

Who could forget those callous words of Joseph Stalin—"One death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." But as callous as those words are, there is something to them. Imagine the Holocaust, for example, without Anne Frank's diary. The fact that we know a little girl—her thoughts and feelings, her hopes and fears, especially her name—makes it a lot more personal, instead of just being another dot on history's timeline.

Same goes with God. Too many people refer to God as just that—God. For them, He's just some vague, unknowable, amorphous being. They might believe some kind of god exists, whoever he or she is, or whatever it is. Even Islam's Allah isn't a proper name, but just the Arabic word for god. In the minds of many, God doesn't have a name—just God.

But not our God—the God of the Bible isn't just some generic deity. He doesn't stand aloof from us, He refuses to remain anonymous, but by His Word He gets personal by revealing His name to us. It's like He sticks out His hand and says, "Put 'er there, my name's . . ." And that's just what He did when Moses was out shepherding a flock, minding his own business. Moses wasn't expecting to meet anyone special when God stuck out His hand with a burning bush and introduced Himself, "Hi, my name's YHWH," which literally means "I AM." And ever since then, that's been God's nametag to the Hebrew people—YHWH, "I AM."

What a hallowed name for God to have! I mean, hallowed means holy; and holy means set apart, special, distinct from all others. Can you think of any other god who would name themselves "I AM"? After all, "I AM" stresses the fact that God exists in Himself—He is, has always been, and will always be. That stands in sharp contrast to every other pantheon, where those gods don't usually exist in themselves but have myths about how they came to be, and even how they change over time—YHWH is different though. He *never* changes but stays the same yesterday, today, and forever—we call that the immutability of God. And since such a God is so unique, so is such a name—it is truly holy and hallowed.

No wonder a few decades ago, when the NY Times printed the holy name of God on the cover of their Sunday Book Review, the conservative Jewish community was in hysterics. Here was the holy name of YHWH, which they wouldn't even print in their own Scriptures—which explains, by the way, why your Bibles replace it with LORD in small caps—here it was in print and blowing around the city like it was common trash. Many pious Jews went out into the streets scouring for these papers, grabbing as many as they could find, so their Lord's precious name wouldn't be desecrated. Just imagine His name rolling through the filth, getting thrown out with the garbage, even kicked around and come tumbling into places like public restrooms, strip clubs, or God-knows-where. Can't you sympathize with these people? I mean, who'd want that to happen to the holy name of our God?

Well, if that's how we feel . . . isn't it kinda strange then that we sorta do the same thing. After all, you and I are baptized children of God. At the font, God's marked each of us with His name as we've been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And if you've been called a Christian, it's only because you bear the name of Christ. So, if God's name is emblazoned on our foreheads, how have we kept it holy? Or like those newspapers scattering about the seedy back alleys of New York City, what in God's name have we done to drag it through the mud?

When I was a boy, I remember if I ever got out of line my father would say, "David, you're a Miller, and that's just not how Millers act. Millers are better than that!" But at the time, I didn't understand—when I'd get into trouble, I just didn't get why my parents cared so much. I figured I'm the one who looks bad here, but what's that got to do with them? Then someone pointed out to me, "Think about how your behavior affects your mom and dad. The way you're acting reflects poorly on them. You're disgracing your family's good name." Suddenly, it dawned on me—I'm a Miller, and this is no way for a Miller to act. Millers are better than this.

You see, how we conduct ourselves not only says a lot about who are as individuals, but as Christians it says even more about the One whose name we bear. Jesus' plan was to have all people drawn to the faith by seeing how we follow Him and the way we love one another. But how've we been at that—are we giving people the right impression . . . or the wrong idea about our God? It's no wonder people say, "The church is nothing but a buncha hypocrites," or I've seen

bumper stickers that say, "Lord, save us from your followers." When that happens, we're like those newspapers, sully God's good name.

Or think about how this relates to the Second Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain." How many of us have no problem texting OMG, as if it weren't the same thing as saying it out loud? Or thanks to the influence of Hollywood, who here hasn't found themselves carelessly blurting out, "Jesus Christ!" or "G.D.!"—and I know you know what I mean by that? When we do, there we go again—we're newspapers disgracing the holy name of God.

In WWII, many German soldiers who went into battle had *Gott mit Uns* ("God with Us") written on their helmets. Can you imagine them actually believing God would champion their cause? That's yet another way God's name is anything but hallowed—when it's attached to our own wild ideas, put on a leash and dragged into our own crazy crusades. How could we think He would be jerked around like that, rubber stamping our personal convictions? If we do that, then once again there goes another newspaper.

