



feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Hi Church,

What a pleasure to worship the Name of Jesus with you this past Sunday. As I read through the book of Acts when we started this series I was intrigued by how these new believers referenced, not only Jesus, but specifically the Name of Jesus. Critical to reading these accounts in Acts we must understand that this group of Jewish disciples was deeply convicted with an incredible reverence for the Name of God to the extent that they would not speak or write His Name for fear of misuse. In fact, due to this caution there is no record of the full Name of God, just YHWH without the vowel points, thus throughout much of history His Name has remained a mystery. Even today orthodox Jews refer to God with the words Adonai or Ha'Shem (literally the ineffable Name) a Name too great to be expressed, described or uttered. So the disciples went from a culture in which they were not even to speak or write the name of God for fear of its misuse – to identifying themselves at every chance by the revealed Name of God in Jesus Christ. What a change! These Jewish men now did everything in the Name of their God! There would have been no way that this group of Jewish men would have gone around using the Name of God with such freedom and authority had it not been for a significant and divine revelation. And it is a benchmark of orthodoxy that Luke used “the name” precisely as a means of including Jesus in the Divine Identity of YHWH. All that YHWH is - Jesus is – truly the Name Above All names.

There is so much we could explore about the Name of Jesus in Acts: they preached in the Name of Jesus (8:12, 9:27-28), suffered for the Name of Jesus (5:41, 9:15, 15:26, 21:13), healed in the Name of Jesus (3:6, 16:16-18), baptized in the Name of Jesus (2:38, 8:12, 10:48) and asked in the Name of Jesus (4:30). But this past Sunday I just chose to focus on the identity and weight it seemed these early believers had for the Name. In Acts 3 & 4, Luke takes up a significant amount of space to explore the healing of the lame man, comparable only to his attention given to the birth and death of Jesus. Furthermore, repeated 8 times in these two chapters is explicit reference to the Name of Jesus. What is so significant that this account is given this much attention at such a vital point in church history? While healing is the back drop of this Acts passage, the central and repeated theme from the beginning of this story all the way to the close of their prayer in Chapter 4:31 is the **Name** in which this man is healed.

In addressing the crowds about the healing Peter uses the phrase “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (3:13) which in its identical form is only used in one other place in scripture, Exodus 3 – where Moses asks the Name of God. That phrase is used 3 times in Exodus 3 and 4 to address the people of Israel and declare to them the Name God chose to reveal to them, I AM (in Hebrew HAYAH, a very close derivative to YHWH). Here at the birth of the Messianic Church God is fully disclosing His Name, Jesus Christ, as a gift to His people. Look at what Peter says when he heals the lame man “*I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!*” (3:6) What did Peter have? What did he give? He gave the Name of Jesus. What are we giving the people in our lives? Do we know the Name of Jesus as a gift we have received as our own? And a gift we can give to those around us? This concept of identity in the Name of Jesus can be more fully explored looking at in Acts

9:13-16. Specifically, Jesus' words to Ananias regarding the call of Saul to be Paul, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to **carry My Name** before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." (15)

This is one of the handful of times Jesus actually speaks in the book of Acts, and He is recorded stating that Paul's purpose is to "carry My Name." It is a unique phrase. The word "carry" here is a Greek word which means "take, bear, or carry." It might immediately remind us of carrying the cross, and rightly so, it is the same Greek word used in Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not bear/carry/take his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." And certainly this must hold some context for in the vision Jesus goes on to say to Ananias, "for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (16).

But interestingly, this is also a concept captured in the third commandment, "You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain." (Exodus 20:3). The word "take" in this commandment is actually a Hebrew word which means "take, carry, or bear" it is the same word used elsewhere in Exodus to describe Aaron bearing the Names of Israel on his breastplate and the name the Lord on a gold plate on his forehead. Thus in other versions it can be translated, "You shall not carry/bear the Name of the Lord your God in vain." I had been raised with the thought that it meant solely not to use the Lord's name as a curse, or to make an oath in His name. And I don't think it is void of those interpretations, but one author David Block, brought another level of meaning which I think ties into Acts.

Block put it this way "If the Israelites would claim Yahweh as their God and claim to be His people, then they must live according to His revealed will...But if, having been stamped by Yahweh's name, they behaved like the nations, as if they belonged to Baal or some other god...then His name would be profaned (Lev. 18:21) defiled (Ezek 43:8) and blasphemed (Lev 24:11, 16). Instead of advertising Yahweh's glory and grace, those He chose to be His handpicked treasures to declare His praises among the nations misrepresented Him and brought same to His name."

Here in Exodus the people of God are being charged to bear the Name of God as a witness to the nations around them, and not to take lightly the impact they have in representing His name. And in Acts God is declaring that Paul would be the man to bear his Name as witness to the Gentile nations. What is it for us to bear that Name of God? Or as Exodus warns us, "not to bear the Name of God in vain?" It is a question I cannot fully answer, but I do pray our hearts would be stirred again with a deeper understanding of what it is to be called as a people in His Name. And that with Paul we might be able to say, "I know longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20).

I would also highly encourage us to pick up Stuart's book, which he will make available this Sunday, Asking in Jesus' Name. It is a great resource for your mediation on the Name of Jesus and includes a whole section of exercises in praying through the Names of Jesus. The enemy desperately wants to name us, what is it for us to receive of the Name we have been given in Christ, the Name that is above every name!

Your sister in Christ,
Monique