



# What's in a Name??

Bible Readings: Romans 16:1-16, 21-23  
Isaiah 43:1-7I



## Introduction: I See You

Who here likes their name? Certain names bring to mind a picture in an instant. When I say the following names you will immediately get a picture of them and perhaps what they stood or stand for Pollyanna . . . Adolf Hitler . . . Darth Vader . . . Mary Poppins . . . Mad Max . . . Walt Disney . . . Jonah . . . Alan Akers. Alan do you want me to ask what people thought??? It could be really funny Alan?

Now, who is old enough here to remember this. (look through mirror with no glass) Who can I see? I can see Barry, Meagan, Phil, Kevin, and Peg.

Janene will you sing for me? Hello Ash, John and Carol. And oh look there's David, Loris and Jennie. Oh, don't you look beautiful Ruth, Rose and Anne and Ian just behave yourself!! To all those whose name I didn't call out, I am sorry, I know how exciting it was when Miss Connie or Miss Louise could see you through the TV and called out your name on Romper Room. Romper Room was on between 1953-1994.



Choosing names, what a responsibility and some that are chosen can be very interesting. I won't mention any here because some of you may know children with those names. However, we do get used to names quickly and often wonder why we were so worried. I know when we called our first son Luke, which we felt was a pretty normal name, my dad said "Luke, Luke why would you call him Luke." Mind you my dad's name was Ernest but he was always called Bob because his sister called him Bob, Bob, instead of Bub, bub!! Back in those times people seemed to have more nick names than they do now. John's were often Jack or vice versa. It was a couple of years after knowing Peg that I found out her real name was Wendy!! We often shorten long names, my Timothy is Tim but then we tend to lengthen short names, my Joel is often Joely. And the meanings of names. What is the meaning of your name? Share it with the person next to you. Is it fitting?? I won't ask Bron what her name means. It's interesting, too, how many Hollywood people change their names. Often to be cool, or to be more saleable or to reflect the image they want to portray.

Take Alexander Leach, who became . . . Cary Grant.  
Reginald Dwight, who became . . . Elton John  
And Caryn Johnson went from Norwegian to Jewish and became Whoopi Goldberg AND Paul Hewson needed a way cooler name and so . . . Bono is born!!



## 1/ What's in a Name?

In biblical times, in ancient times, names were so important. "Someone's name really meant their trajectory. There was great pressure upon the person naming them. They were named them

either because the person saw something in them, they were prophetically told something about them or they hoped or believed something for them or something they believed for them, so naming was very critical. It wasn't about what sounded good, what was the most original, what they liked or what had the appropriate syllables. There was great intention to this. It was something about God has a future for you and if you named them, you were saying, "I control your identity, your destiny, and that's why I'm giving you this name."<sup>1</sup> God did make a few name changes which is hugely significant not because his people needed to be cooler or more hip but because the people changed. They were different. When God changed their name it was because He had changed them!! God said, "I know your name. You are not anonymous but I have a new name for you. I'm going to change your name and it's a better name for you.



Take Abram for example. His name meant Father but it must have been embarrassing for him. He'd get asked, "What's your name?" "Abram" so of course the next question was, "Well how many kids have you got?" Abram replies, "None". "None? Really, who named you, I wonder why they named you that, how could they have got it so wrong!! Abram was most likely always embarrassed!! Enter God. In Genesis 17:3-8 When Abram is 99 years old, mind you, God makes a covenant with Abram and says to him, "*This is my covenant*

*with you: You will be the father of many nations.* <sup>5</sup> **No longer will you be called Abram, your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.** <sup>6</sup> *I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.* <sup>7</sup> *I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, (that's us) to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.* <sup>8</sup> *The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.*" So God says, "Guess what? I'm not only going to change your name, Abram I'm going to give you another higher title that's going to be Abraham meaning an exalted father; for you will be a father of many. Then God changes Sarai's name. Genesis 17:<sup>15</sup> *God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.* <sup>16</sup> *I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."*

