

No Other Name

*Humbled for a season, to receive a name
From the lips of sinners, unto whom He came;
Faithfully He bore it spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious when from death He passed.¹*

Introduction

God seems to take the use of His name very seriously. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7ⁱⁱ). According to Luther there is both a positive and a negative aspect to this commandment. We are not to misuse God’s name through cursing, swearing, using satanic arts, lying or deceiving. I suspect that this misuse garners most of our attention when we teach the Second Commandment in catechism class. After all, young minds are constantly clamoring for a clear definition of what they cannot do.

But Luther also states that a proper use of God’s name is to call upon it in every trouble. This use of the name could use a bit more exploration. In a world filled with names of those eager to have us call on them, eager to be our savior in some fashion or another, how do we use the name of our God. Is His just one on the list of favored providers, (e.g. Doctor, Ecologist, Gardener, God, Housekeeper, Lawyer)? Your people may certainly be confused by the plethora of potential saviors. How are they to call, exclusively, on the name of their God?

Today, however, I want to focus on you as a Pastor. The pressure is on. There is no doubt that the office of Pastor, (and you as its inhabitant), is in the crucible. How do you think of God’s name? Is it an asset or a liability? Do you think of it more negatively, (Don’t speak it in the wrong way, or in the wrong place), or positively (This is the name by which I am saved)? I hope, through a few insights from the Book of Acts to encourage you in your service; so that, together we may proclaim the only name, under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.

I. Luke’s Interest in Names points us to Jesus.

A. Statistics

Perhaps Luke is the one New Testament writer that inherited God’s proclivity for focusing on the name. More than any other writer Luke is inclined to take note of names, sometimes for the least notable activities (Who forgot to open the door for Peter when he was freed from prison? Whom did Gamaliel use as an example of a failure that he hoped the Apostles would turn out to be?). Luke includes 128 names in his Gospel. Seventy-six of those names are in the genealogy of Jesus; 29 more than Matthew lists. And, in the Book of Acts he records 95 separate names. Luke likes to tell us peoples’ names.

Furthermore, now focusing exclusively on the Book of Acts, Luke uses the word “name” 63 times (Mt= 22, Mk= 15, Lk= 35, Jn= 25). Of those 63 uses of the word “name,” 29 of them are used to refer to Jesus. Since the other uses of the word “name” are usually establishing the introduction of a new character, the emphasis on the name of Jesus is striking. Luke seems to be drawing attention to that name. The actual name “Jesus” appears 72 times. Four times the title “Christ” is used separately to refer to Jesus.

Of course, there are other names that appear prominently. “Peter” is used 55 times in the Book of Acts. “Paul” appears 135 times, and Saul 23 times. By sheer numbers it might appear that Paul is the star of the show, but Paul is carefully presented with respect to the name of Jesus. He first appears as Stephen is crying out, “Lord, Jesus, do not hold this sin against them” (7:59). His conversion is also

centered on the name of Jesus. He is told that the name of Jesus is both his mission and his source of suffering (9:15-16). Finally, he confesses that he is willing to die for the name of Jesus. (21:13) Paul's ministry is framed in its relation to the name.

B. The Acts of Jesus.

Someone has given Luke's second New Testament contribution the title, "Acts of the Apostles'." Certainly many actions of the Apostles are highlighted, chief among them, the actions of Paul. However, despite the fact that Paul is referred to by name far more often than is Jesus, it is clear that Paul is an agent of Jesus. He is not independent, nor does he represent himself. He, and each believing actor in this book, only acts in the name of Jesus.

A more accurate title for this work would be, "Acts of Jesus." At least four specific texts should be noted in support of this thesis. First, Luke begins this book by referring to the work of Jesus. *"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen"* Acts 1:1–2 (ESV). One may read here the implication that the first book dealt with the work of Jesus before He was taken up, and the second book deals with His work after He was taken up. He certainly gave commands to His disciples. It matters little that Jesus is working through His disciples. After all the title He gives them in 1:8 is "my witnesses."

Secondly, the key section in the book of Acts, at least as far as names are concerned, is the potent section of chapters 3-4, where the word "name" is used 8 times, and where an exclusive salvific power is accorded to the name of Jesus. In this section the name of Jesus becomes the mission of the Church, and a source of suffering. If it is true that, *"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved"* (4:12), it would follow that this name is the center, the foundation and the subject of the book in which the statement is found.

