

**6 Week Sermon Series**:

**Sermon 5:** Evil in the Name of God

**Date**: Sunday September 11,2016

**Scripture**: Exodus 20:7, Ephesians 4:29-32

**Things I’d Like to Remember from Today’s Sermon:**

**Daily Study Guide**

**MONDAY September 12, 2016 Exodus 20:7, 34:5-10 Using God’s name meaningfully**

In Bible times, a “name” conveyed a person’s inner essence. The third commandment dealt with much more than the “cussing” many Christians associate with it (though casual use of God’s name as a swear word is pretty undesirable). God revealed his “name,” his character, to Israel through Moses. They didn’t always live up to it, but they recorded and passed on the command that they not use God’s “name” to support actions that were out of harmony with it.

• The people of the nations around Israel usually thought their “gods” sought sacrifices as a kind of bribe to get the god to send rain or protect from harm. The Bible’s God told Moses, “I make a covenant” (a promise like he gave Abraham, Genesis 15:18). In what ways have you experienced God’s covenant—God sticking with you through both good and bad? How have the human “trust” relationships you’ve lived with shaped, positively or negatively, your ability to trust that God’s love for you is truly unwavering?

• In recent years, we’ve seen tragic efforts to hide unethical and even criminal conduct in order to “protect” churches or schools that claim a connection with God. In what ways is any person or institution that attaches a word like “Christian” to itself using God’s “name”? What explicit or implicit claims go with a use of God’s name? In what ways do cover-ups of failures harm rather than protect or honor God’s name?

**Prayer:** Lord, remind me every day that “Christian” is not just a label on a census form, but a commitment I’ve made to represent and honor you. Grow in me the qualities that characterize your “name.” Amen.

**TUESDAY September 13, 2016 Isaiah 55:1-9, Isaiah 19:19-25 God’s covenant mercy - for all people**

God called the prophet Isaiah, like most of Israel’s prophets, to share a message with God's people that was challenging -often downright unpopular - yet filled with hope. Isaiah's vision said God's mercy was wider than we'd expect—wide enough to even reach out to include Assyria and Egypt, Israel's enemies and oppressors.

• In Isaiah 55:7 Isaiah said, "Let the wicked abandon their ways … so that (God) may have mercy on them." The thought of God offering his mercy to the wicked is challenging, especially if we think we don’t belong in that category. But everyone makes mistakes in life, and misses the path at times. How does God's great mercy affect the way you view yourself, despite the mistakes you have made in the past?

• Isaiah 19:23-25 casts a vision of bitter enemies uniting to worship God together. This is a hope-filled picture of what the world will be like when God rids the world of hate, pain and suffering once and for all. In your life right now, how could you go about building "a highway from Egypt to Assyria"? In what strained or broken relationships can you effectively build “roads” along which God’s grace can work?

**Prayer:** Lord God, thank you that your mercy is far wider than I could expect, even when that pushes me out of my comfort zone. Help me to see myself and others in light of your great mercy. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY September 14, 2016 2 Kings 5:1-14 A young heroine showed her captors God’s love**

A Syrian general named Naaman had leprosy. An Israelite girl captured in a cross-border raid said she knew of a prophet who could heal him. The king in Samaria thought the Syrians were trying to start a war. Naaman was at first too proud to wash in the Jordan River as the prophet Elisha said. Many of the religious and national attitudes that keep the Middle East in conflict today were at work. Yet God’s love and mercy overcame the obstacles, and the foreign general found healing.

• Trace the many points in this story at which fear of, or arrogance toward someone from a different country or faith could have derailed God’s healing purpose. Who do you deal with often who triggers some of those feelings in you because they are different? Ask God to help you find common ground, and watch for ways to bless that person.

• The unnamed Israelite girl is a remarkable example of what God can do in our hearts. Dragged from her home by raiding soldiers, she still wished good for Naaman and pointed him to the source of help. When has someone wished good for you and pointed you to a source of help? When have you been able to do that for someone else?

