

In the Name of the Lord Jesus Acts 18-19

This morning, I start by asking the question: what's in a name? To answer that simply, and with all due respect to Shakespeare's star-crossed, teenage, infatuated philosopher Juliet, there's a quite a lot in a name. In fairness to Shakespeare, I believe this is one of the points that famous play makes. After all, this question of Juliet's voices the major problem that drives the play: the fact that Juliet's last name was Capulet, and Romeo's was Montague. Were those names as incidental as Juliet wished they were, she and Romeo could have just gotten married and lived happily ever after. But names are not incidental. They hold a tremendous amount of weight and significance.

You can see this in the simple fact that you cannot hear a name without having a perceptible reaction. Whether it is the reaction of indifference to a name you do not know, or a visceral reaction of love or hate to a name you know well. Names are more than just words we use to get one another's attention. Two of the names that will cause some of the strongest reactions in people this year are Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Depending on your opinion of those two men you could have a variety of different reactions to hearing their names. One of those names may fill you with hope, and the other with fear, or one or both may fill you with a sense of discouragement or exasperation or ambivalence. Whatever the case may be, all I have to do is say those names, and you feel an involuntary reaction. This is because, again, names are not just words we use to get each other's attention, they are shorthand for our entire reputation as a person.

Which is a big part of why God has such a strong concern for His name throughout the Bible. It is such a serious thing that it made its way into the Ten Commandments, at number 3 no less: "You shall not take the name of the LORD (Yahweh) your God in vain..." It is also what drives God's words in Isaiah 42:8 when, after a long discourse on His supremacy over futile idols, He says, "I am the LORD (Yahweh); that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols." This falls under what theologians refer to as the jealousy of God. God is not jealous in the sense that a child is jealous of another child's toy. He is jealous about not being misrepresented, among other things. He takes His reputation, His name, very seriously.

This is important to understand, because it sheds light on something we'll see in our passage, which is the importance, privilege, and responsibility of being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Christian baptism is about more than words; it is immersion in the name of our God, and that has tremendous implications for our lives. I love this picture of this man after being baptized, because the way we drip with water after being baptized, like this brother here, is the way we drip with Jesus when we're saved, and the way we're called to drip with, to exude Jesus in the world. Lord willing, our eyes will be more opened to this reality through the Word this morning.

So, let us look at the text together. Acts 18:24-25 reads, "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John." In these verses we are introduced to the character of Apollos, a man who will become a significant leader in the Christian movement. From this brief introduction we learn a few things. First, we learn that Apollos was well-spoken, knew the Bible, and had passion for Jesus. However, we also learn that he was missing some important information.

You see, while Acts details the spread of Jesus' church after His return to heaven, it's important to recognize that this is not the *only* way in which Jesus' reputation and teachings spread. Word about Jesus had spread prior to Pentecost, although there would have been some important pieces of information missing from those reports, as we'll see. Apollos, in my opinion, seems to have heard of Jesus through one of those reports. Additionally, it's worth noting that John the Baptist had just as large a following, if not a larger following than Jesus did in the first half of the first century, and so his teachings would have spread to some extent among the Jews in the Roman Empire as well. And so it was that Apollos had some knowledge of the life and teachings of Jesus, and knew of the baptism that John prescribed, though that knowledge had gaps.

In verses 26-28 Priscilla and Aquila fill him in, which ends up transforming his message: "He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to

welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.”

So, Priscilla and Aquila hear Apollos speaking in the Ephesian synagogue, realize that there are some things pertaining to Jesus that he is not aware of, and so take him aside and explain things. And then you can see Apollos is very similar to Paul in his missionary passion. No sooner has he been updated on the things of Jesus, than he feels compelled to go spread the word in a new city. We will actually find out that he ends up in Corinth, the city where Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla had met and just left, which is why they write a letter of recommendation for him to take to the disciples there. He ends up having a really significant ministry in Corinth, to the point of rivaling Paul’s influence in that church (as we see in 1 Corinthians). And we see that Apollos now has the full message of the Gospel: Jesus was not just a wise rabbi, He was the Christ, the promised Messiah.

