

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

August 19, 2018

WHAT'S IN A "NAME"? EVERYTHING! THANK YOU, LORD!

Psalm 33

What's in a "Name"? I will give you a name and as you are comfortable call out who comes to mind.

If I say "Michael", you say, "Jordan". If I say, "Michael", you say "Jackson". If I say "Michael", you say "Phelps". What's in a name? Well, people...titles...the King of Pop...

Let's try this again. If I say, "Tiger", you think...ohhh, let's give the animal its due! ☺ Now, if I say "Tiger" you think, "Woods". And if I say "Tiger" you might still think "Woods". Tiger in his glory; Tiger in his shame.

What's in a "name"? Everything! **Titles and reputation.** God dedicates two commandments to names: *"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God."* *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."* (titles and reputations). A name is precious, meaningful--carrying a message! So the name of God!

"God" is a rather generic name. Why isn't God's name "Ralph" or "Nathan" or "Aaron"? A better question: why is God's name the "LORD"? The New International Version (NIV) of the bible highlights God's special name for us with all capital letters! Let us read our text, Psalm 33, responsively off the screens. As we do so, ponder how this psalm is a lesson on the blessings of our God, the "LORD", from whom we receive the blessings of life!

Last week, Pastor Pete introduced Martin Luther's approach to praying through the Scriptures. Luther engaged God's Word with four strands of thought woven together into a braid that this world cannot break. *"What is God teaching me?"* is the green strand for spiritual growth in the Word--INSTRUCTION. *"For what am I grateful?"* is the yellow strand for the glory of heaven. I am blessed with heaven as a forgiven child of God and my life is full of blessing--THANKSGIVING. *"What do I regret?"* is the red strand for Jesus' blood covering my sins even as I contemplate them in the light of his Word and confess them to my God--CONFESSION. *"For what should I ask?"* is the blue strand--the hope of the Christian anticipating God's blessings even as we ask--PRAYER.

We practice Luther's approach as we dissect this psalm!

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**BLESSING #1 of 3 this morning: the actual name of the LORD!** The NIV, again, acknowledges the uniqueness of God's name with all CAPS wherever it occurs in the Old Testament. 13 times "the LORD" appears in Psalm 33!

Why isn't God's name, "Ralph"? Well, the explanation for "Ralph" would not be very significant—"God's grandpa was Ralph, so God is Ralph." That wouldn't work since God is eternal—no beginning and no ending—so he didn't have, nor did he need, a grandpa. No, the "LORD" fits very well! LORD is actually a verb that God applied to himself as his name: "I AM".

Only the true God can say, "I AM". You and I cannot say that! The best we can say is, "I am because HE is." The Apostle Paul said it succinctly, "*God himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.*" We ARE because God IS.

**WHAT IS GOD TEACHING ME** by his name, the LORD? The Almighty God is the ONE constant in my life—his love, his strength, his faithfulness will never fail. He is the holy, the perfect God of justice and of love. He cannot BE evil, nor does he put UP with evil. As the "I AM", he never changes. He cannot sin. He does not disappoint. He is ONLY blessing to his people.

**FOR WHAT, then, AM I GRATEFUL** as I ponder the LORD? Because the great "I AM" never changes, his PROMISES never change. God is as good as his word. Period. That is *unique* in the human experience. Beloved parents and mentors leave us by death. Trusted friends fail us at times even when they don't mean to. God? He never does.

**WHAT DO I REGRET** as I ponder God's name, the LORD? "Forgive me, LORD! I forget that you are constant and unailing in your love. Forgive me for liking you when my life is rosy but questioning you when struggles come. Forgive me for forgetting that struggles are not a product of your "not liking me" but are a result of the sinfulness of mankind—sin WE chose. Sin has consequences, this we know. Forgive me when I forget how you solved that issue with Blessing #2—it's coming!"

**FOR WHAT SHOULD I ASK** in light of the name of the LORD? "Heavenly Father, daily remind me that you are my friend because of Jesus, Blessing #2! Remind me that your name of constant holiness and justice and love does NOT need to be scary for me, but only blessing!"

**APPLICATION** Judas Iscariot forgot the name of his God! Judas betrayed Jesus to his death for 30 pieces of silver! Satan manipulated Judas to believe that the LORD was no longer for him! "The I AM God of constant love is for everyone except Judas—my sin is too great." Judas took his eyes off the Live-in-the-Flesh I AM, Jesus Christ—Blessing #2.

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**BLESSING #2 of 3 this morning: the JOY of My Salvation** because of the LORD, my God! Let's revisit verses 1-5.

**T/F:** God will look away and allow people who do wrong to enter heaven.

Answer? FALSE. He will NOT look away when the people of the earth are lined up for judgment on the last day. His holy eye will examine us thoroughly for sin, and when he sees it he will cast us from his presence forever. So where is the JOY of my salvation?

