

Renamed by Grace: From Shadows to Glory

Bible Verses Mentioned: Exodus, John 1:1, John 14, Revelation 1:4-8

Good morning. My name's Billy Cerveney, if I've not met you, and I'm the new guy. I'm trying to be relaxed here, but I gotta be honest, this is wonderful. I love it. I get to look out and see so many faces that I know and so many people that know me. And it's wonderful because it's a good thing to be known, right? Most of the time.

I remember years ago when I graduated from seminary, and I took my first job as a pastor at a church in Nashville. And I preached one of the first Sundays there and I preached three mornings or three services in a row, and you get off, you're trying to make a good impression, and you're shaking hands and hugging necks, and we went out as a family for lunch. In the middle of lunch, I had forgotten that I had signed my son up for a soccer camp. So we scooped him up from the table. We jumped in the car, ran home.

You know the stress of trying to get a child ready and you could find one soccer cleat. You're driving across yards to get there and tie the shoe with one arm and finally get there and my anxiety level is through the roof. Running across the field and the coach is standing there but he's surrounded by a bunch of 16-year-olds and my son was much younger at the time. And I was like, I'm sorry we're here. I'm sorry. We made it. And he says, oh, you must not have gotten the email. We canceled this today. At which moment that pastoral veneer had crumbled to the ground?

And I may or may not have been rude in that moment. May or may not have said phrases like y'all need to get it together. But I most definitely created an incredibly awkward silence for about 30 seconds until the coach turned and looked me in the eye and he said, "Great sermon this morning." True story. So it's good to be known. It's good to be seen most of the time until someone sees or knows something about us, we want to keep hidden.

And it's true of all of us. We all have some aspect of our character, some personality trait that might not be becoming. So we, you know, we kind of keep that behind the curtain and that's just good manners sometimes. But there are certain things that we keep beneath the surface because they're just too painful, or they bring us a lot of shame. And maybe it's the pain in your marriage or a struggle in your work or some secret you've never told another person.

And so what we do is, and I have a lot of compassion for this because we all do it. We stuff things like that down. We think I'm gonna hide this from other people. But the truth is when we're stuffing it down that deep, what we're really trying to do is hide it from ourselves. 'Cause I don't want to feel those things. And we're trying to hide it from ourselves. I promise you this, you're trying to hide it from God. And I promise you also, that doesn't work.

So we do this, what happens is Satan has us exactly where he wants us. This is when we're in the shadows. And that's where Satan comes in and he whispers in our ear. And here's just a little pro tip around that. When Satan whispers in your ear, the majority of the time that he does it, he's going to do it in your own voice. He's going to start to twist those things that you think about yourself or those things you believe about yourself and how God thinks of you.

And in those shadows, He is going to rename you. And we will accept these new names, names like Unlovable, names like Forgotten, Failure, Broken. But the good news is this, the message of the gospel is that Jesus came in to give us that new name. He came in to stick his finger right in the center of that problem.

So right now we're in the middle of Lent and we're in a series that's talking about God's covenants with Israel. So we've done God's covenant with Adam, the Academic Covenant, we've done God's covenant with Noah, we've done Abraham, and today we're talking about God's covenant with Moses, the Ten Commandments. Now, what does having a false name that we were given in the shadows have to do with God's covenant through the Ten Commandments?

That is a great question, and I'm glad you asked it. In order to understand that, we need to back the lens out a little bit and look at the bigger story around that. When we find Israel in the Book of Exodus, they've been in Egypt for 400 years. And at this point, they've been slaves. That's all they know. And Pharaoh's terrified of them because they're multiplying and he's a threat, they're a threat to his power.

So he brutally oppresses them with slavery and he piles more work on them, more work on them. And it gets to a point at one time where he was so afraid that he ordered the killing of every Hebrew male born child. You remember the Moses story? Moses in the basket in the water? But by the time Moses comes along, there's something we got to know about Israel. When we think of Israel, we think of them as these good Jewish boys and girls that go to temple and follow God's law. That's not the case here.

They had lived in Egypt for 400 years. So at this point, functionally, they were Egyptians. They worshiped all kinds of gods. And this new God that came on the scene, they didn't know who he was. And the other thing you need to know about Israel during that time is that Israel had one name for themselves, and the name they had for themselves was slave. Y'all better listen.

So you know the story, Moses comes along, he looks like Charlton Heston. He says to Pharaoh, Pharaoh set my people free. God sends the plagues. He parts the Red Sea. He leads Israel out. Pharaoh's army tries to follow him and the sea crashes down and he wipes them out. And seven days later, they come to Mount Sinai. Now remember, Israel's pagans and they're so confused. Who is this God?

