

We attach a lot of importance to our name, don't we? It's not just how we identify ourselves. It's not that I say that "I am so-and-so, and this is my name." Our name also brings with it a lot more. It brings with it our reputation. And for that reason, that's why we put our signature on documents that we want to say that we're going to do. I am so serious about what I'm doing here that I have put my name upon it. If we take out a loan, for example, we put our name on it as a way of saying "I'm going to repay this." Likewise, companies do this too. They put their name upon their products. They put it on everything that they make, so that very often, we buy things, not because we've tested them out or because we hear from someone else, but simply because of the name. We know that they have made good things in the past, and so we trust that name. We trust it to give us something good. But when we damage that name, when we hurt that reputation, that can be very difficult to get back. If we default on the loan, for example, people are going to treat us differently as a result. And so we should be careful with our name, because it means so much more than just who I am.

Likewise, Christians, God also has a name. And God's name includes everything about him. It includes his righteousness. It includes his holiness. It includes everything that he has done. And God is very, very serious about that name. He doesn't want it to be damaged. He doesn't want his reputation to be hurt. So the question we need to ask ourselves today is: do we take God's name seriously? And why does God take his name so seriously in the first place? Because when we answer those two questions, we will understand what is going on in our Old Testament reading.

Because here in Ezekiel, God's name is under attack. And the reason why it's under attack is because God had put his name upon Israel. God had promised Abraham that he would give him many descendants, and he had promised Abraham that he would be the reason why the Savior would come into the world. He had put his name upon Abraham and upon that promise, and he meant it, so that no matter what happened, God's name would be attached to his people. But Israel hasn't been doing the right thing. Israel has been sinning over and over again. And as a result of Israel's sin, God's name is being damaged. His reputation is being hurt. We understand this too, because whenever we attach our name to something, it's going to reflect back on us. Take that example of that loan. If you have a co-signer on your loan and that person fails to uphold their end of the deal, that's not only going to hurt their reputation. That's also going to hurt yours as well. Whatever we attach our name to reflects back on us. And that's what was happening with Israel. Israel's idolatry, Israel's hatreds, Israel's mistreatment of the poor, all of these things were reflecting back on God and was hurting his reputation. Because now the nations of the world would look at him and they would say, "If this is the kind of people that the Lord associates with, what kind of God must he be? If this is the kind of people he calls his own--these people who are vicious, these people who are sinning, these people who do all of these terrible things--he must be a terrible God too." In that way God's reputation, God's name, was under attack.

And Christians, this is also true for us too. Because have you considered how your actions affect God's name? Because God has put his name upon you. When he baptized you, he put his name upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. God put his name on you and said, "This one belongs to me. This one is mine." And so how does everything that you do reflect on God? If we say that we are a Christian, for example, but then we go out and lie and cheat and steal, how does that affect God's name? If we say that I am a

Christian, but I go out and get drunk or just act in terrible ways, how does that affect God's name? Or if I say that I am a Christian, but I bicker and I fight, especially with those closest to me or especially with those who are in the church, how does that affect God's name? If I say I'm a Christian, but then I don't do anything that God says, what is that going to do to his reputation? Because what will the world think, Christians, when they see us act in this way? What will they say about you? What will they say about the church? Or more importantly, what will they say about God? "If God associates with these kinds of people, if this is what Christians are, then maybe I don't want to be a Christian at all. If this is how the church treats its members, if this is how we deal with one another, why would I want to be a part of that? What kind of God would associate with these people?" When we don't live the way that God wants us to live, Christians, we hurt his name. We hurt his reputation. And as such, we bring him down in the eyes of the world. And that's not something that he's going to take lightly. He takes his name very, very seriously.

Because God punished Israel for their sins, because they had not been treating his name the way that they ought to have. Because God takes it seriously. Consider what he says in the Second Commandment: "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." This is a serious thing. God is jealous for his reputation. And for that reason, he sends Israel away into exile. So we should pay attention too, and take God's name seriously, because God holds us responsible for the way that we represent him, for the way that we uphold his name!

But Christians, there's a new problem that comes about in our reading for today. It's not just that Israel had hurt God's name by their sins. But the fact that they were still in exile at the time of this writing was itself a problem. Israel being in exile was hurting the name of God. Now, let me explain what I mean by that. When the nations of the world around Israel saw the fact that they were scattered among the nations, think about what they must've thought. "These people are in exile, because God couldn't help them. What kind of God would make promises that he's not able to keep?" They would say, "What kind of God would say, 'I will give you your own land,' and now they're scattered throughout the world?" "What kind of God," they would say, "would promise that they would never be hurt or forsaken, and yet he couldn't stop the Babylonians from coming in?" "What kind of God," they would say, "would promise all of these things to them and yet not be able to do any of them?" "Our gods," the nations would say, "are better than the Lord, because at least our gods keep their promises."

See, that's the problem. God can't stand by idly and let the nations slander him in that way. God is not going to appear as if he is weak and powerless to do anything for his people. He is not going to appear like he does not keep his Word. And so that's why he says in our reading, in verse 22: "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came."'" "It is not for your sake," he says, "that I'm about to do this." "Because you don't deserve any of it. I can prove that by your sins. You deserve to be in exile. You deserve to be there forever. I don't owe you anything," the Lord says, "but I'm going to do this for the sake of my holy name. Because I will not be thought of as a God who is weak. I will not be thought of as a God who is unfaithful. I will not be thought of as a God who does not keep his Word." And so for the sake of his holy name, God brings them back

and says, "I'm going to sprinkle you with clean water. I will give you a new heart. I will put my spirit within you, not because of who you are, but because I am the Lord. I mean what I say, and I will keep my promises. And no one will be able to say otherwise. I'm doing this not for your sake, O house of Israel, but for the sake of my holy name!"

And Christians, this is also true for us as well. Because we are not saved because of who we are. We are not saved because we are righteous. Because we aren't. We are not saved because we have something within us that deserves to be saved. We don't have that at all. God would be perfectly just if he didn't save any of us. But God does these things because he has put his name upon us. And he saves us because of Jesus Christ alone. The Father has looked upon the death of Christ, and he has said, "This pays for the sins of all the world." And he has made a promise that whoever calls upon the name of Jesus will be saved. And God is not going to break that promise, because he will not be thought of as a God who does not keep his Word.

Now, that might sound a little cold to us. It might sound a little distant. The reason why is because I think we often think of salvation from ourselves first. We start from below, and we think about our need to be saved. And that's all true. But God saves us not because of us. God saves us because of Jesus. And he comes to us, and he calls us to himself, giving us a new heart, giving us the Spirit within us, giving us all of these things, because he is faithful to his promises. God upholds his Word by his own name. And God gives us that name, and that name is something he's never going to let go. And that should comfort us, Christians, because now we don't have to worry that we've done enough, because we never will. We don't have to worry that we might not be good enough, because we never will be. But Jesus has come to us as our Savior. And God gives him to us. And God does not go back on his Word.

So Christians, let us turn away from our sins. Let us turn away from the things which keep us away from God. Because he has called us to himself by his Son, Jesus Christ, and given us his name. He takes that name seriously, and so should we. But he takes it so seriously that he will make you his own forever because of Jesus. Turn to him because he will not go back on his Word.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your promises and assured us by your holy name. We pray that you would cause us to turn always away from our sins so that we may turn towards you, so that we may glorify you for all that you have done. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.