

**Positioned for Transition**  
**Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 1/15/23**

Is anyone here familiar with the famous leader Michael King? I'll give you a hint – there's a holiday celebrating his birthday tomorrow. That's right. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born Michael King, Jr.

His father was a Baptist pastor who traveled to Germany in 1934 to attend an international conference for Baptist pastors. While there, he toured the country and was impressed with what he learned about the great reformer, Martin Luther. Luther was a Catholic priest who protested against heresies, abuse and oppression in the Catholic Church. That began what is called the Protestant Reformation and protestant churches.

Think about it – the root of the word protestant is protest. A protestant is someone who protests. Michael King, Sr. saw how this related to the racial struggles and protests that were happening for civil rights in America.

And just as Martin Luther took a stand against the oppression of the Catholic church, Michael King, Sr. was taking a stand against the oppression of racism in America. So, when he returned to Atlanta, he changed his name to Martin Luther King and his son's name to Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin Luther King, Sr. knew that great names go with great deeds!

As he grew up, MLK Jr. struggled a bit with the name change. But eventually he accepted it and embraced what it stood for. And the rest is history! What I want you to see is the power of a name and how that transition made a huge transformation in MLK.

We're preaching a sermon series on Transitions for Growth. We felt led to preach on transition to start the year because we believe this will be a year of transition for us! For our church and for us individually. We are believing for growth in our church, both in numbers and in spiritual maturity. We have to make some transitions for that to happen.

We are believing for spiritual growth in our members. You will have to make some transitions for that to happen. It won't just automatically happen. We believe that transition must be handled correctly so that we can grow – as a church and as individual believers.

Pastor Anthony preached a powerful introductory message last week. Today I am preaching on Positioned for Transition.

Remember – transition means the process of changing from one condition to another, from one stage to another, from one season to another, from one position to another.

One of the best biblical examples of this is the transition from the Old Covenant based on law to the New Covenant based on grace. The Message paraphrase of Hebrews 9:16-17 says:

*Like a will that takes effect when someone dies, the new covenant was put into action at Jesus' death. His death marked the transition from the old plan to the new one, canceling the old obligations and accompanying sins, and summoning the heirs to receive the eternal inheritance that was promised them. He brought together God and His people in this new way.*

That transition was huge and many Jewish religious leaders fought against it because they were not in position for transition. Think about it! They were standing in the presence of the Messiah – the One they had been waiting and praying for for years – and they missed Him because they could not make the transition in their mind.

And you won't successfully make the transitions God wants you to make unless you are in the right position – thinking the right thoughts. Listen – transitions happen in your mind before they happen in your life.

The reason I told you the MLK name change story is because I wanted you to see the power of a name change. Especially when it concerns transition.

In Bible times names were not given as casually as they are today. They had meaning and significance. In Bible days – when you gave a child a name – you were giving to them an identity that was in that name. And the child was given a name with the expectation that they would become like their name. So a name represents the sum total of all a person is. When you speak the name of someone, you speak of all that person represents.

For instance – Isaac means laughter because his parents were so happy when he was born. Every time they called his name they were saying they were glad he was alive.

The reason I'm preaching on this is because when I was praying about what to preach, God impressed me with the fact that many times in the Bible, God changed peoples' names in times of transition. In fact, the name change precipitated the transition! For example, in Genesis 12:1-2

*The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." So Abram went to a land called Canaan and God made a covenant with him. And God blessed him abundantly.*

Except for one thing – Abram and his wife Sarai had no children. Abraham had a promise from God, but 25 years went by before it was fulfilled.

Genesis 17:1-16 says:

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless. I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."*

*Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations..."*

*God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."*

Abraham and Sarah waited for 25 years for God's to fulfill His promise. And even then – when it came time for them to receive the promise – they still had to go through a transition. And to get them in the position for the transition – God did something drastic – He changed their names.

