

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: July 9, 2017
Beverly E.C.C, Chicago, IL

“INTO THE NAME”

Acts 19:4-7

- ☑ **“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would *smell as sweet.*”**

Juliet speaks these lines in *Romeo and Juliet*. She is saying, in effect, that names have no correlation to the things they designate, hence they are meaningless.

This *might* be true of roses. But is it true of people?

- ❓ **“What’s in a name?”**

Our last name connects us to our ancestors. In some instances, it identifies our family’s ethnic heritage, geographic starting place, and life circumstances.

☑ Take *Baldwin*. It is derived from the Old German *Baldavin*, meaning ‘brave, bold friend.’ In England, it was changed to *Bealdwine*, and finally *Baldwin*.

(I was unable to dig up the meaning of *Sebby*. It is rarely encountered, and therefore quite special!)

- ❓ **“What’s in a name?”**

Our given names speak volumes about our parents’ ethnicity, family traditions, relationships, convictions, and cultural milieu. Nearly every one has intrinsic meaning.

☑ *Holly* is the name of a tree. It is that lovely evergreen shrub with glossy dark green leaves and bright red berries that we use in Christmas decorations.

☑ *Joanne* is a feminine version of *John*, which in Hebrew means, “*God is gracious.*” We meet a Joanna in the Book of Luke. She was a loyal, courageous disciple

who supported Jesus financially, and who went to his garden tomb early on Easter morning.

- ❓ **“What’s in a name?”**

Names are critically important in the sacrament of Holy Baptism. They certainly have been this morning.

★ First, there is no generic infant involved. No! We have baptized *Holly Joanne Baldwin*, a singular individual with her own name.

If there is another girl called Holly Joanne Baldwin, she carries the name differently. As she grows, this one will imbue it with her distinct identity.

★ Second, in keeping with Christ’s command in Mt 28:18-20, we have baptized Holly “**in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**”

{II Tim 3:16; Heb 4:12} This phrase is not a lifeless collection of syllables. It is “**God-breathed,**” “**alive and active,**” and **bursting with power**”!

{Is 55:11} The LORD himself has promised,

**My word that goes out from my mouth ...
... will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

- ❓ **“What’s in a name?”**

✍ When it is the name of the Living God, it has the power of love, light, and life in it.

☐ Please turn with me to Acts 19:1-7.

■ In verses 1-3 the apostle Paul arrives in the city of Ephesus. He finds some disciples and asks them, “**Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?**”

“No,” they answer. “We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

“What baptism did you receive?” Paul asks.

“John’s baptism,” they reply.

■ In verses 4-5 Paul explains that John’s baptism ⁴ “was [one] of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵ On hearing this, they [are] baptized *into* the name of the Lord Jesus.”

{Ac 3:19; 17:30; Lk 24:47} We should not look down our nose at John’s baptism “of repentance.” Scripture calls us to “Repent... and turn to God, so [our] sins may be wiped out.” God “commands all people everywhere to repent.” The Risen Christ announced that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.”

📖 Repentance is more than feeling sorry for the wrong we have done. It is confessing our sin, asking God to forgive us on the basis of his mercy, rejecting our sin, and seeking to do what is good instead.

David and Laura, you have committed yourselves to parent your children in Christian ways. Teaching and modeling repentance is part of that.

However, repentance is not enough, in and of itself. Here is why: to stop at repentance, to repent and to go no further, is to take on all the responsibility for doing right and changing ourselves. It is to rely entirely on our own resources to overcome the fallenness and brokenness in and around us.

Doing so has disastrous consequences. Either we achieve some measure of goodness, it goes to our head, and we fall prey to deadly pride and self-righteousness; or we screw up big time, give in to failure, and get eaten alive by soul-crushing guilt and shame.

Repentance is a starting point, not the finish line. It is a means, not the end.

† {II Co 5:17 ff} The real objective is reconciliation to our Creator, that we might become “a new creation.”

{I Jn 3:2} It is reconciliation to the Father, that we might become “children of God.”

{I Jn 3:2} It is reconciliation the God who “is love,” that we might love him with all our being and love our neighbors as ourselves.

