

I AM & YOU ARE

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Date: 25-05-2025

A famous quotation of Shakespeare is, "What's in a name? A rose by any name smells as sweet." But some interesting people have that that to a different level. For example, the names of Elon Musk's children – the first child is called Techno Mechanicus, the second is called Exa (as in exaflops, the computing measure Exa Dark Sidel), the third one is called X Æ A XII.

There are other competitors to him. Dallas Clayton who named his child Audio Science. Jason Lee who named his child Pilot Inspektor. The origin of that name was from an indie band called Grandaddy. They have a 2000 album called The Software Slump, and the song's title was: He's simple, he's dumb, he's the pilot. You don't want to have a name like that, do you? These are celebrities who chose differently.

But the Bible has very deep meaning in most names. The names are chosen with great care. They have deep meaning and deep relevance. Today, we are going to look at a few names and a few people behind the names; the names they had and the names they got from God. As we look at that, then we will also look at who you are as God sees you, and who God is. God's name, the I AM. And we will see what that is, and how it matters to us.

1. ABRAHAM

Abraham wasn't always his name. His name was Abram, which means 'father'; father of somebody. But he wasn't known as father of anybody at that point in time, till he was very old. That's because he was not yet a father. So, even though his name meant 'exalted father', he didn't really carry that name too well. In fact, the world says: See this man. He doesn't even have anyone to carry his name after him.

But God saw differently. God called him when he was 99 years old, and He told him, "I'm going to give you a new name. You will not be called Abram; you will be called Abraham." And what does that mean? it means 'father of multitudes'. Many, many people. God saw into the future what Abraham and the people around him could not see. He saw the people who would come after. God saw something. In the same way, we can't see the future, but we do know that God can see into the future.

2. GIDEON

The name Gideon means 'warrior'. Now what was happening when this story comes into play? In Judges 6, we see that Gideon was threshing wheat. Normally this is done in the open so that when the wheat is separated from the chaff, the wind can blow the chaff away. And it is typically done in a high windy place. But here was Gideon threshing wheat in a wine press, where grapes were trampled. This was typically a sunken place. So, why was Gideon doing that, away from the open? Because he was hiding from the Midianites. The Bible tells us that the Midianites would come and take away everything that the Israelites had. This was the Promised Land, and the Israelites were exactly where they were supposed to be. Yet, this was happening.

Gideon saw himself as a fearful man, not a warrior as his name was. But God steps in. a messenger of God comes and meets him, and he calls him valiant one or mighty man of valor, or man of courage. This was said to this man who was in hiding, who has not yet proven himself to be a man of valor. God asks him to destroy the altars of Baal. What does he

do? He goes in the night. The Israelites were worshipping Baal and had built altars there. So Gideon had every right to go and break down those altars. But he goes and does it at night.

Then God calls him and tells him to get an army ready. How many people could he muster? From all of Israel, 32,000 soldiers. The Midianites had 135,000. 32,000 against 135,000. And as if these odds weren't good enough, God surely has a sense of humor. He says, "This is too many. Let's reduce the number." And he gets Gideon to pick 300. And these 300 go on to chase the Midianites because the Midianites were fighting with each other. God had done something tremendous there.

But it required Gideon. It required somebody to stand up and go. Gideon was unsure, but God said, "Come, I'll show you what's happening." And he takes two people along with him and goes and hears what the people in the camp are speaking. That's how God reassures him. That's how he needed to be reassured – this person whom God sees as a mighty man of valor.

3. PETER

Peter was not always known as Peter. He was known as Simon, son of Jonah. What does Simon mean? it means 'he has heard', or 'listener'. If you have been following Peter for some time, you would know that he was usually ahead of himself. He was the first to respond, and normally they say that listeners always wait, they process. He surely wasn't that from all the accounts that we read.

But God sees something different. God calls him. The dialogue is found in Mathew 16:13-20 and I'll take us through the dialogue.

