

## **CALLED BY GOD'S NAME**

**Today's Text:** (1) 2 Chron. 7: 1-22; (2) John 8: 31-44

### **Extracts:**

- 1. Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ... If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land"[2 Chron. 7: 12, 14]**
- 2. They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father-God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. ...You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do... for he is a liar and the father of it" [Jn 8: 39-42, 44]**

*Born in January 1942, Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr., first came into international limelight when he won the Olympic Gold Medal in boxing in 1960. Then, in March 1964, at the tender age of 22, he shocked the world when he beat awesome Sonny Liston to become the Heavyweight Champion of the World. At the first news conference following that victory, he announced to the world, "I am now to be called Muhammad Ali!" For the next six years after that, his boxing career and personal life took a controversial turn. It had nothing to do with his boxing ability. The problem had to do with his new name and what it stood for! Muhammad Ali was named after his father, Cassius Marcellus Clay, Sr., as most of us do, but he changed it to something else after he became a Moslem. Given to him by the American Muslim patriarch, Elijah Muhammad, the new name means "beloved of Allah," the God of the Moslems.<sup>1</sup>*

*In one of the Bible extracts above, the Jews told Jesus that Abraham was their father. When He challenged them on that, they said that God was their Father. Jesus did not agree with them on that either. Instead, He said that Satan was their father!*

*Who then are the people that are called by God's name? Are you one of them? Let us find out in today's lesson.*

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<sup>1</sup> "Muhammad Ali," [www.gale.com/free\\_resources/bhm/bio/ali\\_m.htm](http://www.gale.com/free_resources/bhm/bio/ali_m.htm)

## 1. What is your surname?

Our last name is generally called the *surname*. However, there is a great variety in the way that people arrange their names. For example, the Spanish have compound surnames that consist of father's surname followed by mother's maiden name. Thus, when you hear of a woman called *Maria Luis Ortiz*, her father's surname is Luis while her mother's maiden name (surname) is Ortiz. If she gets married, her husband's surname replaces her last name, if she so chooses, with the prefix, *de*. So, if Maria were to marry and choose to answer her husband's surname, she would be called Maria de Garcia or Maria Luis de Garcia. *For the purpose of our discussion, let us accept surname to refer to that part of your name which belongs to your family line.*

Since Alex Haley published his monumental book, *Roots*, which became a successful television mini-series in the mid-1970's, interest in genealogies has intensified. This has been especially so among Africans in the Diaspora, whose ancestral links back to Africa have been badly severed by the slave trade. People want to know who they are and where they come from because the surname speaks volumes about who they are. The Bible is full of genealogies. **Matthew 1: 1-17** traces the genealogy of Jesus through Solomon and his foster father, Joseph. **Luke 3: 23-38**, on the other hand, traces His genealogy through Nathan and his earthly mother, Mary. As a result, the word of God has established Jesus' authentic claim to the throne of David through Joseph and His humanity through Mary!

Another interesting point about the surname is that it may not be your biological father's real name! For example, I am Imonitie Imoisili. My father is Ojiaga Imoisili and my first son is Uyi Imoisili. In formal circles, each of us would be addressed as Mr. Imoisili. Who is this Imoisili? I never met him! But, the family tree took roots from him. In like manner, the Jews told Jesus that Abraham was their father [**Jn 8: 33**], somebody who died thousands of years before they were born. So, what does this suggest to us? It is that the genealogy of the human race can be traced to our first earthly parents, Adam and Eve. Therefore, by definition, we all can answer to the surname, Adam! When we answer to a name, we accept both the assets and liabilities associated with it. Therefore, by virtue of the *original sin* committed by Adam, all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God [**Rom. 3: 23**]!

In Luke's genealogy of Jesus, He is linked biologically to Adam who is called "the son of God" [**Lk 3: 38**]. Does that not suggest that we all are sons and daughters of God? That seems to be the argument of the Jews in their dispute with Jesus. However, Jesus told them, "You are of your father the devil" [**Jn 8: 44**]. So then, what does it take for us to be called by God's name? That is the surname that I want to answer!

## 2. What does it take to be called by God's name?

At the point that God appeared to Solomon, apparently in a dream by night [2 **Chron. 7: 12**], the temple had been dedicated. There had been feasting and rejoicing for eight days, and thereafter. Solomon had prayed [see “Let us pray”, Vol. 5, No. 6: 15 February 2004]. The glory and presence of God [*Shekinah*] was manifested in the temple throughout that week. The night that God appeared to Solomon, He confirmed that his prayers had been answered [v. 12]. However, God laid down an important condition as follows [14]:

*If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

There are many humble people in this world and yet they do not know God. To be humble means to *willingly* give up your advantages over others when you relate to them. For example, the Head of State can break all traffic rules under the guise of pressing official duties. However, when s(he) chooses to wait for the green light and queue up like everybody else, he/she is humble.

