

Topic	Gospel Identity
Reference	1 Cor 7;21-24
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Morning FBC and we are back to the old days where sermons are being recorded and if you're watching this, this is actually me recorded on a Tuesday night just before we are going into our new MCO. So, yes it is a strange world we're in and going back to this. So sometimes these things happen, we don't know why, but we try to be conscious of what God is trying to tell us. So today we're going to continue a bit on our Genesis series, but we are going to not follow so much the sermon series, but we're going to do bit of recollection. I mean, just give you this "X Æ A-12". Whatever it is. Anyone out there knows what is what this is. I mean, nobody knows, right. This is the name of Elon Musk baby. And of course you will ask, why the name is like who it is, whatever that means. This is how you pronounce it as x I A12.

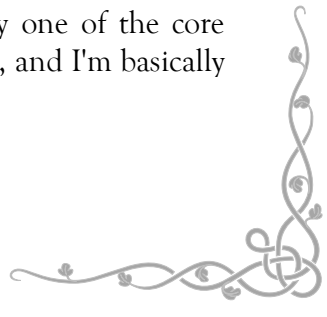
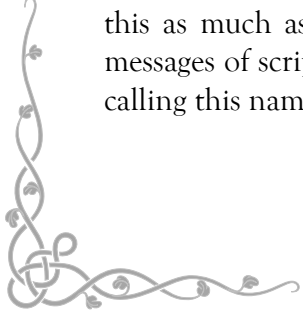
I mean all the best to you when you are in school, your teachers are going to have a handful. Now the point is this when you think of this (X Æ A-12) and you say this is Elon Musk kid. You will say that makes say as he is Elon Musk's son.

Now try another name. Maybe something a bit more easier, "Farrokh Bulsara". Nice. This is a Northern African Arabic kind of name. Now you will not know who he is. He was Freddie Mercury. Can you imagine going to stage and say, "All right we will rock you and this is welcoming Farrokh Bulsara. Sort of doesn't quite make it. You got to say, Freddie Mercury, you know, we are the champions you know. That sort of gives you the ring around that.

So I gave you two names. One name by human parents and the name basically tells you more about a parent's than the kid. Hey, here's another name, which the person renames himself and the new name basically becomes him. So names say a lot.

I want to start a series every month about identity and I am going to start off by basically on names. Now, names are name given by your parents. Names are sometimes given by yourself. What happens when God gives you a name or God changes your name, and in the Genesis series we have been looking at the series about how Jacob wrestles with God or angle of God. And he asked for a blessing and before God blesses him God changes his name. And we had a very wonderful sermon by this by David and Suzanne Adams. I'm not going to redo the someone. I am just going to pick up this notion about naming.

And it's really about the implications when God changes his name from Jacob to Israel and today we're going to look at a series every month I am going to do a new series on developing a gospel centered identity. I like to propose that the idea of identity is one of the most understated things in our Christian doctrine and I think one of the most important. We sort of thing we know this, but we don't really know this as much as we do and the Bible speaks a lot about this. I propose to is actually one of the core messages of scripture and we're going to start with the first identity indicator, your name, and I'm basically calling this naming and knowing.



I'm going to go very much into Genesis chapter 32, but I am going to take it a little bit into the life of Jacob and from his birth all the way until his name was changed to Israel.

Let me share with you three simple points today:

- Naming and personal identity,
- Naming a shared identity
- Naming and knowing.

