

“What’s in a Name?”

Deuteronomy 7:6-11 • Romans 6:3-11

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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One of the joys of having a baby is getting to choose a name. Naming a human is one of the most amazing responsibilities we have. That responsibility can also be a little overwhelming. Well if you are concerned about choosing just the right name, now there’s help. I’m not talking about those books you can buy that tell you the most popular names from three years ago. I’m talking about professional help. Taylor Humphrey, who is 33 and has no children, is a professional baby-namer and people are paying her around \$1,500 to come up with the perfect name for their child, with some paying as much as \$10,000!

You may be wondering why parents would pay thousands of dollars for someone to pick out a name for their baby. And I have no idea. But I suspect it’s because names have a way of affecting who we become. We tend to grow into our name. One day a woman called her pastor to ask him to pray for her teenage son. He had always been kind of unconventional but now he was acting downright wild and she didn’t know what else to do. The pastor said, “Sure, I’d be happy to pray for him. What’s his name?” “His name is Maverick.”

Your name is a big part of your identity. Your last name identifies you as part of your family, both the good and the bad. But your other names identify you as an individual. It identifies who you are. In addition to our given name, we also grow into the other names we answer to, those names others give us or the ones we give ourselves – beautiful, ugly, genius, idiot, champion, loser, leader, worthless.

What is it that defines who you are? What names do you answer to? Who are you? Obviously your family is a big part of your identity. Where you grew up or where went to school can be major influences as well. Many people get their identity from their job. Men are especially bad about this. When we meet another man one of the first questions is, “what

kind of work do you do?” That’s another way of asking, “who are you?”

While all of those can have an impact on you, none of them can truly tell you who you are. If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus, your identity does not come from your job or your family or your school. You are not defined by how much money you have or don’t have, by what kind of car you drive, you are not defined by some disease you have, by your political party, or by the color of your skin. Your true identity is given to you by Christ himself. That’s what baptism is all about.

Baptism is one of the two sacraments recognized by every Christian church. The other is Communion or the Lord’s Supper, which we talked about a few weeks ago. A sacrament is something that, as the name says, is sacred. They were instituted by Jesus and he commands that all of his followers participate in them.

As we discussed before, a sacrament is a sign that points beyond itself to some reality. A sign by itself is meaningless. Sacraments are an outward sign of an inward transformation. Baptism is a sign that visibly points us to the reality of what God is doing. The inward transformation is that we are regenerated, purified and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Baptism points us to the new life God has given us. But we can’t see that happening. So God gave us the sign of baptism to remind us of what He’s doing. Just as water washes away dirt and also cools and refreshes our bodies when we’re hot and tired, the grace of God does the same thing for our souls. The outward sign of the water assures us of God’s gift of grace and forgiveness.

It seems to me that in the Bible baptism is the sign of five things. The first and most obvious is that baptism is a sign of membership in the church – not just the local church but the universal Church. It’s the sign that you are now part of a fellowship of believers. So for you to be baptized into Christ’s church and then not

participate in His church is to deny your true identity. When you are baptized you become part of a family of faith.

That brings us to the second point, baptism is a sign of your adoption into the God's family. Romans 8 says, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of *adoption* as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." In baptism we are given a new last name. We are now children of the God who created heaven and earth. We are now royalty. Through our adoption we now have forgiveness for our sin because of Christ's death on the cross.

Number three, baptism is a sign of our death. That's part of the symbolism of the water. In addition to washing, the water represents death and burial. In baptism we die to our old sinful self. In our passage from Romans 6 Paul writes, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Baptism is a sign that we die to our old identity. We die to the things that divide us. We die to whatever separates us from Christ. Most of all, we die to our efforts to earn our way into heaven. We can't do it anyway. It's only when we die to self that we learn what living really is.

Fourth, baptism points to the promises of God. Verse 5 of our Romans passage says, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his,

we shall *certainly* be united with him in a resurrection like his." That right there is the gospel message, the "good news." When our identity is found in Jesus, our future is found in him also. Jesus said, "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." This isn't just a promise, it's a covenant. Baptism is the sign of the covenant God makes with us. Acts 2:39 reminds us, "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." God always keeps his promises.

Finally, Baptism serves as a sign that you are set apart for God. 1 Corinthians 6 tells us that we are not our own, we were bought with a price. We are marked for a life of service to Christ and to other people. We are set apart from the world. Our lives should look different from that of the world around us. We are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. We have different priorities. We are to be obedient to the One who said, "I did not come to be served but to serve."

Today we have baptized John into Christ's service. He has made promises to worship and to grow in his faith and knowledge of God. We have promised to help him do that. More importantly, God has made promises to him and to each of us. Today, you and I have been reminded of our true identity. You have been given the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let's live up to our family name.

Amen.