

Calling on the Name of the Lord

Genesis 4:16–26, Romans 10:5–18

The title of the sermon this morning is “Calling on the Name of the Lord,” taken from the reassuring words of our New Testament text, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Many Christ-followers have memorized this verse; it is a resounding declaration of the Gospel. Though man sinned, and rebelled against our Creator, the Lord in grace provides a way of salvation. That gives man hope. But what you may not know is that this key gospel-verse is foreshadowed way back in the early chapters of Genesis.

Our Old Testament reading a few moments ago began with the frightful words “Then Cain *went out* from the presence of the LORD.” Cain was the first baby ever born to human parents. The birth of a baby is always a moment of joy; it is like the human race renewing itself. But as Genesis 4 begins, the reader is horrified to discover that the first baby ever born to human parents murdered his very own brother. For this crime the LORD himself pronounced the sentence: “A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.” So Cain, by his own choice, refused to repent, but “*went out* from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.” He made the conscious decision to exclude himself from the presence of God and make his own way in this world—a way that seems right unto a man, but ends in exclusion from God’s comfortable presence eternally.

In the words of our text, “Cain *knew* his wife”—dignified, restrained, faithful language, the meaning of which is perfectly obvious from the context. To translate it “Cain made love to his wife” or “Cain had sexual relations with his wife” cheapens the dignity and elegance of Scripture and introduces a tawdry element into the text. If your Bible says that, you need to get a better one.

Cain knew his wife in the intimacy of the marriage relationship, and she bore a son. The letter to the Hebrews teaches that “marriage is to be held in honor among *all*”—both the righteous and the wicked—“and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”¹ Man intuitively knows that God’s word is right, and that he will hold violators to account. Five generations later (seven generations from Adam), Lamech deviated from the biblical ideal and took *two* wives—Adah and Zillah. In our text we see that human culture develops with advances in city-building, farming, music, metallurgy and toolmaking, but also becomes debased and dangerous with polygamy, revenge and murder. Lamech defiantly informs his wives: “I have killed a man for wounding me.” Rather than observing an orderly process of justice, Lamech took the law into his own hands—a dangerous precedent followed by tyrants today.

¹ Heb. 13:4 NASB

The text then turns its attention from the wicked to the *godly*: “Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, ‘For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.’ And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. *Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.*” Do not miss the significance of this last clause: “Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.” Here is the beginning of public worship. “To call on the name of the LORD” is a figure of speech wherein a part is put for the whole. The language of calling on the name of the LORD specifically refers to *prayer*, which is the chief element of worship: God speaks, and man responds—he responds in prayer. In the words of Calvin, “religion is here properly designated by that which forms its principal part.” And so it is throughout Scripture. Worship is a response to God’s truth. God speaks, and man responds.

And so it is here: men gather for public worship and call on the name of the LORD. Clearly, the godly line has understanding of God’s truth. These ancient worshippers knew the name of God, Yahweh, the self-existent one. In Genesis 1 the God of heaven creates by the power of his own voice; he spoke, and the universe came into being. Specifically, he formed man from the dust of the earth, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul, created in the very image of God. In Genesis 2 we are introduced to God’s holy name: יהוה, what is called the *tetragrammaton* (the four-letter word), translated *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. This is the name by which God made himself known to his people. This knowledge, expressed to Adam and Eve in the Garden, was passed down to their posterity. The godly seed, heirs of an oral culture which prided itself in the ability to preserve knowledge intact, retained this knowledge and passed it on to their children. This knowledge was later committed to Holy Scripture.

So here in Genesis 4 we have the first description of a formal worship service: God’s people gathering together on the seventh day of the week, resting from their labors and gathering with the saints to hear about the God who had given them life and made himself known, who had responded to man’s sin with the promise of the Seed of the woman, the Messiah whom God would ultimately send. All this was part of the knowledge transmitted by an oral culture which would later be written down in Holy Scripture under the inspiration of God. That oral tradition would no doubt also include sacred music. In our text we learn of Jubal, “the father of all those who play the harp and flute.” The musical arts became a means of passing along tradition from father to son. The lyrics of the songs would become indelibly impressed into human minds as the godly taught and admonished one another with sacred music.

So here were services of public worship: men and women, boys and girls, gathering to hear the words of God and exhortations from the elders to receive

those words and put them into practice. Thus, God’s people would respond in worship, calling upon the name of the LORD, clinging to his promise of salvation.

This is noteworthy, for it shows that public worship of the true God (“the LORD”) began easily 2,500 years or more before Moses; the godly seed, in contrast to the wicked, were worshipping God for thousands of years before the institution of the Old Covenant. This worship no doubt included the elders passing on the story of creation and the fall, and the promise of redemption by the Messiah, and exhorting them to continue in faithfulness to the LORD—essentially, public teaching and preaching. It doubtless included also the singing of songs to the LORD—even as the ungodly were using music to corrupt the minds of youth, as is done today (Gen. 4:21, just a few verses before). The godly were using congregational singing to lift men’s minds heavenward.