So, we go back to Genesis 32 and we were just going to go around these few verses. Most of you know the story, Jacob thinks his brother is after him. He thinks his brother coming with 400 men. He is terrified. He tries to plan a way out by plicating the brother with gifts and he prays for God to deliver him. And after the prayer, he tries to rearrange his gifts to plicate the brother and then he wrestles with this man and in the wrestling he discovers that, you know, in the course of it, as you know the story that he is wrestling with God, and of course, we're going to take few verses. One of key verses Jacob replied in verse 26b,

“I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

What's interesting is that the man says, what is your name? And we all know what that story means. The man is basically asking Jacob to confess on his real identity. So the name here connotes his identity and we're going to really go around that and personal identity. So, let me just give you how to give you the context of story because when we look at blessings, the narrative goes way back when Jacob basically lied about his name to get his father's blessing. So, the first time he got the blessing was he lied about his name. He pretended to be Esau. So the story is contrast. Now Jacob has to admit who he really is before he gets his heavenly father's blessing. So, there are two blessings. The worldly blessing he got it by deception, by changing his name. Now to get God's blessings, he has to admit his real name. That's the way the narrative sets itself out. You're supposed to compare the two.

Let me just give you a name, not a very nice name, but since I'm speaking, you should know, let me tell you what my name means. It could be any other name. Arnold Lim Say Han. Lim, I am from the Lim clan. That is the surname. It is important for the Chinese. Say Han. I am from the Chinese Hon Yen, my father gave that. Say in Cantonese, that words means gentle. So again, the name is because your parents want that identity on you and very much he shows you the aspirations of the parents. Why Arnold? It is in my IC by the way. I never gave myself this name because my dad was a golfer. My dad named me after Arnold Palmer. I don't play golf, but it shows you my father's character.

So here is this first thing about names. Names very often show you the characteristics more of the father or the aspirations of the father than the child. So you can see where we're going with this, because scripture is full of that and we see how Joseph names his children, how Leah names his children, they all show basically what they feel and Genesis is very full of all of that. So let me just give you two things, Jacob, in the story basically tells you who that person really is.

So when God says, what's your name? He's extracting a confession from Jacob. I am a deceiver. When I was born, I was a heel grabber and I only come to that after I wrestle with God, I wrestle and I wrestle, and I come in humility and confess. So that's who I really am, broken and contrite a sinner. I come to you God

and say Lord, this is my real identity. Then God says, no, that's who you are on a worldly level, but you are now is Israel. Now work 'el' means God. You fought with God. So who God wants to be is that, so you have this tension who you are and who God wants you to be and that is absolutely critical in Christian doctrine.

In fact, a lot of the Christian narrative, a lot of what we call salvation history narrative of both the old and the New Testament goes around. It is about who you are and who God wants you to be. So, what define Jacob's personal identity? Let me give you two. And the first one is basically his past. His past define Jacob when he says what's your name? I'm Jacob. Why? Now it is something quite interesting because he is one of the only character in the Bible where from his day of birth, the basically narrative tells you this is what you're going to turn out to be. You're a deceiver, you are a heel grabber and he lives up to his name.

And so when you look at the entire storyline of Jacob, he was born with a propensity to deceive. By the way that's saying a lot right about nurture and nature. He has a natural inclination towards a certain sin. So the Bible is bit of a science here. His DNA, his genetic makeup is inclined towards deception. Of course he deceived his brother twice; first of his birthright over a bowl of lentil soup. Secondly, he got his mother to help him to deceive and after that his mother deceives his father by saying something about women of a certain clan and you know and so he had to escape his brothers wrath through the mother's deception and then his uncle deceives him into marrying the another daughter. And then later you read the story, the uncle deceives him again. That uncle changes his wages three times, but Laban is the ultimate trickster. I mean, Jacob is ultimate trickster and Jacob basically shifts around the goats and you can read the story there and gets back his wages and in the end his wife deceive their father. Say the whole thing is toxic. He is a deceiver, his mom is a deceiver, his uncle is a deceiver, his wives are deceivers. The whole family are toxically deceivers and the way the narrative go is basically to tell you this, Jacob your identity is this, you are a con man. Everyone, you come in touch with you all get con by you or you con then. The entire environment is that.

