



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

Dearest family,

Personally, I was really blessed by the praise, the prayer and the preaching on Sunday. Preaching you ask? But you were preaching and that sounds weird! Frankly, if the person delivering the message is not blessed and stirred and challenged by the Word they are bringing, they should probably not be speaking it. The "how's" of our delivery and presentation are always open to improvement but the "what" of our communication, the truth of the Word that is brought, should indeed bless the speaker as well as the hearer. So yes, I was really blessed by the considerations of "the name of Jesus."

What I decided to do was ride on the tails of Monique's excellent message last Sunday, when she drew your attention to the unmissable emphasis in the text of Acts on "the name of Jesus." So crucial is it to grasp this that I thought I'd use the shorter time I had to further reinforce what Monique was rightly focusing on. Remember, that in those early chapters of Acts with such emphasis on "the name of Jesus", the apostles and converts were not yet known as Christians. That identification came a bit later: they were "*called Christians first at Antioch*" (11:26). From the beginning of the church they were primarily described and defined by their association and identification with the name of Jesus. Everything they did and said, invoked and evoked Jesus. They were called "*those who call on this name*" (9:21) and "*those who bear my name*" (15:17). It is interesting to note that in the book of Revelation, describing a church under pressure and persecution, the church in our present world in fact, the description of the spiritual faithful is "*those who are true to my name.*" There is therefore a particular appropriateness in the reward for such: the Lord says He will "*write on them my new name.*"

The apostles only had one explanation for everything that was happening: "*It is by the name of Jesus*" (Acts 4:10).

- You could only be saved by calling on the name (2:21) and there was no other name by which anyone could be saved (4:17).
- They preached that you could only repent and get baptized in the name of Jesus (2:38).
- They understood that forgiveness could only be received through His name (10:43).
- The bottom line was that the gospel was described as "*the good news of the name of Jesus Christ*" (8:16).
- They healed in the name of Jesus (3:6; 4:10).
- Faith was only understood as being in the name of Jesus (3:10).
- Their teaching was in the name of Jesus (5:40) and they only ever "*spoke in the name*" (9:28) Many of the disciples in Jerusalem did not believe that Saul had become a disciple and feared mischief, that he was possibly a plant. However, it was the testimony of Barnabas that Saul now preached "*fearlessly in the name of Jesus*" (9:27) that clinched the evidence for his conversion.
- The explanation for discipleship, for surrender and sacrifice was for the name of Jesus (15:26)
- They ministered deliverance in the name of Jesus (19:5)
- They described the evidence of the presence of God as the name of Jesus being held in "*high honor*" (19:17). Response to the name was the indication of a reviving move of the Holy Spirit. Not surprisingly, they understood that the prime work of the enemy and his demonic cohorts and human associates was "*to oppose the name*" (26:9) This is how we are first introduced to Saul as the leader of the persecution against the church. He is described as one who persecuted "*all who call on your name*" (9:15) But in the very next verse it is prophesied that as Paul he is going to "*suffer for my name*". So it is no surprise to later hear Paul in 21:13 say that he was "*ready...to die...for the name of the Lord Jesus.*"
- But another thing they did was to pray in that name. When they specifically asked God to do things (like signs and wonders) it was understood that not only was their asking in the name of Jesus, but everything requested would be only be given "*through the name of your holy servant Jesus*" (4:30).

Was this some new revelation post-Pentecost? No. How did the first volume of Luke's historic record conclude? *"He told them, 'This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.'" What Jesus said post-resurrection was concordant with all that he shared pre-cross in the Last Supper discourse, where no less than six times he describes that their intimate communication with the Father, that their experience of Jesus' abiding and continuing presence, will be "in my name." (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23, 24, 26). Throughout the gospel record we read of the miracles in the name (Mk.9:39). Jesus said of his disciples' future ministry, "In my name they will drive out demons" (Mk. 16:17) It was Jesus who made the connection between our acting and asking and His name. He spoke of the cup of water given in His name (Mk. 9:41); of welcoming someone in His name (Mt. 18:5) It is the equivalent of Him doing it personally Himself. When we gather in His name to ask (Mt. 18:20) He said "there I am." He foretold that the persecution his disciples would face would be "all on account of my name." He said, "They will treat you this way because of my name."*

His name is the equivalent of His presence. When we act or ask in His name it is as if we are in His **presence** and asking and acting in His **place**. To ask or act in His name is essentially to be in union with Him, to be one with Him, to be so identified with Him, and He with us, that we share the same name. This is why the phrase "in me" is so repeated alongside "in the name." His name becomes our name for the purposes of accessing and approaching the Father, for asking and acting. His ID is ours and it is not identity fraud. We cannot do anything in our own name. It is His name that has grounds for appeal and for making claims upon the Father. We have no claims on God. We have done nothing that makes Him obliged to us, that makes Him our debtor. God does not owe us anything and thus He is not beholden to us. We cannot argue our merits. We can only ask and act in the name of Jesus if we know that we have absolutely no claims on God, no rights. The right that we are given, that we are graced with, is the right to ask and act in Jesus' name when we have no right to ask in our own.

When we do so, it is on the grounds of Jesus' claims on the Father. We do not have the ground to stand on, but He does. Centuries before, Daniel foresaw this when he said that the people did not present their asking to God "on the ground of our righteousness but on the ground of your great mercy." (Dan. 9:18) The risen Christ can claim His redemption rights. He has His claim on us as His inheritance, promised to Him through His obedience unto death even the death of the cross. He has a claim on that which He has fully purchased. He can claim the right of access to the Father. He can claim on the basis of His relationship with the Father. He can claim upon the will of the Father because He only ever does what Father wills.

When we ask and act in the name of the one who has the claims on the one being asked, when I ask in the name of Jesus of the Father and act in His name, when I am allowed as it were to sign my asking with His signature, and act on His approval, then I am heard and responded to. Jesus gives us the right and the authority to use His name to access the resources of the Father and make our claim, as if He was the one doing the claiming. This is why we can ask and act boldly. It's all in the name.

In His name,
Stuart