

INTRODUCTION

This is a message about names. The combination of names can often be funny and fascinating. Someone with more time on their hands than me came up with these names:

1. If Yoko Ono had married Sonny Bono, and after he died she married Bono the lead singer for U2 she'd be named Yoko Ono Bono Bono.
2. If Ella Fitzgerald married Darth Vader she'd be Ella Vader.
3. If Sondra Locke married Elliot Ness and then divorced him to marry Herman Munster she'd be Sondra Locke Ness Munster.
4. If Woody Allen married Natalie Wood, divorced her to marry Gregory Peck, divorced him to marry Ben Hur he'd be Woody Wood Peck Hur. (it gets worse)
5. If Ivana Trump married in succession: Orsen Bean; King Oscar of Norway; Louie B. Mayer and then Norbert Weiner she'd be Ivana Bean Oscar Mayer Weiner!

Most of us remember with varying degrees of nostalgia being in school and saying, "here" or "present" when the teacher called our name. And many of you are still attending school and answering "here." The title of this message is derived from the old hymn entitled, "When the Roll is Called up Yonder, I'll be there." There's a great story behind that hymn. In 1893 James Black was a Methodist Sunday School teacher in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. One day he was calling roll and one of the young girls named Bessie didn't answer when her name was called. Mr. Black knew Bessie's dad was a drunkard and often kept her from coming to Sunday School. Mr. Black said, "Well, I trust that when the roll is called up yonder, she'll be there." As he walked home he thought about his statement and tears filled his eyes as he prayed for Bessie. He immediately went inside and wrote the words and music, which he said came to him effortlessly.

As a bit of trivia, this song was sung in the 1941 Academy Award winning picture Sergeant York. The lyrics are: "When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more, / And the morning breaks, eternal, bright and fair; / When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore, / And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there. / On that bright and cloudless morning when the dead in Christ shall rise, / And the glory of His resurrection share; / When His chosen ones shall gather to their home beyond the skies, / And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there. / Let us labor for the Master from the dawn till setting sun, / Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care; / Then when all of life is over, and our work on earth is done, / And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there."

You may be wondering, "Where *is* 'up yonder?'" and "Will there be a roll call up there?" Well, we're going to learn in this message that God not only loves the whole world of humanity, but that He loves individuals enough to write their names down in a book in heaven, and Jesus said we should rejoice, because our names are written there.

This is the last message in the series from Colossians entitled "Life Overflowing!" At the end of all of his letters the Apostle Paul lists the names of individuals. In fact, he lists more than 100 names of people in all of his letters. When some people get to this point in a book like Colossians, they just scan over it thinking these personal remarks aren't very interesting. But I've always found there is wonderful treasure to be found in the people Paul mentions.

As he finished this letter, he mentioned ten different people.

Colossians 4:7-18. “TYCHICUS will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with ONESIMUS, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. My fellow prisoner ARISTARCHUS sends you his greetings, as does MARK, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) Jesus, who is called JUSTUS, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. EPAPHRAS, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Our dear friend, LUKE, the doctor, and DEMAS send greetings. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to NYMPHA and the church in her house. After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. Tell ARCHIPPUS: ‘See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.’ I, PAUL, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.”

When you finish a class in school, you usually have a final exam. As we finish this wonderful study of Colossians, you might consider this as your final exam. This exam will consist of four simple questions, which can be answered with a simple yes or no.

1, DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR POSITION ON GOD’S TEAM?

One thing we learn from this list of names is Paul had many friends who supported him, and helped him with his ministry. Each one of these friends had a special role to play on God’s team. For instance **TYCHICUS** was Paul’s FedEx guy. Paul was in prison, and there wasn’t a postal system, so it was up to Tychicus to deliver the letters to their destinations. You may not be a preacher or teacher, but you can be like Tychicus and hand out worship folders, or deliver books or food to people who need to be encouraged.

EPAPHRAS was a prayer warrior. It says he literally “wrestled in prayer.” The Greek word is *agonia*, from which we get our word “agonize.” Remember, prayer is not only worship, it is warfare. I thank God for the people in our church who wrestle in prayer and agonize for lost people to be saved.

LUKE, was Paul’s companion and physician. But he was also the one who recorded Paul’s missionary adventures. When you consider the gospel according to Luke and Acts, Luke, who was a Gentile, was responsible for writing more of the New Testament than any other individual. There is never any account of Luke preaching, but those who provide physical care, and keep good records reporting what God is doing are valuable members of God’s team.

The only female on this list is **NYMPHA**, whose name means “beautiful maiden.” She performed the ministry of hospitality, because she opened up her home for a church to meet there. One of the greatest ministries you can perform is hospitality. Are you opening your home for God’s work?