Jesus: "Who do people say I am?"

Peter: "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Jesus: "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter's response was fantastic. "You are the Christ." In Greek, that was the word, Christ. In Hebrew, it was the word Messiah.

Jesus: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in heaven has revealed this to you. Simon, son of Jonah, My Father in heaven revealed this to you. You are Peter, a rock, and on this rock, I will build the church."

In the letter that Peter writes for us, in 1 Peter, he calls us living stones. That's the name that God the Father has given to him, and he is giving that same name to us, calling us living stones.

And He goes on to say something beyond that, which I thought is something that will help us to hold this in our mind. He says, "The gates of hell will not prevail against the church." What does He mean by that. This dialogue is happening in a place called Caesarea Philippi. This place was known for its worship of the Greek god Pan, who was half-man, half-goat. There was a cave at the base of the mountain which was supposed to be the gate to hell. It was said that Pan would go in to hell through this, stay in hell throughout winter, and come back in spring to revive the earth. But what was it actually? It was a cult. And Jesus was telling Peter that everything that you see around you, all this idol worship, nothing can stand against the church. He was giving him this assurance up front, right in the beginning.

These three people who we just heard about, none of them would have agreed at that point with the identity that God had given them. If you would ask them, what do you think they would say? Do you

imagine Gideon agreeing to be known as a man of valor? You and me, when we read that, we wouldn't agree. But God sees differently.

What kind of names does the world around give us?

The world around gives us names – loser, unwanted, outcast, wounded, lonely, afraid. And it isn't bad enough that the world gives us names. Sometimes, we ourselves give ourselves names like: I'm clumsy, I'm accident-prone, I'm poor in math. God doesn't agree with those names. God doesn't want us to take those names. He has a totally different set of names given to us because He reminds us that we are not defined by our past. We are not defined by our failures. We are not defined by our circumstances.

We are who God says we are. and only God has the right to give us these names, names that we ought to hold on to. Just a reminder here! God didn't make a mistake when He made you. And He made you. When He gave you the parents He gave you, the size He made you, the color He made you – nothing was a mistake.

And our failures – He takes our failures and He uses those things and turns them around to our advantage. We see that happening multiple times, because at the end of everything, each one of us is created in the image of God. By some accounts, there are about 50 Or 60 such 'you are' statements embedded through the New Testament. Let me just read out a few of them.

- You are a child of God.
- You have been justified.
- You have Christ's righteousness.
- You are joint heirs with Christ.
- You have a share in Christ's inheritance.
- You are a saint.
- You are hidden in Christ, in God.
- You are chosen by God.
- You have the mind of Christ.
- You have been rescued from Satan's domain and transferred into the kingdom of Christ.
- You have been made complete in Christ.
- You have not been given the spirit of fear, but of love, power and of a sound mind.
- You have been bought with a price and you belong to God.
- You have been adopted as God's child.
- You are God's workmanship.
- You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

These are but a few of the names and I'd encourage each one of us to go and discover these names. Quite a few would have sounded familiar to you. Maybe you memorized those verses. Maybe you remember them from the time that you read the context, or whatever. But I encourage you to take this up as an exercise, and say: These are identities that are applicable to me. These are identities that are supposed to replace the identities of the world irrespective of what they may be.

All of the world's identity statements are partial or sometimes. outright lies. They don't define us at all. Let's look at a few of them.

Four of these identity statements are found in a single verse.

1 Peter 2:9 *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."*

Let's look at what these identities are. Incidentally, these particular four are what God had originally given to the Israelites. When the Israelites didn't hold on to these identities, they kept going around the way the world was going. They started thinking that it was important that they conform to the world, but not conform to the Word of God. We can also fall into that trap if we don't know what our true identity is.

Let's look at these four Identity Statements as an example.

a) A chosen people.

The word 'people' is the Greek *genos*; it talks about an offspring or a family. And what are these things? What does it mean to us as a family? How do we get into that family?

