

Rev. Billy Cerveny

[01:00:04:21 - 01:00:05:06]

Awesome.

[01:00:07:04 - 01:00:10:16]

Y'all pray with me. Father, thank you. It's Pentecost, Lord.

[01:00:11:23 - 01:00:28:08]

Thank you for the gift of Pentecost. Thank you that you poured your Holy Spirit out upon this church. On all churches, Lord, that you would allow us to see the truth of who you are, the truth of who we are, and the truth of your gospel. I pray now, Lord, that you would speak through your scriptures.

[01:00:29:13 - 01:00:34:04]

You give us eyes that see and ears that hear. We pray this in your name, Jesus, amen.

[01:00:37:00 - 01:00:38:21]

It's a rim shot. I never had a rim shot after prayer.

[01:00:39:23 - 01:00:40:08]

Here we go.

[01:00:41:14 - 01:01:24:05]

So a couple weeks ago, we had finished our service and I walked in the back and there was a person that I had not met here before and he was standing in the corner. And I went up to introduce myself and I'm really bad with names at times. And so it helps me that when I meet someone new for the first time, they'll tell me their name and then I'll say their name back to them because it helps kind of ingrain it in my head. And I said, "Hey, how you doing? It's good to see you. My name's Billy." And he said, "Hey, I'm Jathan." I said, "Jathan?" That's a name I've

not heard before. So it wasn't Jathan, Jason. It wasn't Nathan. It was Jathan. And I said, "Well, it's very nice to meet you, Jathan. Is this your first time visiting us, Jathan?" And he looks at me and he goes, "Are you serious?"

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As a joke, that's not even my joke. I stole this from a guy on Instagram, but it's a funny joke and I heard that. I was like, "Names matter."

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Then you'll get it later too if you didn't get it the first time.

[01:01:42:23 - 01:02:16:04]

Names matter and they're important. And when we get them wrong, they really affect us. And we're talking about today, we're studying Pentecost. And this is the time in scripture in Acts chapter two, just to kind of give a little context, where Jesus, he's raised from the dead. He's revealed himself to the apostles. He's ascended and he's seated on the throne and he pours his Holy Spirit out on the church. And this is a time where Jesus gives his people a new name. And he calls the church what it is and he calls them together.

[01:02:17:14 - 01:02:27:20]

And another way of saying it, when we celebrate Pentecost is we're celebrating the church's birthday, which is kind of a cool idea. It's when we became what we were. If it weren't for Pentecost, we wouldn't be sitting here today.

[01:02:29:00 - 01:02:32:13]

Now, when we think about the Holy Spirit, and we wanna talk a little bit about that today,

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you think about the Holy Spirit, we all have a lot of associations with that, don't we? And some of us, we think of the Holy Spirit is, like I always like to say, it's God's special effects department. That it's the thing that gives us the warm fuzzies or it does the miracles or the Holy

Spirit does these miraculous things or makes us feel transcendent, or gives us transcendent experiences. And I'm not saying that's wrong, but if that's all it is, then we will be left in a really desperate spot. Because the Holy Spirit does so much more, and I wanna unpack that a bit. And in order to do that, there's two passages we looked at today, we read, we had a lot of scripture readings today, there took a couple of my favorite ones that we read. And the first one was in Genesis chapter 11.

[01:03:18:03 - 01:03:27:09]

It was a story of the Tower of Babel. And that's not one that we usually think about when we think of Pentecost. Let me give you a little context for this. This is after the flood,

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and God had sort of purified the earth, and Moses had emerged from the ark, and God gives him these commandments. It's sort of, he's echoing the commands he gave back in the beginning in the garden. And he says to Moses, "I want you to be fruitful and multiply. I want you to go out and I want you to fill the earth. And at this point, when we get to Genesis 11, he had followed that command. They had multiplied, and there was lots of people. But the problem was they weren't filling the earth. In fact, they were so scared of being dispersed and losing track with one another, they huddled together.

[01:04:05:01 - 01:04:22:07]

And what it says in Genesis 11, it says that they were, the whole world had one language, and literally translated it said, they were of one lip. They all spoke the same language, and they huddled in this little city called Shinar. Now Shinar is in modern-day Iraq,

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and we don't know much about that city, but it was a city that was founded by this guy named Nimrod. You've heard that name, it's a name in the Old Testament, it's a name in Genesis. It's not just what you call someone when they're doing something less than smart. Nimrod was a character in the Bible.

