ABOVE ALL NAMES

In the Year of Our Lord Sixteen-hundred and Four, John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, died. His body was transported to its final resting place, and, as was the custom, people placed eulogies upon the hearse. One naughty fellow placed a poem, with the title, "The Lamentacion of Dickie for the Deathe of his Brother Jockie." In the poem, the author scorned Whitgift, whom he called, 'Jockie,' and Richard Bancroft, Whtigift's successor, whom he called Dickie. One stanza of the poem reads as follows:

> holla dickye bee not so bould,
> to woulve yt in Cheif Jhesis fould
> as yf to hell thy Soule weare sould,
> lest as Jhocky was oft foretould
> If thou a persecutor stand,
> God likewise strike thee wth his hand:
> A-rankinge thee in the bloudy band
> of ravening cleargie woolves in the land.

The poem was outrageous, and the author, Lewes Pickeringe, a Puritan, was charged with libel, and brought to trial. Attorney General Sir Edward Coke prosecuted the case, which came to be known as *De Libellis Famosis.* Coke compared libel to poison, because both rendered the victim unable to defend himself. Coke said, "Of such nature is libelling, for it is secret and robs a man of his good name, which ought to be more precious to him than his life… Libelling and calumniation is an offence against the law of God." Pickeringe was found guilty as charged. At sentencing, Coke cited Scripture: "Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous." Psalm 31:18) Coke held that libel deserved severe punishment because, he said, "although the libel be made against one, yet it incites all those of the same family, kindred, or society to revenge, and so tends per consequens to quarrels and breach of the peace, and may be the cause of shedding of blood, and of great inconvenience." Pickeringe was fined one-thousand pounds sterling, imprisoned for one year, and made to stand on the pillory. *De Libellis Famosis* was the first case of criminal libel in England. Noah Webster defined 'reputation' this way: "Good name; the credit, honor or character which is derived from a favorable public opinion or esteem. Reputation is a valuable species of property or right, which should never be violated." A person's name is his reputation, and his reputation is his character. It is crucial, then, to know the name of God, and the name of God's Son.

When God first called Abraham, He made a promise to him that He would make of him a great nation, and that in him all nations of the world would be blessed. (Genesis 12:2, 3) Some time later, God made a covenant in which He swore to fulfill His promise to Abraham. (Genesis 15) After that, God appeared to Abraham to give him a sign of the covenant, the sign of circumcision. When He appeared to Abraham, He said, "I am the Almighty God." (Genesis 17:1) God called Himself, El Shaddai, God Almighty. Abraham's son, Isaac, knew God as God Almighty. When Isaac blessed Jacob, he said, "God Almighty bless thee." (Genesis 28:3) When God appeared to Jacob, He said, "I am God Almighty." (Genesis 35:11) God is almighty. He has all might, and there is nothing He cannot do; He can do all His holy will.

When the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt, God told Moses that He would deliver them from their bondage, and that Moses would lead them out. (Exodus 3:8, 10) Moses anticipated the Israelites' inquiring about who sent him, and he wished to know what to tell them. So, God told him:

> I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. (Exodus 3:14, 15)

To Moses, God revealed that His name is I AM. His name means that He has the quality of aseity, of self-existence. He depends upon nothing for His existence, and everything depends upon Him. He is independent of His creation. As God has self-existence, He is immutable. His essential nature cannot change; He remains ever the same God: unchanging, faithful, and true.

God told Moses to command Pharaoh to let the people go. Yet, God told Moses, “But I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.” (Exodus 4:21) God told Moses to tell Pharaoh to let go Israel, God’s firstborn son, then God would kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son.

Moses did tell Pharaoh to let the people go, and Pharaoh did refuse. (Exodus 5:1 2) So the Lord, in order to prove His might, brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians a number of terrible plagues. After the sixth plague, the stubborn Pharaoh still would not let the people go. So, the Lord told Moses to say to Pharaoh the following:

> Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. (Exodus 9:13–16)

Pharaoh’s rise to power was no accident of history; it was God’s design. God had in mind a purpose for Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God caused Pharaoh to rise to power; then He caused Pharaoh to put the Israelites in bondage; then He hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that Pharaoh would not let the people go; then He punished Pharaoh for his refusal. In all this, the Lord never compelled Pharaoh against his will; Pharoah always did exactly as he pleased. God’s purpose in all this was to make a name for Himself; which is to say, God wished for the world to know that He is God, and that whatever powers there may be, natural or supernatural, He is the highest. He alone rules over all. All answer to Him, and He answers to none.

Still, Pharaoh refused, so the Lord sent more plagues, lastly killing the firstborn son of Pharaoh, and the firstborn sons of every Egyptian. Finally, Pharaoh agreed to let the people go, and so the Israelites made their exodus. (Exodus 12:31, 32) But the Lord told Moses that He would harden Pharaoh’s heart, so that he would change his mind and bring again the Israelites into bondage. He said, And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD.” (Exodus 14:4) So, Pharaoh and his army pursued the Israelites, and trapped them by the Red Sea. The Lord parted the waters of the sea so that the Israelites crossed to safety, but, when the Egyptians tried to cross, the Lord caused the waters to return, and so He drowned the Egyptians in the sea. The Scriptures say, “And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.” (Exodus 14:31) The Israelites saw for themselves the awesome power of the Lord, and trusted Him. In this way, God made a name for Himself.

