

Names matter. They play an important role in what Mark, the author of this passage, is trying to communicate to us. So my name is Stephen, pronounced like Steven. I didn't really think names mattered very much growing up. It wasn't until college that I found some importance in my name. This was because, around that time, there was a phenomenon happening in the National Basketball Association. This young man by the name of Wardell, who was also in college, began to light up the scoreboard. He also became a sort of local phenomenon around here.

At first, it wasn't something that I put together. But when I started to do mobile orders for restaurants and would go to pick up my order for Stephen, they would look back at their counter and say, "Sorry, we don't have your order." I could see back at the order counter and see Stephen on the bag pretty clearly. Then they would go, turn around and look again and say, "Sorry, we don't have that." And I would point at it and say, "That's for me, Stephen." But the bag had Stephen on it. They thought I was looking for an order for "Steffen."

I know this is a minor inconvenience, but I think in those interactions, I began to learn that names are part of our identity. They shape how people view us. And by the way, for those of you who don't know who I was talking about just a minute ago, Wardell is Wardell Stephan (pronounced Steffen) Curry!

The point is names are part of our identity. I didn't realize this. Then recently, I also began to learn that the Bible uses names as a part of the way they tell stories. It's actually a part of the way throughout the biblical narrative that authors use names to communicate something to us. I want to say before I start to give you some examples of this, I'm not saying that their names are just figurative. What I'm saying is the author is telling us something both by their name as well as telling us their name. There's a meaning behind the characters' names in many places.

So, for example, the first person I want to point out is Adam. If you know the first story, it's about a being named Adam, who was created from the dirt. The

word Adam literally means humanity or human. So the first human was named human, and he was created, if you read in Hebrew, out of the adama or the dust. So literally, we're called "dirt people."

If you read through Genesis 1, you'll notice every time it says "the human," it's the same word as when it's given that first name, Adam. I do think that was his name, but I also think it's communicating something more. If you go to his wife, Eve, her name is Life or Mother of the Living, which is appropriate because she's the mother of all the living.

If you go to the next story, the name Cain is explained in the text, but the other name, Abel, isn't really explained in the text. If you look at the Hebrew, that word Abel actually is the Hebrew word Hebel, which, if you're familiar with the book of Ecclesiastes, you may recognize as the word that is translated as meaningless. It might not be the best translation there, but it means kind of like vapor or smoke. So the poor guy never really stood a chance, but this is how the whole story goes all the way throughout the Bible. If you go to the Book of Ruth, for example, we know Mahlon and Kilion are best known for leaving Orpah and Ruth as widows. Mahlon's name means the "sickly one," and Kilion is the play on the word for dying. So their name was literally given as that.

The name Joshua means God will save us, which is the same name as Jesus, by the way. The Book of Hosea is full of examples. His children are all named things through which God is communicating things to the people of Israel. So names are important all throughout the biblical text.

This brings us to the Gospel of Mark, which is what we're studying right now. In Mark, we don't see a whole bunch of names. We see the disciples, we see Jesus, and that is the cast of characters whose names we have. When Jesus goes around healing people, we usually say he healed the Syrophenician woman's daughter or the blind man, or the demoniac. That's what they're called, and that's how we know them. We don't actually know their name.

This brings us to an interesting point here because, in this story in Mark 10, I think we're told his name for a specific reason.

"Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Mark 10:46-47

It's interesting that even in the text, it has in parentheses, "which means son of Timaeus," so it tells you his name and then tells you what the name means. But what's interesting is that in our English translations, it doesn't translate the second part; it just says son of (bar means son of), but what does Timaeus mean, and why does Mark feel the need to tell us that he was the son of Timaeus? Why is that important here? He said it twice. Why is that necessary? If you read through the context, it's not really given. As you continue to look, there are no clues anywhere else. So it's an odd thing that this is just left untranslated. Why does Mark tell us his name?

Well, I went to my STEP Bible, which tells me the translations of the word. This is very important that the word Timaeus means precious or value, which means that we are being specifically told the name of this man is the son of value or the precious son.

