

Goal: That the hearer reaffirms the power of Christ's name in their daily lives.

It's been more than 17 years since Rachel was pregnant with our first child. I remember the excitement and anxiety we had, preparing to be first time parents. I remember how much time and effort we put into picking his or her name. The possibilities were endless. Some names we liked because they had family history, others because of what they meant, and others because of how we viewed our first child. If you're curious, Joshua is Hebrew for "*God is salvation.*" Abigail means "*Father's joy*", plus, both our mothers are named Gail. And Benjamin is Hebrew for "*blessed.*" My parents named me Matthew because it means "*God's gift*" and it's the first Gospel. Names carry a specific meaning and the hope of expectant parents.

Names have meanings and they can also carry significant power. If your name is Kennedy, then you may have political power. If your name is Kardashian then you have social media power. If your name is Kim and you live in North Korea, then you have military power. If your name is Hilpert, there's a good chance you're from a family of Lutheran pastors. I don't think there's any power in that. But again, there is, isn't there. I mean, coming from a family of Lutheran pastors means that we're Christians and we have Christ's power working in us.

Have you considered how powerful your name is? I'm not talking about your last name; but the name that you were given at your baptism, "*Christian.*" That name carries tremendous power. This morning, we heard how an action done using Christ's name can do the miraculous. Read this with me, "***John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."* (Mark 9: 38)** So a person, not one of the twelve, was able to use Christ's name to cast out demons. Christ's name gave him power over evil, and even the devil? That's pretty cool, right?

So, what does that mean for God's baptized children? It means that we have that same power. We have Christ's name on us. From the moment we were baptized, we've been marked with Christ's name and equipped with His Spirit so that we too can accomplish the miraculous. I like to compare it to a blank check or credit card. Jesus gives us His name so that we can do anything and everything with His power. No matter what we do, when it's done in Jesus name, it's God's power that is at work through us.

Which reminds me of a line from the movie Spiderman, where Peter Parker's uncle Ben tells him, *"With great power comes great responsibility."* How many of you remember the story of Spiderman? Peter was a high school student who was bitten by a radioactive spider and was given the spiders' supernatural powers. He can climb buildings, jump great distances, and even shoot webbing from his arms. But with great power comes great responsibility. Although from a comic book, it's sound wisdom.

Through our baptisms, God has given us power; the power over sin, the power over death, and the power over Satan; all through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And Christ wants you to use His power to make more disciples, baptizing, teaching and doing the miraculous. But, Jesus warns us that if we abuse this power, and seek our own glory, we'll incur God's wrath. ***"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."*** (Mark 9: 42)

Jesus is serious about sin because He is serious about you. He doesn't want anyone to go to hell. He wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. And to show how serious He is about sin, Jesus says don't misuse the power I have given to you for sinning. ***"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'"*** (Mark 9: 43 – 48) If your hand causes you to be greedy instead of sharing with others, cut it off. Don't let your hand hinder your use of God's power, because the consequences are eternally fatal.

And if your foot leads you away from the study of God's Word and worship, whether it be for our kids sports or a day at the beach, cut it off. Don't let your foot lead you in directions that disrespect the name that God's placed on you. Beware especially if your actions cause others, especially your kids, to question their faith and actions as well.

Then Jesus gets even more poignant, if your eye craves images that do not bring glory to God but seek to satisfy your own desires, cut them out. Don't let your eye tempt you with lustful cravings of the flesh that distract from God's commands. Especially beware if, as a Christian, others think that immoral actions are good and acceptable.

The bottom line is that we've been given this great gift from God, the name of Jesus Christ. We've been marked as Christians and this evidenced by what we do. I picture us like Superman, with the big red S on his chest so that others would know who

he was and what he could do. We have bear Christ's name, in our hearts, marking us as God's people and heirs of eternal life. And as we live as Christians we're reminded of the eternal consequences of witnessing a life that doesn't represent Him to others. With great power that we've received, we also have great responsibility.

Ed Peterman tells a story from his childhood on a farm in Ohio. One day his family discovered they had rats in the barn. So, his parents got some traps, baited them with cheese, and set them around the barn. The next morning Ed went out to see if they'd caught anything. The first traps were empty. Then he came to the last trap and he saw something strange. The trap was sprung, but all that was in it was the severed leg of a rat. He ran to tell his parents. They went with him back to the barn. When they got to the trap with the rat's leg in it, his parents just smiled knowing what happened. They told Ed, *"The trap had caught the rat by the leg. The rat knew that its life was at stake, so it chewed off its own leg to escape. That's the way rats are. Better to go on living with only three legs, than to die with all four."* Ed was astonished at the courage it took for the rat to choose to survive by chewing off its own leg and leaving it behind.

Do we have the courage to do what the rat did? If you were caught in a life-threatening situation would you be able to cut part of yourself off and leave it behind in order to go on living? When you're faced with a situation that calls for you to act against God's will would you be able to surrender a hand or a leg or an eye? Would you be able to surrender a memory or a grudge or an obsession or financial stability if your life was at stake or would you cling desperately to them?

If that sounds too difficult, I'm here to tell you that you're not alone in your struggle. With the tremendous power that we've been given in Christ we've also received God's Spirit working in us, guiding us. Which means that we're not alone. We have a God that has given His life for us so that we will live. He gives us part of himself in His meal so that we'd be forgiven all of our sins and strengthened to live bearing His name.

We have been given a tremendous power from God. He's given us a name so that we would know who we are. A name that has power, name that gives forgiveness, and a name that makes us His forever. With great power comes great responsibility. So today, Jesus encourages us to wear His name and use His power to overcome all those evil spirits in our lives. What an amazing power. What an amazing name we share. Amen.