So holy is the name of the Lord, that at Mount Sinai, He gave them a command concerning their use of it. He said, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." (Exodus 20:7) God's name is sacred, and men may not profane it; it is great, and men may not diminish it. Men must treat the name of the Lord as great, and not treat it as frivolous.

When the people rebelled at Mount Sinai, the Lord desired to destroy them. Moses interceded for the people, however. He said to the Lord:

> LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. (Exodus 32:11–13; compare Deuteronomy 9:28)

Moses reminded the Lord of His promise to the patriarchs, and he urged the Lord to maintain His good name. If the Lord destroyed the Israelites, then He would not only go against His promises, but the Egyptians would scoff at the Lord, and His name sullied. The Lord, for the sake of His holy name, did not destroy the Israelites

At first, Egypt was the only nation to know of the great power and faithfulness of the Lord. It would not be long, however, before the other nations would hear of the Exodus, and of the great power of the Lord. When the twelve Israelite spies returned from their reconnoiter in Canaan, ten reported that the Israelites could not conquer the nations that inhabited the land. The people rebelled against the Lord, and desired to return to Egypt. The Lord was, of course, angry with them, and desired to destroy them, but Moses again interceded. He said:

> Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. (Numbers 14:15–19)

By this time, other nations, beside Egypt, had heard the fame of the Lord and what He did to the Egyptians. Moses appealed to the Lord on the ground of the Lord's good name. He reasoned that, if the Lord destroyed the Israelites, then the nations would scoff and say that, because the Lord could not make good on His promise to bring His people into the promised land, then He is not almighty. Moses appealed to God also on the ground of His great mercy, which He had revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. So, the Lord, for the sake of His holy name, did not destroy the Israelites.

When Israel were in the land of Canaan, the Lord allowed the army of Ai to defeat the army of Israel, because one Israelite, Achan, had sinned against the Lord. Joshua, who succeeded Moses as leader of Israel, asked the Lord for aid. He said:

> Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? (Joshua 7:7–9)

Like Moses before him, Joshua appealed to the Lord on the ground of His great name. If the Lord allowed His enemies to defeat His people, then His enemies would mock. So, the Lord did not destroy His people, but allowed them to conquer the people of Ai, but only after the Israelites executed Achan.

The Lord's name is His reputation, His character, and His character is moral perfection. The Lord is jealous to preserve His great name. He did, however, permit the priests to bless in His name. He said to Moses:

> Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:24–27)

When the priests blessed the people, they were to do so in the name of the Lord. Three times the name of the Lord is invoked, corresponding to the three persons of the Godhead. The priest prays that the Lord will do good to the people, and keep them from harm; that He will look upon them favorably, and be gracious to them; and that the Lord will smile upon them, and give them peace of mind, because they have peace with God. The priest puts the Lord's name upon the people, which is to say, the priest declares that the people belong to the Lord; He is their God, and they are His people. King Solomon, when he had but little time left to live, anticipated that the people would be unfaithful to the Lord. He assured them, however, that the Lord would be faithful to them. He said, "For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people." (1 Samuel 12:22) Later, in the days of the divided monarchy of Israel, when the people were unfaithful to the Lord the prophets appealed to the Lord for mercy by invoking His name. Jeremiah said:

> O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not. (Jeremiah 14:7–9; see also Daniel 9:18, 19)

The people were because of their sins estranged from the Lord, but He was no stranger to them. They were His people, and called by His name. So, the prophet prayed that the Lord would not forsake them.

In the final chapter of the Book of Proverbs, Agur, son of Jakeh, confessed the limits of his understanding of the things of God. Concerning creation and providence, he asks:

> Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell? (Proverbs 30:4)

Agur knows that there is a God who is the world's creator and the sovereign, and he knows that God has a son. But who can tell what is the name of God, and the name of the Son of God? No man can discover these things. God must make them known.

On the day that Mary was delivered of her child, an angel appeared to some shepherds in the field, and made this announcement:

> Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10, 11)

He then told the shepherd where they might find the Christ child. They found the child just as the angel had told them, and they made known to others what the angel had told them. Saint Luke records what happened next:

> And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Before Mary was with child, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her that the Holy Spirit would cause her to conceive a child, who would be the Son of God, and that His name would be *Jesus.* When Mary was with child, an angel appeared to Joseph, Mary's husband, and told him the same: the Holy Spirit had caused Mary to conceive, and Joseph should call his name *Jesus,* which means *The Lord Saves,* and this would be His name because He would save His people from their sins. So, when it came time for Mary's child to be circumcised, Joseph did give his child the name *Jesus.* Jesus is the savior of His people because by His death and resurrection He delivers His people from the penalty, and the power, and, finally, the presence of sin.

The Son of God humbled Himself, became incarnate, and perfectly obeyed God from the beginning of His life to the end, and, because He perfectly obeyed God, God exalted Him above every other man, and made Him ruler of the world. Saint Paul wrote to the Philippians:

> Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9–11)

Jesus is the ruler of the world, and so his name is above every name of man. Now, or later, every man will bend his knee to Jesus, and recognize Him as the Lord Himself, Son of God, son of David, Savior and Ruler of the World. This will be to the glory of God, the Father of Jesus, and so the name of the Lord will be exalted in the world.

Let us understand that God's name is reputation. Let us praise the name of the Lord for His power and mercy. Let us confess Jesus as Lord, and proclaim His name in all the earth.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.