When you talk of praying, non-believers may pray better than Christians can ever do! For example, a Moslem is required to pray five times a day. Once it is prayer time, he spreads out his mat and does not care how you feel about it. The Christian who spends a few minutes praying over breakfast at home is almost ashamed to pray for a brief second over lunch in the restaurant! You remember the story of Elijah during his spiritual contest with the prophets of Baal, an idol? The prophets of Baal prayed from morning until noon *nonstop*. They even “cried aloud and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until blood gushed out on them” [1 **Kgs 18: 17-28**]. Can you beat such fervency?

Strict policing of people’s conduct can make them turn from wicked ways. How many American taxpayers want to run into trouble with the IRS (Internal Revenue Service)? So, if a majority of taxpayers then turn away from filing fraudulent returns, it has nothing to do with their fear of God. In like manner, there are many idol worshippers or atheists who are “very good” and law-abiding. In fact, against faiths where salvation is based on human effort, Christianity cannot compete!

From the forgoing, we see that believers are not unique when it comes to being humble or prayerful or avoiding wickedness. Non-believers can do even better! Therefore, the emphasis in God’s answer to Solomon’s prayer lies in “*My people who are called by My name.*” It is for the sake of such people that God will “*hear from heaven*” and “*heal their land.*” So, who are they that can be called by God’s name?

Let us first examine why Jesus told the people that the devil was their father, not God. He listed the following reasons why God could not be their Father [**Jn 8: 42-45**]:

- They did not love and believe in Jesus who proceeded from and was sent by the Father [v. 42, 45]
- They did not understand His speech and were not even willing to listen to Him [v. 43]
- The people only wanted to carry out the desires of the devil, such as murder and lying [v. 44]

The Bible is very clear that God has only one *begotten* Son, that is, Jesus Christ [Jn 3: 16]. This same Jesus has told us that He is “the way, the truth and the life” and that no one comes to the Father except through Him [Jn 14: 6]. The word of God defines a liar as a person “who denies that Jesus is the Christ. He is an antichrist *who denies the Father and the Son*. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; *he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also*” [1 Jn 2: 22-23]. This poses a big conceptual problem for many believers. Does that mean that God is not the Father of everybody and that people who deny the divinity of Jesus are liars and have the devil as their father?

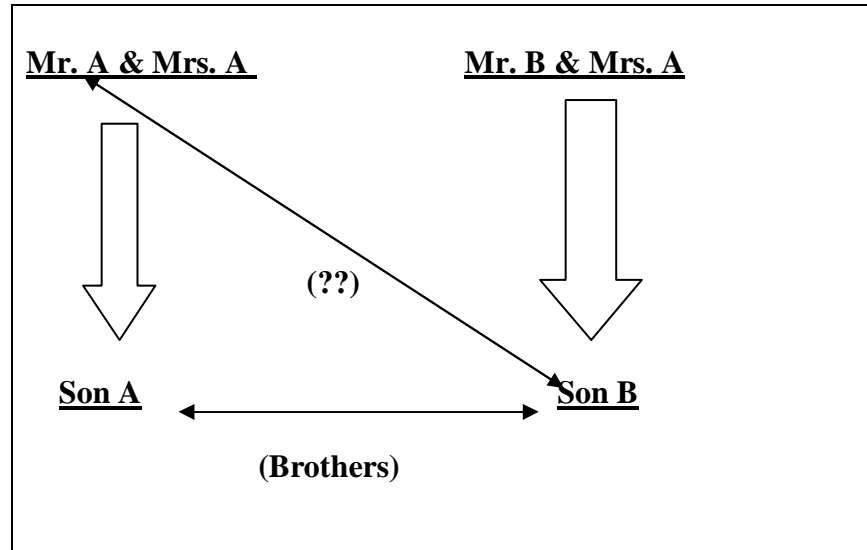
The answer is quite simple! Is God the Father of an atheist? Would you accept as son a child who openly tells everybody that you did not exist, that he evolved from apes? Are you the father of everything that you make or own? How come that your car is not counted as one of your sons and daughters? Clearly, God created us when He said “Let Us *make man* in Our image” [Gen. 1: 26]. Of the Son of God, the Lord said, “You are My Son. Today, I have *begotten* You” [Ps. 2: 7; Heb. 1: 5]. *Only Jesus Christ qualifies to call God His Father*. How then do we qualify to be called God’s sons and daughters?

Let me drive this point home with an illustration that I have used quite often (see sketch). A man (Mr. A) married a woman (Mrs. A) who bore him a son (Son A). She divorced him and married another man (Mr. B) to whom she bore another son (Son B). One day, out of sheer carelessness, both Mrs. A. and Mr. B died suddenly, leaving their son (Son B) a lonely orphan. Now, answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between Son A and Son B? [*They are brothers of the same mother*]
2. What is the relationship between Mr. A and Son A? [*Mr. A is his father*]
3. What is the relationship between Mr. A and Son B? [*There is none! He is not Mr. A’s son and there is no blood relationship of any kind!*]
4. Under what circumstances can Son B become Mr. A’s son? [*Only by adoption, if Son A sanctions it*]

When Adam and Eve, (our fore-parents) sinned in the Garden of Eden, they became divorced *spiritually* from God. We are their descendants (like Son B).

God is the Father of the Christ, the Word that was with God from the beginning [Jn 1: 1]. In the fullness of time, the Christ, the Word of God, was born *in flesh* as Jesus (like Son A) through the womb of Mary, the daughter of Adam and Eve. So, this God-Man is the only begotten Son of God as well as our brother through Adam and Eve. Since our road to God (as Mr. A's abode is to Son B) is no longer accessible to us, being that there is no direct relationship between Him and us, we have to seek the consent and help of our brother, Jesus, to lead us to His Father, being "the firstborn of every creature" [Col. 1: 15]. Jesus has also been called the last Adam who was made a quickening spirit: "the first man was of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven" [1 Cor. 15: 45, 47]. To stay away from Him is a worse option because we are in devil's territory, who had wrested the dominion of the earth and access to heaven from our ancestors when he beguiled them in the Garden of Eden.



To earn the *grace* through Jesus is very simple. We must believe that He is not just only a human being like us. He is the Saviour of the world [Jn 3: 16]. We must be born again of water and of the Holy Spirit [Jn 3: 5]. Why are these steps necessary? When we believe in Him, we receive the right to be called the children of God [Jn 1: 12]. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot say that Jesus is Lord [1 Cor. 12: 3] and those who are led by the Holy Spirit are called sons of God [Rom. 8: 14]. We then receive "the Spirit of *adoption* by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are *children of God*, and if children, then heirs-heirs of God, and *joint heirs with Christ*" [vv. 15-17].

As joint- heirs with Christ, we become God's people, and "then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, *and they shall be afraid of you*" [Deut. 28: 10]. Then, we shall become the temple of God and His

Spirit indwells us [1 Cor. 3: 16]. Then, God will be a Father to us and we shall be His sons and daughters [2 Cor. 6: 18].

### 3. Let the blessings flow!

In his discourses, preparatory to his death, Moses told the children of Israel who were on the verge of stepping into the Promised Land, “Today, the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, *that you should keep all His commandments*, and that He will set you high above all nations, which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honour, and *that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God*” [Deut. 26: 18]. In applying that theme to the modern believer, Peter wrote, “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, His own special people, *that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*; who once were not a people but *are now the people of God (who) now have obtained mercy*” [1 Pet. 2: 9-10].

God is now your Father *because* you have given your life to Christ who has highly recommended you to His Father for adoption. Now, you are His people who are called by His name. *When* you thereafter humble yourself, pray and seek His face, He will hear from heaven, forgive you your sins and heal your land [2 Chron. 7: 12-16]. Then one of you shall put a thousand criminals to flight and two of you, ten thousand [Deut. 32: 30]! Economic or political crisis, personal and family problems shall come at you one way and flee seven ways [Deut. 28: 7]! The Lord will open to you His good treasure from heaven and bless all the work of your hands. Your country shall lend to many nations but it shall not borrow [Deut. 28: 12]. More! More!!

### 4. Conclusion

Two choices are before you right now. You may choose to remain in denial and continue to live in sin, pretending that you are in good standing with God just because you go to church and receive the Communion regularly or people get healed when you pray for them. Even the devil wins more converts for Christ each day than that! On the day that it matters, Christ will say, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness” [Matt. 7: 23]. The other option is to *remain the child of God* through obedience and holy living. That makes you a son or daughter of God, an ambassador of Christ on earth [2 Cor. 5: 20] and a citizen of heaven [Phil. 3: 20]. The choice is yours!

By Christ Jesus, I am a son of God. How about you?