I think that is important because Mark is giving him an identity in the text. He is telling us something about this blind man that we are running into. He tells us this because this is the culmination of Mark's story up to this point. If you read the first eight chapters of Mark, you'll see that Jesus is going around doing signs and wonders. He's calming storms. He's healing people. He's driving out demons. He is showing his authority over everything, and Mark is trying to show us that Jesus is the Son of God through his actions, through the words and actions of Jesus Christ. That's what we are seeing.

Then we get to Mark 8, and we see this thing where the author just takes a second to say, "Are you getting it yet? Do you understand what's going on yet?" So he tells us three stories. He tells us stories about the Pharisees, the disciples, and a story of a blind man. As I said, Jesus has been doing all these signs and wonders, and then the Pharisees come up to Jesus and say,

"Hey, we need a sign to show us that you are the Son of God."

Really? Are you blind? What has he been doing in the last three chapters? He just fed 5,000 people out of nothing. Why do you need another sign? It's clear who this guy is. Jesus goes to the disciples and says not to be like the Pharisees. But a few seconds later, the disciples realize that they didn't bring any bread, and they worry about how they are going to eat. Are you kidding? He just fed 5,000 people out of nothing. Are you blind?

Then we see the story of a blind man. It's an interesting story because it takes two attempts. The first time Jesus begins the process, he kind of sees but doesn't really, and Jesus heals him again. Then he fully sees, which I think is mirrored by the next story where Peter says, "You are the Christ." Then a few sentences later, Jesus calls him Satan because Peter doesn't really get it. And then, throughout the rest of the narrative, throughout the next few chapters, we see the disciples jockeying for position.

As we heard last week, two of the disciples came up to Jesus, and Jesus said, "What do you want from me?" And they said they wanted power and prestige. They wanted to be elevated in the kingdom of God. I can almost hear Jesus thinking, "You guys still don't get it."

Then we come to this blind man. We come to blind Bartimaeus. He's sitting by the road between Jericho and Jerusalem. This road is probably a very popular place at this time. As we know, Jesus is going to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, where he will be killed, so many people are probably traveling this road.

Bartimaeus is probably planted here so he can beg and he can get his daily needs met because he's blind. He can't work. He can't function in the community the way he needs to. He needs to go bother people on a daily basis in order for him to get what he needs just to survive. And then he hears Jesus walking by, and he yells, "Jesus, please save me. Please deliver me from this blindness." And the crowd responds and says, "No, you're not to come near Jesus. You're not worth it." The text even says, "*Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 48).*" The people around Jesus, the ones who are supposed to be following the true God, are saying to that poor man that he didn't deserve this.

Undeterred, Bartimaeus cries out even more. I can imagine that growing up, Bartimaeus heard stories from the Hebrew scriptures. He grew up being baptized in the Hebrew scriptures, being told these stories every day where they believe that one day the Son of David would come and put an end to evil, that one day there would be someone who would make things like blindness go away. Bartimaeus has probably heard these stories and wished, "I just hope that guy comes during my lifetime so that I could see, so I don't have to live like this anymore."

On a daily basis, he begins to hear these stories of this man going around Galilee, healing people, and doing miraculous things, and Bartimaeus probably put these two things together. How do we know this? Well, Bartimaeus is the first person in the entire book of Mark to call him the Son of David. He identifies Jesus for who he is. Bartimaeus gets it, and he sees who Jesus is. And isn't that the irony of this whole story?

Bartimaeus sees who Jesus is, where all the people around him don't seem to get it. They're saying he didn't deserve this, but Bartimaeus knows who Jesus is, so he will not be turned away. "Please show me mercy, God." And Jesus stops. I'm sure the people around him are confused. We have to get to Passover to celebrate, Jesus; we can't stop for every beggar along the way.

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. vv. 49-50

And they do. They find that poor beggar. He leaps up to his feet and runs to Jesus.

What a contrast to the rich young ruler we saw just a few passages ago. "*What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked him*" (51a). I'm sure this struck the disciples because, as we learned last week when the disciples came up to Jesus, they were asked that very same question, the very same phrase in the Greek—what do you want from me? They wanted privilege; they wanted power; they wanted esteem. And Bartimaeus, the precious son, what does he want? His request is simple. "*The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see'*" (51b). "Please save me from this life I'm stuck in. I have no other hope." And what he hears in response to this is, "*Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along*

the road" (v. 52). How beautiful a sound that must have been to him.

