

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?**  
**August 3, 2008/Crossroads/La Paz, Mexico**

Last week Pastor David talked to us about one of the names God is known by: El Qanna. Do you remember what it means? God: the Jealous One. God is jealous of us. He wants us to worship only Him, to put no other gods before Him. El Qanna.

The Bible teaches us many other names for God, revealing His character and nature as we learn them.

The patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—knew God as El Shaddai. This meant God the Mighty One or God the All-Sufficient one. Genesis 17:1 says: When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty (El Shaddai), walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.” God also revealed himself as Jehovah-Jirah: God will provide. In Genesis 22, Abraham is told to sacrifice his son Isaac. In verse 8, Abraham said to Isaac: “God (Jehovah-Jireh) himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.”

Moses, however, came to know God in a more intimate manner. In Exodus 3 God reveals Himself to Moses through the burning bush. He first identifies himself as the God of the patriarchal covenant. “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

This was no small claim. These 3 covenants included the promise of a great name, a great nation, a blessing to all the nations, an everlasting kingdom, and a land to possess forever. (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 26:23-25; 28:3-19; 35:9-14)

As the story continues, Moses continues a conversation with God . . . actually, he's stalling, he's not sure what he's getting himself into: “Okay, you want me to go to the people of Israel and say ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ But what if they ask me ‘What is his name?’ What shall I tell them?”

You can almost hear Moses thinking, “Yeah right, like this is going to go over big. People are going to actually believe I had a conversation with God.”

And God responds: I AM WHO I AM. Tell them: I AM has sent me to you. The LORD (Yahweh), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,

and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial name to all generations. (Exodus 3:14-15)

This is the first time the name YAHWEH (Yhvh, pronounced YAHWEH in Hebrew) is used for God. After this first time, it is used 6924 times in the Old Testament, making it the most commonly used name for God in Scripture.

When God says this is his name forever, a memorial name to all generations, God is stating that He is to be known in the context of His everlasting covenant promise forever.

The name YAHWEH proclaims God as eternal, self-sustaining, self-determining, ever-faithful, and sovereign in an everlasting covenant relationship with Israel. I think it's interesting to note that YAHWEH is the name God gave the people of Israel just before He was to lead them on a journey of faith and deliverance out of Egypt. YAHWEH. I Will Be With You. I Will Not Leave You. I Will Keep My Covenant with You.

As God continues his story with his people Israel, he reveals other aspects of his character, which results in additional names to identify Him with.

In Exodus 17 when God helped the Israelites prevail against their enemy the Amalekites, Moses built an altar and named it The Lord is my Banner. God taught them that Israel could not wage warfare alone. They needed God Their Banner, God who was a faithful, powerful presence in times of battle.

In Malachi 2:10 we read of El Echad: The One God.

In Deuteronomy 7:9 there is El Hanne'eman: The Faithful God.

Psalms 31:5 speaks of El Emet: The God of Truth.

El Elyon is The Most High God in Genesis 14:20 and Psalm 9:2.

El Hakkavad in Psalm 29:3 is The God of Glory.

And the list goes on. Why is it so important to understand and know the names of God? Because it is how we learn of the character and nature of the one being revealed through the name. In Biblical times, the person and his or her name are

virtually equivalent and inseparable. To say the name was to reveal the total person: heart, mind and soul.

The word “name” in Hebrew is shem. Shem means a mark or a memorial—expressing a person’s individuality. A name is a mark of a person’s honor, or dishonor, his authority, and his character. A name describes and defines everything about the person. Parents would choose a name as a reflection of their dreams and goals for their child. The child’s name might even tell a part of that family’s history. For example, Joseph—Jacob’s son who was sold into slavery and later became the second in command of Egypt under Pharaoh—named his first born son Mannesah which meant “Forget” and he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” His second son he named Ephraim which means “Fruitful” saying “God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.” (Genesis 41:51-52)

So to speak a person’s name, was to know their family history, their character, the way he or she was making their mark in the world. The same is true for God. To speak God’s name is to get a glimpse into God’s character, his history with people, the way he has revealed himself to his creation. YAHWEH. The God who can be trusted. Who stands by His covenants. Who will be faithful unto the end.

Now, if God’s name is important, it would stand to reason that our names are just as important.

Proverbs 22:1 says: “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”

Salma gave us the beautiful image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd last week during the children’s story. In the Gospel of John, where Jesus compares himself to a Good Shepherd, he says: “. . . the sheep listen to His voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (John 10:3-4)

Jesus knows you by name. In the eyes of God, You are not some nameless blob on the earth.

Now, granted, today our names aren’t always chosen for us with great intent. Maybe your parent’s chose your name simply because they liked it, it was the name of a famous person, or it was the first name they could think of when they

looked into your squalling face. However, some of us do have names that carry history. We're named after someone in our family. Or your parents looked through baby name books to see what a name might actually mean before they gave it to you. Maybe the location of your birth helped name you.

But regardless of how you got your name, and even if you don't particularly like your given name, it does identify who you are. It marks you in this world. When people hear your name spoken, not only do they think of a certain face, but it also makes them think of your character, your profession, your attitudes, your beliefs.

### **Have you ever thought of your name as a reflection of who you are?**

That your name has a past, present and future. It reveals where you've been, where you're at, and where you're going?

And having said that, let me ask this: Are you claiming your OWN history? Are you comfortable with who you are? Are you accepting who God created you to be? Or are you worried about everybody else, and what they think of you? Or sometimes, do you even wish you were somebody else?

God would look you in the eye and say, "I know you by name." In other words: I know you inside and out. Your dreams. Your goals. Your failures. Your relationships. Your struggles. What you believe. What you don't believe. Whom you love. Whom you hate. If you like pets. If you're scared of thunderstorms. If you love classical music. If you prefer to boogie. I KNOW YOU BY NAME.

### **What's in a name? YOU. The total package: heart, mind and soul.**

God wants us to become comfortable in our own skin. To shout to the world: I AM JOYCE. I AM PAULA. I AM RODOLFO. I AM RUBEN. He doesn't want you to shout someone else's name. He wants to hear you shout your very own name, the identity he gave you when you were conceived in your mother's womb. The creative, energetic, profound, amazing person that *only you* can be.

So today, as you ponder and reflect on the names of God . . . as you dive into Scripture and learn more about God as you discover his names . . . may you also have the courage to ponder and reflect on your name . . . may you not be afraid to walk down the unique path that is given you by God . . . may your identity in Christ Jesus transform you into a name, an identity, that gives glory and honor to God.

The Apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that: “. . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

We’re going to sing a song together called “I Will Change Your Name.” As the words are being passed out to you, let me read the lyrics out loud. Listen to what God promises to do with your name:

I will change your name  
You shall no longer be called  
Wounded, Outcast, Lonely, or Afraid  
I will change your name  
Your new name will be  
Confidence, Joyfulness, Overcoming One  
Faithfulness, Friend of God  
One who seeks My face.

Don’t like your name? Don’t like who you are? God can change you, inside and out. In the name of Jesus, that is his promise to me and you today.

Let’s sing this song together. And after the song, we’re going to continue our reflection on the theme of “Names” by watching a short movie.

**Sources:**

“Old Testament Understanding of the Names of God” by Mary Barnum.

The Truth of Yahweh: Studies of God’s name emphasizing the Oneness of God.

“Name” by Rob Bell. NOOMA video. #18.