

# **“AT THE NAME OF JESUS”**

May 3, 2009

Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24

## **Introduction:**

Names are important to God, because they are, they are also important to us.

Words, from which names come, are also important: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is a children’s riddle designed to teach children they can rise above names called them by others, or words spoken against them. The intention is noble but the truth is words do hurt, or help, or heal. If words were not important than we could say anything, no matter how ridiculous, and always be correctly understood. But, it is not that easy. We need specific words spoken in a correct context, and through a helpful tone of voice to affect a proper understanding and response from us.

If words are important, how much more is a person’s name? A person’s name is important to their understanding of who they are, how they fit into the family structure, and what they have inherited. Some of our names reflect the idiosyncrasies of our parents. Sometimes the name we are known by isn’t the name we were given at birth but is a nick-name acquired later which has replaced our original name. Many of us here today

love, hate, put up with, or try to disguise our names.

Some names are family traditions, passed lovingly from one generation to the next. The children grow up being told of the importance of their name; how it connects them to their ancestors as well as their present family.

Some names are given to children because they stand for attributes the parents hope to inculcate into their children. There used to be lots of girls who were named for one of the classic virtues, such as faith, hope, grace, Irene, or charity. Other parents named children after Biblical characters whose qualities parents hoped to see reproduced in their children. Thus, there are children named Deborah, or Ruth, or Mary, or Elizabeth, or Sarah, or Abraham, or David, or Stephen, or Mark, or John, or Peter, or James. Names, an extension of words in general, are important. Parents do a disservice when they carelessly name their children.

### **The Bible Gives Evidence That Names Are Important.**

In the Old Testament world names most often were descriptions. For instance, **Adam**, is made from the dust of the Earth – *adamah* (Gen. 2:7). His very name is a word play on the substance from which he is created.

**Jacob** is a personal name built on the Hebrew

noun for “heel” meaning, “*he grasps the heel*” or “*he cheats, supplants*” (Gen. 25:26; 27:36). Into our culture has come the expression, “he is a real heel”.

God later changes Jacob’s character and changes his name to **Israel**, which means “*he strives against God.*” This came about after Jacob wrestled with the angel and had his hip put out of joint (Gen. 32:28).

Then, there are the name changes God made to **Abram** which meant “*exalted father*” to **Abraham**, “*father of a multitude*” (Genesis 11:26-17:4); and to **Sarai**, meaning “*Princess*” to **Sarah**, meaning “*mother of nations*” (Gen. 17:15).

In the New Testament, the tradition of God changing a person’s name continues. The two best examples are Jesus changing the names of Simon bar Jonah and Saul of Tarsus.

Simon, son of Jonah, was chosen by Jesus to be the rock upon which he would establish the Church, of which we are privileged to be part. So, Jesus chose the Greek word for rock – Petros – to rename Simon. From the Greek Petros we get the name Peter. Peter, from the scared fisherman who denied three times even knowing Jesus, history discovers Peter, the rock who died via crucifixion rather than again deny Jesus, his Lord. Not

only did he die on a Roman Cross, he chose to die hanging upside down because he didn't consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

Then there is Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish Pharisee who was also a Roman citizen was enlisted by the Ruling Council of Jerusalem to stamp out the movement of those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus chose him to be the Apostle who would carry the Gospel into Asia Minor and Europe. When Jesus converted Saul to faith in Himself he also gave him a new name - Paul. Though he was a murderer before accepting Jesus as his Savior and Lord, Paul was given a new identify to go with his new character and occupation as an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Names are important to God, and because they are, they are also important to us.

Everything God did in history to establish the primacy of names,

### **God Fulfilled In The Name of Jesus.**

The naming of Jesus was no accident. Matthew's Gospel begins, in chapter one, with this explanation: *<sup>20</sup>But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy*

*Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

Even the name Jesus was no accident. God had determined when the plan of salvation was first conceived. Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which is a title meaning, “*Yahweh is salvation*” and “*the anointed one*” or “*Messiah.*” In the role Joshua filled, leading the people into the Promised Land, God had set the stage for the name of Jesus.

From our lesson in Acts today we heard these words: “*There is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved*” (:12).

