

Shofar Piketberg - God knows - What's in a name?
29th December 2013

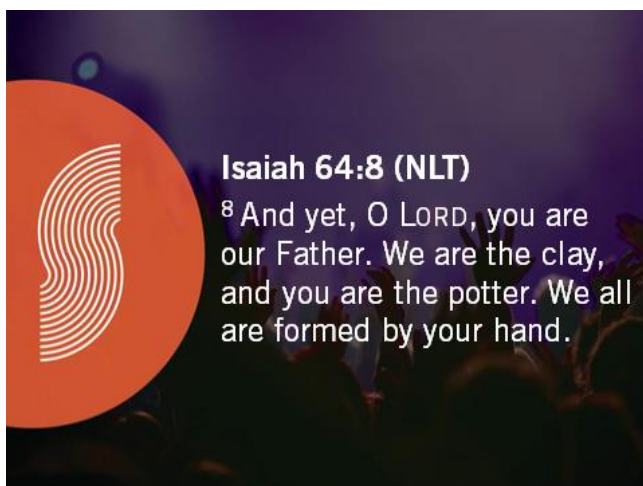
Introduction:

I have the rare (for me) privilege of speaking to you for three Sundays in a row, so, making the most of this opportunity; I plan to do a mini-series entitled "God knows". This week's instalment is called "What's in a name?"



What is the point of these three messages?

God knows everything, including the end of everything - we can therefore trust Him absolutely with our lives. His plan is perfect - wherever we diverge from His perfect will for our lives, we miss His best for us. He will make every situation count in His quest to perfect us for His glory. Does He have the right to do this? Of course He does - the creation is always subject to the Creator!



What we prideful people forget is that God is Supreme - He is our Creator, and therefore has every right to choose our destiny and role in His master plan. Our very best response in every situation is to find out what His plan is and to submit to that plan as faithfully as possible. In that way we will best please Him, fulfil the purpose for which we were created, and spend eternity with Him! We will also discover that He

has created us as a perfect fit for His purpose... This is also where we will find that elusive rest that is spoken about in Scripture. When we speak of resting in the Lord, we are speaking of where we are in His will for us at the moment.

A simple illustration of the relationship between a creator and his creation might be where I decide that I want to bake a cake. There are numerous choices to be made in the process - am I baking it for myself, or my family, or for an event, or as a gift for someone? What sort of cake?



Sponge, chocolate, fruit? Iced or not iced? If it is iced, what sort of icing? Butter or water? If it is a fruit cake and it is iced, should there be marzipan under the icing? The point is that no matter what the outcome that the choices about my cake lead to, I have the freedom of choice - as the creator of the cake - to make those choices. Is it not also true that the name of the cake describes it? Simply saying to you that I have a chocolate cake for you inspires an expectation of chocolate cake - not sponge cake or fruit cake.

It is quite clearly a whole lot more complex in the case of the Lord and us - He gave us a free will, which we very often exercise in opposition to His will.

So another illustration might be that of training a horse. The horse has an ability to choose. What we do when we train a horse is to motivate it to choose to obey us. Even a well-trained horse can sometimes choose incorrectly - for instance it might be

frightened by something making a sudden loud noise - if it has not been trained to ignore loud noises. Or something completely irrational, like this...



The point here is that as the trainer or owner of the horse, we have the freedom to train it as we choose to do - to be a cart horse, a riding horse, a war horse, etc.

Of course the reality of the Lord and us is at a completely different level - more like that of the proper relationship between a father and his children - but hopefully you get the point.

So why do we rebel against our Creator? Simply put, it is because of pride (the sin of Satan). We have too high an opinion of ourselves and our abilities.

Now, let us turn to this week's subject "What's in a name?"

How often most of us have asked one or all of these questions (especially at this time of year): "Who am I?" "What is my purpose?" "Why am I here?" "What will happen to me when I die?"

As we need to do when we want to use any tool or piece of equipment, the sensible thing to do is to ask the maker or operator for the knowledge needed to use it. If we want to undertake a task, or learn a skill or ability - we ask those who have the necessary knowledge to instruct us.

And that is what we'll do as we try to answer the questions put a moment ago.

We can learn a great deal about how the Lord works with us through the way that people are named in Scripture - there are many examples that we could study, but, because we have a limited time, I plan to restrict our examples to two:

"You are to name Him Jesus" and "You are Peter..." Let's have a look at two very well-known pieces of Scripture:

We take up the narrative where Joseph, Jesus' father, is wondering what to do about his pregnant fiancé...



This tiny extract has vast depth, but let's restrict ourselves to looking at the Name - Jesus. See how the angel tells Joseph the Name and its meaning? As a general rule, wherever in Scripture a name is given by the Lord, the name is followed by what it means - as we see in this case and the other one that we plan to look at.