Abram means exalted father, but Abraham means father of a multitude. Abram only had vision for a child – but God's plan was the nation of Israel to come through Abraham. The name change was to get Abram into position to transition to be Abraham – the father of a multitude.

Getting him into position required a change of vision, a change of thinking, a change of mindset. It was the same for Sarai – who had her name changed to Sarah. Sarai means princess, but God said that He changed her name to Sarah, a mother of nations - a mother of kings.

God changed their names because they were going global. Abram and Sarai were becoming the father and mother of a nation! So He positioned them for transition.

You see – their previous names were insufficient to empower them in their new mission so God had to position them for transition. They were thinking too small! And we need to be sure that we are not thinking small because that will keep us out of position for transition to God's destiny for us!

According to the Midrash – which is an ancient Jewish commentary on the Bible - when a person's name changes, they become virtually a different person, with a different destiny and a different potential. That happened with Abraham and Sarah.

And God did the same thing for Jacob – whose named meant supplanter, cheater, deceiver. He lived up to that name until God changed it to Israel – meaning to strive with God or to have power with God. God had to transition Jacob from deceiving his way through life to become Israel, someone who had the power of God in life. And God has to transition us from selfishly going through life in our own strength to people who live our lives dependent on the power of God.

Jesus also changed Simon Peter's name. Simon means "hearing" and Peter means "Rock." So both of those names are significant.

Here's what happened when Jesus first met Peter in John 1:41-42

*Andrew found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Peter" (which is translated, a rock).*

Actually, Jesus did not just give him a new name – He added to his name. Luke 6:13-14 says:

*Jesus called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter...*

Jesus didn't merely give him a new name to replace the old one. He "also" named him Peter. He was known sometimes as Simon, sometimes as Peter, and sometimes as Simon Peter.

By nature Simon was brash, vacillating, undependable and outspoken—with a habit of revving his mouth while his brain was in neutral. When Jesus met him, Simon fit James's description of a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Jesus changed Simon's name because He wanted it to be a perpetual reminder to him about who he should be. And from that point on, whatever Jesus called him sent him a subtle message.

This is very fascinating and I never knew it until my study this week. Sometimes Jesus called him Simon and sometimes He called him Peter. If He called him Simon, He was signaling him that he was acting like his old self. If He called him Rock, He was commending him for acting like a rock. From then on, Jesus would gently chide or commend him just by using one name or the other. Jesus would call him Simon whenever he displayed the characteristics of his old self—when he was sinning in word, attitude, or action.

For instance, when Peter was skeptical because Jesus said to let down your nets after they had been fishing all night and caught nothing – Jesus called him Simon.

When Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He would be crucified – and then Jesus told him he would betray Him 3 times, He called him Simon.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter fell asleep while he was supposed to be praying, Jesus called him Simon.

Basically, whenever Peter needed rebuke or admonishment, Jesus referred to him as Simon.

It must have reached the point where whenever the Lord said “Simon,” Peter cringed. He must have been thinking, Please call me Rock! But it seems like Jesus was saying, “I’ll call you Rock when you act like a rock.”

And He did! In Matthew 16:15-18 Jesus asked His disciples,

*“Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of John, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’) and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.”*

A few weeks later, on Pentecost, Peter and the rest of the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. It was Peter, the Rock, who stood up and preached that day. It was then that He transitioned to live up to his name. And the Bible never calls him Simon after that!

And for God to position us to transition us to accomplish the vision He has for us – He must first change our mindsets about who He is, and who we are in Him. For many of us our God is too small and our vision is too shortsighted. So, God has to expand that!

So, new names declared the plan and purpose of God for people’s lives. God changed people’s names in the Bible to position them for transition, to proclaim a new beginning, new hope, new blessings.

My name is Joseph, but when I was a child people called me Joey. That was okay until I became a teenager. I realized I was in a transition from childhood to adulthood. It would take years to get there, but I could not see myself being called Joey as an adult. So I asked everyone to stop calling me Joey and start calling me Joe. That was a very significant moment in my life as I declared who I was becoming. I wasn’t there yet, but I was positioning myself for transition.

