



18 PENTECOST  
SEPTEMBER 26 & 27, 2015

1ST, MARSHALL  
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Genesis 32:22-30; Mark 14:32-36  
*What's in a Name?*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Names are very important to us:

- They tell us **who** we are...
- They tell us **whose** we are...

Our names:

- may tell us something about our history
- may reflect something of our nationality
- might even be a key to our **personality** (have you ever known a woman named Grace who failed to **be gracious**...?)
- Our names might even tell us something about our...**parents' sanity**...

True story: I read an article this week about a 9 year old girl over in New Zealand who sued her parents to get her name changed. Do you know the name her *loving* mom and dad put on her birth certificate – **and** which she had to endure for the entire 9 years of her life?

***Talula Does the Hula From Hawaii!!!*** It has a nice beat to it...AND, people would certainly **remember** the girl because of it. However, she **hated** the name...and the judge agreed to let her change it.

Here are some **other** names that aren't very popular for babies these days. If you know the answer, shout it out!

The man who betrayed Jesus was named: **Judas**  
-(Do you know and cute little kids named Judas?)

Harry Potter's arch enemy is: **Lord Voldemort**

The bad guy dressed all in black from Star Wars is: **Darth Vader**

The mean woman who planned to make a fur coat from 101 Dalmatians?  
**Cruella De Vil**

Those names even **sound** bad when you **say** them, right? Thankfully, when most parents are choosing names for their beloved children they tend to avoid those of *bad characters* and *strange phrases*.

**However**, there's one fairly **popular** boy's name that has an *unfortunate* meaning. Is there anyone here named **Jacob** or **Jake**?

**Jacob** is the starring character in our Bible story for today...and up until this time, he has **truly** lived up (or down!) to the meaning of his name.  
**Does anyone have a guess as to what JACOB means?**

To: **overthrow**, or **oust**, basically to be **grabby** or to be a **cheat**.

Here's how that plays out in Jacob's life:

He was born the second son in a set of twins – but coming out of his mother's womb, he was *grasping the heel* of his older brother, Esau. So his parents named him Jacob, or *the cheater*, and that's what he became.

In those days, the oldest brother was the luckier one. He'd automatically be given something called the **birthright** – that would guarantee him a **double** share of their family's inheritance. Then, their father's **final blessing** was a stamp of approval, or vote of confidence in a sense. Each blessing was unique, and once given, could not be revoked.

Guess who ends up with **both** of those gifts...??? Which is amazing in itself as the 2<sup>nd</sup> son, but especially because **Esau** was their father's favorite son, while **Jacob** was their mother's favorite son.

Here's how it all happened: one day, when Esau had been out hunting, Jacob stayed in camp and made a delicious stew. **Esau** comes home, **smells** the food and says, *I am starving - give me a bowl of that!* **Jacob** says to his brother, *Tell you what, you sell me your **birthright**, and you can have this whole **pot** of stew.* And he did!

Sometime later, their father's health really starts to fail – he's convinced that he'll soon be dead. So he tells **his** favorite son,

***Esau**, go hunt a deer and fix me a meal that I'll really enjoy...then I'll give you my blessing.*

Well, their **mom** hears this, tells **her** favorite son **Jacob** to fix their father's favorite meal, **pretend** he's Esau, and trick their father into receiving his final blessing. Which he does – and when Esau discovers that he's been tricked out of his **both** his birthright and his blessing... well, **what do you think he'd like to do to his brother about now?**

So, Jacob **hits** the road – gets out of Dodge in the middle of the night and takes his thieving reputation with him. Now, not many of **us** deserve as bad a handle as good ol' Jacob...but virtually **all** of us ***have-been-or-will-be*** called names that may or may not be true – many of which can cause us pain.

Take a minute right now to think about some of those hurtful names that others have called you, or hurtful names that you have called yourself:

Liar or fake.	Unworthy or unfaithful.
Coward or bully.	Unloving or unlovable.
Weird or dumb.	Irresponsible or irredeemable.

