

Your New Married Name!

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’S hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”

A major aspect of marriage, at least as God intended it, is sharing. First you share a home. In Genesis it says, ***“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.”*** A husband and wife don’t get married and continue to live at home, him with his parents and her with her parents, meeting once a week on Saturday morning for breakfast. That’s not marriage. No, they leave their families and share their own home together. They share the kids, and not just bringing them into this world, but share in caring for them, raising them, loving them, disciplining them. They share such things like money. Yes, we have two checkbooks in our family, one common one and one for my wife’s piano business, but that is because it is easier to track her expenses in her checkbook for tax purposes. Both checkbooks are in both names, and we talk it over before one or the other buys something special. It is “our” money and any purchase is for “us.”

You share happiness, you share sorrow. Remember, they are united to each other and are one flesh. The hand will notice if the foot is stomped on and hurts as it rushes to grab the foot and rub away the pain. They even share names. Traditionally the bride takes on the groom’s last name. Even if they decide to hyphenate their names, they are still sharing them. In my experience, a common cause in marriage problems is when one no longer wants to share. Problems arise.

The reason I am talking about marriages is a passage in our text: ***“...as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”*** The Lord often helps us understand our relationship with him with the picture of marriage. In that marriage, we will see, there is sharing where God takes on our sins and where we take on his holiness. And to show that this sharing takes place, God gives us a new married name. To help us understand this, God describes the restoration of his Old Testament people with the picture of a marriage.

Back in my previous congregation in Denver, we had a debate with the school library committee. Every year a number of books are donated and the committee reviews each one whether it is appropriate or not. There was one book, an autobiography of a famous sports athlete. I hesitate to say which one. Normally we don’t have problems with kids reading about sports heroes. But in this autobiography, this particular athlete boasted in how he had had affairs and sexual relations with over 10,000 women in his lifetime. After a short debate, we decided not to expose our kids to that and did not put the book in our library.

I share this because that is exactly how God’s Old Testament people behaved with God. He often uses the picture of a marriage to describe his relationship with them, and though he was always faithful to them, they continuously committed adultery against him. In Isaiah chapter one, the Lord begins by describing this fractured relationship: ***“See how the faithful city has become a harlot.”*** Often they worshipped stone and imaginary gods as God. Too often they trusted their alliances with foreign nations rather than in the Lord. Their unfaithfulness wasn’t just a weak moment one time; it was every day, every where. If their case came before a modern divorce court, the judge would have no sympathy for them. They would lose everything and receive nothing in return: no alimony, no custody of the kids, no home, not even one piece of furniture.

And they did lose everything. They will lose their married name with the Lord and receive new names, “Desolate,” “Deserted.” Even the surrounding pagan nations would notice something was wrong. The Israelites would be carried off into captivity by the Babylonians and the once great nation would be deserted. Picture if you will the downtown area of some once famous city. All the downtown buildings with their majestic, beautiful architecture, stand empty and condemned. The area is a ghost town. No nation on the earth received more from the Lord: the promises, the covenants, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, a land flowing with milk and honey, the promise of the Messiah, the parting of the Red Sea, destruction of Jericho. All of this the Lord gave them, and they committed spiritual adultery by worshipping other gods. They got what they deserved.

But the Lord’s zeal and hatred of sin is more than matched by his love even for those who hurt him every way. ***“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.”*** Listen to the Lord’s excitement and determination. Like a dam that can’t keep floodwaters at bay anymore, or like a sudden, brilliant display of fireworks in the sky, the Lord breaks out. Nothing will keep him back. Nothing will shut him up. He will not rest until he saves his unfaithful wife, Israel. He will not rest until he restores her former beauty.

My hometown of Benton Harbor was once an important city. It had a booming downtown area. Some of the buildings there were listed as some of the top ten sites to see in the state of Michigan. But the prosperity departed. Businesses closed or moved and for years it was empty, condemned, and a place for drug dealers. But some of it is coming back. In the middle of this depressing area, some business came back, nice restaurants, art shops, even an Arnold Palmer golf course and corresponding million dollar condos have come. There is life again.

God promises to bring life back to his people. ***“The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’S hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you.”*** Again the surrounding nations will watch and be filled both with confusion and awe. Confused because who could love such an unlovable people. Awe because God does love them. Where divorce courts are filled, the Lord refuses to divorce his unfaithful wife. No other god in the world will do that. Though she suffered from her sins, he will restore her and breath new life into her. He will change her name. Instead of being known as harlot or deserted or desolate, she will have the married names “Hephzibah” and “Beulah” which is Hebrew for “my delight is in her” and “married.” He forgives and takes his people back.

But why? To understand what he did for them, we must understand that the Lord is doing the very same thing for us. Our relationship with the Lord is also like a marriage, and yet, have we been more faithful? Like Israel we trust just about anything more than God. It is tax time. Maybe you are revisiting your home budget and more is going out than coming in. So you look for solutions, cutting here, redoing your budget. Of course more money would solve your problems. And that is the point. Why don’t we fall to our knees in prayer and ask God who alone blesses us for advice and help? Like wandering wives, we often don’t come home to the Lord, visit with him, listen to him. Instead we get our advice from other places, and it shows. We are no better or different than the Israelites.

Yet, the Lord that deals with us today is no different than the one who dealt with those Old Testament people. He is still filled with the same zeal. ***“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.”***

Like any other marriage, there is a sharing between the bride, us, and the Bridegroom, our Lord. One bit of sharing is still fresh in our memories, Christmas, where, as it says in Hebrews, he came to share in our humanity. God was born of a woman and born under the law. Jesus did something dangerous to himself. By sharing in our humanity, he put himself under the same law as we all must live under and which condemns us to death and hell. One mistake, one slip, and he would share our fate. Only he was tempted in every way like us and yet had no sin.

He also shared something else from us. Even though he had no sin and had nothing to worry about, he became sin for us. He shared our guilt, our sin, our death, our hell. He shared what we deserved, total alienation from God and nothing but judgment. He died for us.

But he now shares with us. That life that had no sin he shares with us. When I look at my father’s confirmation picture, I see a family resemblance with myself. A sinner like us looks nothing like God, yet because of Christ, we share with him his status as a son of God. Adopted by God, he does something that normally does not happen in adoption: there is an actual family resemblance. We look like Christ now because gives us his holiness. God sees his perfect son in all of us.

And he shares with us his resurrection. He is the firstfruits and we will soon follow him out of the graves. We will share in his home, heaven. He shares his righteousness and holiness so we will actually belong in heaven.

That is because we share his name. Sometimes I forget and I assume you forget, too. Notice how we start off the worship service, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Those words were spoken at your Baptism. In Baptism he washed our sins away, wrote our names in the book of life, and put his name on us. I pray you and I will get it next time we hear those words: “Oh, he is speaking to me by my new name.” Married to him, we share his name.

“The Lord’s delight.” That is how the Lord feels about you. Blair Walsh missed the game winning field goal that would have led the Vikings to the next level of the playoffs. I have read and heard he is a broken man, yet I also heard of grade school children sending him letters telling him how much they appreciate him.

Now when you come to church, what will hear? What do you need to hear? Yes, we blew the game. We lost, and we should be released, we should be remembered for it. If we had names that describe us, what would they be? Desolate? Deserted? Unfaithful, one who doesn’t trust God, liar, unhappy, discontent? Yet, the tells us he delights in us. He marries us and gives us a new name. What more could you ask for? Amen.