{Jas 2:5} It is reconciliation to God the King, that we might “inherit the kingdom he promised.”

{Rev 1:6} It is reconciliation to God the Holy One, that we might be “priests to serve” him in holiness.

It is reconciliation to God the Reconciler, that we might be his messengers “of reconciliation.”

David and Laura, you have committed yourselves to parent your children in Christian ways. Teaching and modeling this kind of reconciliation is part of that.

■ Notice that verse 5 uses the language of relationship. The Ephesian disciples are “baptized *into the name of the Lord Jesus.*”

★ This is a description not of a procedure, but of an effect. As a result of being baptized “**in the name of the Father... Son, and Holy Spirit**” they are initiated “**into the name of the Lord Jesus.**”

{?} In Scripture “**The name of the Lord,**” “**the name of God,**” and “**the Name**” (with an uppercase “N”) function as “**summary [statements] of his nature and how he has revealed himself ... [they are] virtually synonymous with the word ‘God’ itself.**” The same is true of his personal names and more particular titles.

So, to be “**baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus**” is to be “**baptized into**” Christ himself. It is to be united with Messiah. It is to be so intimately bonded with him that our lives are wrapped up in his.

? How does this happen? It is not brought about by applying water or by reciting the correct words; it is accomplished by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

■ Verse 6: “**When Paul [places] his hands on them, the Holy Spirit [comes] on them, and they [speak] in tongues and [prophesy].**”

This is the momentous impact of baptism! It opens the door for us to enter into covenant relationship with God the Father through the reconciling ministry of the Son and the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit.

As she matures, Holly will become personally accountable. She will receive reconciliation, or not.

Nevertheless, this baptism is valid. There is a great deal to say about this, but I will limit myself to two points.

✈ First, baptism is about God. It’s not about us. This is equally true for infants and confessing believers alike.

{Jn 15:16} Baptism is a sign and seal, not that we have chosen God, but that God has chosen us. Christ Jesus speaks only what his Father tells him, and he says: “**You did not choose me ... I chose you.**”

{II Co 5:18; Heb 9:15, 12} Baptism is a sign and seal, not that we have reconciled ourselves to God, but that God has “**reconciled us to himself through**” his Son. Christ “**is the mediator of [the] new covenant,**” not us.

{Jn 3:7} Baptism is a sign and seal, not that we are regenerating ourselves, but that the Holy Spirit is regenerating us. “**Flesh gives birth to flesh, but**” it is “**the Spirit**” who “gives birth to Spirit.”

{Eph 2:8} “**For it is by grace**” that we are “**saved, through faith – and this**” faith “**is not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God.**” We cannot take credit for “our” belief and trust in the Lord. Even that is a gift!

Baptism is about God. It is not about us.

✈ Second, the sequence of baptism and the Spirit’s coming is unimportant, as is the time between them.

In today’s text, the Spirit is given *at* baptism. But sometimes the Spirit is given *before* it, as in Acts 10 {46-47}.

At other times, he is sent well after the sacrament. In Acts 8 {15-17} some believers are

baptized **“into the name,”** yet the Spirit does not come on them until some days or weeks later.

There is no statute of limitations on the effects of baptism. It has no expiration date. The Spirit does as he pleases, in whom he pleases, when he pleases.

The order of baptism and the Spirit’s coming is unimportant. So is the duration of time between them.

All the same, the sacrament is not magic. It does not automatically bear fruit, not even when the recipient is a professing adult.

Almighty God is able to do anything he wants. Still, it appears that, by and large, he prefers to accomplish his purposes by working through people.

What we do matters for Holly. Our character, conduct, and witness might be what elevate her baptism from a formal ceremony to a life-changing initiation **“into the name of the Lord Jesus.”**

It is vitally important that we follow through on the promises we have made. We won’t do it perfectly; yet with the presence of God’s Spirit in and among us, we can do it faithfully and fruitfully.

This morning we have baptized Holly Joanne Baldwin **“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”** And we hope and pray that she is also being initiated **“into the name of the Lord Jesus.”**

? **“What’s in a name?”** Everything that matters, when it is the name of the Living God.