

“In the Name of God”

Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 6:5-15

Every preacher, during his or her lifetime preaches on this prayer. It is foundational to Christian worship and devotion. Many of us learned this prayer as little children either at the dinner table or during bedtime prayers. It disturbs me that there are some modern, so-called seeker oriented churches that have abandoned the practice using the Lord's Prayer altogether. There's nothing wrong in reciting a memorized prayer just as there is nothing wrong in reciting a memorized poem or singing your favorite song as long as it is from your heart.

Take for example, this popular song from the late 1960s whose lyrics go something like this, "Why do birds suddenly appear every time you are near? Just like me they long to be close to you. " Corny—yes. Beautiful—yes, but it is an example of the devotion of one person to another. Just try to convince a couple who fell in love to this song that this song is not a worthy of their devotion to each other. Just try...

The Lord's Prayer is like this as well. It is an example of our devotion to the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth, who wills goodness and joy for his creatures. To study this prayer is to study God's love and power for us. According to none other authority than Jesus himself, this is a model prayer. It is not the only worthy prayer, but it is the one that Jesus taught his disciples when they asked, "Master, teach us how to pray."

IN THE NAME OF GOD...

First, I wonder if God ever gets tired of people using his/her name in connection with their own mean, hateful, or violent actions? God is truly a merciful God given the things that get attributed to him/her! There is a stern warning to those who would in the Third Commandment:

The King James Version says, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. (Exodus 20:7)

The NRSV says, “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.”

This command is often misunderstood and misused, when it is taken to refer to “bad” or vulgar language. While “right speech” is indeed at issue, more is at stake than not cursing or using obscenities. What must be understood is that the “name” of Yahweh speaks of God’s powerful presence and purpose. The utterance of the name is the mobilization of the presence and power of God, an assumption that is still evident in prayers offered “in the name of Jesus.”

Second, when we start to pray the Lord’s Prayer we do so “In the name of God”. We had better be careful when we do this...the name of God is dangerous and powerful...

When Moses receives God’s Ten Words, the Ten Commandments, he is on the holy mountain. When Jesus interprets the Ten Commandments in Matthew it is the Sermon on the Mount. This is no coincidence!

In the Book of Exodus YHWH comes storming into the presence of Israel (19:16-25). This divine arrival, technically characterized as a theophany, a showing of God, is a disturbing upheaval of the mountain.

Old Testament scholar and teacher Walter Brueggemann (*Delivered into Covenant*, page 40) says that:

YHWH comes storming into the presence of Israel (19:16-25). This divine arrival, technically characterized as a theophany, a showing of God, is a disturbing upheaval of the mountain. This description of divine arrival is highly stylized and may reflect something of a repeatable liturgical performance. YHWH, shrouded in mystery, is accompanied by fire, smoke, the violent shaking of the mountain, a blast of trumpets, and thunder. The mountain, occupied by this assertive deity, is now saturated with dangerous holiness, so dangerous that YHWH might "break out against them" (v. 22). This report of awesome divine arrival defies explanation.

That divine arrival is like the procession of a royal person about to ascend to the throne, for the mountain is something like YHWH's habitat. And from that throne-like residence, YHWH speaks-ten times (20:1-17)! When the commandments of YHWH are sounded in YHWH's own utterance, the narrative reports that Israel amid thunder,

lightning, trumpet, and smoke was terrified. The Israelites trembled before the divine presence, because it came to them as threat. This is no benign God of easy assurance; this is rather a sovereign who has outmatched Pharaoh and who must and will be obeyed.

IT IS IN THE SAME NAME OF GOD THAT WE BEGIN THE LORD'S PRAYER, "Our Father, who are in heaven, hallowed or holy is Your Name!" We had better be serious. We had better come to the Lord with awe and trembling...

The Bible and God's name is NOT to be used to curse or condemn others that you disagree with. The Third Commandment concerning taking God's name in vain is much, much more than letting a "dammit" with God's name attached to it escape your lips!

Brueggemann once again reminds, "to invoke through utterance the power and purpose of Yahweh in the service of some purpose that is extraneous to Yahweh's own person. That is, the violation is to make Yahweh (who is an ultimate end) into a means for some other end. The third commandment asserts that God cannot be put to use and is never a means toward an end (v. 7). The notion that the ultimate human purpose is to "glorify and enjoy God" means that God is pure end and never means.

In seasons of heated and sometimes ugly political debate (and lately when has it not been the case?) some have even used God's name and God's Word to curse others. One politician once used a portion of Psalm 109 as a prayer against those with whom he disagreed:

*Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand on his right.  
When he is tried, let him be found guilty;  
let his prayer be counted as sin.  
May his days be few; may another seize his position.  
May his children be orphans, and his wife a widow.  
May his children wander about and beg; may they be driven out of the ruins  
they inhabit.  
May the creditor seize all that he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of  
his toil.  
May there be no one to do him a kindness,  
nor anyone to pity his orphaned children.*

*May this posterity be cut off;  
may his name be blotted out in the second generation.  
May the iniquity of his father be remembered before the LORD,  
and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out.  
Let them be before the LORD continually, and may his memory be cut off  
from the earth. (Psalm 109:6-15, NRSV)*

When Jesus said, “Pray for your enemies” I don’t think that he meant this which leads to my third and final point— When we pray to “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed or holy is your name” we are to call upon the Name of God through Jesus. We are to call upon God in the heart of Jesus...

Let me close with this... We human beings need to regularly put our existence into proper perspective by reminding ourselves of the majesty of God and not our own. The brilliant scientist Sir Isaac Newton said that he could take his telescope and look millions and millions of miles into space. Then he added, “But when I lay it aside, go into my room, shut the door, and get down on my knees in earnest prayer, I see more of Heaven and feel closer to the Lord than if I were assisted by all the telescopes on earth.” AMEN.

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