From the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, verse 3, we read that the Lord “*revives our souls ... and leads us to right pathways for his Name’s sake.*” From 1 John we received this commandment: “*Believe in the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ and love one another.*”

Listen to these other actions called for in the New Testament having to do with the name of Jesus: From Acts 2:38: *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the*

*forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

So powerful was the proclamation, in Jesus' name, of what God was doing that the rulers forbade Peter and the Apostles to "speak or teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18).

Perhaps the most powerful witness concerning Jesus' name comes from St. Paul himself in his letter to the Philippians, chapter two, verses 5-11: <sup>5</sup>*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup>*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* <sup>7</sup>*but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* <sup>8</sup>*And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.* <sup>9</sup>*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,* <sup>10</sup>*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* <sup>11</sup>*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Imagine! God established Jesus' name to be supreme even in heaven. That means even the angels bow at the name of Jesus and confess him to be Lord.

Not only the angels in heaven, said Paul, but also every knee on earth. Might that mean all creatures? Not only humans but also all animal life will know Jesus as their creator. Could that be possible?

The one that gets me though is Paul's phrase: "under the earth". Even the demon spirits and human souls who intentionally rejected Jesus Christ and reside in hell will one day bow their knees to Him and confess Him as their Lord. Imagine if at the end of the Civil War all the soldiers and political leaders of the Confederacy had to bow their knees to Abraham Lincoln and confess him as the Lord of their existence for the remaining days of their lives. How bitter would have been that drink? How humiliating would have been that posture and that confession?

What do you think it will be like for the Devil, all the angels who followed him in his rebellion against God, and all the humans who bought Satan's lie that there is no God, and Jesus is not the Lord of all life when they are standing before the resurrected and glorified Jesus Christ in the presence of Almighty God? The demons will know Jesus, and exactly who he is, because it was He they rebelled against. He was their commanding officer. They know that Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of

Lords. They knew the risk they took when they exercised their free will and rebelled against God's rule. It is hard to have tons of sympathy for them.

On-the-other hand, think of the plight of those souls whom the Devil and his henchmen lied to, deceived, and brought into their own rebellion against God. Now those souls whom Jesus also died for will pay for their refusal to believe in Jesus with their souls. And, before they exit to their eternal destruction they will bow their knees to Jesus, and confess with their tongues that Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords; and he could have saved them from their sin if only they had called out to Him. Think how awful many of those lost souls are going to feel at that moment when they know for certain the destruction caused by their bad decisions.

To us, John has given a commandment:  
"Believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ and love one another."

**Call To Action.**

We are called Christians because we say we believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ. If you are calling yourself a Christian because you don't know what else to call yourself, but you don't really believe in the Name of Jesus, today I ask you to repent. I am pleading

with you to become what you say you are.

There are any number of people living in this country who, for convenience sake, call themselves Americans; but they really aren't, no do they intend to become a full-fledged American. Their loyalty is still to another country. Their citizenship is still in another land; and to another country they intend one day to return. Don't be that type of Christian.

God is a jealous God. God does not like it when our loyalty is divided between God Almighty and the gods of this world. If you have divided loyalty it means you have not yet bowed your knee to Jesus Christ by inviting Him to come into your life in order to forgive you of your sin, and to fill you with His Holy Spirit. When He enters He doesn't come in as a minority partner. He comes as the Lord of the house. He is the Master of our soul or He is nothing. If we invite Him to enter our soul with the intention of continuing to run our own life then we need to be ready for a serious struggle. There cannot be two masters of our life.

If this grabs at your, or witnesses to you that this describes your life, here is what you can do: In the privacy of your seat you can ask Jesus to come into your life. As you do surrender your sin to him. He will gather it

up and remove it from you. Thank Him for forgiving you and setting your conscience free from guilt.

Ask him to fill you with God's Holy Spirit so you have God's witness within you that you are now a child of God's forever family. Purpose to begin listening to the guidance the Spirit will give you as you make decisions throughout the day, and as you deal with moral issues that constantly arise.

Thank Jesus for all He has done for you! As you come to Communion be sensitive to the fact you are now having communion with your Lord and Savior for the first time. Open your hand and thus, symbolically, let go of the control of your life. With your hand empty receive the body, the presence of Jesus whom you are consciously taking into yourself. As you receive his blood be aware it is from the cup of forgiveness. He bleed and died that you and I will be forgiven; now we are reconciled to Him; now we need to prove that by loving each other.

Simple, isn't it? As the song says, "They will know we are Christians by our Love, by our love; yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

Amen? God bless you and be with you forever.