This is very significant, because many times the men in the Bible received name changes and the women didn't. God says, "Abraham, that's your new name, what a blessing but I am not stopping there, I am blessing you so much I'm going to bless your wife too. (God must know the saying '*happy wife, happy life*') I'm going to give her a new name, and together the two of you, will be an incredible blessing." Her name goes from Sarai to Sarah. And Sarai meant, 'Princess' which I'm sure was Abraham's pet name for her!! BUT God now says, "Guess what? She now to be known as 'Sarah'. This name is much stronger and more powerful, she has moved from 'Princess' to 'Queen Mother'. This is amazing. Sarah has become, due to her name change, Queen Mother, Special Princess of God. Can you imagine Sarah? Can you imagine the confident swagger with which she would have walked



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/anonymous-part-3-rob-ketterling-sermon-on-name-change-190354?page=2>

with? Like, "I was Sarai, a princess, and he was Abram, you know, exalted father. And we have no kids. And now he's like this great amazing father of many and, guess what, I am the Queen Mother." We know, despite God's promises they made attempts to take matters into her own hands, before this prophecy was finally fulfilled. They both finally lived up to the names that God gave them." In actual fact God gave them some of His name, the letter 'h', the 'heh' of Yahweh, when he changed their name He breathed some of his Spirit in them.

There are many other name changes God makes, too many to go into here, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter, Saul to Paul.

In our reading from Romans we see a list of names to whom Paul is indebted. And as we look at just a couple of their names and meanings we get a glimpse of what is going on behind the scenes with these people and their place in the church. These lists show us that people are not anonymous, that they are making a difference, that the apostle Paul recognized them. And so too is everyone, even today, who serves in the Lord's church. You are not anonymous, God sees you and values all you do and all you are. Paul has been writing some amazing deep theology throughout this letter to the Romans so it is amazing to think the first person who comes



to mind is Phoebe, a woman. *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae."* (Romans 16:10) Cenchreae is a port city of Corinth and Phoebe was the leader of the Church there. And he says, *"I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me."* Paul is basically filling out a reference form for Phoebe. Paul is saying, "Phoebe is a good person and I can vouch for her. Phoebe, means radiant star and she is an amazing lady." Actually in this list, Paul gives a lot of credit to his fellow female workers and leaders purely by mentioning them. He clearly lets us know that women have a significant

place and are growing the church, even leading in the church. Phoebe was also an Emissary who brought this letter to Rome and was most likely the first first to read it aloud to the congregation there. Phoebe has the exact same term as Timothy and Apollos. Paul names Phoebe as a deacon and she has really blessed the church with her money. And he says, "You may not realize this, but I know it and God knows this lady made a difference and she is not anonymous." To all of you who give generously, thank you, you are appreciated and to God you are certainly not anonymous.

The second and third people in this chapter are Priscilla and Aquila. He says, Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. They worked and they travelled with Paul. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet, also the church that meets at their house. This husband and wife team have a beautiful, powerful ministry. Four of the six times these two are mentioned they are mentioned together but four of the six times the apostle Paul mentions Priscilla first, which is extremely significant. Priscilla is the leader of their church, and Aquila is right there by her side. There is an anointing on her that it is obvious as people say her name first. This does not discredit Aquila it gives her the credit she is due. Her work and her



are not anonymous or taken for granted. We too thank our home group leaders who minister and care for those within them, and for those who do it as a couple. I also want to thank our women who minister in many powerful ways within our church, we appreciate your obedience, your courage and your giftedness.

Epenetus, is next on the list and was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Now Epenetus name means worthy of praise. Paul says, "*Epenetus was the first person that I led to faith in Jesus Christ.*" He was there from the beginning. We are about to celebrate our 40th

**40<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY**

Anniversary, if you are an Epenetus in this church, thank you. Thank you that you believed in this Church when there was nothing here, when there was so little. It was rough at times at the Centre we would have kids running all over the place. For years we had to setup and pack up. Thank you that you were among the first and thank you if you are still here, you have remained faithful through all the ups and downs.

