

The Name Above all Others

Deuteronomy 12

This morning we are returning to our study in the book of Deuteronomy. We took ten weeks to cover the first ten chapters; we'll only take six weeks to study the last 24 chapters. So we'll obviously be selective, studying key passages.

The book of Deuteronomy has been called "a book on the boundary." The people stood on the boundary between the wilderness and the Promised Land. They stood on the boundary of the past and the future. They stood on the boundary of past disobedience and future obedience. They needed to become a people who accurately represented God to the nations. Therefore they needed to know God and love God with all their heart, soul, and might. By being a showcase of God Himself, they would be a light to the nations. The core challenge of Deuteronomy is to be wholeheartedly and exclusively devoted to YHWH.

In light of this calling, today's passage (Deuteronomy 12) instructs the children of Israel, "Once you displace the nations living in Canaan, destroy their places of worship." They were entering a Land dotted with shrines to many different gods with many different names. Israel was to be a people who worshiped one God in a central place. There - in the temple in Jerusalem - God would establish His name.

Of course today's passage is not a mandate for Christians to wipe out all competing religions (here in America or elsewhere). Deuteronomy was written to a specific group of people (the children of Israel) who were being given a plot of land (Canaan) by God where they would establish a nation with a government with laws and a judicial system. The church is living under a different covenant: we aren't a nation (in the political sense) with laws and judges and courts that make rulings that are binding on everybody else. We are a people scattered across the world, living in exile.

We are going to see that just as the name of God was to reign in Jerusalem, the name of Jesus is to reign among us - both corporately and individually. We are to live our lives in such a way that makes clear that there is no other name that compares to the name of Jesus. As we'll see, there is no competition between the name of Jesus and the name of God the Father.

The Old Covenant: God's Name in One Place (Deuteronomy 12:1–9)

If you've been with us for our study in Deuteronomy, verse 1 will sound very familiar:

1 "These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth.

Thirty times in Deuteronomy Moses tells the people to observe **everything** that is commanded (see 6:2, 8:1, 12:28, etc.); nothing is optional or incidental. Sometimes a speaker (Christian or other) will say, "This is just my opinion. . . take it or leave it." The

book of Deuteronomy doesn't say that. It says, "When you enter the Land, be very careful to do *everything* commanded so that you will prosper." In verse two Moses gives a specific command that was essential for their well-being.

2 "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.

Notice that the nations "served their gods" in many different places: on top of mountains and hills, under every green tree, etc. By contrast, the God of Israel would be worshiped at only one place, at a place of God's choosing. The command is to utterly destroy the places of worship that they find in the Land. Moses gets more specific in verse 3:

3 "You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods and obliterate their name from that place. 4 "You shall not act like this toward the Lord your God.

The altars were used for sacrifices. Sacred pillars were stones set up to symbolize various deities. The Ashram poles were made of wood to represent the fertility goddess. Engraved images were idols that the people worshiped. By tearing down, smashing, and burning these religious symbols was a way to "obliterate their name from that place." In the Bible the "name" represented the person - his/her essential character. To obliterate the name of the Canaanite gods was to disempower them and remove everything they stood for.

And remember that the Canaanites weren't peace-loving people whose religion was healthy and wholesome. No, they burned their children in the fire to appease their gods (see v. 31). The name of a god who required child sacrifice should not be allowed to exist alongside the name of YHWH. We've seen throughout Deuteronomy that Israel's God demanded exclusive, wholehearted devotion. He was in a category all His own; He could never be one of many gods that the people worshiped.

As you know, we live in an age in which it is very popular to assert that all roads lead to "God." We commonly hear that all the major religions teach basically the same thing and worship the same "god" under different names. It is true that some religions do share some common teachings when it comes to morality, but the God of the Bible is very emphatic that there is one and only one Name that should be worshiped.

Notice the vision given for the name of God in verse 5ff:

5 "But you shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come.

