

At the peak of His popularity Jesus chose twelve of His disciples, called them up on a mountaintop, and there He named them. Three times Mark uses the word “name.” So this morning I want to ask:

1. Do names still carry power and authority?
2. How you lay hold of the new name that Christ gives?
3. How is this possible for sinners like us?

First: Does “Naming” still carry power and authority?

Naming and Power

In the ancient world your name meant more than a name means today, so I have been told. The reason is that in the ancient world *who* you were related to was more important than *what* you did. That’s why there are so many genealogies in the Bible. Today, your identity is tied more to what you do than to who your “people” are. But, as progressive as we think we have become, names still wield their influence.

Why do actors change their names? Well, it’s hard to reinvent yourself without a new name. There was something about their original name that was unmarketable. Why do companies pay consultants millions of dollars to brand their products? They want to reinvent things like tooth paste or bar soap in such a way that will make you want to buy it. They want to increase their influence over you. When I was young, I could tell when I was in trouble because my mother would use all three of my names. If she said, “James Richard Lincoln,” I was in trouble. She wanted to increase her influence and establish her authority. Normally she called me “Gee-um,” which is southern for Jim. She couldn’t say my name with one syllable. However, when I was in trouble, she said, “James Richard Lincoln.” Names carry power. I was born with a weak heart. So, she added Richard to my name because of the courage and strength of King Richard the Lion hearted, the 12th c. king of England.

Look, what you have been called and what you have been named carries power. I know a man whose father nicknamed him his “Good for nothing boy.” At the time his dad thought that was clever and I suppose he was shooting for reverse psychology. So he would introduce his son to everyone he met as his “Good for nothing boy.” Guess how that boy turned out? That boy lived with agonizing struggles all of his life and through adulthood. The one who authored him named him and breaking free from that name has been next to impossible. When my step-dad was sober he called me Socrates because I was an excellent student. When he wasn’t sober, he called me “Idiot” with a couple of words in front of that, which I won’t say. It’s amazing to me how defining those two names have been in my life. You may have to accept this by faith, but there are times in my academic life that have been nothing short of brilliance. I made discoveries in grad school projects that professors said were brilliant. At the same time I am capable of concluding and saying the dumbest and most bonehead things possible. There are many ordinary things that everyone seems to know about that I can be absolutely clueless about. I can remember how dumbfounded I was when I discovered that the word “heirloom” was not spelled “air loom.” My thinking often bounces back and forth between brief moments of brilliance and moments of idiocy, which is linked to the two names I heard most growing up as a kid. By the

grace of God in Christ, I now have a new name that eclipses both of these. My point, for now, is that there is enormous power in whatever it is that names you. It has a shaping power.

Naming and Authority

Not only did ancient names carry great power, naming also signified authority. Isn't it true that the author of a book or the inventor of a product gets to name it? She has authority over it. In the first chapter of the Bible, the fact that God names the sun, moon, land, and sea signifies that He has authority over what He has made or over what He has authored. And the fact that you have been created or authored means that you have been made for authority. As a result you will serve *something* or *someone* all the time. The question is, "What or who names you?" What or who has the ultimate authority over your life?

This is why the ancients believed that if someone knew your name they would have control or authority over you. You might remember that the demons once said to Jesus, "We know your name." That meant, "We know who you are and you don't threaten us." Something similar is still with us today in athletics. A basketball player may say to his opponent, "I've got your number!" What does he mean? He means, "I know so much about you that you cannot show me anything new or anything that I cannot counter. I know your number or I know your name. I have authority over you." In both the ancient and modern world, naming has power and it also communicates authority.

When Jesus takes His disciples aside up on the mountain in verse 14, it literally reads that Jesus chose twelve "whom He named apostles." Some of your translations do not include the last phrase. However, Luke gives us the full statement by saying in chapter 6, Jesus, "called His disciples to Him; and He chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles." (Lk. 6:29). He uses the word named again here in verse 16 when He names Simon "Peter" and again in verse 17 when He names James and John "Sons of Thunder." When Jesus named Simon "Peter" or "rock," Jesus was speaking into Simon's life a metaphor of what he would become by following Jesus as his Lord and Savior. In time, his relationship with Jesus would make him stable, solid, and enduring like a rock. We don't know much about James and John the sons of Zebedee, however Jesus names them *Sons of Thunder*. Perhaps they were by nature quiet and needed courage and would come to have a strong voice in the world. Jesus' naming had a shaping power in their lives.