We deduce from Scripture that Jesus kept a low profile until He was baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit when He was around 30 years old. So the Lord named Him before His birth - and then more than 30 years elapsed before the fulfilment of His name appeared - indeed it was only fully realised after His crucifixion and upon His ascension to heaven, after which the Holy Spirit was poured out onto the earth.

We may see from this that the Lord may be trusted to know the end from the beginning. Jesus lived His life among the people that He came to offer salvation - so He experienced life as they did, and came to understand them really well. Hebrews 5:8 tells us that He "learned obedience through what He suffered". So any one of His peers might have looked at Him and really wondered about what was happening. But God knows!

As we read this next portion, keep the two verses that we have just read in mind...



Matthew 16:13-14 (ESV):

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"
¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."



Matthew 16:15-16 (ESV):

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ*, the Son of the living God."

**Messiah* (a Hebrew term) and *Christ* (a Greek term) both mean "the anointed one."

Let's pause here for a moment - We see in verse 13 that it is Jesus (the LORD saves) who asks the question. He refers to Himself as the Son of man. Peter recognises Him as "the anointed One", the Son of the living God. This happened AFTER Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit at the occasion of His baptism by John - therefore He was anointed by the Holy Spirit. As an aside, when the anointing oil was applied as directed by the Lord in His instructions for the original Tabernacle, it was to make holy (set apart for the Lord). From this we may deduce that one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to make us holy. Now let us read on.



Matthew 16:17 (ESV):

¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.



Matthew 16:18 (ESV):

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock* I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

*The Greek words for *Peter* and *rock* sound similar

So we see that Peter was given a revelation of Jesus Christ (the LORD saves, the anointed One). Remember that at this time, the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out onto the earth and that it was only the high priest who was anointed to minister to the Lord on behalf of the Jewish people. So the title Christ was highly significant, as it meant that Jesus was considered to be High Priest. And there is a lot in that - the High Priest was the one who was the go-between between God and man at that time. It was he who would enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and it was he who was responsible to offer the sacrifice that cleansed the Jews of their sin, ie. restored their relationship with the Lord. So the title Christ was extremely significant - and of course His death on the cross, where He offered His life to take upon Himself the penalty for our sin, fulfilled the promise of His Name.

Every time that you and I utter the Name of Jesus Christ, it should remind us of the fact that He is "the anointed One who saves".

God knows...

Now let's turn to Peter. Jesus saw what His plan for Peter was, even though Peter was not yet fulfilling the reality of his new name. As we know, he did come to do so. And that is the point - God knows His plan for us, and will lead and shape us to fulfil it - if we let Him. Because He knows His plan for us does not necessarily mean that we will fulfil it - that is up to us. It is only as we submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit and allow ourselves to be formed that we will reach the goal that the Lord has in mind for us. In other words, we need to agree with the Lord in our actions.

Peter lived for about three years in close company with Jesus, seeing all that He did, and under His instruction - truly, a disciple of Jesus! But did this mean that his life was perfect? No, it did not. He was tested (as was foretold by Jesus) and failed the test. I think that one of the greatest lessons for Peter in this test was possibly that what was going on in his heart was exposed to him - he feared the opinion and reaction of people more than he feared the Lord. Quite clearly, he repented - just learning that he died crucified upside down shows us that his conviction was firmly in the Lord, as also a study of his writings will show. It appears that the tendency to fear man stayed with him to an extent - remember that Paul rebuked him for giving in to the Jewish expectation around relationship with gentiles - this after the Lord had spoken to him very clearly in a vision about it.

Every time that someone called Peter's new name, he would be reminded of the fact that Jesus had said that His Church would be built upon the revelation that He is the Christ.

God knows...

What does it say about the way that the Lord feels about us? He had such faith in Peter's character that He gave him the name Peter prophetically - even though He knew every flaw in Peter. It is the same for us - He knows us perfectly, "warts and all". But He never gives up on us.

So what were the keys for Peter actually achieving the goal that Jesus had for him?

He was in relationship with Christ (he knew Him),

He was open to being led by the Holy Spirit - read Acts for more on this,

He repented when he realised that he was in error,

He was obedient to the Lord.

These are the same keys that we need to apply in our lives if we are to achieve the Lord's goal for us.

Each of us needs to come to understand that we are not a mistake, that we have been born for this time and place, and that we do have a purpose here on the earth - but even more so, we have an eternal purpose and destiny. God knows. Trust Him to lead and guide you - He always knows best!

(No worship team on duty.)

Pray for the congregation - particularly for a revelation of the truth that Jesus Christ is who He says that He is, and that our best response is one of love for Him, and obedience to Him.