Moses isn't concerned about the eventual location of the temple. He mainly wants them to understand that God would choose one place where His name would be established.

The name of God represents His true character. The place where God established His name would be the place where He reigned. There people would understand who He really was; there they would understand His true heart.

The past couple months Brenda and I have been part of a Bible study on the “long name of God” found in Exodus 34:6. Moses cried out to God to reveal His ways and glory; God responded by saying He would reveal His name. In Exodus 34:6 we read:

6 Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

The God of Israel has a fierce compassion that compels Him to act on their behalf (He had rescued the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt). He doesn’t have a short fuse; He is slow to anger. He doesn’t have just a little bit of grace/mercy; He is abounding in lovingkindness. The temple in Jerusalem would be a place where that God (the God with that name) was understood, loved, and worshiped.

6 “There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock.

Instead of offering these various types of sacrifices wherever they found an altar, they were to bring them to the place God chose to establish His name. We don’t have time to describe these sacrifices and offerings in details. I would simply point out that the fact that they could bring sacrifices meant that God is a God who forgives. The fact that they had herds and flocks meant that God is generous; He is a God who blesses and gives abundance.

Notice the theme of joy and celebration in verse 7:

7 “There also you and your households shall eat before the Lord your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you.

Some of the offerings were completely burned on the altar, but some were eaten in the presence of God. In the Bible to eat with someone meant relationship and acceptance. The fact that people could have table fellowship with God Himself (eating before the Lord your God) meant that He would provide a way to remove their sin.

8 “You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; 9 for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you.

The Land was their resting place and inheritance. Once they entered the Land they would need to give up their habit of doing whatever seemed right to them. They would need to worship God only at the place where He chose to establish His name. If they understood that “Name,” they wouldn’t see this restriction as bad news; they would see

it as good news (gospel!) because the one true living God had provided a way for them to know and love Him.

In our time remaining, I want us to consider the implications of this passage (Deut. 12) for those of us living under the new covenant. You may remember that when Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman she asked Him where a person should worship (in Samaria or in Jerusalem). Jesus replied that an hour was coming when worship wouldn't be restricted to any one place; rather, people would worship in spirit and truth throughout the earth. And numerous Scriptures make clear that the "name" we worship is Jesus.

The New Covenant: Jesus' Name throughout the Earth (Isaiah 45:22-23, Philippians 2:9-11, John 4:19-24, Matthew 28:18-20)

Before we land in the New Testament, I want us to touch down in the book of Isaiah to pick up a key phrase and a key concept that gives continuity between what Moses told the children of Israel and what the New Testament tells us as followers of Jesus. In Isaiah 45:22–23, God gives a gracious invitation to every person in every nation:

22 "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;
For I am God, and there is no other.

Israel failed miserably in her calling to be a light to the nations. But the plan was for Israel to be a showcase of the one, true living God. The nations were to conclude, "The so-called gods that we worship are blind, deaf, and dumb. But the God of Israel sees and hears and speaks. He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth. And so we come to Him to be saved!"

In verse 23 God lets the nations know that since He is God "and there is no other," one day He alone will be worshiped.

23 "I have sworn by Myself,
The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness
And will not turn back,
That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.

The day would come with all other "gods" would be exposed as frauds. On that day every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance. Again, the invitation is to come to God and be saved so that bowing the knee will be joyful worship instead of forced submission.

In Philippians 2 Paul explains that Jesus has been humble from eternity past. His humility prompted Him to lay aside His heavenly prerogatives and become one of us. As a flesh-and-blood man, Jesus "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." In light of His crucifixion for our sins, we read this in Philippians 2:9–11:

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul makes an obvious reference to Isaiah 45:23 when he writes that “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. . . and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” In a striking move, Paul identifies the name of Jesus with the name of the God of the old covenant. Of course the New Testament repeatedly, emphatically makes this point over and over.