[01:04:39:16 - 01:04:44:23]

And Nimrod was known, and he was the first leader who was a tyrant.

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And he was known that he would build these cities, and what he wanted to do was he wanted to build these kingdoms that weren't just powerful kingdoms, he wanted to rival God.

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And so as Nimrod and these people, they came together, they started to build this city, and it says in the scripture, they learned how to build bricks.

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And they got pretty good at it, and they became full of themselves. And they said, you know, we're gonna take this a step further. And it says, come, let us build ourselves a city in a tower

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with its top in the heavens,

[01:05:17:12 - 01:05:24:06]

and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole world.

[01:05:25:16 - 01:05:43:07]

Now the name, the Hebrew word for, they're gonna build a name for themselves, and the Hebrew word for name here is Shem. And it doesn't mean the name like, that's just what you'd put on your driver's license. What it's saying, let us build a lasting, enduring legacy that is about us.

[01:05:44:08 - 01:05:51:08]

Let us become people of renown, our reputation that will precede us. We want to rival God.

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Not a good start.

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So what they set out to build this tower,

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now what this tower was, what a lot of scholars believe is they were building what we now know to be the world's first ziggurat. And a ziggurat's a fun word, but this was a worship structure that they built in that region during that time. And they kind of, you might have seen pictures of them, they kind of resembled pyramids. And as a ziggurat, they had these staircases that went to the very top, and the premise of this was, they would build these staircases so the gods would be able to walk down and receive the sacrifices that were being offered to them.

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And you can see them, they're actually all over the Near East during, even now, the ruins of these things. And the ziggurat in Babel was massive, but it had one important difference than the other ziggurat's that I just described.

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That the staircase that it built was not for God to come down.

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The staircase that they built was a staircase for them to go up and be equal with God.

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So what does the scripture says? It says, "And the Lord came down to the city." So as the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built,

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when you read this in the original language, it's kind of like tongue in cheek, because they're saying, "We're gonna build this thing, and we're gonna be equal to God." But when you read it, it's like God kind of gets out of his chair and he's like, "What is that little thing down there?"

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It's kind of like making fun of them a little bit, and he goes and he's kind of squinting to see, and it's almost like children playing in the sandbox.

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And he goes down and he sees what they're up to, and the Lord saw the city, and in response to their hubris to their pride, he gives them three divine judgments. Within Genesis, they call curses.

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And the three curses that he lays out, the first one is that he scrambles their language.

[01:07:54:18 - 01:08:01:13]

He makes it those people that were one lip, he made it so they couldn't communicate with it, he threw them into chaos and disorder.

[01:08:03:03 - 01:08:05:19]

So they lost their ability to speak to one another.

[01:08:06:21 - 01:08:09:17]

And the second thing he did is he dispersed them all over the earth.

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Basically, he's saying, "If you're not gonna go and fill the earth like I told you, then I'll see too that you do."

[01:08:18:05 - 01:08:34:05]

And the third thing that he did, and most profoundly, it's where the people had rejected God and his power over and over again, all the way through Genesis. What God says, "If you're gonna reject me, you're gonna reject me, okay, then reject me, thy will be done."

[01:08:35:08 - 01:09:04:19]

And it's one of my favorite writers says, a guy by the name of Michael Heiser, he says, in Genesis 11 is a picture of God divorcing the nations, where he steps back and he says, "Okay, you are free to do what you want. You're free to worship what you want. You're free to follow your own whims, and you're free to worship any way you like." Which interestingly enough, when you read Genesis before chapter 11, you don't see any idol worship anywhere. And when you get to chapter 12, it's everywhere. It kicks off. So God pushes back from the table.

[01:09:06:14 - 01:09:27:01]

There's something I want you to see here about this passage is, these people, they stepped in, and they had one goal, and they wanted to make their name great. They wanted to rival God. They wanted their names to echo through eternity, as you might like hear in Gladiator. But in Genesis 11, you know what you don't hear at all? You don't hear one person's name.

[01:09:28:08 - 01:09:36:13]

You don't hear the name of a people. There's not an individual or a group that is referenced or remembered or mentioned, good or bad.

[01:09:38:07 - 01:09:44:19]

What this says is in their attempt to make their names great, to glorify themselves, they actually made themselves really small.

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Because they stepped out of this larger epic story that God was trying to write, and they made their story about their own egos,

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the story actually shrank.

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And their efforts became really flat,

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and became really empty.

[01:10:02:17 - 01:10:07:16]

Now I read this, and we all read this, and you think to yourselves, like, who were these people?