Thirdly, the service of Paul is clearly founded on the name of Jesus. The account of his conversion is the only text, in Acts, where Jesus makes reference to His own name. Jesus says to Ananias, *"Go, for he, (Paul) is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel"* (9:15). [Emphasis added] As the Church's mission is focused on the name of Jesus, so the mission of Paul is focused on the name of Jesus. Furthermore, the suffering of the Church begins, in the book of Acts, with Peter and John being thrown into jail for the sake of the name. So also Jesus makes it clear, at the beginning of Paul's service, that he will endure suffering. *"For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name"* (9:16). [Emphasis added]

Fourthly, if the chief actor of the book of Acts is taken to be Paul, then the conclusion of the book is quite anti-climactic. What happens to him? Why does his travelogue just drop off the page with a thud? A close look will reveal that Luke is giving the purveyors of Paul a playful poke. It is as if he were saying, "This book is not about Paul." When Paul arrives in Rome he calls together the local leaders of the Jews and begins to recount his travails, explaining why he is there. They interrupt him to say that they have never heard of him. (28:21) The name of Paul had not preceded him to Rome. He hadn't made quite the splash we often think he had. Luke reveals his true purpose in the final sentence of the work. *"...proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance"* (28:31) (ESV). It is true, Paul proclaims, but the subject and primary actor is Jesus.

Since the name of Jesus plays such a strong role in the Book of Acts it is helpful to see the entire structure of this work coordinated to His name. The same is true for our lives. We may gain key insights to living the life of faith, by placing the name of Jesus first in all that we do. We regularly pray that His name may be kept holy among us. Considering the acts of the ministry to be His acts may be a practical way to practice this desire. We can consider the acts of this book to be the acts of Jesus.

II. A Christocentric Structure of Acts.

	(!= "Jesus")	(*="Name" ref. to Jesus)	(#="My name")
Jesus ascends 1:1-11	(! 2)		
Jesus replaces Judas w/ Matthias 1:12-26	(! 3)		
Jesus preaches to Israel by Peter 2:1-47	(! 5)	(*2:21, 2:38)	
Jesus, alone saves 3:1-4:31	(! 11)	(*3:6, 3:16, 4:7, 4:10, 4:12, 4:17, 4:18, 4:30)	
Jesus' resurrection is testified to 4:32-5:16	(! 1)		
Jesus, alone saves 5:17-42	(! 3)	(*5:28, 5:40, 5:41)	
Jesus' name martyrs Stephen 6:1-8:3	(! 3)		
Jesus preaches through Philip 8:4-8:40	(! 3)	(*8:12, 8:16)	
Jesus converts Saul 9:1-9:31	(! 5)	(*9:27, 9:28)	(#9:14, 9:15)
Jesus preaches to Gentiles by Peter 9:32-11:18	(! 5)	(*10:43, 10:48)	
Jesus recruits Saul 11:19-30	(! 1)		
Jesus frees Peter from prison 12:1-12:25	(! 0)	(Angel of the Lord?)	
Jesus preaches in Asia by Paul 13:1-14:28	(! 2)		
Jesus' opens the Church's eyes 15:1-15:35	(! 2)	(*15:26)	
Jesus preaches in Asia by Paul 15:36-20:38	(! 18)	(*16:18, 19:5, 19:13, 19:17)	
Jesus' name brings suffering to Paul 21:1-28:16	(! 6)	(*21:13, 22:16, 26:9)	
Jesus is the subject (Not Paul) 28:17-28:31	(! 2)		

III. Only the Name of Jesus. (Act 3-4)

A seasoned beggar sat at the gate of the temple. At forty years old he had learned a thing or two about asking for alms. Lame from birth, his friends had grown used to carrying him to the sanctuary. Those who went in and out of the gate had grown used to seeing him, and were familiar with his story. Intriguingly, Luke does not record his name. Perhaps that is because the most important name is about to explode on this banal scene.

The comfortable balance of begging and giving was shattered when Peter and John bestowed a different kind of gift. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (3:6). Peter puts the name of Jesus first. We can only imagine what it must be like, after forty years of impotence, to suddenly feel strength in your feet and ankles. We do not have to imagine the response. He went walking, and leaping and praising God. (3:8)

Such a raucous scene would naturally draw attention, especially as "all" the observers recognized him as the perennial panhandler from the front gate. So a crowd was stirred, one large enough to induce a sermon from Peter. Warming to the opportunity, Peter lets the burgeoning crowd have it with both barrels, that is, law and gospel. Though God had glorified Jesus, Peter roared, you delivered, denied and killed Him. God however raised Him from the dead, which resulted in a powerful name. It is His name, by faith in His name, and faith through the name of Jesus that the lame man is healed. Peter vehemently refuses any personal attention, denying the healing was his action (3:12). This event is not about the acts of some apostles. This is about the action of the name of Jesus.