**Prayer:** Loving God, I want to become more and more like the nameless girl in this story. Help me to desire your good for all the people I deal with, and to learn from stories like these how to point them to you. Amen.

**THURSDAY September 15, 2016 Exodus 21:15-25, Matthew 5:21-26, 38-45 Jesus expanded our knowledge of God’s wishes**

In this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly used the formula, “It was said … but I say to you …” The law in Exodus 21 (also Leviticus 24, Deuteronomy 19) limited revenge to “an eye for an eye.” In a world in which revenge was often viciously excessive (“you hurt me, I’ll kill your whole family”), Israel’s law of proportional revenge was more merciful than most. But Jesus taught an even more radical approach: “Love your enemies.”

• We think of ourselves as more sophisticated than the ancient world. Yet we talk about “settling a score” or “getting revenge” in everything from sports rivalries to multi-million dollar business deals. How does it reshape our interactions to replace an ideal of revenge with an ideal of mutual love and service? In what ways does Jesus' teaching speak to your heart about the ways in which you deal with others?

• The Translator’s Handbook on Matthew said, “The term [for love in ‘Love your enemies’] from the Old Testament always implies a sense of faithful loyalty, not mere emotion, so that expressions which approach this idea are to be preferred over those meaning merely to like someone very much.” What does it look like in your life to “love” people you do not “like very much,” even people who have wronged you? How can Jesus’ life and death help you re-define “love” in terms of actions rather than feelings?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me with the kind of rock-hard, determined love that could face the cross to give me the chance to choose eternal life. Teach me how to love in a way that reaches beyond good feelings. Amen.

**FRIDAY September 16, 2016 Ephesians 2:11-19 Breaking down the barrier of hatred**

The apostle Paul knew about religious prejudice and hatred—he’d lived it (Galatians 1:13-14). In these verses, he was probably picturing the wall in the Jerusalem Temple’s courtyard that bore signs warning in Hebrew, Greek and Latin that any Gentile who went beyond that wall was subject to death. He also knew from his own life that Jesus’ power tore down the dividing wall between people, and broke through barriers of race, prejudice and fear.

• In their book UnChristian, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons wrote that “nearly nine out of ten young outsiders (87 percent) said that the term judgmental accurately describes present-day Christianity.” When you meet difference in someone else, are you more inclined to build walls, or to tear down walls and seek understanding? How does Christ’s acceptance of you inspire you to be part of the “one new humanity” Jesus came to create?

• Paul’s ministry focused particularly on bridging the divide between Jews and Gentiles (cf. Galatians 2:6-9). What are some of the major factors (education, economic or social status, political beliefs, denominational connections, etc..) that divide people from one another in your world? How can you use your influence to carry on Christ’s work to “create one new person out of the two groups, making peace”?

**Prayer:** Loving Lord, history tells me that often we misrepresent your name because people who are different from us scare us. Help me more and more to learn to see all people the way you see them. Amen

**SATURDAY September 17, 2016 John 8:1-11 Jesus’ viewpoint: who was wrong and why**

John said the religious leaders, stones in hand, were using this woman to trap Jesus (verse 6). That probably explains why the woman’s partner (she couldn’t commit adultery alone!) wasn’t there—the leaders may well have set her up. They saw themselves as righteous, as upholding God’s law (verse 5). Jesus reframed the issue, saying, “Whoever hasn’t sinned should throw the first stone” (verse 7). After the “righteous” people slunk away in the face of this challenge, Jesus told the woman whose life he’d saved, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don’t sin anymore.”

• Around 1400, William Langland wrote, “All the wickedness in the world that man might work or think is no more to the mercy of God than a live coal in the sea.” In what ways does guilt or shame haunt your life? Imagine yourself huddled on the ground as the woman in this story was. Then hear Jesus say to you, “I don’t condemn you.” How can those words open your life to greater freedom, peace and joy? How can you extend that life-giving message to other struggling people whose path you cross?

**Prayer:** O God, you are the source of life and light, not condemnation or pain. Guide me that I may avoid the terrible evil of a condemning, self-righteous spirit, and pass on your life, hope and light to others. Amen.