And so it is today: true worship is a heartfelt response to God’s truth—a dialog: God speaks, and man responds, God speaks, and man responds. God speaks in inspired Scripture, which is read and preached. Man responds by reverently listening and offering up Scripture-based prayers, singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, confessing our faith together, observing the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, giving of gifts to the Lord, and making lawful oaths and vows to the Lord.

This, then, is the meaning of calling on the name of the Lord. We call upon him to save us. We do this individually, asking him to save us; and we do it collectively, with the gathered congregation.

Now let’s turn ourselves to our New Testament text. We have three points: (1) We are lost without Christ; (2) We must call on the name of the Lord to be saved; (3) We must hear the word of God in a faithful church. First,

1. We are lost without Christ

Our text begins: “For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’” The law to which Moses refers is the *moral* law—God’s eternal standard of right and wrong—based upon God’s own holy character.

The reason why worshipping a false god and making graven images is wrong is because God will not give his glory to another. The reason that taking God’s name in vain is wrong is because the name of God is supremely holy. The reason why desecrating the Sabbath is wrong is God’s own example of resting on the seventh day of the creation week (and Christ’s example of meeting for worship in the Upper Room with his disciples on Resurrection Sunday, thereby changing the day). So it is with the second table of the law. The reason God expects us to honor those in authority over us is because God is the ultimate authority and must be honored by all men as Father. The reason that taking innocent human life is wrong is because man the creature bears the image of God. The reason that God requires

sexual purity is because God himself is pure. The reason that stealing is wrong is because God does not steal. The reason why lying is wrong is because God cannot lie. The reason why coveting is wrong is because God is perfectly satisfied in himself and does not need anything outside himself in order to be perfectly happy. The moral law, the summary of all God's commandments, is not *arbitrary* but an expression of God's holy character.

Listen to the words of verse 5 again: "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.'"

Here is God's requirement: he wants us to *do* those things—in other words, to do them perfectly. He wants us to do them out of a willing heart, exactly as instructed, for his glory alone. If we are honest we will have to admit that we have *never*—never even once in our lifetime—attained his perfect standard. If you think you can gain heaven by being a good person, think again!

I can't tell you how many times session has examined a candidate for membership, and we have asked, "If you were to die tonight, and stand before God, and he were to say, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' What would you say?"—to which would come the answer, "I'm a good person. I try to do good works." No! That is the wrong answer! God's standard is absolute perfection. If your goal is to reach heaven by keeping the law, then you have to keep his law *perfectly*, every moment of every day, your whole life long, not only following the letter, but doing so with all your heart, out of a true love for God.

Most of us want to be law-abiding citizens. If you want to be a law-abiding citizen, then you observe the speed limit—not one mile per hour over. You never pick up your cell phone while driving. You keep your dog securely chained up on your own property, so that he never gets away. You pay your property taxes by the due date. I remember once, years ago, when I paid my property tax one day late. I *intended* to pay it on time but got busy and forgot. If I would have gone to the treasurer's office and said, "I'm sorry; I had good intentions but forgot," you know where that would have got me! I had to pay the full penalty the same as the guy who paid his bill a month late. Another time years ago I got a traffic ticket for running a stop sign. Traffic was light, nobody was coming, and I did slow down *almost* to a full stop. No matter. The arresting officer—a man barely out of his twenties, threw the book at me. I started to make excuses, but he said, "Save your breath." And my 5-year-old grandson was in the car!

But God's standard is even higher. Our text says, "Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall *live* by them.'" The apostle Paul cites Leviticus 18:5, which says, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, *which if a man does, he shall live by them*: I am the LORD." That phrase "which if a man does, he shall live by them" occurs *eight* times in Holy Scripture—five times in the Old Testament and three times in

the New.² Now we know that God doesn't waste words. The Bible is not one word longer than it should be! But God wants to impress this lesson upon us: if we think we can win his approval and merit eternal life by our good works, then our works have to be absolutely perfect. No sin, just perfect lawkeeping! One mess-up, and you are toast. No second chances. God is absolutely perfect and holy. He says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). If we compare ourselves to our neighbor, we might think, "I'm not so bad." Yesterday, Norma and I went on a walk. Now we live in a nice neighborhood, but there are a few properties that are not well kept-up. One property in particular has a red tag on it—it's been there a few years, and nothing seems to be done about it. A couple other houses have driveways full of banged-up cars. Another always seems to have loud music blaring in the summer. If you lived next-door to one of these, I'm sure it would affect your own property value. It's easy to get an attitude of pride: *hey, I take care of my property*. If we compare ourselves to our neighbors, we can make ourselves look good. But what if we compare ourselves to Almighty God? Be honest: do you measure up to God's perfections? You do not. The conclusion is inescapable: we are lost without Christ. Second,

