

## Bless God's Name!

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Exodus 3:1-15, Psalm 145:1-3, Psalm 103:1; Philippians 2:5-11

Ex 3:1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Ex 3:2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

Ex 3:3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

Ex 3:4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

Ex 3:5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Ex 3:6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Ex 3:7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

Ex 3:8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

Ex 3:9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

Ex 3:10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

Ex 3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Ex 3:12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Ex 3:13 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

Ex 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Ex 3:15 God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. [NIV]

*I will extol you, my god and King,  
And bless your name forever and ever.  
Every day I will bless you,  
And praise your name forever and ever.  
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
His greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145) [NRSV]*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And all that is within me.  
Bless his holy name! (Psalm 103)*

Phil 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Phil 2:6 Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

Phil 2:7 but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,  
 being made in human likeness.  
Phil 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
 he humbled himself  
 and became obedient to death—  
 even death on a cross!  
Phil 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
 and gave him the name that is above every name,  
Phil 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
Phil 2:11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
 to the glory of God the Father. [NIV]

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Throughout the Bible – in the psalms especially – the people of God are called upon to bless God’s name.

To bless God, of course, is to praise him. We praise him for his mighty works; we praise him for his unsearchable greatness; we praise him for his loving kindness and his mercy; we praise him – we bless him by proclaiming his great worth with our lips, in songs of joy and thanksgiving.

But blessing God is more than simply praising him; it is to honor him. That’s deeper and more challenging than simply to praise. And notice what we are to honor: God’s *name*.

It’s amazing, if you look up “name” in a Bible concordance, and look for God’s name or the name of the Lord more specifically, you find verse upon verse. The “name” of God is obviously really important to God’s people, because it is very important to God himself. God cares about his name. We are always being asked to bless it.

In olden days, names were more special and carried more meaning than they do today. Today for the most part, names are picked because they sound nice or look good on paper. Or maybe they are given to honor somebody. Or maybe just to be trendy.

In Biblical times, naming children was critical. A person’s name was an essential part of that person’s being – it reflected the very essence of one’s personality. A name was not just a word that stood for that person. In some sense, the name *was* that person. What was true for an ordinary human being was especially true for God. His name, therefore, was to be spoken with reverence. His name demanded awe. His name was to be “hallowed” for to invoke God’s name was to invoke God himself.

In the Bible, God is given a variety of names: “El Shaddai,” meaning God Almighty; “Elohim – meaning “strength or power.” And the most special name of all was given by God to Moses at the burning bush: “Yahweh” – which means “I am who I am.”

In those days, you didn’t play around with God’s name. They understood that God’s name was very powerful, for it represented a very powerful God. The early Israelites held the divine name so sacred they did not speak it. When Hebrews talked about God or if they were reading the Scriptures out loud and came to the name of God, there would only be a respectful silence - their lips were not pure enough

to say the name of God, so holy was his name. To this day, a devout Jew will not pronounce the name of God -- Yahweh, or Jehovah, but will substitute "the Lord" instead and will use it in quiet reverence.

When Hebrew scribes came to the name of God in the scripture text (Yahweh), they either left it blank because it was too sacred to write, or they substituted the word Adonai – THE LORD.

God's name is indeed sacred... and should be uttered only with the deepest kind of respect. There is a sense in which, when we talk about God and use God's name, we ought to take off our shoes because we are standing on holy ground. Jesus instructed us to pray *"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...."*

It is the name of God, and the name of Jesus, the name above all names, before whom every knee shall bow, which is to be blessed - that is, honored .

I hardly need to tell you the name of God has undergone an enormous devaluation in recent years. The third commandment to not take the Lord's name in vain has been broken again and again. The divine name is so often been misused and abused.

The first thing we think of, of course is profanity. I am always saddened when I hear the holy name of God or the sacred name of Jesus Christ being dragged through the mud and is used not as a blessing but as a curse.

But misusing God's name is so much more than using profanity.

We misuse his name -- we fail to bless, to hallow, to honor his name -- any time we fail to take God's name *seriously*.

That catches all of us, doesn't it? It's not just profanity. If we rattle off a prayer to God in worship – even the Lord's Prayer -- without thinking, then we have misused his name. If we are singing "Blessed be the name of the Lord" and our hearts are not in it, then we are misusing God's name. If we glibly pepper our speech with "praise the Lord," using it as a kind of empty cliché and don't really mean it, then we are misusing his name. If we take an oath or a vow using God's name and we do not honor it, then we are misusing his name.

And what is even more to the point – if you and I are called by God's name and bear his name, but our lives do not match, then we are not only bad advertisements for God, but we bring shame and dishonor to the One we represent. We cheapen God's name every time we live contrary to God's word and fail to do what he says. We sully his reputation.

Jesus, in his time, was irate about the cheapening of the divine name: *"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven. On that day [the day of judgment] many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"*

Clarence Jordan, a Christian writer, has these strong words to say about using the Lord's name in vain. They get right to the point:

*Now the words in vain mean "empty and meaningless, of no account, of no seriousness." We take it [the Lord's name] and on we go and it means nothing. We keep sailing under the same old banner, living the same old life, having the same old attitudes, walking in the same old way. The name has meant nothing to us. It doesn't change us. You don't take the name of the Lord in vain with your lips. You take it in vain with your life. It isn't the people outside the church who take God's name in vain. They've never taken it so they can't take it in vain. It's the people on the inside, the nice people who would not dare let one little cuss word fall over their lips -- they're the ones many times whose lives are totally unchanged by the grace of God. They're the ones who take the name in vain..."*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been adopted by faith into God's family. That means we bear the family name. What a sacred name it is – noble in its heritage, and powerful in its influence for good... We have sacred name to uphold. We bear the name "Christian." And that means we are to relate to people in a certain way. The word "Christian" means "little Christ." You and I are to be little copies of the one whose name we carry. We are to be "little Christs where and with whom we live. And that means sharing with, loving, and blessing the world and its people as Christ did.

Are you and I honoring his name by the way we live?

There is a story about a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great who was brought before the great world-conqueror for a court-martial. When the emperor had listened to the charges and the evidence, he turned to the soldier facing condemnation and said, "What is your name?"

"Alexander," was the reply.

Again the emperor questioned, "What is your name?"

And the second time the soldier answered, "Alexander."

With a cry of rage, the emperor roared, "What is your name?"

And when the soldier answered a third time, "Alexander," the great general angrily replied, "You say your name is Alexander? You are found guilty of your crime as charged and now you must pay the penalty. Either you change your conduct or change your name, for no man can bear the name of Alexander, my name, and do the things you have done."

Let us bless and honor God's name in our worship, so that the praise we offer will truly be an expression of our mind and heart. Let us bless and honor God's name in our life, so that others can see the consistency between the name we believe in and the name we bear and the things we do.

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ and are growing as a Christian, to you his name ought to fill you with awe. It is a name you will want to exalt, a name you will want to share, a name you will want to honor above all names... So may it be...

*I will extol you, my god and King,  
And bless your name forever and ever.  
Every day I will bless you,  
And praise your name forever and ever.  
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
His greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145)*

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And all that is within me.  
Bless his holy name!*