Who is this God? How does he fit in this erector set of all these other gods that we worship? But most of all, why does he care about us? We're a bunch of slaves. Why would he do this? And they watch Moses and he goes up the side of the mountain and God's presence descends on the mountain and it's covered with smoke and fire and the ground begins to quake and there's peals of thunder and there's peals of lightning and there's trumpet blasts that are coming from somewhere.

And Israel is terrified. And there in the first time we see in the entirety of the Bible the first time Scripture is written when God takes his finger and he carves the Ten Commandments into the stone tablets. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. Honor your father and mother, do not murder, et cetera, et cetera.

Okay, so God gives them the rules. So what? That sounds like religion, right? No, there's a lot more to it. See, anytime you see a law, it tells us about the heart of the law giver. It tells you what the person giving the law values. So if you see, if you're driving down the road and you see school zone, don't speed, 25 miles an hour, you know that the people that pass that law value what? Children.

And so what's happening here when God gives Israel the Ten Commandments, he's not just telling them what to do. He's telling them who he is. He's telling them what he's like. He's not just saying don't murder. What he's saying is, I am the God of life. I value life. He's not just saying, don't commit adultery. He's saying, I love marriage and families, and this is my thing. He's not just saying, don't worship other gods.

He's saying, I am your God. It gets better. See, Israel is God's chosen people. He carved them out. So in that moment, God's not just telling Israel who he is. He's telling Israel who they are. I'm giving you a new name. You are no longer slaves. You're a holy nation.

You are set apart to be this billboard for all the world to see, my goodness, that they will look at you, this set apart nation, the way you act and love each other, and care for the poor, and the way that you are, and they will be drawn to me. And if you want to cut with the grain of your design, the way I made you and fashioned you together in your mother's wombs, you need to agree with what I'm saying here. You need to value life. You need to respect marriages, all marriages. You need to love and honor your parents on down the line.

You see, the law is perfect. It was this perfect representation of God's character. The problem was Israel, just like you and me, was not. And when Moses was up on that mountain, they were so committed to their slave name and their sin and their rebellion. They got scared that he wasn't coming down quick enough.

So they started gathering jewelry together, melted it down and built a golden calf and worshipped it out of the box. And this happens again and again and again. So why does this matter for you and me? See, you and I, we're similar to Israel. I know the rules. Be good enough, be nice enough, be kind, love others like I love myself.

Forgive others, don't lust, don't be greedy, don't nurture secret sins in my life. That's a test. If that's a test, if that's the yardstick I'm holding up and I'm measuring myself against it, guess what? I am not passing that test. Everybody loves the idea of forgiveness until you've got something really deep you have to forgive, right? It's hard.

And the bigger the failure, the more we want to hide it, and the more we stuff it down, and the more we let it define us, and the more we find ourselves back wallowing in those names that we just can't seem to get rid of. And the beautiful thing is this, as Christians, we live in a very different part of the story than Israel. See, Christ was the perfect Israel. And where Israel failed and where Israel couldn't get it right, he succeeded perfect obedience.

And in his sinlessness, he climbed on the cross and he took that punishment that we deserved. Because by His resurrection and the gift of His Holy Spirit, He could give us a righteousness that He deserved. See, Jesus' death and resurrection, it did what Moses' law, the law of Moses could not do. That law, it was a measuring stick. Again, you stand up next to it and Israel just all they could see was how short they were falling against the law.

And salvation of Jesus, it's different. It meets us in the middle of our sin, not on the other side of it. It descends right into the center of my failures, in my struggles, where I'm hurting, where I'm broken. That's where He comes, not waiting for me on the other side of me to get it all together. And there, Jesus gives us a new name. It's a name we didn't earn. It's a name that He earned for us. What's that name?

Holy. You are righteous. You are a new creation. Ooh. Wait a second, I don't feel that righteous. What about that thing I did or the thing that I feel inside? You don't know the things that I wrestle with. Yes, I do. I know what you wrestle with. Not because I'm hiding in the bushes watching you, because I know my own heart and I know what I wrestle with.

And that's the scandal of the gospel. That is the scandal of the gospel that your new name, your righteousness is not because you're good enough. It's because he is. But what about the ways that I let go of God? And I cling to that old name of myself when I go back in the pit of my addictions or greed or self-centeredness. Yes, exactly. That's why Jesus is called a savior and not a self-help guru.

He knows you're going to let go of him, but he is not going to let go of you, no matter how hard you try. And when I surrender to that truth, it allows me to approach these failings in a new way. I don't try to overcome these things so I can be loved by God. I am loved by God. I have nothing to hide. I can come out of the shadows. I can let go of that shame.

And I can begin to admit those struggles with myself, with other people, and God. And guess what? When that happens, we begin to feel the Spirit move in us in new ways, and we begin to see ourselves change and transform into the image of Jesus. Amen.