For the fifth all Paul says is, "*Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you*" and that's all we know, she is a hard worker but she is recognized. In every church there are just hard workers and Paul is saying here, "You are not anonymous." If you're a Mary or a hard worker, thank you. We thank God for all our hard workers that serve so quietly, often behind the scenes and yet so faithfully. Number eight is Ampliatus, Paul's dear friend in the Lord. Verse 8 says, "*Dear friend,*" it doesn't even say he does anything in particular. It is speculated this guy was physically disadvantaged and so perhaps couldn't do any work but by including him, Paul is saying he is still our dear friend, he is still an amazing encouragement to the body just by being here. He is not anonymous and he doesn't have to 'do' anything except 'be' a dear friend. Sometimes you may think, "I can't do this, I can't do that, I'm not of any value. I'm anonymous. God doesn't care, I'm getting too old and I just can't help how I would like to" don't worry, enjoy being with us you are a part of our family and you encourage us just by being here. Thank you for making the effort to come week after week!!

All of the people listed here are named and noted and fulfill a service, a ministry and are not anonymous, they are noted by Paul and commended to the other believers. We have not got time to go through them all here today. Can I encourage you to do some homework at home and find out more about some of the others, it's fascinating!! Their names say so much about who they are and what they do. We would love to name all of you, members of our family who why I believe Paul ends this chapter with, "Greet these people with a holy kiss." He is not saying this so as we can just kiss everybody. He is saying, "Let's not take these people for granted. Let's realize that everybody has a place in the body. Everybody is doing something, and they are not anonymous. They matter. They are making a difference."<sup>2</sup> We want to say thank you. Actually that is why we are having our Thank you lunch next Sunday at Moores to thank you all. I hope you can come along.



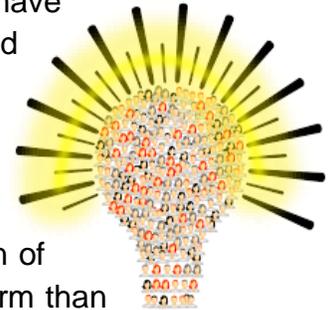
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/anonymous-week-4-rob-ketterling-sermon-on-church-body-of-christ-189605?page=4>

## 2/ Sticks and Stones



Names give us an identity. I was adopted and I grew up thinking my birth mother would not have named me. When I received my birth certificate many years later, in my 30's, I saw for the first time the name she called me. It was weird to think that name on that paper was me, and was, who I was to her. Although it was a different name, I was pleased that at least she had known me as someone and not just a baby or a number. Prisoners are given numbers, and often say this numbering is one of the most demoralizing and isolating experiences of being in prison. In the musical *Les Miserables* we see the prisoner 24601 always fighting for his identity, to have his name recognized as Jean Valjean. In the New Testament many of the people who are described as possessing an evil Spirit, are not named. We see in Mark 5:9,10 in fact they are numbered. Jesus asks one of these men, 'What is your name? He replies, "Legion, my name is number 6,000."

But just as not having a name can hurt, so can being called names. Apparently, there is a redhead support group because of all the names redheads get called. I have certainly been called a few in my time. One of my childhood nick names, and there were many, was light bulb because I used to go really red if I got embarrassed and I'd light up like a light bulb. Thankfully, I grew out of that!! Most of the names were fun and I didn't mind but there was one name I was called which I still can't say today!! The old wife's tale we used to try and say through gritted teeth is I hope now obsolete, because the psychological pain of verbal abuse and name calling is known to cause the same, if not more, harm than the physical sticks and stones. I am sure most of you here can think of a nick name you didn't like, or a label you were given, such as hopeless, fat, no-hoper, stupid or menace. So often these names can become self-fulfilling. Often, when we are in pain or feeling trapped we can feel anonymous, or feel just like a number, like we don't really count, like we are a nobody. Jesus set free from bondage the man who was just a number, I wish we had been told his name. If you still have wounds from names you were called or from circumstances, such as loser, unwanted, accident, abandoned, forgotten, idiot, mistake, sleaze, failure. Jesus can and will set you free from those names that have grabbed you in life. You are none of those names. Do not let them hold you anymore. At the end of the service, if you would like prayer to be set free from a name that has grabbed hold of you someone will be available to pray with you. The name of Jesus is powerful and can break the name that has wrongfully attached itself to you. When we know Jesus we are given new names.



## 3/ Terms of Endearment



Many of us have pet names for one another. Our Amy was called Chook by Dave and Possum by me. God has beautiful names he calls us by. Isaiah 43:1 says, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine." That's the God we serve. He said,