- Jesus said, “If you’ve seen Me, you have seen the Father.”
- Hebrews 1 tells us that Jesus is “the exact representation of His nature”
- John 1 tells us that no one has seen God at any time, but Jesus has “explained Him” - Jesus is God in a flesh and blood body. Like God the Father, Jesus is full of grace and truth. Jesus is compassionate and gracious. Jesus is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.

What does this mean for us? Knowing that one day at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, we should live in glad submission to Him here and now. Basically it means that everything we do should be compatible with the Name of Jesus. [I hope I’ve made clear that this is consistent with living in submission to the Father and the Spirit as well.]

The New Testament has dozens of references to speaking and acting in Jesus’ name. As we become conformed to the image of Christ, we speak and act just like Him. As we abide in Him and His words abide in us, we too are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth. Here are five examples:

Mission. (*Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38, 4:12, 8:12*) - We are to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we lead people to make a comprehensive declaration that they are “all in” when it comes to the name of the Triune God.

Prayer. (*John 14:13-14*) We pray in Jesus’ name. We are told in John 14:13–14:

13 “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

This doesn’t mean simply tagging “in Jesus’ name” onto the end of our prayers. R.A. Torrey gives an analogy that I find helpful. If you walk into a bank with a check made out to you for \$1,000, the teller is going to look at the name on the bottom of the check and see if that person has \$1,000 in his/her account. If they do, the teller will gladly give you \$1,000. That name has that power/authority/clout at that bank.

Torrey says that when we pray we are going to “the bank of heaven.” We don’t pray in our own name, claiming that we deserve this or that. The name of Jesus is the only name that has any clout in heaven. Praying in His name means praying with confidence that He is who He says He is - the good Shepherd, gentle and humble in heart, gracious

and compassionate. And it means praying things that are compatible with His will and His ways. That's why He said, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish. . ."

Suffering/Persecution. (*John 14:21, Acts 5:41, 9:16, 1 Peter 4:14*) Peter wrote that "if you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed." If we are so associated with Him and everything He stands for, there is blessing in being mistreated as He was. We experience the fellowship of His sufferings.

Obedience (*2 Timothy 2:19*) "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

Everything (*Colossians 3:17*) Paul closed every loophole when he wrote, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

As followers of Jesus, everything we do should be compatible with and an expression of the name of Jesus. Given that the name of Jesus represents His character, this is a beautiful thing. It's not some burdensome regulation that God is forcing upon us.

I'll close by telling you some of my mother's spiritual story. My mom was raised in a Jewish home in St. Louis and Chattanooga. Since her mother was ill most of the time and since her family was wealthy, my mom was raised by a nanny. Her mother never cooked a meal for her in her life. Her nanny ("Pinky") was verbally abusive to the kids. She told my mom, "Nancy, you are pretty in two ways: pretty ugly and pretty apt to stay that way." My mom grew up thinking she was ugly. [The first time I saw a picture of my mom as a college student, I thought, "Wow, my mom was good looking!"] But she grew up thinking she was unwanted and unloveable.

She went to a Christian prep school in Chattanooga where she was required to memorize large passages of the New Testament. When she was in college at Wellesley she had some warts on her finger that wouldn't go away; she tried doctors and medicines. Then she remembered from her high school days that "there is power in the name of Jesus." She prayed in Jesus' name that her warts would go away; and they did. That got her attention!

After college she moved back to Chattanooga where a friend invited her to church. She began attending church and eventually put her trust in Jesus Christ. She experienced the truth of what Peter said in Acts 4:12.

12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

The word "Jesus" isn't a magic; it's not as if vocalizing that name has magic power. Rather, believing in the name of Jesus brings salvation because of who He is: He is the One who died for sin and rose again!

Lord's Table

Dwell on the fact that because His body was broken for us and His blood was shed for us, He has been given a name above every name. As you worship Jesus, ask yourself the question, "Heavenly Father, is there anything in my life that is incompatible with the name of Jesus?"