[01:10:08:17 - 01:10:10:01]

Like, what were they thinking, right?

[01:10:11:10 - 01:10:12:16]

The same things that we think.

[01:10:14:15 - 01:10:15:21]

Because we're the same way, aren't we?

[01:10:17:05 - 01:10:23:10]

I mean, how much of our lives are spent chasing the validation of this world?

[01:10:24:17 - 01:10:34:22]

How much of your life, I can speak for myself, how much of my life has been spent on this hamster wheel of trying to make our names something that we think it should be?

[01:10:36:00 - 01:10:38:14]

Trying to gain the approval of men.

[01:10:39:19 - 01:10:42:16]

It's almost cliché when we think about it because it's so true.

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How often do we make the story about ourselves, or we spend our life trying to build our own version of our own ziggurat? Like, what would that be for you?

[01:10:54:01 - 01:10:59:18]

Maybe it's your work, or maybe it's kind of where you fit into the structures of Ortega,

[01:11:01:02 - 01:11:02:12]

or maybe it's how we parent,

[01:11:04:14 - 01:11:06:11]

maybe it's what kind of preacher I am.

[01:11:08:02 - 01:11:09:10]

Let me tell you this, and this is true,

[01:11:10:14 - 01:11:16:14]

it's not a question of if you contend with this, it's a question of how you contend with it.

[01:11:17:14 - 01:11:18:10]

Because we all do.

[01:11:19:16 - 01:11:31:01]

We all will step on that hamster wheel, and if you cannot identify, if you're not aware of the ways that you are trying to seek validation in some way in your life, I'm telling you, you need to figure it out because you're in danger.

[01:11:32:08 - 01:11:33:10]

Because we all do it.

[01:11:35:02 - 01:11:43:21]

One of my favorite things when I speak to young preachers, guys that are coming along, and they wanna step into a pulpit, it never freaks me out if they battle pride.

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If they say, "Man, I really wanna do good at this, "I really want people to think well of me." That doesn't scare me. What scares me is if they don't know that that is going on in their own hearts.

[01:11:57:15 - 01:12:11:09]

Because if they don't see that, they can't contend with it. They can't engage with the Lord and say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner who is stepping in "to open your word and to proclaim your glory, "please proclaim it despite me."

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That is a heart worthy that's ready to step into that. But we need, the point is this, we need to be able to engage ourselves. We need to be able to see it.

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How do we do it? How do we break free of it?

[01:12:26:10 - 01:13:28:03]

I was in Nashville before I moved to Jacksonville, and lived up there for 23 years. And one of the neatest ministry things that I ever got to do was that I was the chaplain for this professional soccer team up there, this MLS team, the Nashville Soccer Club. And it was awesome. You had these young guys from all over the world that came into the city and they were playing, they were all rock star players, incredible athletes. And you got to walk with them and go and journey with them through life and go to practices and hang out in the locker rooms and deal with the front office and some of the coaches and all that kind of stuff. And I remember one day I was at a game and we had this new player that had come into town. And I was sitting on in one of the booths and I was speaking to a guy who was one of the kind of higher-ups in the office there that had some dealings with who, which players came and went. And we were sitting there watching as this young player came out and he just had this amazing first half and he scored this goal, just a banger in the right corner. And everyone went nuts.

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And right after that, the player runs over to the side of the field, he turns to the crowd behind him and he does this and he points both of his thumbs to the name on the back of his jersey.

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I totally get it. We've seen this kind of thing before. But what struck me was that the person I was standing next to him, I heard him groan.

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And I kind of let the moment pass a minute and I said, hey, what was that about? Why was that so disturbing to you?

[01:13:57:07 - 01:14:01:13]

And he told me, he said, you know what, that guy's doing himself a disservice.

[01:14:03:00 - 01:14:15:12]

I get it. I get it that he's here, he wants to make a name for himself. He's trying to establish his career. But when egos like that only make you forgettable, is what he said.

[01:14:16:14 - 01:14:26:05]

And then he said to me something I'll never forget. And this was this, and I wrote it down. It says, if you play for the shield on the front of your jersey, they will remember the name on the back.

[01:14:27:18 - 01:14:30:18]

Flip it around and you push everybody away.

[01:14:32:18 - 01:14:38:10]

And what he was saying in that moment, is the same that we were saying in a minute ago, is if you try to make the story about you,

[01:14:40:00 - 01:14:50:02]

if your story is really just about inflating or drawing out or propping up or displaying your own ego, man, do we shrink that story. And you alienate yourself from other people.