By naming His disciples, Jesus is claiming a divine prerogative just as He did when he forgave the sins of the paralytic. What kind of audacity does a person have to declare another person's sins forgiven? To forgive someone else's sins means that He considered all of that man's sins to be sins against Himself. Only God could possibly make that claim. When Jesus claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath, He was also claiming for Himself a divine prerogative; only the LORD God who created the universe and who rested on the Sabbath has the ultimate authority over the Sabbath. By naming His disciples, Jesus is alluding back to Genesis when God named the universe into existence. He is claiming to have the authority to direct the course of their lives, to tell them who they are, and how they should live. So bizarre were His claims that His family concluded He had lost His mind (3:21). No rational person makes the claims Jesus made. It was His claim of divinity that created so much hostility to Him by the religious leaders of the day. No sane person and especially no sane Jew accepts the worship of another person as Jesus freely did. God created the universe by naming it into existence; God spoke the universe into being out of nothing. Jesus made them apostles and named them apostles. His naming of His disciples comes with the same naming power exhibited when God created the universe. Listen, if someone has been named "Good for nothing," Jesus comes and names you, "My beloved child." If someone names you "hopeless" Jesus comes and names you "able" and says that you can do all the things you need to do through Me." If someone names you un-loveable, by their inattention or abuse, Jesus comes and names you, His

“beloved” and His “bride”. Jesus is claiming to have divine power to call into being that which He names. So, who has named you? What name do you follow? Is it your wealth? If so what happens when it is gone? Is it your looks? What happens when your looks are gone? Is it your success or family? Whatever it is, “What happens to you if you lose it?” Jesus says, “Look, I come to you and I can name you again”, - it’s an audacious claim. He says, If I give you a name, it will stand up to wealth or poverty, health or illness, betrayal or love. This naming was not just for the apostles. Jesus says, “as many as receive me, to them I give the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in Me.” A Christian has been named the child of God. Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep, and I call each of them by name.” Rev. 2:17 says, “To him who overcomes I will give a white stone with a new name written on it known only to the one who receives it.” Because your life is in ways unique and like no other, so Jesus knows you as no other possibly can. But never give your identity to anything but who you are in the Lord Jesus Christ.^{1[1]} He is the only one who can name you in such a way that will liberate, love, forgive, serve, support and lead you for God’s glory and your best joy. You have been created and authored by God. He made you for perfect, loving, and liberating authority. Jesus says, “Follow Me, believe in Me, trust Me, learn of Me and you will find a name that will never perish, fail, or fade away”. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will never perish but have everlasting life.” This new identity given to you by God will remain even if your wealth, health, prosperity, friends, success, smarts, and sanity fail you. Who names you? Isak Dinesen writes in *Out of Africa*,

[1] *What about AA’s practice of identifying its members with “I am an alcoholic.”? Didn’t Paul say that he was a sinner?* Because alcoholism is a phenomenon of denial, it is critical for those who fight this battle to own up to the reality with all the clarity and transparency possible. With alcoholism, as it is with many sins, there is something being suppressed, something we do not want to admit. For example, we know that real hostility and bigotry hide themselves so that they can do their work unobstructed. Moreover, if anyone tries to tell us this, it may stir up even more anger and defensiveness on our part. I’m guessing that it is for this reason that AA calls for the regular admission, “I’m an alcoholic.” Denying the reality of such strong desires, cravings, and one’s history of mismanagement of or inability (powerlessness) to manage them is devastating to recovery. If some allow themselves to say, “I’m not an alcoholic,” this might trigger the suggestion, “I can handle or manage a drink or two without any negative consequences.” If acted upon, this thinking error can lead to a relapse with all the humiliation pain and suffering that can follow. I am deeply grateful for AA and the millions of people the program has helped. I don’t know if there is anything that has worked any better for people except perhaps a Christian version of the same thing. I think I am OK with a Christian saying they are an alcoholic *if* they can say it the way the apostle Paul confessed that he was a sinner or the way Christians confess our sins in any traditional order of confession, such as the ones we include in our weekly bulletin. Here’s what I mean. When Paul confessed that he was a sinner (cf. 1Ti.1:15), he could say that as a Christian only as he would identify himself by a dozen or more other realities about his identity that serve to defeat the tyranny of his identity as a sinner.

When Christians confess our sins saying that we are sinners, we never let that identity stand alone or give it the power to identify us exclusively or predominantly. As Christians, we mitigate the power of the statement “I am a sinner,” with our new identity in Christ. Through faith in Christ, we have been given the power and authority to live by a new identity. We are God’s forgiven children, we are the sheep of His shepherding, members of His body, heirs of His resurrection power, seated with Him at the right hand of the Father, raised to walk in newness of life, and temples of His Holy Spirit and a thousand more good realities. In Christ, all things have become new. Although, the identity as sinner is still part of our reality, this identity has been *fatally damaged* and on its way to being irradiated. In the meantime, our new identity in Christ is an able defeater of the tyranny and dominating power of our old identity that remains in the members of our body. I believe this is true of an alcoholic as it is for all believers. So, it is appropriate for Christians to say that we are “sinners,” if we say it knowing and confessing who we are in Christ. A Christian alcoholic needs to own up to that part of her identity that names her as an alcoholic, AS LONG AS she can say, with the same conviction, that she is now and even more so, an over-comer, God’s child, a temple of the Holy Spirit, enabled with resurrection power, beloved, prized, cherished, a new person in Christ, Christ’s Bride, and His Beloved. Her identity as an alcoholic is a present reality, however it is one that has received a fatal blow and, unlike our identity in Christ, it is an identity that is fading and has been fatally weakened in the Light of who we are in Christ.