By now the powers governing the maintenance of the temple had been alerted, and being irritated by the proclamation of the name of Jesus, they threw the apostles into jail, to cool them off for the evening. The next day the authorities themselves are drawn, mysteriously, inexorably to focus on the name. "By what power, or by what name did you do this," they ask (4:7). No better bait could be tossed for another sermon on the name. Peter begins by again attributing the physical healing of the man to the name of Jesus. Then in one of the most masterful rhetorical twists of any sermon ever preached, Peter points out that the physical miracle is only a vehicle to reveal that the name of Jesus is ultimately about spiritual healing. Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other

name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,” is the centerpiece of the book of Acts. Everything prior is building to it, and everything following is result.

The response of the authorities is predictable, if painful. They cannot deny the ample evidence of the miracle, in the form of the lame man walking. So, they seek to sequester the name, twice repeating the order that the apostles are not to speak the name of Jesus. Somehow, they know it is not the acts of the apostles that they should fear, but the name of Jesus.

The reaction of the apostles to this aggressive gag order is perhaps less predictable. In the face of severe threat, they claim that they cannot but speak of what they have seen and heard, of the name of Jesus. The authorities, also threatened, but by the crowds which were impressed by this miracle, release Peter and John. The account of this intense incident closes with the apostles safely ensconced among believers, and praying that God would give them boldness while God did signs and wonders through the name of His holy servant Jesus (4:30).

The chart on the previous page, “A Christocentric Structure of Acts,” demonstrates the extreme emphasis on name and the name of Jesus in these two chapters. This section reveals at least one way to examine the teachings of Acts. Luke tells us there is much action in the history of the Church, but there is one primary actor, and there are many names that have been a part of that history, but there is only one name that saves. For this reason, the name of Jesus becomes the mission of the Church. The rest of the book can be understood as a working out of that mission.

The mission continues to this day. And you live the mission by virtue to the Spirit of God having granted faith, as well as by your call to serve in a unique office dedicated to proclamation. The similarity between the events of this first century healing and the life you live as a spiritual healer today are startling. The name is still not welcome, and as a result you also may find yourselves judged as common uneducated men.

IV. Names the world substitutes for the name of Jesus.

The scandal of particularity is as offensive in twenty-first century America as it ever has been. You may be accorded a voice in the marketplace of American religiosity if you use the correct terms. Being “spiritual” is acceptable. Believing in god may not set off the alarms if he is understood as a higher power. You may even get by with using the name of Jesus, as long as it is offered in an eclectic list of spiritual leaders. But try to utter the name of Jesus as the only name by which we must be saved and you will experience a reaction similar to that which the original disciples did. You will be shut down, ridiculed and threatened for your arrogant and hateful attitude.

God did not give us a spirit of cowardice (II Timothy 1:7), but it is exceedingly easy to avoid the name. So easy, I suppose, it rarely registers that we are daily denying the name. In the hustle of life we have grown accustomed to substituting other names for the name of Jesus. The truth is we believe that there are other names that can save us.

For example, we believe in the name of science. Despite our long-running squabble with the scientific industry over the origins of life, we have a subtle, yet hopeful confidence that it will save us. Someday science will cure cancer, or Alzheimer’s, or heart disease, and may rescue us from the threatening peril of climate change. This is not a faith relationship because there is evidence of progress on each front. This is simply a name to which we accord a certain degree of power and thus confidence. It has the potential of becoming idolatry.

We, especially we Americans, believe in the name of the military to save us from war. The shock and awe that we can visit upon the heads of any other world power has become our defensive shield. God help the politician who rails against the military industrial complex. We don’t want anyone to mess with something we depend upon so much to keep us safely inoculated from the rest of the world’s ills.

We believe in the name of the law. The powerful name of the law has taken a few hits recently. It may not be as (color) blind as we like to think, but we still depend on it to save us from the chaos of anarchy. We shudder to consider whether we could survive, as so many people do, in failed states governed by dictators or mobs, where life is cheap and possessions are costly. We trust the law to save us from all that.

We believe in the name of education. We believe that education can save us from a whole host of evils. We have been striving to educate our way out of poverty, racism, single parent homes, pollution and diabetes for years now. If a problem can be identified, a class can be developed to teach us the solution. Furthermore, education becomes our pedigree. We believe that the more letters we have behind our names, the more valuable we are and the more isolated from danger we can be.

We believe in the name of money. Yes, we will all readily confess that the love of money is the root of all evils, but what we take with the left we give back with the right, warily watching the stock markets, padding our IRAs and 401ks, all the while enjoying the kind lifestyle that scarcely 20% of the world's population can enjoy. We are frightened by recessions, depressions, and low Sunday attendance.

