

What's in a Name?

Luke 2:21

Introduction

“What's in a name?

That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell so sweet.” – Juliet (*Romeo & Juliet II, 2*)

As far as Juliet was concerned, a name was just a label. She would love Romeo no matter what his name was. It didn't matter to her that she was a Capulet, and he was a Montague and their families had been feuding for who knows how long? At one point, she asks Romeo to deny his name and lineage for her. If not, just declare his love for her and she will deny that she is a Capulet. Is a name merely a label?

Names & Meanings

In our society, the answer would be “yes, they are just labels.” Parents choose names for their children for several reasons. They may like the sound of them. Or they pick a first and middle name that go well together. They may name their child after someone else. My brother and I both have four-letter first names and three-letter middle names to go with our twelve-letter last name. Sometimes, if a person is famous or infamous enough, they will give meaning to their name. Not too many parents name their boy Judas anymore.

Descriptive Names

Some cultures use descriptive names. Some native American tribes named their young after the first thing they saw. Some biblical names are descriptive. As a baby, Esau was red and hairy. Esau means “hairy.” His descendants were called Edomites. Edom means “red.” Gershom means “a sojourner there.” This is what Moses named his son born to him while he sojourned in Midian.

Prophetic Names

Some names tell us about the person's future. They are prophetic in that they describe what a person is going to be like. That's the kind of name Jesus is. In **Matthew 1**, the angel tells Joseph to name the Boy Jesus, *for He will save His people from their sins* (**Matthew 1:21**). Jesus in Hebrew is *Yeshuah* and means “Yahweh has saved” or “Yahweh is salvation.” Lucas Lossius (1508—1582), German Lutheran teacher and musician said: *This is the chief benefit of Christ, that is, that He frees His people, that is the church, or those who believe in Him, from sins. However, those He frees from sins, He also frees from the payment and punishment of sinners.* He is our Savior.

The Power of the Name

The name Jesus does more than just describe who He is. When Peter healed the lame beggar at the temple, he said, *“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”* (**Acts 3:6**). Whenever anyone is healed, it's in the name of Jesus. It's in His name because it's by His power. We are saved in the name of Jesus.

The Glory of the Name

And because Jesus was obedient to death on the cross, that name is now *above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11).*

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