There WAS a day when the Father looked away because of our sin. Do you remember when? That's right! When his Son was hanging on the cross, dying for the sin of the world! ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** Jesus cried. The Father in heaven looked away...he removed his blessing from his Son...and in the true sense of the statement "he gave him hell," the hell we deserve...that he could rightly say to us, ***"As far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed your sins from you. Come into the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."***

**WHAT IS GOD TEACHING ME?** "I have joy that no one can take away!" I AM has forgiven my sin in Jesus! He has declared me holy and upright and true! He did not look away from my sin—he faced it and sent his Son!"

**FOR WHAT AM I GRATEFUL** as I ponder my righteousness from the LORD? "Dear God, thank you for making me holy in Jesus! I do not need to be afraid of you and your words. I am free from sin through forgiveness! My every day can be a day of praising you! Maybe I can't sing or play the harp, but I can love my spouse and my children and my co-workers for YOU...and I can especially love people who don't know your forgiveness!

**WHAT DO I REGRET** as I ponder my righteousness from God? There are days when I forget that Jesus said, "It is FINISHED!" I despair in my sin and my light for Jesus in this world dims. Or, we forget what he said and what it means and how big a deal it IS—and the light of our witness dims in his world as we embrace sin's pleasure! There is no joy as guilt hits and Satan tempts, "Ah, we have another Judas! Sinning outside of the circle of God's love?"

**FOR WHAT SHOULD I ASK** as I ponder my righteousness from God? "Heavenly Father, instill in me the habit of daily being in your Word. I want to hear your voice. I want to daily remember my standing before you in Jesus, my Savior. I do not fear to see your face for 'It is finished!' I will NOT be seduced by life's pleasures for "It is finished!" I will use creation to your glory!

**APPLICATION** True story. Martin was a young, German farmer. Married to Clara, he had once written twitter-pated letters to his bride-to-be. She knew she was cherished! Then the days came when she would see him across the yard with his foot up on the fence rail, quiet and staring off into the distance, thinking. He didn't say much to her anymore. She sensed he wasn't twitter-pated; she wondered if he still loved her.

Does OUR love for our Father in heaven ever grow cold? Do we forget that we once had a joy in his forgiveness that was new and exciting?! Does Jesus' love for us fail to fuel a heartfelt and obvious love for him? There is an old saying, "If you don't feel very close to God, guess who moved?" The LORD doesn't change—HE doesn't move—he never ceases to love. ***"Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous!"***

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**BLESSING #3 of 3 this morning:** PEACE from the Creator is our joy of the day! Let's highlight verses 6-22.

Consider this philosophical question: ***Is peace the absence of evil or the presence of God?***

Are you familiar with the Apostle Paul and his thorn in the flesh? Paul writes of it in 2 Corinthians: ***“Because of these surpassingly great revelations, to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But the Lord said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.’”***

Paul’s thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, was permitted into his life to keep him humble as Paul did God’s amazing work having seen heaven itself! Paul asked for the thorn to be removed—Satan was tormenting him—the Lord said, “No. My grace is sufficient.”

***Is peace in life the absence of evil or the presence of God?***

***“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made...he gathers the seas into jars...he commanded and the creation stood firm...The LORD foils the plans of the nations...his plans stand firm...from heaven the LORD looks down and sees...he considers everything we do...no king, no warrior, no horse saves...but the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him...he is our help and shield...may your unfailing love be with us even as we put our hope in you.”***

**WHAT IS GOD TEACHING ME?** Peace will always be the **presence** of God, for evil will dog us to the very gates of heaven.

Think of Elisha the prophet and his servant surrounded by the army of Damascus. Elisha’s heart was at peace! Why? ***“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet said. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*** And the LORD opened the servant’s eyes to see the angel army of God!

Think of Goliath who taunted the shepherd boy, David, ***“I will give your flesh to the birds and wild animals.”*** David’s reply? ***“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the Name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel!”*** You know the rest of the story!

Remember the floodwaters rising to cover the mountains to a depth of 20+ feet? The LORD had shut Noah into the ark!

**FOR WHAT AM I GRATEFUL** as I ponder the LORD my God? “Whatever thorn or evil, present or ahead, on the road of life, I need not be afraid. The LORD will be with me wherever life leads. His presence is greater than any evil of world or Satan!”

**WHAT DO I REGRET** as I ponder the presence of the LORD my God? “LORD, forgive me for those days when I am so distracted by busyness that I fail to remember your presence or spend time with you in prayer and in study. When I am not hearing your voice, I forget your presence, your plan, your purpose in all things to bring me safely home to you. Illness becomes a flood threatening to overwhelm; evil in the world becomes ominous making my heart afraid; and the words of people can threaten my peace and my joy!

**FOR WHAT SHOULD I ASK** as I ponder the presence of my God? “Father, help me to know you better, to know better the power of your Name! Your name is not Ralph—which is good. Nor is it Michael—which is OK. Nor is it Tiger—all good! You ARE Father, Son and Holy Spirit—names that help me know you and your love. You are the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah, the beginning and end of our salvation. All good! But best of all you are the “I AM”—forever present! Forever present with your love, with your justice, with your faithfulness. Never changing! I like that trait in you! I LIKE your Name! It brings me peace and joy. Thank you, LORD!” Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Nate Strobel  
414-422-0320, ext. 293  
nstrobel@stpaulmuskego.org