For almost twenty years, Jacob lives with this memory – he’s living proof of how much truth was in the name he’d been given at birth. Then one day he decides, ***That’s enough! It’s time to face the music...***

All along the trip back home, he **broods** over what he’d done, he **worries** about his angry brother, and **wonders** what Esau might do to him. It’s a long journey, and Jacob has lots of time to think.

When they’re about a day away from home, Jacob hears some startling news: his big brother Esau is coming to meet him...with **400 armed soldiers!** Imagine that you’re Jacob. **What would you guess your brother is going to do to you?**

So now takes place the **wrestling match** we heard about in our **Bible** story. The night before he meets his brother, Jacob is all alone. Suddenly a person, an angel, a messenger from God **tackles** him – and they wrestle throughout the night. It’s a strange story, right?

And yet, maybe not all **that** strange... Are there any Star Wars fans out there? Think back to the episode entitled The Empire Strikes Back. Yoda, the Jedi master, is trying to teach his young, hot-headed student, Luke, a very valuable lesson: that what we can get our *minds and hearts* to do is almost **more** important than what we can get our bodies to do.

But Luke **doesn’t** care about that – he just wants to **hone** his fighting skills so that he can **return** to his **friends** and **help** them take on the Evil

Empire. So Master Yoda sends Luke into a cave – where he must confront whatever he finds.

Says the wise man to his student: *Your weapons...you will not need them.* Well, before **long**, Luke's arch-enemy – Darth Vader – appears in the cave and he's quickly caught in the fight of his life.

### **Can someone tell us what happens to Luke in the cave?**

He's in the dark...

...just like Jacob.

He's scared of what the future holds...

...just like Jacob.

He's not real happy with the way he's lived his life so far...

...just like Jacob.

He wonders if he'll ever be the type of person who will do the right thing for the right reasons...

...just like Jacob.

Luke ends up defeating Darth Vader in the cave...but he's in for a **big shock**. When he lifts up the mask of the bad guy, **whose face does he see?** *His own!!* Luke was fighting against **himself** in that cave.

I think this is very close to the struggle that **Jacob** endures the night before **his** big meeting. Though he's wrestling with a **messenger** from **God**, he's **mostly** fighting **himself** – the way **he used to be** vs. the way **he'd like to be**...the names he's **been** called vs. the names he'd **like** to be called.

So instead of running away again, he faces what he must – and in the end, he prevails, he wins... And then he's blessed with a gift from God: the angel *changes Jacob's name*. He's given a **new** one, *Israel, one who's not afraid to wrestle for what is right*.

Jacob can no longer be the cheat, the grasper, the stealer. As his old, cheating name is **removed**, so his old cheating nature **dies**. He has been tried by fire, purified, made clean in his heart and whole in his soul.

God **loves** that. God **delights** in that. God wants each one of us to engage in that same kind of struggle – daring to take an honest look at **who we are**...and match that up against who **we could be**.

But the **great** blessing here is that God refuses to let us fight that battle alone. God decided **long** ago that he'd never abandon us to our struggles, never tell us to get our life straightened out **first** and then come to him for acceptance and love.

When we come into the Lord's holy presence, alone, in the dark, clutching tightly to those names that have defined us and confined us, that have hurt our hearts and harmed our souls, that have held us down and held us back...God smiles and says, *You've come to the right place*.

And as Jacob was given a new name by God – so you and I are given a new name as well – in fact, we've all been give the very same name.

When we were brought into Jesus' family of faith, we were all given the name of Christ...**Christian** is your name, and **Christian** is my name, and **Christian** is the name of everyone everywhere who sees, in Jesus Christ, God's incomprehensible gift of love and grace for all.

Truly, with the sign of the cross on our foreheads, God looks at us and says, *You are my daughter. And you are my son. You are my beloved child – And I love you dearly.*

That's...an incredible invitation to leave behind all those names that we can now ignore. So rest secure, stand tall and embrace God's call to help the rest of the world know that they are loved by God as well.

Now, you'd think that with so many people named *Christian*, things might get a little confusing. However, unlike poor *Mrs. McCave who had 23 sons and named them all Dave*, God lets us hold on to our **earthly** names to keep the church and our community working well.

Christian. Child of God. Truly **that** name tells us **who** we are, and **whose** we are. Let go of all the rest. Amen.