“Some are not aware of any idea that God had when He made them. Sometimes they make you doubt that there ever has been much of an idea or else it has been lost and who shall find it again? They must accept as success what others warrant to be success. And to take their happiness even their own selves at the quotation of the day. They tremble and with reason before their fates.”^{2[2]}

Dinesen says they take happiness and even themselves at “the quotation of the day.” in other words, they live by what everyone else says not what their Maker says and Redeemer says. Jesus will give you a new name that will stick for eternity.

Second: How does a Christian lay hold of her new name?

It took Peter and the other apostles all of their lives to lay hold of and to grow into the name Jesus had for them. So, this is a process. First Jesus appointed His disciples to be with Him (3:14). This of course is intimacy. You can only lay hold of your new name as you receive, hear, embrace and take in the love of Jesus into your heart through fellowship with Him. Verse 14 says that Jesus called them to be with Him. He calls you to be with Him and to hear and receive His love. Rom, 5: 5 says that the love of God has been poured out within our hearts.” Are you ever with Jesus or are you too busy for solitude?

Also, the word apostle means, “sent one.” Mark says that Jesus sent them out to preach, and to cast out demons. For now, just notice that the apostles laid hold of their new names by serving others in word and work. They served others by giving a word of repentance, faith, and the forgiveness of sins through faith in the Lord Jesus. By casting out demons they relieved suffering in people’s lives. The only way you can lay hold of your new name is by losing yourself in the service of others. You cannot find your name in Christ by looking at your naval. It’s a paradox. You can only find your name in Christ out of being sent because we were originally created for love. And love only happens when the wellbeing of another means more to you than your own. If you’re forever looking inside yourself, examining yourself, and assessing yourself, and probing yourself, evaluating yourself in order to find your name, you’ll miss it. Jesus said, “He who loses his life for the kingdom of God will find it.” Is there any time in your life to serve others? If you are too busy to serve you’ll never find out what’s written on the stone.

Then, notice that Jesus appointed twelve. Why did Jesus choose twelve apostles? Just as Moses called the twelve tribes of Israel into a nation from Mount Sinai, Jesus called a new nation, a new people, and new community not based on ethnicity or nationality, but a community based on following Him and believing in Him. Beloved, it’s only in community that you can discover your new name in Christ.

Look, have you ever noticed that when you hear your own voice that has been recorded, it sounds much different than you thought it did? When I hear myself speaking on a recording, my voice is weaker and more muddled than I perceive it to be. When you hear your own voice, as you speak, you are *not* hearing what others hear. What you are hearing is a sound that is bouncing off the bones in your neck. The same is true for singing. Not everyone is as good a singer as they imagine themselves to be. Just watch the early episodes of American Idol. How could these people be so self deceived about their singing abilities, or lack thereof? Look, you

^{2[2]} Dinesen, Isak. *Out of Africa*. New York: Modern Library, 1952, 269-270.

cannot know who you really are unless you give some people permission to tell you about your blind spots. If there is no one in your life who dares to tell you these things, you are not in an authentic community. And some of us react so strongly to any correction that no one will ever serve that role in our lives. People are too afraid to tell you your faults because you might get mad or emotionally shut them out. In church we are always walking on eggshells around people because, if we do not, people will just get up and leave. And that hurts. It's only as others reveal your deficits that makes it possible for you to lay hold of your new name in Christ. Now, few are skilled at doing this well. So, don't lay your life open to everyone; that is foolishness. You can only lay hold of your new name in community. To the degree that you give yourself to these things: stay close/intimate to the risen Jesus; dethrone yourself out of the center of gravity around which everything must orbit and make time to serve others; and live in authentic community with others, and you will you lay hold of the name Jesus has for you.^{3[3]}

Third: How does Jesus make all of this possible?

On Mount Sinai, when Moses called the twelve tribes of Israel, he came down the mountain, and saw the sins of the people. He then said to the LORD, "Lord ...Blot my name from the book you have written and forgive their sins. May their sins rest on me." However, as much as he might have wanted this, Moses was not able to forgive people's sins or stand in their place. He too was a sinner. However, Jesus, so that our names could be engraved forever on God's heart had His name, as it were, blotted out. The "Righteous" became a "Curse." He bore our sins in His body, so that we would not have to bear the consequences of our sins. This is how the Lord Jesus redefines authority and uses it. He uses it to lay down His life and to take on Himself the penalty for our sins so that we could be named "At peace with God" forever. He gives us the record of His righteousness and He bears our sins.

Those who follow and trust Him have been named the Children of our heavenly Father and Beloved forever and ever. Because of Jesus Christ, your name is written over His heart. To the degree that this reality melts your heart and moves you to trust Him as your Savior and to follow Him as your Lord, you will come to know your new name in Christ. Who has named you? Only Christ can give you the name that will truly honor your Creator and give you a joy forever and ever. Receive the name, which is above every name. Receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Lord and Savior.

^{3[3]}I have adapted and tweaked much of this from Dr. Tim Keller's messages on the Life of Jesus given at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in NY, NY and Dr. Kent Hughes commentary on Mark *Jesus, Servant and Savior*.