

I have to question the wisdom of a certain Texas governor of the late 1800s. I don't question his policies or leadership of the great state of Texas, but the name he and his wife chose to give their daughter... well... I don't know. It's not that Ima is necessarily a bad name in and of itself, but when you're Governor Hogg... yeah. Ima Hogg. (This is true, by the way, not a prank name.) Can you imagine the jokes poor Ima had to face in school?

And what impressions poor Ima must have given those who hadn't even met her. With a name like Ima Hogg, in Texas nonetheless, I'm sure many assumed she overweightly, slovenly, and lazy. But that couldn't have been further from the truth. Ima was a fit young lady who soon became one of the most respected women in Texas in the 20th century. She was an art collector, a philanthropist, and even established the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. Too bad she had such an unfortunate name.

Now, how does that apply to the 1st Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be your name"? Well, you and I, dear friends, were born with a very unfortunate name too. We were called "sinners." But now you and I have been given a new name - "Christians" - with with all the benefits that go with that name: forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and heaven itself. And we've had such a wonderful name change because God has revealed to us *his* name - a name that is special, holy, and set apart, because his name - who he is and what he's done - brings us salvation. And so, we long to keep his name holy as we represent him. Hallowed, holy, be thy name. And what a name he's made for himself!

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." So says Juliette in the famous play, *Romeo and Juliette*, written of course by... Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. At least that's what many conspiracy theorists believe: that "William Shakespeare was a pen name, a pseudonym to hide the true identity of the author. Kind of ironic, don't you think? That that which we call Shakespeare, by some other name seems not quite as sweet.

What is in a name? They say if you want to sell a car, talk about the car. If you want to sell a copy machine, talk about the copy machine. But if you want to sell yourself, talk about the other person. And say their name often. People love to hear the sound of their own name. Isn't that the truth?!?! But it's more than just the pleasing melody of a string of syllables pronounced together that sounds so nice, isn't it? It's because people love to know they're cared about, that their name means something to someone else - especially in our increasingly impersonal society. You see, I value my name, not because it sounds nice, but because it means something to others. I have a reputation - hopefully a good one and people don't instantly think angry thoughts when they hear "Pastor Jason Strong."

It's that true of any name? There are associations - whether or good or bad - that go with that name. Michael Jordan, or today, LeBron James. Tom Hanks. Barack Obama. Sarah Palin. Those names conjure pictures in your head, they call to mind characteristics of those individuals and the actions they have done.

And the same is true of God's name. His reputation - who he is and what he's done - is called to mind when you hear one of his many names. So what kind of a name has God made for himself? Well, he describes what his name means in Exodus 34. When you hear "The LORD," our English translation of the Hebrew, *Yahweh* (later translated, *Jehovah*), what comes to mind? First, we think of a just God. One who

is holy and sinless and cannot tolerate sin. Speaking of himself in the 3rd person, God said, ***"He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."***

Yikes! That must have been a tough one for Moses to relay to the Israelites. They had just made a golden calf and chose to worship it instead of the true God who just brought them out of Egypt with such miraculous displays of his power. Just as they had broken God's commands - the very commands Moses was bringing down from the mountain - Moses smashed the tablets. That's why our text began, ***"So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones..."*** And God had just told them, ***"Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."*** (Exodus 33:3) When you think of the name, the LORD, think just, holy, righteous. Think one who cannot tolerate sinful rebellion.

But thankfully that's not all there is to God's name. Yahweh also told Moses that his name was, ***"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."*** God is not just a God of justice, but also a God of compassion who is "slow to anger."

This literally describes a picture of God's nose. Of course, God is spirit and doesn't have a physical nose. But it's a word picture for God's temper. Several places in the Old Testament, God is described with nostrils flaring at injustice. Psalm 18:8 says, ***"Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth."*** But here in Exodus 34 the phrase "slow to anger" is literally "long of nose." Anger shows in flared nostrils and snorting, like enraged people with reddened noses. But God is "long of nose," meaning that it takes much longer for his wrath to kindle. It takes a long time for his blood to boil. God demonstrated that time and time again to the Israelites when he continued to show his patience and mercy to them after they rebelled again and again. What a reputation God has! What a name he's made for himself! The God of perfect justice! The God of perfect love!