What is interesting is that it appears Apollos did not take the time to update his message at the synagogue in Ephesus before he left, as I think we see evidence of this in 19:1-3. “And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ And they said, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’”

I think it will be helpful for us to imagine the timeline of Paul’s and Apollos’ ministries at this point. First, Paul comes from Corinth to Ephesus, where he parts from Aquila and Priscilla. Second, about the time Apollos is arriving in Ephesus, Paul is leaving to go to Caesarea. Apollos spends a short time in Ephesus, and then departs for Corinth. Meanwhile, Paul is taking a circuitous route back to Ephesus, and this is where Acts 19 picks up. It’s fairly confusing, but the end result is that Apollos ends up in the city where Paul first made disciples, and Paul ends up in the city where Apollos first made disciples. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul speaks to how Apollos built on his ministry in Corinth, when he says that he planted, Apollos watered, and through their joint ministry God gave growth. Now, in Acts 19, we will see how Paul watered the seeds Apollos had planted in Ephesus, and the growth God gave there.

Remember how we saw earlier that Apollos initially preached a message that was some combination of Jesus’ teachings, and the baptism of John the Baptist? Well, this is essentially what Paul finds when he returns to Ephesus. He finds disciples, followers of Jesus. But they had not heard of the Holy Spirit, and they had only been baptized with John’s baptism. This is why it seems to me that Apollos did not update his message in Ephesus, at least not very thoroughly, because the beliefs of these men are so close to Apollos’ original message that Priscilla and Aquila corrected.

Recognizing these significant gaps in their understanding then, Paul sets about informing them in verses 4-7, much as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos. “And Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all.”

Paul begins by explaining the purpose of John’s baptism, and the fact that Jesus was the fulfillment of that purpose. In Luke’s account of John the Baptists’ ministry he says, “And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” John’s baptism focused on repenting from sins, not just for the sake of personal absolution, but as a way of preparing for the coming of the Christ, who would bring a different kind of baptism. Again, in Luke 3:16 in response to people wondering if he was the Christ, John says, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

This is what Paul explains to the Ephesian disciples: John’s baptism was a preparation for the coming of the Savior, and now the Savior has come, and the baptism John said He would bring has come as well. These disciples eagerly believe this great news, which leads Paul to baptize them in Jesus’ name. He then lays his hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit, which manifests in them speaking in tongues and prophesying, and there just happen to be about 12 of them.

Luke's clearly trying to draw out a point here, isn't he? The significance is hard to miss when you consider the rest of Acts. There are strong echoes of Pentecost here. Based on this powerful sign from the Holy Spirit, it's clear that this is a significant moment. And in verses 8-10 we see why it was so significant.

"And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Here we see that the coming of the Holy Spirit on these 12 men, in conjunction with Paul's continued ministry, unlocks Asia Minor to the Gospel. You may recall that the last time Paul passed through this region he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go into Asia, and was instead called to Macedonia. But now the Holy Spirit uses Paul and these Ephesian disciples to cause all the residents of Asia to hear the Word of the Lord.

This particular expression of the Holy Spirit, shown by speaking in tongues and prophesying, has marked significant outbreaks of the Gospel throughout Acts. Of course, Pentecost is the first coming of the Holy Spirit and the first preaching of the Gospel. A similar scene occurs in Acts 10 when the first group of Gentiles receives the good news. And now, it accompanies a major move of the Gospel into Asia Minor. And in this instance, this powerful move of the Spirit is unleashed by the new baptism that Jesus brought, which I would like to take a moment to talk about on this baptism Sunday. Luke says that Paul baptized the disciples in our passage "...in the name of the Lord Jesus." This is a direct reference to what Jesus called His disciples to do in the Great Commissions, saying they were to baptize disciples "...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."

Have you ever wondered what that means? I mean, which name? What name do they all share? Yahweh? Jesus? Something else? Well, the fact that Jesus says "the name" singular, in reference to three persons should be a give away that something deeper is going on than simply saying the right word for God. This is where we come back to what I mentioned earlier: a name, particularly in the biblical understanding, is shorthand for a reputation, it is shorthand for a person. Thinking of it that way gives some clarity as to what Jesus meant in the Great Commission, and what Luke means here. To be baptized in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit, or in the name of Jesus is to be immersed in God's reputation. That might be a confusing statement, so let me explain a bit.

First, let us deal with why Paul baptizes "in the name of the Lord Jesus", when Jesus told the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Put simply, it is the same thing, because Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's reputation. God becoming a man to die for the salvation of the world is the fulfillment of a plan that God has been working on throughout all of history, and therefore it is the act that defines His reputation. The name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ought to call to mind a God who graciously saves. Christ Jesus is the embodiment of that salvation, and therefore, the name of the Lord Jesus is synonymous with name or reputation of God.

