

**Theme:** Father of promise for all

What's the difference between a name and a nickname? A name, in our culture at least, isn't generally given with a ton of thought put into the actual meaning of it. We like the sound of it or choose it because of a family member. "Joseph" means "He will add /increase." Was I named this so that I'd go on to increase some stuff, nominative determinism, or because it was used by a bunch of people in my family already? It's that.

A nickname, though, given by one's peers which sticks to that person truer than their real name, captures an aspect of them as seen by others and puts a name to it. One of my friends is called "Gramps/Grampa." I have to make an effort to call him by his actual name, whatever it is. Other nicknames contain praise or become a title describing a grand accomplishment in a word. There's Greek Emperor Alexander the Great. A less imposing military figure but with unquestionably better nickname was Commanding General of the U.S. Army from 1841-1861, Winfield Scott, aka, "Old Fuss and Feathers" for his insistence on etiquette, which Billy the Kid and Calamity Jane could have used a little of. Lot of nicknames in sports: The Great One Wayne Gretzky, Earvin Magic Johnson, Joe Cool Montana, Yogi Lawrence Berra, and Hammerin' Hank Aaron. Elvis was the king of rock'n'roll. Some refer to themselves in third person as Turbo... By Isaiah, God is called LORD, Father, and Redeemer. These names are who God is in the absolute fullest sense, each highly significant, but that significance is lost on all of us at times when we can't see God being these things in a way that fully makes sense to us, if it makes any sense at all. God feels aloof, far off, hidden, obscured. Lots of psalms talk about this yet throw themselves up to God's mercy because he says he's gracious. This section of Isaiah is in the same vein.

Remember how Isaiah begins his book? With a strong call to repentance for all God's people and he begins its close in chapter 63-64 with a plea for mercy made powerful awareness of sin but also

confidence to the LORD, our Father God, in hope he'll provide as only the perfect Father can, "*You, LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.*" (**Isaiah 63:16**) A fountain of faithful free love, our tender Father and Redeemer God always has been and will always be. Binding himself to care in grace for our every need, our Father redeems us with his Son's body, blood, and life and gives all the other stuff of infinitely lesser value. There's only one God like the LORD, the only one of all the gods who's real and acts on behalf of those who believe his words and wait, never in vain, for his word to be fulfilled.

This is who God is and he gives us a Bible filled with evidence. He's gracious and loving and rejoices to see his righteous children, made pure by faith, through his power, doing his will and remembering his ways. That's just who God is and in response, what do people do? Continue to sin, rousing the anger of the almighty God. All of us have done so. What did Isaiah say at his commissioning? That he was a man of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips, a sinner among sinners. Same for us. Because of the pattern of persistent sin as response to God's continued grace, the question must be asked, "*How then can we be saved?*" (**Isaiah 64:5b**) The writer of Hebrews advancing the thought, asks, "*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,* <sup>27</sup> *but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*" (**Hebrews 10:26, 27**) Why should we be saved when we're like that? This is about as honest a question as it gets and each of us needs to ask it of ourselves.

The answer's simple. We totally shouldn't be, but we think we should! We try desperately to display that we're save-worthy, trying to meet God partway by doing all kinda good stuff. What thoughts do we project onto God by acting this way, though? Does God think, "That person, even though I'm aware of the millions of sins they committed, they did 7 righteous things last week, so maybe they're worthy of my grace after all." Flippant example but accurate portrayal of the trite thoughts we foist onto

God. God doesn't think along these lines. Ever. In fact, should we think, "Hey God, I did ya a favor!" even pointing at things he told us to do, saying, "See, I followed your Word, walked in your ways, remembered you. Not so bad after all am I??" God answers that thought directly, "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*" (**Isaiah 64:6**) True indeed. Do you read that like an indictment or a confession? Why not both? It convicts of the truth that if we think we've done a meritorious or redemptive act in God's sight, we've actually done the opposite. All those things from each one of us are like filthy rags to God. Our righteousness can't be based on this, but reveals instead such inner decay that like dried leaves, the guilt of our sin blows all of us away.

Have you noticed how strong the collective language is in this section of Isaiah? Repeating "all of us" or "we all" many times. This plea for mercy is universal. All of us must toss ourselves up in hope to God that he'll catch us, forgive us, love us. Isaiah, with his picturesque imagination and writing style says we're like clay in God's hands; God will do what he will with us, as a Father. So why not ask for grace of the only one who can shape us according to it? God makes us this way through the greatest promise: Jesus! **II Corinthians 5:17**, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" **Galatians 2:20**, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.*" **I John 3:2**, "*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" This is the work of the Lord's hand in Jesus – it's you! You are a new creation filled with inexpressible joy because you are forgiven and being forgiven means living forever in the best place ever to better all the time know God and his love.

Plead confidently along with Isaiah, *“Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.”* (**Isaiah 64:9**) Big things couched in modest terms. Ask for them! Ask God to be merciful for Jesus’ sake. Jesus, the perfectly pleasing offering and substitute for all people is the reason for our forgiveness. God says through another prophet, **Jeremiah 31:34**, *“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”* We are forgiven, all of us, and given holiness. The universal pronouncement of forgiveness God gives is tough to miss. That’s intentional on God’s part. He wants you to know who he is, that he is your LORD, your Father, your Redeemer who takes away all your sins, who protects you. It’s who he is, so it’s what he does because he delights in you for Jesus’ sake. Amen.