So God is telling him something very wonderful. Your past does not define you. You were the deceiver and after this chapter you find for chapter 33 onwards till his death, there is no mention of deception. The narrative is telling you that and God is trying to tell you, don't let your past define your identity. And sometimes our past can really really grab us. Especially if you've been hurt in your past, especially if you've been traumatized, especially when you were in school and you were bullied or you had a bad marriage or you failed at something and that thing just basically after a while becomes you. So, your past defines your present and basically propels you to the future. I was a failure, I am a failure now and I'm going to be a failure.

So, the first thing God does is God tells him your past doesn't define you. What's the next thing that defines his identity? And you find that again in the narrative, the narrative is about wrestling. It is about Jacob wrestling with God, but is that the only time the text tells you about wrestling. Before this, we are told he is terrified because he is told his brother is coming with 400 men and then he wrestles, he wrestles with his fear. And he takes his fears to God in prayer. That's how the text flows, wrestle with fear and then wrestle with God. And again, what he's trying to tell you, the text is telling you how his fears has so defined his identity. So, this is how the text moves. Early on the chapter is overcome with fear and he is terrified. And then he had this very detailed plan to remove his fear.

You know, this guy is an ultimate planner, right? He plans everything. How he deceives his father he plans it. How he sees Laban, you should really read a story how he think the speckled goat shifts it around, this guy is a planner you know. He has really got a lot of plans, risk management. He prays to God to remove the fear and then continues with this plan. It is great plan. And then he wrestles with God. And here's a breaker, what's your name? What's your name? My name is Jacob. And then God says, no, I'm going to give you a new name. After that you know what happens? He faces his fear. That's what the text is telling you. He faces his fear. Let's read it back in verse 13 to 21.

The keyword here is “Go ahead of me,” “He is coming behind us”, “your servant Jacob is coming behind us”. It repeats again and then perhaps my brother will receive me. That's a fear. Now what he has done is that he has got his great plan where he got all these gifts and look at the gifts. You know why there's so much gifts, he is feeling guilty. He is trying to pay back his brother what he stole from the brother. He stole from this brother his inheritance and so this is basically a ransom. You look at all the animals there, it is a King's ransom. He's basically saying I'm going to do the right thing, I'm going to give you back what I stole from you, but he is very smart. He sends the gifts in waves, you know like a boyfriend say, oh my girlfriend's 21st birthday, I am going to give her 21 gifts. So one by one, I am going to send it out. First gift, don't like it. Second gift, you don't like it. Third gift, by the I hit 21 gifts, she is going to be happy. So they go in waves in waves. And after that he says, second, third. So the first one goes, second one go third one goes and in the end when Jacob goes at the end, the brother was cooled down.

Jacob was very intelligent, but look at what happens after he wrestles with God. The next chapter, he says this

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with 400 men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead

He didn't go behind. The plan now changed and bowed down to the ground seven times, you know, the number means, you know, that means it is a Godly number. He didn't run from his fears. Now you see fears or your emotions can become your identity. I'm so scared, my children don't take care of me. I'm so scared that I'm going to lose my job. I'm so scared off this of that and after a while their fear personifies your identity.

There is one way of looking at it. He said, God help me, I'm terrified. God says, okay, I'll help you. Then Jacob says, alright thank you Lord, Hallelujah. You're going to send me four angels to help me, maybe angels to take me and my family far away from my brother, because his whole life has been running. God says, no, I'm going to damage your leg so you can run from him. No, I'm going to bless you. I'm going to remove it from your socket and you are going to limp. You know why, because God is trying to tell you that, I'm going to make you so powerless, you depend on me. No more you cheating and you face your fears on my strength.

What is great in the next chapter, the brother sees all the treasures and says, what are all these droves. I don't need it, take it back. It's quite a fascinating story. Now, basically, identically identity comes from this.

Your emotion drives you to a certain identity. It pulls you to an action. It may not be fear. It could be anger. It could be jealousy. It could be bitterness. It becomes your identity.