So he leaps up and follows Jesus, which is what we hoped the rich young ruler in the previous passage would've done. It's what everybody should have done. The story is so beautiful, and it speaks to us on many levels here. There are so many things it's saying. It's such a great story, but for today, I want to point out how it speaks to us on a corporate level as a community of people; and how it speaks to us on an individual level.

What I think is important to notice is Bartimaeus' blindness has ultimately become his identity. Every time I hear a sermon on Bartimaeus, he is blind Bartimaeus. He's not just Bartimaeus. His identity is wrapped up in his blindness. That's what he's known for, and I imagine in his day, that's what he was known for as well. He's that blind guy over there.

That's the truth that we can all, in some ways, identify with. We may not be blind, though some of us may be, but there's something that we all carry. There's something that we're all bringing along as we meet as a community of believers. There's been hurt; there's been pain; there's been abuse; there's neglect, abandonment, cancer, diabetes, a degenerative illness, whatever it may be. We're all bringing something here.

Then we realize that we're a community of people who are hurting. We're a community of people who are blind if you will. And then we go into the world, and we see the world's a messed up place. We watch the news, and you can see this on a consistent basis. The world is just horrible in so many ways. So as a community of hurt people, as a community of broken people, how do we approach this broken world? What do we begin to do? How do we begin to transition from being where we are to where God wants us to be?

It's hard because we feel broken; we feel defeated. We look at the world, and we wonder how we can change this. Everything that is suggested to us by our society doesn't seem to work, and so what do we do?

That's the beauty of the story of the Bible because many people have rightly noted that the Old Testament is a consistent message on how messed up the world is. If you read the Old Testament, it seems horrible sometimes, and that's kind of the point. The point is that

humanity, when left to itself, and even when God comes and speaks to them, fails constantly. It is just a consistent cycle over and over again. Humanity is failing; we can't do it on our own.

Then in Ephesians, we are told that Christ came and died. He delivered us and saved us for a purpose. That purpose is to be a community that does good in the world, that does good works, so we will bring Christ's light to the earth. The question that I often get is, "Give me some practical examples." How do we do this? How can we be a light? How can we be different?

A good place to go to is Jeremiah 29. The Israelite people were in exile in Babylon. They're steeped in a culture that is different from the way things should be. The Babylonian culture was wicked. It was full of all kinds of evil. And these people were dragged from their homeland and forced to live in a land that was not their own. And God had a message for them. They weren't sure how to live. God said to them:

"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." Jeremiah 29:5-7

Or, to put it another way, live in the city God has put you in. Make it just like the Garden of Eden. Eat the fruit of the work that you do. Build families. Welcome people in. Love others. Seek the best for your city. Look out for the welfare of the city because it's not just the city that will benefit; you, too, will benefit from the city doing well. Don't buy into the old way of doing things. Create a new community here. And that's what we're trying to do. We are trying to counter form against the way of the world.

That's a consistent word we've been hearing lately. We're trying to develop an alternate community. So if you're feeling the weight of being stuck in the world, if you feel hopeless, we are given a specific example of how to live in the prophet Jeremiah's words. So I would encourage you to start there. Begin to plant gardens. Welcome people in, invite people into your home and into your life, even if it's a little uncomfortable, even if you're a little messy because we all are. Christ will work through what you do in those small

places. Our mini-gardens that we create point to the eternal garden, that future hope that we have. We're creating here so we can give people hope for what's to come.

Before I leave this topic, I want to address some push-back that may be on your mind. I've heard it from other people, and so I want to bring it to the forefront and talk about it. Some people say this approach isn't active enough. We're not engaged in the present culture enough. Or we need to be actively fighting in our culture. We need to be campaigning against the evil. I have three responses.

First of all, counter-forming, developing a new community, is actively fighting. This is what Jesus did when he came to earth, and so is what we are called to do here as well. We're creating an alternative to the world. The world has failed at every step along the way, so we shouldn't look to the world for advice.