The beauty of our church and every New Testament church is we have variety of members who have a variety of gifts and abilities—and every person is important. If God has led you into this church, I believe it’s because He has a special, unique role for you to play on our team. If you aren’t actively serving somewhere, there is some aspect of ministry that is lacking. If our church is going to be what God wants us to be you’ve got to find your place on God’s team and start functioning in that capacity.

2. ARE YOU THE KIND OF FRIEND WHO STICKS AROUND WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH?

The Bible says in Proverbs 18:24, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” There is a huge difference between being a companion and being a true friend. Paul had both kinds in this list. For instance, are you an **ARISTARCHUS** friend? Aristarchus was a guy who stuck with Paul when the going got tough. He was there when Paul caused a riot in Ephesus. The Bible says, “When the mob heard this they were furious and began shouting: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater.” (Acts 19:28-29) Later, when Paul boarded a ship to Rome, Aristarchus was by his side again. We read, “We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. (Acts 27:2) If you know your Bible you know what happened on that voyage. Paul was a prisoner, but before the end of the voyage, he was giving the orders. “The weather started getting rough; The tiny ship was tossed; If not for the courage of the fearless Paul; the sailors would be lost.” The ship wrecked on the island of Malta, and as Paul had predicted none of the crew died. And there was a waterlogged Aristarchus crawling up on the shore beside Paul. Everyone needs a friend like Aristarchus. If you want a friend like that, why don’t you BE a friend like that?

In contrast, there are some “fair-weather friends” who leave when things get tough. Are you a **DEMAS** friend? We don’t know much about Demas except he was here with Paul in prison, but five years later Paul was back in prison. In the last letter we have recorded from Paul, written just before he was executed, we read these sad words written about Demas to Timothy, “Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me.” (2 Timothy 4:9-10). Demas looked at this world and decided he loved it more than the next world, and he deserted Paul when Paul needed his help. He was a deserter. He was AWOL—Absent Without Love. Which kind of friend are you?

Everybody needs a good friend. One of my favorite stories about friendship comes from the life of Hall of Fame baseball player, Jackie Robinson. Because he was the first African-American to play in the majors, he was the target of racial slurs at every stadium. He was even booed in his home stadium. In one of his early games at with the Dodgers, he was enduring the jeers of the

home crowd. When he committed an error, the fans rose in noisy protest of him slinging all kinds of racial epithets at him. At that moment, an amazing thing happened. Pee Wee Reese walked over and put his arm around Jackie Robinson's shoulder and together they turned around to face the crowd. The crowd grew quiet when they saw Robinson's friend standing next to him. Later Jackie Robinson said, "I'll never forget that day, because it was my friend's arm around me that saved my career." That's the kind of friend God wants each of us to be. Do you know of someone right now who needs an arm around their shoulder? Don't be a Demas friend—be an Aristarchus friend!

3. DO YOU HAVE A "FORMER FRIEND" WHO NEEDS YOUR FORGIVENESS?

There are a couple of names on this list with interesting stories. The first is **ONESIMUS**. He was a runaway slave. After he escaped, he became a Christian and encountered Paul. Onesimus' owner was a Christian named Philemon. The book of Philemon is Paul's personal appeal to Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus back. Paul wrote: "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son when I was in chains...that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother...So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me." (Philemon 10, 15-17)

Paul not only asked others to forgive friends who had wronged them, he did it himself. This happened in the case of Mark who is often called John Mark. There was a time when Paul had been estranged from John Mark. The Bible says, "Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company." (Acts 15:37-38).

Sometimes two Christians experience conflict. That's what happened between Paul and Barnabas, and the wedge between them was John Mark, a relative of Barnabas. There was a time when Paul refused to work with Mark. But by the time Paul wrote this letter Mark was there with him, and in his final letter to Timothy Paul wrote, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me." (2 Timothy 4:11) Paul had been reconciled with Mark.

Would you take a minute and do an inventory of "former friends" who were once a part of your life? Maybe they deserted you like Mark did. Perhaps they wronged you in a business arrangement like Onesimus had. Would you be willing to receive them back as a brother or sister? Unforgiveness is a heavy burden to bear. Would you be willing to contact them this week and say, "I want to talk to you about restoring our friendship."

4. IS YOUR NAME WRITTEN IN GOD'S BOOK?

It's an honor for these individuals listed in Colossians 4 to have their names recorded in God's Book, the Bible. Just think, when we get to heaven and meet Aristarchus or Onesimus, we can say, "Hey, I remember reading your name in the Bible!" But is *your* name written in God's Book? Since God's Book, the Bible is complete there's no way for our names to be written in the pages of Holy Scripture. But God has another Book, called the Book of Life and the Bible tells us that it's possible for our names to be recorded there.

The most important question you can consider is this: “Is my name written in the Book of Life?” There will be a roll call in heaven someday—it’s called Judgement Day. The Bible predicts this Judgement Day in many places. For instead the Bible says in Acts 17:30-31, “God commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by that man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” God has already appointed a day—it’s on His calendar. He has already appointed a judge—Judge Jesus.