And what a name God has made for his people - for Israel and... for us!

You know it's not just for the Israelites that ***"He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."*** is an intimidating phrase. After all, we've been no better than them. God has taken his great name - his reputation - who he is and what he's done - and he's entrusted that name to us. He's said to you and me, "Go and be my representatives. What people see in you, they'll think of me."

Just the other week, we were blessed to have a member of Peace down in Eagle River come and help us out with our VBS. And whether she knew it or not, Jessie came as a representative of Peace. How she acted and behaved reflected not just on her, but on her congregation. (And she did an outstanding job, by the way. The members of Peace must all be polite, friendly, and hard working.)

But, let me ask, how well have you represented God. Do you call yourself a Christian? Then you are his ambassador, since you bear his name. Whether you know it or not, whether you like it or not, whether it's fair or not, what other people think of when they hear the name Christ or Jesus, depends a great deal on you who call yourself Christian. I'm sure you too have heard people say, "If that's how

Christians behave, I don't want to be a Christian."

Is that sometimes because of you? Do you faithfully represent God's name by the way you live your life? Do you **"let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"**? (Matthew 5:16) Do you faithfully proclaim the name of the Lord? Not always. Not perfectly. And neither do I. And in our attempts to make a name for ourselves, we've made our own golden calves, and ruined God's name.

And for such sinful failures, for the way we've run God's name through the mud by the way we live and behave, by the way we act and by the way we don't act, for the way we fail to keep his name holy and special and set apart, we deserve to have God take his name from us. We deserve to have him say, "You are no Christian. That's not how one bearing my name behaves." We deserve his punishment - both now and in eternity. We and our children and their children after them. And God would be perfectly just in doing that.

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Did you know that *sympathy* and *compassion* are really the same word? Just one's Greek and the other's Latin. They both mean "to feel with someone." God is that close to us. He shares our nerve endings and our tear ducts. What hurts us hurts him. But God didn't just sympathize by sending a card that said, "I'm so sorry for you that you have to go to hell! No. His sympathy - his compassion - led him to act! When we were doomed to hell, he intervened. Because God couldn't stand to see our misery without his help and salvation, he sent Jesus to endure the hell that should have been ours.

That's how God's qualities, described in his name, can coexist. He is just, punishing every sin. Not a single sin ever committed has gone unpunished. But Jesus took that punishment for us. So we won't go to the hell we deserve. God is also **"compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."**

You know, that word "forgiving" in the Hebrew is נָשָׂא [pronounced *naw-saw*], which literally means "to lift or carry away." A fellow pastor once told me when he was studying Hebrew in college the mnemonic aid he used to remember נָשָׂא was to think of NASA. NASA takes a massive rocket ship and lifts it off the ground and carries it far away from the earth into outer space. Isn't that a fitting picture of what God does to our sins? He packed all our wickedness and rebellion and sin onto Jesus. He lit the ignition on Good Friday and sent all our sin flying. **"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."** (Psalm 103:12) This is who God is! This is his reputation!

And because we know his name, **The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God**, what blessings are ours! We have forgiveness! We have peace with God! We have the promise that he will maintain his love and continue to remain faithful to all his promises! You know, someone once lamented that in a time of misery the only place he could find sympathy was in a dictionary. It might seem that way sometimes. But you know that it's never the case with God. He is there! He is the definition of

compassion, our source of help in trouble. He is the one who encourages us to cast our anxiety and all our guilt and sin on him.

And for the blessed privilege of not only knowing God's name, but bearing God's name as "Christians" we can't help but thank him and strive all the more to keep his name holy. How? For starters, represent him better as you live pure and godly lives in all you say and do. Then follow Martin Luther's suggestion: ***"Fear and love God that we do not use his name to curse, swear, lie or or deceive or use it superstitiously, but call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks."*** Share his name - his reputation of who he is and what he's done with others who don't know it. And finally, ask him to help you keep his name holy whenever you pray, "Hallowed be thy name." In Jesus' name dear friends, amen.