And you need to do the same thing! I’m not saying you need to change your name – I’m saying you need to start calling yourself what your heavenly Father calls you so you can position yourself for transition.

It’s time to agree with God and call yourself what He calls you! Romans 12:2 says:

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

You will be positioned to transition when your mind is transformed by God’s view of you rather than conformed to the world’s view of you.

I know people who believe lies. Not just doctrinal lies, but lies about themselves. I know people who are smart but they think they are stupid.

People who are beautiful who think they're ugly.  
 People who are enormously talented but they think they are mediocre.  
 People who are successful but they think they are failures.

People may have called you stupid or ugly or a loser – and maybe you've even called yourself those things! But it's time to change! It's time to change your identity!

Many problems in life come from the lies we believe about who we are. Until we identify these lies and replace them with truth, we will not be overcomers. The Bible calls these lies we believe strongholds. These self-destructive thoughts can take over our lives if we do not renew our minds with the truth.

Remember Proverbs 23:7 says that

*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*

In other words, what you believe in your heart, you will live out.  
 If you believe you are a loser, you'll lose.  
 If you believe you are a winner, you won't be satisfied with losing.  
 You'll keep at it until you win.

If you believe you are a sinner, you'll sin.  
 If you believe you are a saint, you'll live a holy life.  
 That's not to say you'll never sin, but you won't see sinning as your identity, as something you have to do.

What you believe about yourself is vitally important. That's why what you believe about yourself must be based on what God says about you. Not what some person told you and not what you tell yourself.

You see, the world will try to tell you who you are.  
 People around you will try to tell you who you are.  
 The enemy will try to tell you who you are.  
 But don't listen to any of it.  
 You tell them – it does not matter who you say I am.  
 What matters is who God says I am!

They say I'm a sinner, but God says I'm forgiven!  
 They say I'm a reject, but God says I'm accepted in the Beloved!  
 They say nobody wants to be my friend, but God says I am His friend!  
 They say I'm a loser, but God says I am more than a conqueror!  
 They say I'm stupid, but God says I have the mind of Christ!  
 They say I don't have anything, but God says He gave me all things!  
 They say nobody wants me, but God says He chose me!  
 They say nobody knows who your daddy is, but God says I'm His child!  
 They say nobody loves me, but God says nothing can separate me from His love.

They say I can't do anything; God says I can do all things through Him!

As I close – I want to remind you that almost everyone in the Bible who was used by God first responded with the words “I can't.” They had to have a transition in their minds before they were used by God. The way they thought about themselves actually became barriers they had to break through in order to be positioned for transition.

Moses had to break through the barrier of not being able to speak well.  
 Jeremiah had to break through the barrier of thinking he was too young.  
 Abraham had to break through the barrier of thinking he was too old.  
 Sarah had to break through the barrier of thinking it was impossible for her to have a child.  
 Peter had to break through the barrier of thinking he was unqualified for ministry because he denied Christ 3 times.  
 Gideon had to break through the barrier of low self-esteem and thinking he was too weak and his family was too poor.  
 Deborah had to break through the barrier of thinking she could not be used by God because she was a woman.  
 Esther had to break through the barrier of her race.  
 The woman at the well had to break through the barrier of her race and her gender and the fact that she had multiple failed marriages.  
 Thomas had to break through the barrier of doubt.

And you can do this too!

Break through your barriers by having faith in the God of breakthroughs!

You can do all things in His power!

If God is for you – who can be against you?

Whatever you go through – call on the Lord of the Breakthroughs and He will get you through!!

I like the old song, I Will Change Your Name. Listen to these lyrics:

I will change your name. You shall no longer be called wounded, outcast Lonely or afraid.

I will change your name. Your new name shall be confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one, faithfulness, friend of God One who seeks My face.

What are you calling yourself? Does that need to change today so you can be positioned for the transition to fulfill God's vision for your life?