Second then, to be baptized in the name of Jesus (or the Father, Son, and Spirit) is to be immersed in His reputation, which is a little picture of salvation. Firstly, because to be immersed in Jesus' reputation means we become *participants* in His reputation. In other words, Jesus' reputation becomes our reputation; His perfection, covers our imperfection. 2 Corinthians 5:21 captures this idea when it says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that *in him* we might become the righteousness of God." Secondly, to be baptized in Jesus' name means we become *contributors* to His reputation. This is why the New Testament repeatedly calls Christians to live in a way that is "worthy of your calling", or "worthy of the Lord", or "worthy of God". It is not hard to see how the actions of Christians have impacted the reputation of Christ in the world, for good and for ill. We have an awesome call to contribute to the name of God, and when we get baptized we are declaring that magnifying the glory of God is going to be our life's pursuit.

If you're a little terrified by that reality right now, I would say two things. First, good. It's a huge, serious responsibility, and we should feel the weight of it. But second, remember the first part of being baptized in the name of Jesus: His perfection covers our imperfection, including the times we *do not* live in a manner worthy of our calling, which, incidentally, increases the gloriously gracious reputation of Jesus, doesn't it? So that even our mistakes and failures get redeemed for our good, and God's glory.

And so it is that baptism in the name of Jesus (or in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit) is a picture of salvation, which is a thing completely of grace (because we get to participate in Jesus' reputation), and yet, in which how we live is still tremendously important and consequential (because we are called to contribute to Jesus' reputation).

And I would argue that this participation in and call to contribute to the name of Jesus is also what leads to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. First, because our immersion in the perfect righteousness of Jesus makes us fitting vessels and conduits for the Holy Spirit. And second, the Holy Spirit, being God, is jealous and zealous for the name, the reputation, the glory of God, and so He is the Helper of those who are jealous and zealous for the same. Hence, we see the Spirit come upon these believers powerfully following their baptism.

So, our main idea is this: baptism in the name of Jesus is a picture of our participation in His reputation which makes us fitting vessels for the Holy Spirit, and a declaration of our commitment to contribute to the reputation of Jesus by the power of His Spirit.

Now, what does this all mean for us? First, it means if you have never moved past repentance (the recognition that you're a broken, wicked, sinner) to the fulfillment of repentance, which is participation in the wholeness, righteousness, and perfection of Jesus, then I invite you to take that step today. Repentance is a preparation for righteousness. God does not intend us to live our lives wallowing in the guilt of our sin, He intends that sense of our sin to prepare us to understand the good news that we can have Jesus' own perfection as a gift. If you have not yet, claim your stake in the name of Jesus.

Second, if you have received the gift of participation in the name of Christ Jesus, realize that you are now a contributor to that name. You may have noticed that a lot of our worship this morning centered on the idea of Jesus being king. The title "Christ" means "anointed one". This is an allusion to kingship, and it gives us another way of looking at our participation in and contribution to Jesus' reputation.

A good king is the glory of his people, and the people are the glory of the king. We are a part of Christ's kingdom and are therefore representatives of the kingdom. If you are a Christian, that is simple fact. The only question is whether we are representing the Kingdom well or not.

So, take some time to wrestle with this question: "If my life was all someone had to tell them what the Kingdom of Jesus was like, what would they think it consisted of? What would they think the values of the Kingdom were? What would they think the King of that Kingdom was like?" And, of course, the necessary follow up to those questions is, "Are those impressions consistent with the Bible's portrayal of the Kingdom, its values, and its King?"

This is not a guilt trip. For each of us, we will find that aspects of our lives reflect the Kingdom well, and other aspects reflect it not so well. Rather, this examination is not meant to be a condemnation, but an evaluation so that we can better magnify the name of our King. So, as you evaluate, rejoice in the ways you have begun to take on the character of the King, and, after recognizing them, bury the failures in the perfect reputation of King, rejoicing in the grace that makes that possible.

Finally, and very practically, if you have put your faith in Jesus, but have never been baptized, please consider doing so. We will be having another baptism service in the next couple months. If you have put your faith in Jesus, the reality is that you have claimed your portion in His name, and you are a contributor to that name. Baptism is an opportunity to celebrate that participation, and contribute to His reputation by telling others what Jesus Christ has done for you.

It is a tremendous responsibility to represent the King and His Kingdom, but it's also a tremendous honor, blessing, and joy when we consider that there is grace for every failure, and that we have the promise that He who began the good work with be faithful to complete it. We were made to bring glory to God as His image bearers, and His grace in the Lord Jesus means we can pursue that aim of our existence without hindrance, guilt, or fear.

Now, to the One who invites us to be immersed in His name, replacing our reputation of brokenness, failure, and imperfection with His reputation of wholeness, righteousness, and perfection, making us fit vessels for His Holy Spirit and magnifiers of His glory, to Christ Jesus the King be glory forever and ever. May He be seen by all through us. Amen.