This final judgement is often called The Great White Throne Judgement, and it is vividly described in Revelation. “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:12,15)

There are “books” (plural) and there is another Book—the Book of Life. These people are being judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. Don’t get the idea God records all your good deeds on one page and all your bad deeds on another page and if the good pages outweigh the bad you go to heaven, but if the bad pages outweigh the good, you go to hell. I believe these books of works will serve as a record that no matter how many good deeds a person performed, good works alone will never gain them access to heaven. The Bible says, “not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He has saved us.” (Titus 3:4, 5) A person could have fifty books of good works, but if their name isn’t in the Book of Life, they will be cast into the lake of fire.

It’s important to distinguish between this judgement and the Judgement Seat of Christ. I believe that followers of Jesus will NOT be judged at the Great White Throne described here in Revelation 20. We WILL be judged at the Judgement Seat of Christ. But this judgement isn’t to determine if we’re lost or saved, but to determine how faithful we were to use the gifts and abilities the Master gave us. So, if you’re a true Believer, you shouldn’t fear this Judgement. Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

CONCLUSION

Have you ever had your name appear in print? Did it make you proud to see your name in the newspaper, or some magazine? In this present world we tend to make lists of people we think are more important than others. In Hollywood they talk about people who are on the “A-List.” Actors and actresses are rated as being on the D, C, B, or A list according to their box office drawing power. According to an article on wikipedia.com, there are only nine actors on the A+ list. Care to guess who they are? George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Will Smith, Tom Hanks, Johnny Depp, Russell Crowe, Jim Carrey, Tom Cruise, and the only actress on the A+ list is Julia Roberts. But I don’t know how old that list is, because those positions of power and popularity can change in a week. Wow, isn’t it great to have your name on the A+ list?

Have you ever seen a movie or television show where’s there’s a long line of people waiting to get into a popular club in New York or LA? In order to get past the bouncer you have to be on

the "list." Those sports and movie celebrities who are on the A-list never have any trouble getting in. They just walk to the front of the line and because they're on "the list," they get in.

You may not ever get your name on one of those kinds of lists, but there is another list of names that is far more important than any list of earthly celebrities. We could call it the G-list—God's List. Don't worry if you're not on the A-List in this life, it's the G-List that'll matter for eternity.

Can you imagine one day at the Great White Throne Judgement as Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, or George Clooney stands before Judge Jesus, He'll ask the recording angel, "Is his name written in the book of life?" If the angel says, "No," can you imagine one of them saying, "Hey, look again! I'm an A-List guy! I get in anywhere I want to go!" But the only list that matters is G-List—the Book of Life.

Or let's imagine the scene of some unregenerate church member we'll call Larry Lost standing before Judge Jesus. The Judge asks the recording angel, "Is his name written in the Book of Life?" The angel shakes his head, and Larry says, "Wait a minute, Lord! My name is written on the roll of Green Acres Baptist Church! My name is written on the annual contribution report to church, and on my baptism certificate! Lord, Lord, there's got to be a mistake!" But there's no mistake. Just because your name is on a church roll doesn't mean it's written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you, depart from me, you evildoers.'" (Matthew 7:22-23)

Let me ask you again: Is your name written in God's book? Are you thinking, "I hope so"? The Bible says you can *know* for certain. Here's how: You must admit you're a sinner and repent of the attitude you'll ever be good enough to save yourself. Then you must simply accept God's free gift of grace. Salvation is not by my works, it's by God's grace alone. Salvation isn't like climbing a tree; it's more like falling into the arms of God. You really do let go and let God save you. When you do, you can rejoice in knowing your name is written in God's book.

Jesus spoke about this list of names in heaven. Once he sent out 70 disciples to preach and heal the sick in His name. These disciples came back rejoicing that the demons were subject to them in Jesus' name. Jesus said, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20) Don't worry if you're not on an A-List or a list of Who's Who. Rejoice that your name is written in heaven! And the news gets even better! In Revelation, Jesus tells us when your name is written in heaven, it is written with indelible, permanent ink. He said, "He who overcomes...I will never blot his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." (Revelation 3:5)

Names are important to God. That's why there are so many in the Bible. As we will sing in a few minutes, God knows your name. You are precious to Him. God says, "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:16)

My friend, one day, when the roll is called up yonder...will you be there? You will be if you are trusting Jesus alone for your salvation.

OUTLINE

1. DO YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR POSITION ON GOD'S TEAM?

Yes No

2. ARE YOU THE KIND OF FRIEND WHO STICKS AROUND WHEN THINGS GET TOUGH?

Yes No

3. DO YOU HAVE A "FORMER FRIEND" WHO NEEDS YOUR FORGIVENESS?

Yes No

4. IS YOUR NAME WRITTEN IN GOD'S BOOK?

Yes No

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." *Revelation 20:12, 15*

OUTLINE



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes