

My fancy phrase for you today is nominative determinism. I'll say it again, nominative determinism. Nominative determinism is the theory that your name determines your future. And so it is we find fun coincidences. Daniel Snowman wrote an article on arctic exploration. Jules Angst was a professor who wrote on anxiety. Montee Ball was a football player. Rosalind Brewer is a former executive at Starbucks and at Coors. These are all examples of names determining future.

Today we have a “name” Sunday. In our lessons read earlier in this service, we learn of the power of names. Abram has his name changed to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. In our Gospel reading from Mark, Simon Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the Christ, that is, the Savior who is come to redeem Israel. In Matthew's account of that same event, we see that Jesus gives Simon the name Peter which means rocky. Jesus gave Peter that name because of that rock-solid confession of who Jesus truly is. In all of this, we learn today **THE LORD CHANGES OUR DESTINY WHEN CHANGING OUR NAME.**

Nominative determinism is the theory that your name determines your future. I. Our name determines our destiny. Which is all well and good if you're an aspiring actress with the last name Star. It's good news if you're the world's fastest man with a name like Bolt. On call night, all of our classmates knew our friend Matthew Bless would have high hopes. Who wouldn't want a blessing from Pastor Bless?

Our name determines our destiny. But what if you don't live up to your name? What if you are given a bad name? Polite Barber Shop downtown is owned by Mike Rude. A Roman Catholic Cardinal in the Philippines was named Cardinal Sin. What do you do with a name like Jacob? Jacob means deceiver!

In our Old Testament lesson today, Abram had a problem. Earlier on the Lord God had promised that his offspring would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. But what do we read here? Abram was ninety-nine years old. Sarai was no spring chicken either. They were well past the child-bearing age.

Our name determines our destiny. And this isn't just about what it says on your birth certificate. How many of us have dreamed about the names we want to be called one day? How many college freshmen have wanted to be called “doctor” until organic chemistry caused them to lose all hope? How many young people want to be called “honey,” but the right person doesn't seem to come along? There are many married couples who want to be called mommy or daddy, but they have a difficult time having children. How many couples want to be called grandma or grandpa, but their children seem more interested in raising dogs and cats?

Nominative Determinism, our name determines our destiny. When what we want doesn't happen how we want it to happen or when, we get discouraged. We invent names for ourselves. The student staring at a D on her exam starts to call herself stupid. The single guy who gets stood up on a date starts to call himself a

creep. The man fired from work starts to call himself a failure. The wife who can't have kids starts to call herself defective. The retiree without grandchildren starts to call himself lonely.

To be fair, God does call us to work hard. He calls us to use the talents He has given us to His glory and to His praise. But in each of these above scenarios, an idol rears its ugly head. There is a real sin to believing the line, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." Repent. Turn from your sin. You can control our destiny as easily as you chose your name at birth.

Nominative determinism, our name determines our destiny. Yet we see that II. The Lord changed Abram's destiny when changing his name. The Lord is in control of our destiny. He knows every day of our life and He has it planned out for you. This was also the case for Abram.

Apart from the Lord, Abram was hopeless. There is no way that a ninety-nine-year-old man could have offspring as numerous as the stars. Abram tried to take matters in his own hands. He tried the whole, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul" mantra. He slept with Sarai's servant Hagar to have a son Ishmael, but that just got him into hot water. That act of taking matters into his own hands didn't work.

Yet everything changed when the Lord came to Abram. He said to Abram, **"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."** How did Abram reply to this? Did he say, "Sure can do!" Did he promise to the Lord that he'd keep all the commandments? All we read is **"Then Abram fell on his face."** No big speech, no eloquent words of wisdom. Abram simply bows down in worship to the Lord.

From there, the Lord tells Abram, **"No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations."** The Lord changes Abram's name to Abraham, and with that name change is a change in Abram's destiny. He is no longer just the father of Ishmael, but soon becomes the Father of many nations and people groups. Through the birth of Isaac, a family line is formed that leads all the way to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World. Nominative determinism, our name determines our destiny.

Now, our Old Testament text skips over perhaps one of the most important parts, see how we jump from verse 7 to verse 15? What we circumvent is the establishment of circumcision as the sign of the covenant between God and mankind.

I understand why circumcision may not be a pleasant topic to consider at church, and I'm not here to give an anatomy lesson. However, suffice it to say that circumcision set apart the Hebrew males from the rest of the nations. In addition, it was a reminder that the promised Messiah would be born of Abraham's offspring.

Circumcision shaped the Israelites' identities. Nominative determinism, our name determines our future. On the eighth day, the boy was circumcised, and that's when he also received his name.

And so the New Testament talks about a name change that Christians undergo. The Apostle Paul writes, **“In [Jesus] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.”** III. The Lord changes our destiny when changing our name.

The Bible teaches that the Old Testament rite of circumcision is fulfilled in Baptism. In Baptism, you have put on Christ. His name becomes your name. In Baptism, the mark is not a cutting away of flesh, but rather the pastor says, “receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.” X marks the spot in baptism.

Nominative determinism, our name determines our destiny. In Baptism and through faith in Jesus, your story changes—your fate changes. Your story becomes Jesus' story. Your life is wrapped up in His. In Baptism, you are the Heavenly Father's beloved child.

We can thank God for all gifts that He gives us, but our identity is not wrapped up in the passing things of this world. You are not your last exam grade. Your value is not determined by who you are dating or to whom you are married. You are not your 9–5 job. God's love for you is not determined by the number of children you have—or grandchildren for that matter.

So don't stress out when you realize that you are not the master of your fate or the captain of your soul. Don't give up hope when your plans fly out the window. Know that your future is not tied into your family history, your given name, or your past failures.

Trust the Lord who has graven your name in the palm of His hands. Trust the crucified Lord in whose palms were graven nails, in whose feet nails were pounded, and in whose side a spear was thrust. Trust in the Lord who has claimed you in Baptism, has saved you in His death, and will raise you alongside His resurrection on the third day.

Beyond your given name, beyond your family name, remember the name that was given to you in your Baptism. Christian. You are a Christian, you are God's own child. That is your identity. That is your name. Everything else is secondary to this one truth. Nominative Determinism. “and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.” Dear Christian, live your life with joy as the one who has been marked as the Redeemed.