What happens, it is a very old movie. Some of you have not seen it when you're my age have seen it. It is called a Matrix. And you'll find there is a tension of identity here. The adversary agent calls him Mr Anderson, he keeps calling Keenu Reeves Mr Anderson. Who is Mr Anderson? He is a nobody, working in a software company, but no he's got stability but is a nobody, but what does he want to be? He wants to say my name is Neo. So there's a tension. There's a tension between what society wants him to be and what he wants to be. Of course if you follow the story the director's had a issue too. So here's what identity is. It is about who you think you are, what society wants you to be and who you really want to be.

Now, what's wrong with this equation. God's not in a picture. God is not here at all and what the story of Jacob does is Jacob is a man struggling to find himself. He hopes to get married, settle down. He has a certain trajectory and God rips it all apart, puts him on a limb and mix him face himself and that is where the wrestling is. You see, you can name yourself after the many things. That's why some people like to have a title in front of them. Some people like their name cards, many things identify us. Am I Arnold Lim, the church elder. What if I'm not an elder, am I less of a human being? I'm Arnold Lim the architect, Peter Ng, the doctor. How much is a career defining your identity? How much are you as a married person defining your identity? We have many identity markers. So what this text is trying to tell you is this, what does Jacob represent. It is your all self and what God wants you to be Israel, is your new self.

Besides your personal identity who you personally are, we all belong in a community. So naming actually belongs to a corporate identity. So we're going to look at what naming and what we call shared identity means. And there's only interesting part of the verse, which is overlooked. And at the end of the chapter, it says this,

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,

This is after Jacob wrestles with God, and God has basically put him on a limp and he say, and he was limping because of his hip. And look at verse 32

Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

There's sometimes details say a lot. And what is it? It tells us something about the function of the narrative. Number one, the story is about man name Israel, Jacob who turned Israel but the story is deeper than that. The story is for a nation named Israel. There's a double play there. You see, the background of this story is set when Israelites as slaves or ex-slaves are on the way on the Exodus to the promised land. And so this narrative serves as a fall for them to understand what to do. In the same way Jacob has to face his fear of Esau, what the Israelites on their journey they have to face their fear as they enter the promised land. As you know you read Exodus, it says the spies come back and say the Canaanites are huge and the story tells us the Israelites became terrified.

That's what the functional story is. And the story is to try to remind the Israelites, do not be terrified, go depending on God, the same way what Israel did or Jacob did. He's had to go on a limp. He faced Esau, prostrated with the strength of the Lord. And the story is a reminder. A reminder that Israelites as a community do not depend on your own strength. They depend on God and to not forget that they were one slaves, in bondage and now the Lord had liberated them and they belong to the Lord.

So in 1-Corinthians chapter 7, which is quite interesting chapter. The chapter is about marriage and singlehood and right in the middle the chapter talks about slaves. Like what is to go to do with the chapter? We read a chapter, it is about married people, single people, widow people, the chapter opens about sex and then in the middle there is a strange verse,

21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. 22 For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

And basically Paul is saying, you know what whether you are a free man or whether you are a slave, both of you belong to the Lord. That is what we call a shared identity here. So the chapter talks about status. The whole chapter 7 is about status and how people densified themselves, like status, your marriage, your divorce, you are married to a nonbeliever, you are uncircumcised, you want to be circumcised. Slaves want to be free, singles want to be married, engage wants to be married, widow wants to be married, and Paul tells you don't change your status. It's not a big deal because your identity entity is not defined by who you belong to, which clan, which pack, which group you belong to. You see group identity is very much something that gives us confidence. I need to get married. I come to church. I'm single. I can feel a bit stigmatized. You know, if I'm divorced, I feel stigmatized. I feel that I'm a failure. I need to get circumcised if wanted to be accepted, this happens especially if you're a younger person or maybe we all had it in school. We all wanted to belong to the in crowd. We all wanted to have friends. We all wanted to be accepted. I don't want to belong to the slave group. I want to belong to the freed person.