So, as we pray this first petition, "hallowed be Thy name," it looks as if it's fallen on deaf ears. I mean, everywhere we turn, we've made a mess of God's holy name—it is anything but hallowed—so it sure seems like this prayer's gone unanswered. Is He even listening, we wonder—because Lord, where's the holiness, the hallowedness?

Funny we should ask, because this is one prayer God has heard loud and clear . . . and answered loud and clear too. Just like Moses was out tending his sheep, just minding his own business, so the shepherds in Bethlehem were also keeping watch over their flocks at night. But this time it wasn't a burning bush, but a great company of the heavenly host that lit up the sky. Talk about an introduction!

You see, in the babe of Bethlehem God was sticking out His hand like never before—giving us a literal hand to shake. And when He gave His name this time, He wasn't just telling us His first name, YHWH . . . but His middle name too. When the shepherds rushed to the manger, they beheld the *fullness* of God's glory. Whereas, YHWH just means "I AM," it almost seems incomplete—"I AM" *what*, we might ask? But with the God-given name of Jesus, Yeshua in Hebrew, we get the divine name YHWH . . . plus the added verb *saves*—literally, Jesus means "I AM the one who saves" or "The Lord saves." *Saves* is God's middle name!

Now, what could be holier, more hallowed than that! You see, no other god promises salvation so freely by grace. Sure, Buddhism offers nirvana . . . but only if you've totally emptied yourself and achieved peace with the universe—we've all done that, right? And Islam offers you Jannah, what they call paradise—with rivers flowing with water, milk, and wine, and for each man at least 70 virgins with wide, lovely eyes . . . but only if Allah's extra pleased with us . . . the trouble is, how could we ever be pleasing enough; at least, how would we ever know? But in the name of Jesus, God reveals further how He's holy and set apart, has distinguished Himself from all gods. He promises you the gift of salvation with complete certainty at absolutely no cost. No wonder Jesus is the name that's above every name—"The Lord saves."

So, it might've been Stalin who said, "One death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." But that's not what God would say. By His name, God's laid bare His heart to us—and while He'd agree that one death is a tragedy, He'd also say that millions of deaths isn't a statistic but a *catastrophe*! So, just as that's where we were all headed because of our unholy use of God's name, Jesus—the Lord who saves—took up the master recording of every blasphemy, profanity, and sacrilege of God's holy name ever uttered in history, and—before you could say "damnation"—He deleted them all. Taking those sins upon Himself, He erased them for good when He was rubbed out on the cross. All of that died with Him.

So, when God listens to us now, what does He hear—silence? No, Jesus didn't just take away our sins, but He has permanently taped over them. In place of every misuse, Jesus has recorded His every right use of God's name. Whenever He called on God in prayer, or brought glory to His name, or lived up to it—by being the Lord who saves—

Jesus was dubbing His righteousness onto the soundtrack of the world, the soundtrack of our lives. And so our own names have not only been cleared, but are also written in the book of life. In Jesus, God has heard our prayer and hallowed His name—saving us as only He could do. Maybe that's enough to keep us from misusing the holy name of God.

A couple members of Duke's faculty once told the story of a student they knew. This student was the first person in their family to go to college. And when someone offered them illegal drugs saying, "Go ahead, try it. It'll make you feel good," without hesitation the student said, "No." "Don't be so uptight," the dealer said. "Nobody's gonna know you tried some dope, got a little high." But the student said, "That's not the point. The point is that my mother cleaned houses and washed floors to send me to this college. I'm here because of her. I'm here for her. I wouldn't do anything to demean her sacrifice for me." So that's one reason not to disgrace the God's good name.

But perhaps there's an even better reason for why we not only don't misuse His name, but actually use God's name rightly. Chances are, you might be here today, just minding your own business, when God sticks out His hand to you. Right here at this altar, as He puts Himself in your hands, you and He get reacquainted once more. When you hear "Take, eat; this is My body" and "Take, drink; this is My blood" it's like He's saying, "Put 'er there, great to see you again. I'm Jesus—the Lord who saves you . . . The Lord who *still* saves you." And getting to know such a deeply personal, caring, loving God—His name becomes more precious than a lovesick adolescent doodling the name of their beloved over and over again. This is the precious name of a God who would hold nothing back but even promise that "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." Knowing such a God, who's given Himself so utterly and completely to us, how could we not call upon His saving name?

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