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To Know Him by Name: Jehovah-shammah

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Ezekiel 48:35

Happy New Year! I've been thinking of 2010 (you have to call it 2010, not 2,000—10. All the cool people have decided that's what it is), and I've been looking at what my goals for this year will be. (I don't know about your last year, but one of my goals was just to *make* it to 2010!) So I looked up the top resolutions for this year. Can you guess?

- To lose weight.
- To get fit.
- To eat right. Next were things to stop:
- To stop drinking so much.
- To quit smoking now.

Next highest were financial:

- To pay off debt.
- To save money.

Next were more self-improvement:

- To get a better job.
- To get a better education.

And next were:

- To reduce stress at work and to reduce stress overall. The only other top winner:
- To take a trip. (Probably to help reduce stress). And on the bottom of was:
- To volunteer to help others.

Do you see what's missing? Anything that involves spiritual growth or even outreach to others. How sad, when that's one of the most amazing ways to change your life for the better!

But sometimes I totally forget that. I still think of myself more than anyone else. I still want to live for today, and what I can get for myself today. After all, who can depend on the future? Many of us fear the future. And I'm not just talking about the direction of our economy or our society or our national deficit or our personal finances.

What do *you* do, when your future doesn't look as good as your past?

What do *you* do, when your future doesn't excite you?

What do *you* do, you're not sure what to do next?

What do *you* do when you feel alone, abandoned, or forgotten?

What do *you* do when you feel stuck in difficult circumstances?

I'm inviting you to realize God has something to say to you, January 3rd, 2010. It's an ancient word that keeps getting made new for today. We mentioned on Christmas Eve how Israel came under attack, lost everything, and many of the people were led to Babylon in captivity. In the home of their enemy, they faced 70 long years of exile. (Jeremiah 29:10). And they heard the prophet Ezekiel describe how the glory of the Lord had departed the Temple back home in Jerusalem. Basically they were losing any stability, and any identity they thought they had. Sounds pretty contemporary to me. Anybody in captivity today, feeling like you've lost whatever stability and identity you knew?

And it was there, in the Babylonian Captivity that those hurting, displaced Israelites were about to learn a new name for their God. And it was amazing. It appears in the very last verse of Ezekiel. It refers to a future, earthly Jerusalem, the city which the Lord Jesus Christ will inhabit when he returns to earth to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. 48:35 *"The distance all around will be 18,000 cubits. "And the name of the city from that time on will be: Jehovah-shammah—The Lord is there."* The Lord is in this place.

That's good news to those of us here who are facing tough times and big decisions and unknown futures. (Isn't that all of us?) Our biggest problem with God is, we can't see just how good it is to follow Him! We can't imagine what our lives would be like if we really lived as though He is Jehovah-shammah—in this place! Our imaginations aren't big enough. Our hearts aren't big enough. Our trust in Him isn't big enough. I believe if we could understand what it's supposed to be like, if we could understand just how good it is to cling to God's truth, to the purity of His presence, we would be like the wise men and want to be where He is, to worship Him!

But we struggle. Scripture tells us, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* Proverbs 29:18. They may not die outright. But something within them begins to wither away. **Most of us prefer the hell of a predictable situation rather than risk the joy of an unpredictable one.** We suffer from learned helplessness.

A westerner was in India, and saw a man selling quail. Each one had a leg tied to a string, tied to a spike in the ground. All they did all day was go in a little circle. This upset the westerner, so he bought them all, took them to an open space where he could free them, and untied their leg. All they did was go in the circle again. He shooed them, and they scattered...only to flock together and go around and around and around again, even though they were freed. How much is that like us? We've been trapped for so long by our false ideas and by our insecurities that we're still running in circles. We haven't realized that God is *Jehovah-shammah*, and He came to free you and me to live in the freedom of His Word, His truth, His love. We're like the POWs who lose hope and die. Church, the stakes are high. Life and death. What are those steps toward perishing? Dreams die. Shoulders sag. People become restless and irritable, warring and spending money only on themselves. God-given gifts atrophy. Hearts go for other affections, rather than Christ-honoring causes. People disengage. What you think matters. Knowing God as *Jehovah-shammah* matters.

The problem with no vision is, we're not even sure we *want* to be that close to God. What if our #1 New Year's resolution was to be closer to God? To explore prayer. To grow in my faith. To join closer with God. To find others who will help me do that.

Basically, God's only left us with 2 choices: When you know this name, *Jehovah-shammah*, the Lord is there. It's one of two ways: Is my passion to be *in God's presence*? Or am I indifferent? Or do I dread it? (oops, that's 3). And if I dread being in God's presence, then this is our prayer: "God, I need you to rescue me from myself right now this morning! Lord, please set me right! Don't let me be happy to be far away from you any longer!"

If you know God is Jehovah-shammah, even the thing you dread most this year, you can face, if you know Him by this name, because even in that, "the Lord is there."

Even the thing you fear most this year, you can survive, if you know God's faithfulness, that "He will be there."

Even in a hostile work environment, claim Jehovah-shammah. Write this name for God somewhere at work, "The Lord is there," and see what God can do through you this year. In regular conversation people are open to discuss spiritual things. You don't have to condemn them or judge them right then and there. And Jesus said, when anyone shows any interest in spiritual things, that is God moving in their lives and the Lord is there.

Even if you're the only Christ-follower at home, you're not alone. Jehovah-shammah is with you.

Even in the hospital. Or even like Paul in the inner dungeon at Philippi, he was in the presence of the Lord.