We drop names because we want to see that we are connected, connected to the right people you know, so that's called group identity. And so basically Paul is telling you, there's only one person you identify yourself with, you belong to Jesus. And what he says,

22 For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

In Romeo and Juliet, Juliet says this because Romeo is from the wrong family. It is like a Chinese drama. He is actually from a poor family. So in that society and in Italian society, he's not bought enough for Juliet. You know, he is a slave. You know, he is a lowly status man and Juliet says something really interesting.

What's in a name? a Rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

Whether are you slave, whether you are a freedman, whatever your social status, whether you are married, whether you're single, whether you are successful, whether you lost your job, whether you made a million

dollars, whether you are highly, highly important, whether nobody knows you, a Rose by any other name would smell just as sweet and it is smell of aroma of Christ and he ends this session with a really great verse. He says this,

23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings.

Again, this is Exodus language. This is a language tied back to the Israelites on the way to the promised land to remind themselves you were once in bondage to Pharaoh and now you have been bought by the blood of the lamb. This is language to remind them your identity is in Christ. The Israelites on that journey as the reader the account of Jacob are meant to remember they were bought at a price. They belong to Yahweh and we in a new covenant belong to Christ.

Those of you who are familiar with Game of Thrones. There is an army there. They call it Unsullied. This army are all given names and the names are given to them to remind them of their lonely slave status. They are all slaves and so the chief character is a guy called Grey Worm. It is a name of a slave. You're a nobody that is why we call you Grey Worm and in one of most pivotal scenes, the army is rescued by Daenerys, the chain breaker. She liberates them and she tells Grey Worm, give yourself a new name. You are now no longer a slave, give yourself a name that you're a proud of that you're not known to be slave and Grey Worm tells Daenerys. I will keep my name because it is the name that I remembered the day that I was made free and my slavery, I was broken from my bondage as a slave. So Grey Worm becomes a name he remembers Daenerys, the chain breaker who broke her free of slavery and so we do the same thing. We do the same thing on a much deeper level.

In the same way Paul tells the slaves, remember you're bought at a price. In the same way the Israelites do not eat a meat broken by socket to remember Israel, the man Israel struggling with God, memory reinforcement of who we really are to remind. I Arnold Lim is not identified because I'm an architect or I'm a church elder or I've got friends or I'm married or whatever it is, I am a child of God. I belong to Jesus and we belong to Jesus together and when we celebrate the Lod Supper, we remember we are brothers and sisters together that is our shared identity. That is our name.

In the Old Testament naming is actually about knowing. So let me explain a little bit of what that mean in details now. In the Genesis 32 texts naming is all over the chapter. Jacob confesses his name, Jacob then asked for God's name. God changes Jacob's name and Jacob name is a place. So it is obviously the author is trying to tell us something. Let us go to the text and this is again some of those verses we tend to miss out. Verse 29

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But God doesn't tell him his name. God says, why do you ask me my name? Have you asked yourself why and then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel. Basically he named the place and he says, because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared. And very often these verses are overlooked. Now there's a similar reading of this if you like in Judges chapter 13, where the parents of Samson meet an angel of God and they ask what is your name? And again, similarly, the angel of God tells the parents of

Samson. I'm not going to give you my name, it is too much for you to comprehend. And then the chapter as the same way, the parents are terrified because they believe they have just met God.

So here is what the narrative trying to tell you. God can ask you your name. You can't ask God his name. Why? Why not? That is theologically very powerful. So let me repeat it again. God has the right to ask you your name, you don't have the right to ask God his name. And after an encounter like that Jacob names the place Peniel because he wants to remember something. What does he remember? Because his life was bad. Now, what do we see? We see humility here. So let me just give you what naming and knowing is.

Number one, to know someone by name is to state you are intimately aware who he is and what the story is trying to tell you is this, God knows Jacob inside out. Now, Jacob doesn't know God as much as the way God knows him, because God is God. You do wrestle with God and you know, right. What's your name? I'm Jacob. All right. Now you tell me what's your name? I'm God. That means you and God on the same level field. That's not happening. So the point of the text is basically there's a hierarchy of relationship, but the second thing more importantly the story is telling you that identity is ultimately forge in intimate relationships.