Secondly, the gospel hasn't been spread by the extension of Christianity in the culture, but it's by creating a counterculture, an alternative community built on the blood of the faithful followers of Christ. The Christian tradition, both presently and throughout church history, has only spread through the world through the blood of the faithful people to Christ. It has not done well when it has become too closely tied to the state. Every low point in Christian history is when the church came too closely tied to the state. So again, from church history, I would say let's create a counterculture.

And third, if this is how God commanded us to live or commanded his people to live in Jeremiah, I think the question is not, is this working the way I want it to? Is it working fast enough right now? The question is, do you trust that God knows better than you? Do you trust his way?

So what we need to do again is create a new culture, create a new community where we are different, where we are shaped by a different rule of life. We're called to a cruciform life. It's life shaped and marked by the cross of Christ, which is marked by faithful endurance through hard times, not by elevating ourselves, not by finding high places in our culture, but by a cruciform life, a life centered around the cross of Christ.

This leads me to the individual question, the question for each of us that's presented both here in the text and in the past text. It was toward Bartimaeus the first

time, but I also think this is a question that should be asked of us. What do you want from Christ?

Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" And I think the question is for you here as well. What do you want him to do for you? What do you want from Christ? He confronts us with that question and asks that question to each person. Or, to put it another way, I think the author intends for it to be heard. Where do you find your identity? Where are you going to find your value? Do you want to assign yourself a name, or do you want your name to be found in Christ? Where is your identity?

As you read the gospels, you see the disciples prior to the death of Christ. You see this very clearly in John 11. Philip, on this same journey that we're talking about right now, says, "Let's go die with Christ." Because what they think they're going to do is spark a revolution against Rome. They think that's why Jesus came here. They thought what needed to change was their government, and Jesus came and said, "No, this isn't the way." He humbled himself, even to the point of death on a cross. Jesus didn't think a new Caesar was needed. He brought a new kingdom instead.

What Christ does is he invites us into a new way of thinking. It's not one where we're fighting against the culture as individuals. It's a life that is cruciform, that is built on the cross. Christ believed his enemy wasn't the physical world. It wasn't the people who were killing him. Paul even says it this way. He says,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12

You're not fighting the person in front of you who does wrong. You're not fighting that person who hurt you, your boss who's talked bad about you, your friend who has betrayed your trust, or your spouse, who you can never feel the same way about again. It's not about that. We're fighting against the evil in this world. Some people get wrapped up in it, but we have to remember that what we're fighting against, what Christ fought against, was not people but against the evil that works behind the scenes.

So what's not going to solve this problem for us as individuals in our day-to-day life is doing evil back to people. I think this is why Christ says to turn the other cheek. I think this is why Christ says to go the extra mile when someone's taking advantage of you because we are not fighting against them as an individual; we're fighting against evil. So if we respond to evil by doing more evil, we're just compounding the problem.

Look at what Christ did when he was faced with evil against himself. He went to the cross. He was faithful, and he did what was right all the way up till the end. And I think that is what we are called to as well. That's the identity; that's who we are supposed to be known as—believers, Christ followers.

Are we going to find our identity in the way the world gives us identity or in something that we want on our own or us winning our own battles? Or are we going to find our identity in the same place Bartimaeus did as the son of great value, as the precious sons and daughters of God? Bartimaeus saw a new way to live.

In John 17:3, we're told, "*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*" The Christian life is about knowing Christ, following him, and walking in his footsteps. It changes us as individuals. It works on our hearts so that in our interactions, we are more like him on a day-to-day basis.

So what I want us to do, what I want us to reflect on, is where are we finding our identity? Are we trying to hold onto the things that the world gives us? Are we trying to grasp tightly the title, the prestige, the money, and the power that we're given in this world? Or are we going to humbly submit to the identity that Christ has given us? Are we going to make our lives about knowing who he is and how he's working in this world?

Take these moments to reflect. Will you be like the disciples and come to Christ for what you can get from him? Or will you have faith and trust like Bartimaeus? I pray that God would give us the sight and the name of that blind beggar Bartimaeus—precious son and daughter of God.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2023 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1469-29FC