Revelation 17:14b tells us that His called, chosen and faithful ones.

God does the calling. He chooses us. and by being called and chosen, you and I are officially begotten into God's family. We are chosen and made members of God's family. God is the Father; so we relate to each other as brothers and sisters.

The church is known as the household of God, as we read in Ephesians 2:19. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household." The operating word here is 'chosen'. You are listening to this not by accident but because you are chosen to listen to this.

b) Royal priesthood.

Priesthood seems to us to be up there; royal priesthood even more so. The priest's role was to be the intermediary between a holy God and sinful people. There were various functions that he had to do.

- He had to present sacrifices and offerings from the people to God.
- He would have to pray to God on behalf of the people.
- He was supposed to maintain the tabernacle.
- He was supposed to be teaching the people how to be holy and instructing them in God's law.

When Jesus came, He served as a high priest and the sacrifice that He gave was once and for all. The sacrifice was over. He was the sacrifice. So He set a living example. What does that mean for us?

- We have direct access and so we present our lives as a living sacrifice to God.
- We can pray directly to God the Father.
- We are the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16 reminds us about that, that we are the temple of God because the Holy Spirit dwells in us.
- Christians have God's law written into our hearts. The Holy Spirit writes God's law into our hearts. So we learn by following God's example, the example of Jesus, to discern between good and bad, evil and good.

c) A holy nation.

The idea is not a nation in the form of a country the way we see nations today, but as a people. God desired the Hebrew people, the Israelites to be, as written in Exodus 19:6, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Israel didn't keep up to that. they lived more like the world than set apart and holy to God.

But today, Christians are to be different. We are supposed to be holy, and we can be holy because God gives us the strength, the ability and the Holy Spirit to be able to do so. God wants His nation, the church, to be a glorious church, not having a spot or wrinkle, but that

she should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:27. Christianity is not just a set of beliefs but it's a way of life. And that's what it's been called from the beginning.

d) A people for God's own possession.

Here we see the word 'possession' having meanings like property or gaining, saving, acquiring, laying up, keeping, obtaining, acquisition, preservation. And God proclaimed Israel to be His special people. What would distinguish them? Observing and walking in His laws and ways. And the church is to be different. We are set to become blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked generation.

These few statements are just one small vignette. Four out of 50+ 'you are' statements. Peter closes this verse so beautifully by saying, "God called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." When God calls people into His truth, He sets them free. They are no longer in bondage; He sets them free.

Let's look at the next part of this sermon.

Who is it who gives us this identity?

When Moses was called by God, He got his attention by a burning bush and God calls him and He gives him a mission – to go and rescue the Israelites from slavery. When Moses asked Him, "Whom shall I say sent me?" God's answer was "I AM." God's name for Himself. Incidentally, there are a large number of names, but the most important or the most central name is this word called I AM.

Why I AM? If you look at this word, for example, I am a father, I am a husband, I am walking to the door, I am standing here and speaking. They are all talking about something happening after that or something that is qualifying that 'I am'. But the moment you take that second part away and leave just the words 'I Am', there is a completeness to that which only belongs to God. God is complete. He is constant, nothing can change Him, nothing can sway Him. In all sense, He is complete.

So, when we look at that, we can see that God doesn't need anything beyond to be influenced. We have been raising our bouquet of praises, we have been praying – these things do not change Him. They are pleasing to Him, no doubt, but they don't change Him. He is already complete. It's not like you coming up to me and saying, "O Ajay, you're so good and all that." I might get pleased at what you're saying, and that might add up to me. But nothing adds up to God. He is constant. His ways are constant. The things He does are all constant. His existence is not contingent on anybody else or anything else.

And Jesus also incidentally uses the same term. We see that in two places in the New Testament.