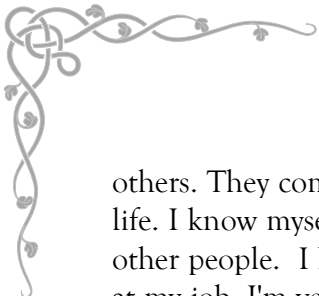
Now this is really quite I think mistaught by a lot of us and I struggle with it for years. In London there is a memorial, a memorial to soldiers who have no names. They are in the first world war. They fought and they died. And so what happened? The British government brought them back and this is what is written on a stone there if you go to London and you will find this is what is written there

Beneath this stone rests the body
Of a British warrior
Unknown by name or rank

Now at the top of it, at the first statement where it says beneath this stone rest the body of a British warrior that's right there. You find there is a verse written up there. You can see it upside down. You know what it says, it says the Lord knows them that are his. 2 Timothy 2:19.

Here is somebody who had no name, unknown, no identity, lost, like a lot of people nowadays who feel that, you know, I'm a nobody, you know I'm just a nobody, but the text is saying the lord knows who they are. When God asked Jacob, what's your name, he is calling Jacob out. He says Jacob, I know you. I know you who you are and when Jacob says, what's your name? God is trying to say is, well that's not for you to tell because I know you better. Let me try to break it down for you. You see, for most of us, this is how we look at our life. We know ourselves. We need to know ourselves. I need to know my strengths. I need to know my weaknesses. I need to know my abilities. In fact, some people write public purpose statements out of this. No, I know my gifts, my strengths and some people come to you in church to say, you know, I'm very good at this, I think I'm called to do this. Then the second thing we see is I need to know God. I need to know God, God, Jesus died for my sins. I'm a believer now, I've changed my ways. I know God. And because of that, I know myself, I know God, therefore I know what is God's purpose for my life.

And for many years, I think I was like this. A lot of us are like this. And have you ever wondered why churches are so split? Why a lot of people who believe in this dogma end up having arguments with



others. They come to church, they think you know what, they say you know, I've been doing this my whole life. I know myself. I know my scripture, so I meant to do this. And then they find they can't get on with other people. I know what I was in my job, I'm here in this church to serve in this area because I did this at my job. I'm very good at this and you people are so disorganized, that is my calling. Because there's one part missing here. And it's, this. It is to know that you are known by him.

The story is trying to tell you, God knows Jacob better than Jacob knows himself. And number two, Jacob doesn't know God enough, that's going to be his life journey. So sometimes in life we think we're very smart. We think we know everything, but God knows us better. And that's why at the end of it, he renames the place Peniel because it's a sign of humility. And for a lot of us, we have lost that.

We become so subtly arrogant, we have become so subtly critical of others. We come to church and we think we have got all the answers. Anyone who thinks he has only answers, who has got it all planned out. I think doesn't know himself and he doesn't know God enough. And most importantly, he doesn't know that God knows him. And sometimes we need to be like Jacob, we need to walk with a limp, face our fears and say God, you know me better than I know myself. I just need to just trust you and this is my journey. You give me enough to know what my purpose is, but not in the details.

There was another man who was also renamed. His name was Abram and God changed him to Abraham after a covenant. He had a purpose. He had an identity, but it took him years and God just revealed to him little bit by little bit by little bit and so it is with us. That's my identity. So let me just end with this. What is your name? What is my name? Is my name identified by my past, my fears, my social groupings, by my talents, my abilities, because I think I'm very smart. My name is this. My name is Christian. That's your name? Why is my name that? Because I know another name and it's a beautiful name. It's a wonderful name and that name is Jesus Christ. He's my Lord and he's your Lord and that is my identity. We belong to him. Blessed Sunday. God bless you all.