

A New Name

Richard Dawson *Sunday 27 July*

Genesis 17¹⁻⁹ / Roms 8¹²⁻¹⁷

What's in a Name? A lot if you read the Bible.

God is big on Naming things...

God Names things as He creates them in Genesis [Read V1-8]

The very first job man is given is to Name the Animals

God changes people's names!

He changes Abraham's Name from Abram to Abraham

He changes Sarah's name from Sarai to Sarah

He changes Jacob's name from Jacob meaning 'deceiver' to Israel meaning 'God strives or God rules'

He changed Peter's Name from Simon to Peter and

He changes Paul's Name from Saul to Paul.

Why does he do this? What's is all about? Is this just a whim so of like redecorating your home every few years? What's God up to here?

Story of Joan to Jenny

Looking through the History of God's Name changes you find two common themes.

The first is that God's Name for us makes a break from our past

The second is that God's Name signal for us a new future.

God wants to separate us from our past or at least from a part of it. Each of the biblical characters I've mentioned need a break from their past. Perhaps it was...

A history they need to forget/ a habit they need to break/ a thought pattern they need to stop/ a specific memory they need to be free of

For God – that past is gone – [Corrie Ten Boom – sins buried in the deepest sea and God puts a sign up saying 'No fishing']

We are so impacted by something from our past/ a mistake/ a foolish act/ a loss/ a grief/ a fear/ a failure
And these things lead to Names – perhaps not names people give us but sometimes yes – names from others. But the worst names are the name we give ourselves...
Useless/ feeble/ unable/ unlikeable/ unsuccessful/ too rough/ too skinny/ too fat/ too tall/ too short... and the list goes on. It is virtually endless.

Can you remember the names from your past? I can, some of them. Most of them I deserved.

But when God got a hold of my life I found that the first thing he seemed to want in my life was to leave these names behind.

I had to do this because if I didn't they kept shaping my life. Kept telling me what I should be and should do/ kept taunting me with memories of silly reactions and bad responses.

God wants us free of this.

God wants to call us out of our past and into a new future and that means leaving behind those names so we can received God's name for us.

Every one of the people in the Bible who got a new name had a past that needed to be forgotten.

Abram became Abraham after he'd made the biggest blunder of his life by trying in his own strength to become the Father of a nation. In the absence of a son from Sarai he agreed to have a child by her maid Hagar and so Ishmael was born. But God said – leave it behind, I'm not only going to make you a great nation but you will be the father of many nations.

Sarai became Sarah after the same incident though it was her idea. And the result was that Hagar and the boy taunted her about her inability to have children. God gave her a new name meaning 'princess' to let her know in part that she was still precious to Him.

Jacob the deceiver became Israel meaning 'God strives or God rules' after years of relying on his ability to scheme and deceive. But God gave him a new name so that He would be reminded that God was at work striving for him – he didn't have to deceive.

Peter got a new name after publicly denouncing Jesus going from Simon to Peter and Paul got a new name after having led a murderous campaign to kill and imprison as many Christians as possible.

Our past in so many ways can become our prison.

God says it doesn't need to be. Take a new Name – take it from Me!

You will be from now on...

Bold and not frightened/ bright and not dumb/ able and not disabled/ joyful and not flat/ clever and not clueless/ friendly and not aggressive/ a peacemaker and not angry.

With God's name comes an ability to leave behind these negative images, memories and understandings of who we are.

And why should we accept God's Name for us? We should do so because God is love and His name for us will always reflect that love. The Westminster confession says that the chief end of humankind is to know God and to enjoy Him forever but what is the chief end of God? It is love. It is to love Creation and particularly to love us so that through us Creation might witness God's love in action.

Don't fear the direction of God. Don't fear where He is taking you. It may be strange but if He remains our navigator **we will arrive!**

God's intention is to give us new name so we can leave behind the past but if we examine those who got new names we find a double destiny arises. They leave behind their past but they gain **a new future!**

Identity determines future...

Who you believe yourself to be determines your direction in life.

The Bible speaks about belief a lot but I suspect we miss one of the main reasons it does if we think only of **belief in God**.

This is important – no doubt, but so is simply **believing God**.
[subtle difference]

We are to believe God when He speaks about the past and to believe God when He speaks about the future.

We are to believe God when He speaks about what is good and to believe Him when He speaks about what is not good.

To believe God about life and to believe Him about death

To believe God when He speaks about others but most important of all...

To believe God when He speaks about us!

And this is precisely the great verdict about Abraham – such a human, such a flawed character in many many ways. But how does the Bible sum up his life? Here's what it says...

Galatians 3⁶

“⁶Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

And Jesus says this in John 9

“²⁹Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

The question is, are we prepared to do this? Are prepared to believe God and to receive from God a new Name?

Hearing that Name is really the beginning of a new life/ the opening of a new door – a door to heaven both here and in eternity.

We begin by opening our hearts to God – by inviting God to come in and to speak His Name to us. If you would like to do that today please pray with me and please, tell someone you can trust this week that you've begun this journey.