

**Meditation:** “What’s in a name?”

Names are powerful things. They tell us who we are. A very few of you may know that my first name is Charles. It is derived from Charlemagne, a strong leader, who through military conquest managed to unite much of Europe into a single empire. The name most of you know me by is Mark. It is derived from the name Mars, who was the Roman god of war. My last name, Perry, is an anglicized version of Poirier, so I understand. We were Normans who conquered England almost a thousand years ago. The Normans were Norsemen, Scandinavians, who conquered part of what is now France – Normandy, and then they became very French. The family name was likely something like Per – which, in Nordic language is ‘stone’ or ‘rock’. My roots go through England, France, and into Scandinavia, and I am named after a skilled warrior, the Roman god of war, and rock.

As powerful as the names our parents give us are, we have other names too. Sometimes they hold more power over us than the names our parents give us. In high school, my father’s name was Beaky. You see, he was a skinny kid with a large protruding nose. When I was in university, my Spanish professor, Pastor Valle-Garay, told us that he and all his friends, and enemies too, had nicknames. He said that it was common practice when he was growing up in Nicaragua to look at a person and pick on an unusual physical feature, like my father’s large nose, and turn that into the nickname for that person. Pastor had a large head on top of a small body, and so his nickname was Melon Head. He said that to this day they still use their nicknames. He walked into the office of a friend who was an important executive, and asked to see him. The secretary asked if Pastor had an appointment, and when he said he didn’t, she told him he could not see the executive. “Tell him Melon head is here to see him,” Pastor told her. She called her boss and relayed the message. The executive had the door to his own office open before the secretary had her phone hung up. Names are powerful things.

Perhaps the most powerful names, are the names that we call ourselves. "Stupid". "Fat". "No-Good". "Lazy". "Ugly". We play them over and over again in our heads until they destroy us. Sometimes they come from others who told us that is who or what we were, and we internalized it. Sometimes they come from us. Either way, they break our spirit and destroy our lives.

The Israelites had that problem. They had been taken into captivity into Babylon, Iraq. Their homeland, Israel, had been plundered. Jerusalem had been ransacked. The temple, the center of their faith, the center of their identity, had been toppled. After generations, they were allowed to return home to a land that had been pillaged. The vineyards had been uprooted. The olive groves had grown wild. Towns and villages had been left vacant and had decayed. Their once prosperous land had become barren and desolate.

Okay, so I confess, I tinkered a little with the text. The KJV indeed says, "but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah;" but it doesn't say "You shall no more be termed Azubah, and your land shall no more be termed Shemamah." What it actually says is "You shall no more be termed forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed desolate. I put the Hebrew names, names that were in the footnotes, in to the text as we read it. I did it to make a point. First, we don't understand Hebrew names. Who knew that Azubah meant 'forsaken', or that Shemamah meant 'desolate'? Who knew that Hephzibah meant 'my delight is in her', or that Beulah meant 'married'? The bigger point I was trying to make is that names have meaning. Our names mean something. My wife, Barbara....her name is derived from Barbarian, which means stranger. How many know her well?

Back to the Israelites, at least that first group to return to the land of their ancestors. Like the land, they called themselves Shemamah – Desolate. They believed that their ancestors had been taken into captivity as punishment. They were being punished by God for not being faithful. And now they returned home to a barren and desolate land. The temple was gone. There was no place to worship God. There was no place for God to live amongst them. They were a people who felt forsaken by their God, and so they called themselves Abuzah - Forsaken.

They believed they were Desolate and Forsaken people. Those were the names they called themselves. Those were the names playing over and over again in their heads. Those were the names that were destroying, not only their spirits, but were actually becoming self-fulfilling prophecies, just as the names we call ourselves can become self-fulfilling prophecies. If we say we are fat, we see ourselves as fat, no matter what our weight. If we say we are liar, we see ourselves as liar, no matter what we say or do.

It was to these people, 'Desolate' and 'Forsaken,' that God spoke through the prophet Isaiah. You shall no more be termed 'Forsaken,' and you land shall no more be termed 'Desolate;' but you shall be called 'My Delight Is in Her,' and your land 'Married.' God was saying that the Israelites were not forsaken people, but chosen people, chosen by God. God, through the prophet Isaiah, said to the Israelites, "as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

The question I have is, when is the last time that, of all the names you call yourself, you called yourself God's delight? Have you ever called yourself God's delight? Why not, because you are?!? You are not Godforsaken, but chosen by God. You are not anything other than God's delight, and, after the last twenty-two months, I can understand how you may not feel like it. After the last twenty-two months I can understand how you may feel like you are Azubah - forsaken, or Shemamah – desolate, but I tell you, you are God's delight.

The next time you start to call yourself a name, any name other than God's delight, I want you to stop yourself, and remind yourself that you are God's delight. In fact, I invite you to write 'God's delight' on a piece of paper and tape it to the mirror, where you will see it every day. Tell yourself your new name every morning when you wake up. Whatever it takes, take those names you call yourself now and get rid of them, and replace them with your new name, God's delight.