[01:14:51:13 - 01:14:58:12]

But when you make it about the shield, when you make it about the club and you make it about the crowd or about that you step into this epic narrative,

[01:14:59:17 - 01:15:01:05]

of which you are a part now,

[01:15:02:11 - 01:15:13:09]

of which that you stepping into something bigger than yourself, you don't even have to be the greatest player in the world. You are part of a deeper purpose, a deeper meaning. You're part of a deeper community.

[01:15:14:19 - 01:15:17:20]

And you all have your eyes focused in the same direction.

[01:15:19:09 - 01:15:22:13]

And we do that, what's that version for us?

[01:15:24:00 - 01:15:31:17]

What does it mean for us to not play for the name on the back of our jersey, but for the shield, for the crest on the front? Welcome to Pentecost.

[01:15:33:12 - 01:15:35:16]

That's why the Lord gave us Acts chapter two.

[01:15:37:00 - 01:15:43:08]

Acts chapter two, Jesus, like I said, he's risen from the grave. He tells the church, he says to his apostles, "Don't leave Jerusalem.

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"Something's coming, I just need you to wait." So they huddle into this room and they're all sitting around. And Pentecost is a festival

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and it's one of these three pilgrimage festivals. What that means is the Jewish people that were scattered from all over the world, it's one of the three festivals where they come home and they offer a sacrifice. And it's 50 days after the Passover and all these people from all over the world, Charlotte just read it, it's like a United Nations list. You had people from Asia. You had people from Egypt, from Rome, from Mesopotamia, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And they had gathered

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and they were offering their sacrifices and the disciples, all of a sudden it says in verse two, suddenly a sound like a blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

[01:16:36:20 - 01:16:38:02]

This divine interruption.

[01:16:39:10 - 01:16:48:07]

You know what it reminds me of, it's like when you read the story of Mount Sinai, when God gives Moses the 10 commandments and then he shakes the mountain, that was what was happening, he rattled the house.

[01:16:50:00 - 01:17:09:02]

And all of a sudden it was so loud, these tongues of fire descended upon each of the apostles head and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak in languages that were not their own. And the crowds around the house heard this going on and they ran to see what was going on. When they arrived, they see these Galileans

[01:17:10:10 - 01:17:24:16]

who speak Aramaic and all of a sudden the person from Egypt hears Egyptian and the person from Asia hears whatever language they were speaking, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And they're blown away. What were they saying?

[01:17:25:16 - 01:17:27:02]

They were telling the story of Jesus.

[01:17:28:12 - 01:17:33:20]

They were telling the story from David to the prophets, to his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension.

[01:17:35:13 - 01:17:37:19]

And the Holy Spirit made it so they could understand.

[01:17:40:10 - 01:17:44:02]

Now what does that have to do with the Tower of Babel? And what does that have to do with you and me?

[01:17:45:10 - 01:17:56:07]

When God has poured out his Holy Spirit, when he established his church, his first order of business was reversing the curses from Genesis 11.

[01:17:57:09 - 01:17:57:22]

You see this?

[01:17:59:04 - 01:18:07:17]

In Genesis 11, God confused their language and divided them. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit reverses this confusion so he could proclaim Jesus.

[01:18:08:22 - 01:18:13:07]

In Genesis 11, God scattered the nations and he gave them nothing in common.

[01:18:14:12 - 01:18:22:03]

In Acts 2, you see that he is uniting the nation. He is baptizing them with the Holy Spirit, bringing them into one true church.

[01:18:23:19 - 01:18:44:20]

In Genesis 11, the people build this staircase to climb up to God to proclaim their own glory. Here in Acts 2, you hear the rushing of God like a wind slamming down into the house. Why is he doing it? He's making it possible for people to see his glory so that he can proclaim the glory of Jesus' name. It's massive.

[01:18:46:16 - 01:18:50:14]

This matters because the Holy Spirit, it does the same thing for us.

[01:18:52:10 - 01:19:00:06]

Because without the Holy Spirit, you and I would be left to speak our own individual and irrelevant languages of our own glory.

[01:19:01:20 - 01:19:09:18]

Without the Holy Spirit, all I would be busy trying to build these silly little ziggurats to proclaim and climb up and make my name great.

[01:19:11:06 - 01:19:14:06]

The Holy Spirit, when it comes, it comes with power.