2. We must call on the name of the Lord to be saved

If the only thing we knew was that we are lost without Christ, that would be the truth, but it would leave us utterly without hope. But the good news of the Gospel is that God, of his own free mercy, provided a remedy. This remedy came at great cost. From eternity past God the Father chose a people to give to his Son; the Son received that people and became incarnate, becoming man, taking on our humanity so that he might live the perfect life that God requires of us, and go to the cross to die in the sinner's place, that all who look to him in faith might receive eternal life with him in heaven. Christ, in turn, sent his Holy Spirit to bring us from death to life, to give us a new nature, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, so that we can call upon him in faith. Salvation, from start to finish, is thus the work of a gracious Savior who loved us and gave himself for us. We are lost *without* Christ but saved *by* Christ, through the gospel. The apostle Paul enlarges upon this theme in Romans 10. Because of the limitations of time we can only touch upon the high points this morning.

Verse 9 declares, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Can there be any sweeter promise? Here is good news for the sinner who knows that he or she is lost without Christ and utterly without hope apart from him. Here is what God requires of us: to confess Christ as Savior and Lord with our mouth

² Lev. 18:5; Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 20:11, 20:13, 20:21; Luke 10:27–28; Gal. 3:12, as well as our present text

and believe that what the Scriptures say about him is true: that he died for our sins according to the Scripture, and that he rose again the third day by his own mighty power.

Here is the only man in history to vanquish death. He was put to death by the Romans, at the demand of the Jews, who hated him and wanted to get rid of him, because they considered him a threat to their power. Here was the long-promised Messiah, the Seed of the woman, standing in their very presence. Here before them stood the Messiah of Israel, whom generations of their predecessors longed to see, but when he came, they rejected him. They wanted nothing to do with him. They would rather die in their sins than bow before him. So they cried out for his death. “What do you want me to do with Jesus who is called Christ?” “Let him be crucified!” So they stripped and flogged him, nailed him to a rough wooden cross, and lifted him up to die. The Savior called out to the Father, crying with a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*” that is to say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” At about the ninth hour—three PM, the very hour that the Passover lamb was being slaughtered in Jerusalem—Jesus breathed his last and died. His body was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb, where he fulfilled Scripture by being interred three days and three nights. But early in the morning on the first day of the week he rose again by his own power. If this is true—and Scripture declares it to be true—then this is a fact of history that must be reckoned with. If Christ rose from the dead, then that proves that Christianity is true, and every human is duty-bound to accept it. If Christ did *not* rise from the dead, then everything I have said this morning can be safely ignored. But if Christ *did* rise from the dead, then the Word of God is true, and you and I and every human person will stand before him in the final judgment.

What does God require of you? To believe the gospel, to call upon the name of the Lord, to confess him as Savior, and commit yourself to him. If you do this, then you—an undeserving sinner—will be declared righteous in the sight of a holy God. You will inherit heaven, and life with Christ forevermore.

We must call on the name of Christ the Lord in order to be saved. But there is one more thing we must do, and that is

3. We must hear the word of God in a faithful church

Our text concludes with the words, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.’”

Note the emphasis on “hearing” and “words” that “sounded.”

In our individualistic culture a lot of people assume that all they have to do is give mental assent to the propositions of Scripture, and that is enough. And yes, the Bible does say, “repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). But even there, the verbs are plural: “repent *ye*” and “believe *ye*.” Repenting and believing are things

that a person does *with* the church. In Scripture, those that are saved are added to the church. It is in the context of the church that the church *hears* the word of God. It is in the context of the church that the sound of the preaching of the gospel goes out into the world. The biblical way to join a church is not by signing a church covenant, but by professing Christ with your mouth, with his people.

The church needs the living *preaching* of the Word, not Jumbotrons and movie clips. Do *you* believe in Christ? Do you acknowledge that he is your only hope of salvation? Do you receive him as Lord and Savior? Do you confess him with his church? Do you voluntarily put yourselves under the elders' oversight? We need—*all* of us, as the saints who gathered in ancient times with Seth and his son Enosh³—to call on the name of Yahweh, to gather with his people, to worship him and sing his praises with biblical Psalms and God-glorifying hymns.

And once we are saved God's Word is to be *in our mouths*, as we read the Holy Scriptures aloud with our families and with our church family, awaiting his return. Amen.

³ ironically, his name means *man* or *mankind*