few keystrokes, or thumb strokes. OMG. The interesting thing to me is that it is not really used as an oath. It’s an alarm. Or it’s an exclamation. There is no promise or mission or act involved. There’s no change in status or heart. It’s just a casual use of God’s name, perhaps for the impact, perhaps for the ease of use, perhaps because we seem to hear it on TV and in movies, perhaps because everyone else is saying it. And what could possibly be wrong with using the name of God instead of “wow,” or “really” or “holy mackerel”? I enjoy the Antiques Roadshow on TV. When folks are told how much their stuff is worth, often their response is, “Oh, my God.”

“Jesus Christ!” “God damn it!” “I swear to God.” And many more ways we use God’s name as a punctuation point, looking for impact, or for certification of truth-telling, or just because we can say it. We call it swearing, or cursing, but it is nothing more than using the holy name of God for our own unholy purposes.

But there are appropriate ways to use God’s name. Moses, before he died, summed up God’s expectations for the Israelites. This is part of what he said:

*“Take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* ***13*** *The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve,* ***and by his name alone you shall swear.******14*** *Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you,* ***15*** *because the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the Lord your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth.” —Deut. 6:13-15*

Moses was pretty clear that it was Ok to swear, to take an oath, and to use God’s name as a stamp of sincerity on that promise. We do that today. It is a way of using God’s name in the right way.

“I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.”

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

When we pray, we often end our prayers with, “I pray it in the name of Jesus.”

See, an oath taken in God’s name implies *gravitas*, importance. It is meant to be binding. An oath sworn in God’s name carries weight. It has juice. An oath sworn in God’s name is a serious thing to break.

“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord…” God says to Moses on the mountaintop.

wrongful use = vanity, emptiness of speech, or lying and

including God’s name to make it look truthful

Using God’s name with love, respect, acknowledgement of God’s pre-eminent place in our lives and in our universe… that is just fine. In a real way, it is worship of God.

God has many names. The Bible is full of them.

In Genesis, God is the Breath of Life

In Exodus, the Passover Lamb

In Leviticus, God is our High Priest

Numbers, the fire by night

Deuteronomy, God is Moses’s voice

In Joshua, God is salvation’s choice

Judges, lawgiver

In Ruth, the kinsman redeemer

First and Second Samuel, our Trusted Prophet

In Kings and Chronicles, God is Sovereign

Ezra, a true and faithful scribe

Nehemiah, the rebuilder of broken walls and lives

In Esther, God is Mordecai’s courage

In Job, the Timeless Redeemer

In Psalms, God is our morning song

In Proverbs, Wisdom’s cry

Ecclesiastes, the time and season

In the Song of Songs, God is the lovers’ dream

In Isaiah, God is the Prince of Peace

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet

Lamentations, the cry for Israel

Ezekiel, the call from sin

In Daniel, the stranger in the fire

In Hosea, God is forever faithful

In Joel, God is the Spirit’s power

In Amos, the arms that carry us

In Obadiah, God is the Lord, our Savior

In Jonah, God’s the great missionary

In Micah, the promise of peace

In Nahum, God is our strength and our shield

In Habakkuk and Zephaniah, God’s pleading for revival

In Haggai, God restores lost heritage

In Zechariah, our fountain

In Malachi, God is the Son of Righteousness,

rising with healing in his wings

In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, God; Man; Messiah

In the book of Acts, God is the fire from heaven

In Romans, the grace of God

In Corinthians, the power of love

In Galatians, God is freedom from the curse of sin

Ephesians, our glorious treasure

Philippians, the servant’s heart

In Colossians, the Godhead Trinity

Thessalonians, our coming King

In Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, our mediator and our faithful pastor

In Hebrews, the everlasting covenant

In James, the One who heals the sick

In First and Second Peter, God is our shepherd

In John and Jude, God is the lover coming for his bride

In Revelation, God is King of Kings and Lord of Lords

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God has many names. Here’s what God told Moses…

*God said to Moses, "I AM who I AM." —Exodus 3:14*

*“I AM who I AM.”*  God. The only God, the One God, the God we worship. We love the name. We choose to use God’s name in ways that bring honor to God and the children God loves. Jesus taught us to pray, and he began his prayer by addressing it to our Father, in heaven… hallowed be your name…

*Pray with me…*

*Great and Glorious God, who loves us so desperately, have mercy on us today for the way in which we abuse your name, using it so casually and flippantly, as though you are nothing but a period on a sentence. Forgive us, please. Re-instill in us the importance of keeping your name as hallowed, as holy, as righteous. Reinforce our use of your name to praise you, to make covenants with you, to uplift others and witness to your greatness. And help us curb name-calling that hurts and diminishes others, for we know those things are not of love. Knowing that we are not strong enough to change on our own, please give us the strength we need to speak and think with your purity and clarity of thought so that we might truly be powerful and grace-filled witnesses of your glory in this world. I ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.*