[01:19:16:09 - 01:19:25:11]

It doesn't come just to make me feel good, though it does at times, but it equips me. It pulls a scale from my eyes. It illuminates.

[01:19:26:13 - 01:19:29:00]

It allows me to see the truth of who I am.

[01:19:30:00 - 01:19:44:04]

It allows me to contend with those things in my heart that I would never see on my own. Those things that I know are dangerous, and all of a sudden, it allows me to see that. But it also doesn't just leave me with that. It allows me to see the truth of who Jesus is.

[01:19:45:06 - 01:19:48:15]

It allows me to see that he brings me into union with him.

[01:19:49:20 - 01:20:04:11]

It's the Holy Spirit. When I read scripture, or you heard what was read earlier, those things, anything that you felt the eyes of your heart lift up and say, yeah, that's true. Oh, that's good, or I want that, or there's something in there that I don't understand, but you're leaning in. That's the Holy Spirit.

[01:20:05:17 - 01:20:09:19]

Without it, that just falls like a flat tennis ball on the ground. It doesn't make any sense.

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We don't have the ability to send that stuff on our own.

[01:20:15:09 - 01:20:22:19]

It's the Holy Spirit. It allows us to see the larger story of the gospel of which we are now a part,

[01:20:24:16 - 01:20:35:03]

that we as people who are marked by the Holy Spirit, we are given a new name. We are given a New Jersey, not the state, a New Jersey.

[01:20:37:21 - 01:20:44:23]

We're given a New Jersey, and we are now, and we are now stepping into a story where we are never riding on the bench,

[01:20:46:17 - 01:20:49:23]

where we spend our lives trying to earn a place of consequence.

[01:20:51:04 - 01:20:53:20]

What the gospel says is you are of eternal consequence.

[01:20:54:23 - 01:20:56:23]

You are of immeasurable worth.

[01:20:58:18 - 01:21:01:05]

How do you judge what something is worth?

[01:21:02:08 - 01:21:14:06]

How do you judge what something is worth? You look at the price tag that swings from it, right? What is someone willing to pay for that thing? What was someone willing to pay for you as a Christian? What was it?

[01:21:15:10 - 01:21:25:18]

Jesus, he paid everything, all that he had. He left the throne room to suffer the indignities of this world to lay down his life.

[01:21:27:16 - 01:21:40:14]

To have his body destroyed, what? For you, that's the price tag. You are of immeasurable worth, of immeasurable value, of immeasurable significance. If he did that for you, what would he not do?

[01:21:42:03 - 01:21:44:04]

Think about this, what would he not do?

[01:21:45:17 - 01:21:49:00]

And with that knowledge, how does that change the way we walk into the world?

[01:21:50:01 - 01:21:51:19]

It changes it in some profound ways.

[01:21:52:20 - 01:22:13:00]

One, where I might step out now, and I'm still gonna build things, or I'm still gonna grow things, or I'm still gonna work along the lines that I work in, or whatever it is. Except before, where I was working to try to earn some validation that I didn't have, that becomes a frantic journey where everything's at stake.

[01:22:14:02 - 01:22:37:01]

But now that I'm in Christ, and I have the gift of the Holy Spirit, and I've been brought into this larger story, and I can play for the crests on the front of my jersey, I don't have to worry about the name on the back of it. And the name on the front of my jersey, it says Jesus, God's glory. And I play for that, and guess what? In that place, I know I have value. I know I have worth. I know I have significance. It's not mine to lose. I'm never gonna lose that. And it sets me free.

[01:22:38:10 - 01:22:47:10]

That I can go into this world. I can build his kingdom. But what I am, and who I am is no longer at stake.

[01:22:48:22 - 01:22:50:04]

That's a powerful message.

[01:22:52:00 - 01:22:54:13]

Because of Pentecost, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[01:22:56:09 - 01:23:00:19]

It's a gift that gives us the ability to have this conversation.

[01:23:02:08 - 01:23:09:13]

It's a gift that allows us to sit and participate in, and to submit to, and understand God's word.

[01:23:10:18 - 01:23:13:23]

It's through the Holy Spirit that we are given a new name.

[01:23:14:23 - 01:23:17:08]

And it's one that is written on the palm of his hand.

[01:23:18:10 - 01:23:19:19]

It's one that can never be erased.

[01:23:21:10 - 01:23:30:11]

And it's one that will be whispered in our ear one day when we cross over into glory, and we are met by our Savior Jesus. Amen, amen.

[01:23:30:11 - 01:23:41:22]