



December 12, 2021

“None of Your Relatives Has That Name”

Luke 1:57-80

He Shall Be Called John

A name from outside the family

John: “YHWH is gracious” (from *Johanan* or *Jehohanan*)

Names can allude to occasions, personal characteristics, family relatives

Some names describe the person: *Jacob* (“cheater”), *Esau* (“hairy”), *Samson* (“like the sun”)

John was eccentric, prophetic, challenging, edgy, in your face

Grace as lovingkindness, undeserved favor, tender mercy

Hmmm. How does this fit together?

When God Gives or Changes a Name

Not to describe the person but a picture of what **He** will bring about in/thru the person

Abram (*exalted father*) to *Abraham*: **I have made you** the “father of many nations”: Gen 17:5

Isaac: **God has made laughter** for me, everyone who hears will laugh: Gen 21:6

Ishmael: because the **Lord has listened** to your affliction: Gen 16:11

Jacob (*cheater*) to *Israel*: **God strives** or he has wrestled with God: Gen 32:28

Jesus: **He will save** His people from their sins: Matthew 1:21

The opposite of the spirit of Babel: “let us make a name for ourselves”: Gen 11:4

The **grace God will bring** through John’s life: redeemed (68), salvation (69), saved (71), mercy (72), covenant (72), delivered (74), salvation (77), forgiveness (77), light (79), peace (79).

Our New Name on the White Stone: Revelation 2:17

God has a name in the works for all of us!

It is what God from the beginning has intended to breathe into being through you

The Jewish saying: “with each child, the world begins anew.”

Three thoughts from George MacDonald’s sermon *A New Name*

One: To the one who conquers: the name given when we *have become* the name

We do not need to strive for a name we or someone else gives us: Eph 2:10

Two: Everyone given a *peculiar* name, leading to a priestly role for everyone

And here our very individuality leads toward mutuality in community

Three: The new name extinguishes ambition with holy aspiration and relational humility

Excerpts from George MacDonald's *A New Name* (from Unspoken Sermons, 1867)

ONE: To whom is this name given? To him that overcometh. When is it given? When he has overcome. Does God then not know what a man is going to become? As surely as he sees the oak which he put there lying in the heart of the acorn. Why then does he wait till the man has become by overcoming ere he settles what his name shall be? He does not wait; he knows his name from the first. But as--although repentance comes because God pardons--yet the man becomes aware of the pardon only in the repentance; so it is only when the man has become his name that God gives him the stone with the name upon it, for then first can he understand what his name signifies. It is the blossom, the perfection, the completion, that determines the name; and God foresees that from the first, because he made it so; but the tree of the soul, before its blossom comes, cannot understand what blossom it is to bear, and could not know what the word meant, which, in representing its own unarrived completeness, named itself. Such a name cannot be given until the man *is* the name.

TWO: For the name is one "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Not only then has each man his individual relation to God, but each man has his peculiar relation to God. He is to God a peculiar being, made after his own fashion, and that of no one else; for when he is perfected he shall receive the new name which no one else can understand. Hence he can worship God as no man else can worship him,-- can understand God as no man else can understand him. This or that man may understand God more, may understand God better than he, but no other man can understand God as he understands him. As the fir-tree lifts up itself with a far different need from the need of the palm-tree, so does each man stand before God, and lift up a different humanity to the common Father. And for each God has a different response. With every man he has a secret--the secret of the new name. In every man there is a loneliness, an inner chamber of peculiar life into which God only can enter. From this it follows that there is a chamber also--(O God, humble and accept my speech)--a chamber in God himself, into which none can enter but the one, the individual, the peculiar man,--out of which chamber that man has to bring revelation and strength for his brethren. This is that for which he was made--to reveal the secret things of the Father.

THREE: "But is there not the worst of all dangers involved in such teaching-- the danger of spiritual pride?" Pride springs from supposed success in the high aim: with attainment itself comes humility. But here there is no room for ambition. Ambition is the desire to be above one's neighbour; and here there is no possibility of comparison with one's neighbour: no one knows what the white stone contains except the man who receives it. Here is room for endless aspiration towards the unseen ideal; none for ambition. Ambition would only be higher than others; aspiration would be high. Relative worth is not only unknown--to the children of the kingdom it is unknowable. Each esteems the other better than himself. How shall the rose, the glowing heart of the summer heats, rejoice against the snowdrop risen with hanging head from the white bosom of the snow? Both are God's thoughts; both are dear to him; both are needful to the completeness of his earth and the revelation of himself. "God has cared to make me for himself," says the victor with the white stone, "and has called me that which I like best; for my own name must be what I would have it, seeing it is myself. What matter whether I be called a grass of the field, or an eagle of the air? a stone to build into his temple, or a Boanerges to wield his thunder? I am his; his idea, his making; perfect in my kind, yea, perfect in his sight; full of him, revealing him, alone with him. Let him call me what he will. The name shall be precious as my life. I seek no more." Neither will he thus be isolated from his fellows. For that we say of one, we say of all. It is as *one* that the man has claims amongst his fellows. Each will feel the sacredness and awe of his neighbour's dark and silent speech with his God. Each will regard the other as a prophet, and look to him for what the Lord hath spoken. Each, as a high priest returning from his Holy of Holies, will bring from his communion some glad tidings, some gospel of truth, which, when spoken, his neighbours shall receive and understand. Each will behold in the other a marvel of revelation, a present son or daughter of the Most High, come forth from him to reveal him afresh. In God each will draw nigh to each.