In case you still have some life in you, there is one more name that must be addressed. This is a name that attacks Pastors in unique ways. It is the name of "me." These words were read over you at your ordination, *"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant..."* (2 Corinthians 3:5–6). Yet we insist on referring to it as "my ministry," as if we were sufficient in ourselves.

The idolatry of "me" is deadly in at least two ways. In the first place, it may kill me. It may kill me physically because I think I am bound to say "yes" to everything. I believe that the salvation of my people depends on me being able to meet every need, on me being there every minute, on me having all the right words, on me knowing all the answers. And, since I know that I cannot meet this standard, I tend to isolate myself so that no one else, neither my people, nor my brothers in the office, will notice my insufficiencies. This is a terrible physical burden. It may kill me spiritually as the name of "me" rings so loudly in my ears that I cannot hear the only name that can save me. My name is on the marquee out front. My name is in the masthead of the bulletin. My name is on the website. The name of "me" can drown out all others. I do not know if this is a problem for you, but since it is a problem for me I thought I would mention it.

Secondly, the name of "me" can cause my people to die, because they may not hear the only name that can save them. If I am out front, then Jesus may be in my wake. If I am first, then Jesus may be second. If I insist that people listen to me, then the voice of Jesus may become background noise. This happens so subtly that it requires a constant vigilance of the Word to guard against it. I do not know if this is a problem for you, but since it is a problem for me I thought I would mention it.

Dear brothers in the office, the Word has just killed you. He had to do it so that you could hear this Good News. "There is salvation in no one else." Jesus has brought salvation to you. He has brought it for you. His name is above all the other names you have used as substitute. As high as the heavens are above the earth so high is His name above every other name. Yet, He has brought His name down to you. He has placed it upon you in your baptisms. His name heals each sin, and all of its death, and claims you as His own. In the name of Jesus you are forgiven, and freed to serve His name.

V. Serving the name of Jesus as a Pastor in the twenty-first century

The Acts of Jesus offers a distinct way to think of the work of the office of the Word. Let us consider for a moment how Jesus is at work in the service He has given to us.

A. Bearing the name before the world. (Acts 9:15)

Reading the Acts of the Apostles as the Acts of Jesus may help us understand “my ministry” as the ministry of Jesus. It was certainly so for Paul. Jesus pursued Paul, knocked him off his horse, put him in a tomb for three days and then raised him to a new life. “ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βασιτάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου.”ⁱⁱⁱ Paul is a vessel, a σκεῦος. It would be difficult to find a more generic term. It is variously translated as: vessel, thing, goods, instrument, article, gear. The thing it itself is not significant. What makes it significant is the action of Jesus. Paul is chosen. Jesus chose Paul for a purpose.

The same can be said of those who inhabit the office of the Word. Apart from the action of Jesus we are not noteworthy. But Jesus has chosen us. This is the significance of the call into the office. You are called by Jesus. Perhaps not as dramatically as Paul, but just as violently He has dragged you out of your name into His, and called you into the highest office.

Jesus is intent on using Paul to bear His name. βαστάζω is used by Luke to refer to physically carrying things, (e.g. Casket, moneybag, jar, lame man). In this way it can be seen that “bearing” entails some work that should be considered a burden. It is also used metaphorically; to bear the cross, as well as the name of Jesus. This metaphorical load can be seen in the way Paul behaves; he lives the name Jesus in adherence to the words of Jesus. It can also be seen in how he speaks; he speaks the name of Jesus as the center and sole purpose of his message, as the only name by which we must be saved.

The audience for the hearing of the name is given in the broadest of terms. Paul is assigned to speak both to those who are in the Church and those who are outside the Church. In other words, he is to speak the name of Jesus to everyone. There is a one weighty detail that may be meaningful for our day. Jesus mentions that Paul will bear His name before kings. The confrontation of the powerful by the most powerful name, created much conflict for Paul and may yet for us as well.

“My name,” Jesus says. Bearing the name of Jesus is an overlooked manner of framing the work of a Pastor, overlooked, but helpful. While it is true that those who inhabit the office are chosen for a unique vocation, the vessel in this case begins to diminish as the sound of the name it bears grows louder. There is no doubt that a load is born by Pastors in this manner. But Jesus has promised that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The name you bear has borne your burdens.