Even there is better than in Caesar's best palace apartment with an unknown god.

Even in suffering? Yes. One of the things that I didn't get when I went into "ministry" as a career was "What do I say to someone who's dying? Or someone in the hospital? Or someone going through a terrible time? And one of the most amazing things I found was those people were usually the ones talking to me about experiencing God's presence! *They* were ministering to *me*! They knew first hand *Jehovah-shammah*—God was there. If you are here and you are suffering, know that the LORD God is available to you in a special way, if you turn to Him. He won't force Himself on you though.

What would *you* be willing to do for the Lord God, if you knew God would be there, with you every moment?

A Church alive in Christ, *Jehovah-shammah*, is like a little slice of heaven, and God's Spirit is doing things that just don't make sense. But there's a purity, a unity, a solidity of faith, and Scripture, holding fast to the truth of God, a spirit of prayer and honoring of Christ that enables us to catch a glimpse of just how good it can be, and the people don't perish, they grow. They thrive. They seek to reach out.

Don't be found anywhere where you could not say that the Lord was there. Day in, day out, make your prayer "Holy Spirit, you must go before me in this. If not, I'm not going." That's what it means to be led by the Holy Spirit, guided by God.

What a New Year it would be if we realized *Jehovah-shammah*, and we used all our powers to worship and serve in His name. If we loved our families and did our jobs in His name, that "the Lord would be there." Scripture tells us NOTHING would be better.

Today, in this worship service, may be the day you begin an acquaintance with God. Allow His Holy Spirit to help you. Go to Him with every one of your burdens and troubles. Cry to God. Hand your stuff over to Him. When your heart breaks, don't take it out on everybody around you. Take it to the LORD God, *Jehovah-shammah*. Confess your failures to Him, trust in Him for your forgiveness and cleansing and new life full of meaning and purpose. In every stressed out situation, lean fully into Him. With every adversary, even when it's yourself, put your trust in Him. Go into this year with Him. He has known you in every way, and He loves you still. Let Christ receive you to Himself forever, from this moment on, that the best thing that could be said of you is "*Jehovah-shammah*," the Lord is there.

Study Guide for Matthew 1 – 5

Monday: Read Matthew 1. The Genealogy of Jesus (1-17): Meditate on the idea of God's faithfulness to all generations. Who are the significant people in your spiritual upbringing? The Birth of Jesus (18-25): Share with a friend some positive qualities about your dad. What do you learn about faith from Joseph?

Tuesday: Read Matthew 2. The Visit of the Magi (1-12). Who are the 3 "Magi" to whom you turn for advice today? How are the responses of the magi similar or different to Christians today? What do the star, the Magi, the gifts, the homage, the hostility, and the prophecy teach about the significance of Jesus? What gifts have you offered Jesus? The Escape to Egypt (13-18). When, like Herod, have you felt threatened by Jesus' kingship? The Return to Nazareth (19-23): Would you be willing to say 'yes' if God asked you to move on with Him? Pray for faith and fulfillment in God.

Wednesday: Read Matthew 3. John the Baptist's Ministry (1-12). How would you paraphrase John's message for today? Is there something you need to repent for and be done with? Repentance does not mean "if you feel sorry enough for your sins, God will forgive you." Biblically, it means a complete change of attitude toward God, demonstrated by a change in your way of life. Can you make a change? What is holding you back from being ready? Jesus Baptized (13-17). How has God affirmed you as His child in Christ lately?

Thursday: Read Matthew 4. The Temptation of Jesus (1-11). What are you tempted by? Jesus resists Satan's offer to use the things of this world for His message: food (economic means), miracle worship (religious means), nations (political power). Jesus' Preaching Mission (12-25). How can you help people 'see a great light'? Again, what do you need to repent of? How does God's Kingdom seem 'now' to you?

How does it seem 'not yet'? Spiritually, are you leaving the boat? Following hard? Feeling left behind? What healing are you looking for?

Friday: Read Matthew 5. The Sermon on the Mount is a kingly announcement of how men and women are freed to live when they commit themselves to Jesus as Master of each moment of our lives. Because Jesus is the Living King, we can live in relationship with Him and can abandon ourselves to the unique life He describes. The Beatitudes (1-12): A new set of values His followers are to live, which run counter to our cultural values. Values Expressed in Action (13-16): How can you be "salt" and "light" in our society today? Jesus' Fulfillment of the Law (17-48): These are many illustrations of how His teaching looks when we live it out. It must be an inner transformation that is salty and shining outwardly. Since all of us experience something of anger, lust, divorce, swearing, revenge, selfishness, and hate, what is Jesus saying? Does this show us how truly sick we may be, apart from God? At our church we say "The Gospel isn't a hammer. It's medicine." What is the medicine You need most? Since it is only "in Christ" that we have hope of living this out, (v.48), take time to rest, to bask in Him and His love for you.

Tips for Bible Study

Remember: by looking at whole chapters, we are looking at larger chunks of Scripture. Look for overarching meanings. It doesn't have to be some deep experience every single time. Enjoy the rhythm of it. Don't allow it to become tedious, but rather, pray to be hungry for what God does reveal to you as you read. If a certain passage grabs you, that's the God of creation speaking to you through His Word! Mark it, or write it down. Have a notebook or journal handy.

Set a time to meet with your spouse. Have your family study it. Find a friend or small group of friends to touch base with, even if it has to be via email. What is God speaking to you? What are you learning? What's making sense?

Find a friend as you go through this process to ask: How's your life? How's your walk with Christ? How's your ministry?