

"What's in a Name?"

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

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INTRODUCTION

Just knowing the name of something can send shivers down your spine.

It happens to the musician who gets to play a Stradivarius

or the art lover who gets to gaze at an original Rembrandt or Monet
or DaVinci...

Think of your own hobby or passion

imagine being able to physically handle (or own) the very best of its kind!

"owning it" could be done to impress (name dropping),

but true "connoisseurs" love the object for its intrinsic value -
craftsmanship, quality, provenance, etc.

Or think of famous people or famous places

what's the fascination with wanting to meet famous people - scientists,
inventors, writers, etc.?

why do we go on pilgrimages to visit famous places around the world?

There's obviously more to a name than just the name...

A NAME IS NOT JUST A NAME

We use names to convey the *quality* of something - this brand is low quality; that
one is high quality.

We use names to refer to the *character* or *good name* of someone or some thing:

This company is trustworthy, that one is not.

Ideas and ideologies have names attached to them too...

This "ideology" or "approach" is good; that one is dangerous.

Note - I've deliberately avoided using specific names because just the mere mention of a particular company or ideology could distract you for the rest of this sermon

- that's how powerful names are - they carry certain types of "associations," memories, experiences, likes/dislikes...

This type of labeling is also how names are used in the Word, namely, to convey the quality or character of something.

In fact, all the people, places and objects identified in Scripture represent the wide spectrum of spiritual qualities and attributes belonging to the human mind (see AC 144-145).

So let's move from talking about the names of material objects and places to PEOPLE

- because life is all about relationships w/PEOPLE
 - our relationship with each other (neighbor)
 - our relationship with the Lord

In our reading today from the book, *True Christianity*, we learned a little about how important it is to HONOR & RESPECT a person's name (in the context of not taking the Lord's name in vain)...

- we learned that a name is not just a name, that a person's *character* is intimately tied up w/their name, so much so that the two become inseparable...
- we see this in households, names freely talked about vs. those not mentioned or avoided

NAMING

In the ancient parable about creation, Adam is tasked with naming all the animals (see Gen 2:19, 20).

We learn that Adam "naming" the animals represents the ability the Lord gives us to recognize the nature or quality of something (see AC 144).

This is an important gift to be given because

we need to be able to recognize,
identify
and *name*

...the incoming thoughts and feelings that rattle around
in our head.

Naming the thoughts and feelings that have taken up "residence" in our mind

**weakens the grip of evil
and strengthens the power of good.**

When we strive to "*have no other gods*" before the face of the Lord,

we are seeking to identify (expose) the dominant, unhealthy occupants in
our mind

- anger, impatience, justifications, self-righteousness

We're taught, "*that which we love above all else is our god*" (AE 950:3)

Anything that robs us of the joy and happiness of heaven

NEED TO BE SPECIFIC

When it comes to "naming" the things going on in our lives,

- we have a tendency to speak in "generalities"
- tendency to make sweeping statements, so vague they could mean anything!

Divine Providence no. 278 says, "*confessing ourselves guilty of all sins, saying, I am a sinner. I was born in sin. There is nothing sound in me from head to foot*"...will actually "lull them all to sleep" until we are eventually blind to them all.

"Naming" a specific negative influence or habit inside us (false god)

frees up space in our mind to adopt and absorb the good qualities (names) of the Lord.

WHY THE LORD HAS SO MANY NAMES

This is one reason we are given so many different, SPECIFIC names for the Lord.

NOTE: Imagine if the only name we had for our creator was "God"

- how could we get to know Him?
 - understand Him?
 - learn what it is He desires for us?

At Christmastime we read, hear, and sing the different names of the Lord.

- There's tremendous POWER in this because saying these names
- each name reveals a specific quality
 - something we need

In the Christmas account told in *Matthew* and *Luke* we learn about the...

HOLY ONE
LORD
SAVIOR
MESSIAH/CHRIST
JESUS

IMMANUEL
CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL
THE LIGHT
SON OF THE MOST HIGH
SON OF GOD

CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

In doing so,

we have a tangible God, a God who comes to us in HUMAN FORM
by saying and singing these names
we invite a rich variety of heavenly spheres and influences from the
Lord to take up residence in our hearts and minds...

- to rule, reign

We will end with our text from Isaiah 9:6.

What is interesting about these names of the Lord (again, all connected directly to Christmas) is that the names need no explanation...

Perhaps this is why this prophecy has become so famous.

In calling on these names, we know what qualities, what characteristics, we are wanting to reign in us this Christmas season:

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace..." (Isaiah 9:6).

AMEN.

Lessons: Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:21; AC 145; TCR 297-300 (excerpts)