So, like Paul, you live the name of Jesus. Since you are a public figure, the life you live is readily seen by the public, and judged against the name. You are called to live in such a way that people hear the name of Jesus in your behavior. Because the Spirit of Jesus is has taken up residence in you, this is precisely how the name works. The name of Jesus is living itself out in its servant. I do not suggest the absence of sin. I emphasize rather the reality of the name. Of course, the name is given to deal with the problem of sin. Still, James tells us that we who teach will be judged with a greater strictness, and seems to apply this both to our behavior as well as to our speech. We cannot ignore the law, but this is a standard that you cannot bear. I commend you to the power of the Word, in the form of a healthy practice of confession and absolution. The name you bear is powerful enough to heal physically and spiritually.

You also proclaim the name of Jesus. This summary of the Gospel is a staggering simplicity. Pastors are rarely known for an economy of words. Our verbosity may, at times, endanger the name. We would do well to consider the charge given by Jesus to Paul. Bearing the name does not imply coercion, convincing, or conversion. We simply bring the name before believers and unbelievers alike. Our desire for visible results may be the greatest idolatry of “me.” I find it to be an axiom that the more I try to convert someone the more I talk, and the more I talk, the more room I find to talk about me. Thinking in terms of bearing the name may help to simplify my proclamation. If I have carried the name of Jesus, (Of course, I mean in the context of the Gospel), before my audience I have given them all that they need, and perhaps more than they can consider in a lifetime. Conversely, if they have not heard the name of Jesus they have received nothing.

A number of practical applications flow from this thought. I shudder to add another pressure to Pastors when developing a sermon, but I wonder whether the name of Jesus may serve, rather, to relieve some of the pressures. The broad spectrum of sermonizing today runs from entertaining through the use of quotable quotes and inspiring storytelling through an academic presentation of evidence that commands a choice. The few that hold out for Word-based presentation of Law and Gospel are deemed to land somewhere in the unmemorable middle. How would the work of developing a sermon be changed if the sermon were considered, by the Pastor, to be an act of Jesus? How would the tone of every sermon feel if, no matter where it fell on the previous spectrum, its aim was to present, not evidence, but a person, Jesus?

The same paradigm might be applied to every Pastoral act. In personal devotion, we would read the Word in order to find Jesus in every word. The goal of teaching would not be the presentation doctrine, but doctrine would be used to present Jesus. Counseling would not be directive but directing people to the Counselor. Evangelism would not be a persuasion or an apologetic act, but using those means to introduce the hearer to Jesus. In short, it will be beneficial for the Pastor to be cognizant of living in this reality; all signs point to Jesus.^{iv}

B. Suffering for the name. (Acts 9:16)

The mission of the office is to bear the name of Jesus. The least admired or desired result of the mission is suffering. “ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν.” Jesus forewarns us, through His call to Paul that suffering is δεῖ, is necessary. Those who bear the name cannot avoid it. The suffering is not incidental. It is ὑπὲρ, for the sake of the name.

The degree of suffering certainly varies from generation to generation, and from location to location. Paul speaks of some tribulations as light and momentary. A brief review of history will reveal that the Church has gone through some eras where bearing the name required the price of blood, and others where it appeared the name bore cultural benefits.

Having recently emerged from an era of the latter experience in this country, our estimation of the weight of our sufferings is likely to be skewed. We may be mocked privately and publicly, but we are not yet at the point of shedding our blood. We may be considered buffoons when we speak the name, but we are still allowed to speak it. Nonetheless, it is clear that suffering for the name of Jesus is soon to be the greater part of bearing it. Now is the time for we who, by virtue of the office, are under the public surveillance program, allow the Spirit of God to prepare us for the suffering that is to come. We are not alone. The martyrs who have gone before us raise their voices to the throne.

There will be some in the Church militant who give up. Already the dark clouds of persecution are massing on the horizon. Some, with ears for the weather, have heard tyranny’s thunderings and have softened their tone. Some have given up the name entirely by substituting a more politically correct name.

But you, dear brothers are not in their train. You stand, by the same grace that upheld Peter and John, squarely under the name you bear. The same Spirit that enabled Peter and John to remain faithful resides in you. The time may come, and sooner than we may think, when you too may hear the command not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. When that day comes you will answer with all the saints who have gone before you, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name, under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved.” So, to this day, Jesus continues to act in His disciples.

*At the name of Jesus knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess Him, King of glory now;
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call Him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.*

S.D.G.
Terry Forke
Montana District Pastors' Conference
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ⁱ Noel, Caroline. "At the Name of Jesus" #512 Lutheran Service Book. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis. 2006.

ⁱⁱ All English Scripture quotations: *English Standard Version*. (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001).

ⁱⁱⁱ All Greek Scripture quotations: Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., Robinson, M. A., & Wikgren, A. (1993; 2006). *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (with Morphology)* (Ac 9:15). Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

^{iv} Sounds like a good title for another paper, "All Signs Point to Jesus, A Christocentric Theory of Semiotics"