John 8:56-59 while talking to the Pharisees and thereafter to the Jews.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad." That's what Jesus tells the Jews. So the Jews said to Him, *"You are not yet 50 years old, and you have seen Abraham?"* Jesus said to them, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."* So they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

If Jesus had just modified that slightly, and if He said, "Before Abraham was, I was," the people would have just said, "Okay. Probably there's something off with this person. They would have ignored it. But He used the very same words that they knew and associated with God. That really got them upset because He was claiming to be God, which we know He was.

The second time we see this happening is documented in John 18:6. This scene happens when the soldiers come to arrest Him, led by Judas. And Jesus asks them, "Who are you looking for? They say, "Jesus of Nazareth." At that point in time, He gives the same response. He says, "I AM." What happens then? If you read that verse, you will see that the soldiers fall back. These are soldiers, aggressive. They were coming to arrest somebody. The very words that He uses 'I AM' throws them back. The Greek word used there for fall is *pefto*. That's something like a falling seed. They fall back.

That is the power of that name. Who is that we are talking about? He is the Creator. We are talking about God, our Creator, our Sustainer, our Savior. Creator? This universe? Scientists are constantly re-assessing the size of the universe. The current understanding is that it is 94 billion light years from end to end, and that taken using the earth as a center point, which probably it's not. So they describe it as the known or observable universe. Nobody truly understands how big the universe is. And every few years, as science progresses, there are better ways of understanding and more and more objects are being discovered in the universe. Things people didn't know existed. And that is a God. The Bible reminds us that the whole universe was spoken into existence by God.

He is the One. He is the only One who gets to give you the name or the identity that you can carry. It's not the world around, it's not the transient identities. It is the permanent identity that the Creator of this whole universe can give you and me. And that is the comfort that we need to take. We need to spend time to figure out what is the identity that the Maker of the universe is giving me.

Our Identity

Your children might participate in the society games where, amongst ten kids, the first child gets a medal. Maybe, the next step might be a school. You might get a medal. Then there may be somebody who might do something excellent and get a medal from the President. Which one is more valuable? It's not the medal which was won in the society; it is the medal which was received from the President. Just so, the name, the identity that the Creator has given me is more important, more valuable to me. So, if I know that there is a totally different identity that I can get, isn't it my responsibility to go and find out what it is?

And here it is! Everything is already there in the Word for me. Thank you for all the identities that God has given me. I'm grateful to God for the identities that He has given to me. And we should look for these identities and find out because God has given us His Word. The Word is a continuous story, starting from Genesis right through to Revelation. Everything that God wants us to know about the future is already here in this Word. He is such an awesome God, isn't He? Even though He has spoken this universe into existence, light years that we cannot even fathom, yet He is the same One who has the hair on my head numbered. He is so personal and so immediate, so proximate to me, so close to me. That is something that counts for so much.

We see that we have a plan, God's plan for us. And we can listen to what that plan is. We can unfold that plan with God. We allow Him to take us through that plan with us because He has a better plan than what I can ever come up with. So, it becomes my responsibility to look for that plan, to look for that identity, to look for what He has to say for me, rather than the world's directions, the world's purposes. They are all transient and limited. But God's purposes, God's calling and plans are unique for each one of us. Each one of us is precious to Him. Each one of us is the reason why He came to earth, dying on the cross for our sake, giving us the Holy Spirit, giving us the comfort and the knowledge that He is there with us, continues to be there with us and will definitely be with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

So, let's take time to identify what is that identity that He has given us. What is the plan? Let us learn to trust Him. The more we learn to trust Him, the more we get into that place. And how can we do that? you all probably know somebody, either a family member or a friend or a neighbor who smokes. They know that smoking is injurious but they don't allow that knowledge to turn into a belief and impact their choices or their activities. Like that, this knowledge is not enough if it remains just head knowledge. It has to translate to belief. If I believe what the Maker of the universe says about me, then I will allow that to dictate how and what I do. Then, and only then, can I be in His plan.

Amen.