

The couple turns away from me and smiles. Their family and friends smile back. They're newly married. But they do have one more task to complete before its official. It's true, what God has joined together let man not separate, but if the government license isn't signed there's nothing to separate. I catch the beaming couple as quickly as I can, bring their two witnesses along, and get the marriage license signed. And do you know what almost every bride asks me? What name do I sign? The new one I say. Then almost every time she says, oh I'm signing my new name. Now seriously, like she hasn't practiced how it's going to look before that?

A new name means something special. It means a change of identity, a change in how people address us, and a change in how we see ourselves. Christians have a name. Not the earthly name our parents gave. This is the name by which God knows us and calls us. But it wasn't always the name we have now. We really have a new name. Just like a bride taking a new name when she gets married, we got a new name when we became God's bride.

As we continue to look at the glory of Christ our King, the famous son during this season of Epiphany, it is into the first lesson and the book of Isaiah we go. There we find out we are...

**The Bride with a new name  
Not forsaken but delighted  
Not desolate but claimed**

For many months there was a house in our neighborhood a couple streets over that was bringing everything down. At a neighborhood meeting the people who lived close were complaining. The bushes were overgrown to the point you couldn't see the front door. Garbage piled up in the yard and no one cleaned it up so it blew everywhere. The lawn grew and grew to incredible heights. Whoever lived there had obviously walked away. No cars came or went. No people came or went. It was a forsaken house and it became an eyesore.

For many centuries the Israelites looked like an eyesore. They were supposed to be worshipping only the Lord. But they constantly found themselves involved in worship of false gods too. They were supposed to marry only within their people but they found themselves attracted to and marrying outsiders. Over and over there were examples of forsaking the Lord. As they were forsaking the Lord they had every expectation God would forsake them. It's what they deserved.

But things were not as they thought. **"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch."** Things were exactly the opposite. The Lord spoke up and wouldn't stop speaking. He couldn't stop speaking about these people, not because of them, but because of what he had done for them. Righteousness. Salvation. God gave them these amazing blessings as gifts. God wanted everyone to know.

Instead of forsaking his people, God delighted in his people. He made the ones who were forsaking him his bride. They needed a new name, which he gave. They needed to be beautiful, which he made them. God took the formerly forsaken and in his delight he cleaned them up and made them beautiful like a golden crown of a king. Beautiful with decorations, jewels, and priceless gold. So beautiful God held it up to show it off. He loved and delighted in his bride. **"No longer will they call you Deserted...but you will be called Hephzibah...for the Lord will take delight in you."** It's a new beautiful name for God's bride, a gift of God's grace to them and for his glory. The Lord delights in them.

Zion, Jerusalem, Deserted, Hephzibah, none of those names registers with us. We don't go by those names. We may struggle to see ourselves in this portion of God's Word. But is there any reason Deserted might be our name? Is there anything about our lives that seems like we've walked away? Have we let our lives get a little overgrown with errors that started out small with us thinking we could control but now are out of hand? Are we so hard headed that we let our sins blow us this way and that until we can no longer say they just affect us not everyone around us? Do we let our sins grow and grow until everyone around us says how ugly we are? Honestly, yes I've had those moments. I've walked away from problems I didn't bother trying to clean up. I've got the dirty little secret sins that I convince myself are mine alone, but in reality they hurt others too. My life and your life are filled with the ugliness of overgrown sins. Trying to clean that up ourselves, trying to wash it off, trying to make ourselves beautiful and right just won't work. For every one of those God forsaking sins we should be forsaken.

The authority, emphasis, and vividness of this new name really belong in the mouth of the Lord. Isaiah writes but God speaks. God will not and cannot remain silent about the great things he's done. He provided righteousness for Israel. He provided salvation. But not just for them. Righteousness has been declared for all people. Righteousness, a rightness before God that didn't exist before, has been declared to you. It is yours. The realization that you are right with God washes over you and in the process cuts down those out of control sins. Being declared right with God picks up the trash of sin that floats through your lives and into other people's lives too. And what is left behind is forgiveness. Total forgiveness for all ugly sins. It's not your work or mine. It's God's work. He cleans us up and forgives us. He washes us and makes us beautiful. It's a power of forgiveness coming from outside us and applied to us.

Our salvation comes from God through this righteousness. God make us his bride. He longs to give us a new name. **“The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.”** All that the Lord has called, those that he washes of their sins and works faith in their hearts to trust in him, he gives them all a new name. Not forsaken anymore but delighted. God delights in you and he delights in me.

Many brides still change their name. Every time they write it, sign it, or hear it they're reminded of the husband who gives it. The relationship that started, the joy and love that exists, the protection and safety that relationship provides. Their groom delights in her, will sacrifice for her, go out of his way to make her happy. He does everything for her. God acts the same way towards us, people who are part of his Church of all believers in Christ. We are claimed by our groom to be his own and receive a new name.

There's every reason for God not to claim his people. Throughout Israelite history it was constant rejection. They made themselves desolate, emptying themselves time after time of things God wanted them to do and be. But for reasons we can only describe as God's love for people who didn't deserve that love God claimed them. He made them his bride and brought them close. **“As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”** It seemed improbable, but God wasn't sad that they were his. He claimed them and rejoiced over them.

Anybody facing a new tumor knows that desolate feeling. The person with no job and no prospects knows it. The single person, married person, obnoxious person, even the person with loads of Facebook friends but no actual human contact all at times might know the desolate feeling. Wandering in the middle of heartache and pain feeling sorry for ourselves because we must be wandering alone. The world seems to be getting worse and closes in on us. We can't do anything about that. We're just one person. Why even try? Another day of desolation, loneliness, and bitterness leave us lost in our sins.

If you've felt that desolation, you have a new name. God promises to claim you and has. Like a husband brings his wife close, so God brings us into a close relationship with all the benefits. God claims us as his bride. He rescued us. He lifted our sins off us and onto the one he sent for us. Christ Jesus became our groom by taking our sins. He claims us. Now he can't wait to get us home. We wait for the full realization of those blessings. This close relationship still spans between earth and heaven. But we're already called the bride. We already have the new name. **“No longer will they...name your land desolate. But you will be called... your land Beulah...your land will be married.”** You are not desolate you are Beulah, married, chosen, claimed by Christ.

This is our future. God can't wait till it's complete and you're in heaven with him. That's why he calls out and refuses to remain silent. The whole world needs to know that God's people are coming home as his bride. And there's still room. He wants more. He wants to call out more unbelievers to believers. He wants more who are not currently his bride to become his bride. This is why he gives his promises. It's why he rejoices over you and me. It leads us to rejoice over him. That leads us to proclaiming the great grace God has shown to us. We have a new name. Not desolate but claimed by God.

New brides sometimes fumble with their new name. God gives you a new name as his bride. What that name means is most important. You are not forsaken because Christ delights in you. You are not in desolation because Christ claims you. You are God's bride. Prepare yourself for an eternity with Christ to praise and glorify God. You are the Bride with a new name.