

Sunday 2nd March 2025 - Know My Name: Anonymous

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Preacher: Kim Thomas

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. It's good to see you. And as Matt says, isn't it lovely that the sun's shining? It makes such a difference in people's lives. I think that's one of the things I was grateful for when I woke up this morning and saw the sun coming through the window. So, good.

So, we're going to continue our sermon series, as Matt said, focusing on names. Know My Name is the name of the series. And it's about the value.

We've been talking, haven't we, about the value and the importance of names. And the difference, the different meaning each name has and how important that is. And just how powerful a name is. And I was thinking about that when I was, sorry, I am going to keep going off script because that's what I do.

But I was thinking about that when I was preparing this. And the importance of names came home to me from when I was a schoolchild. Because my name, as you know, is Kim. But my actual name is Kimberly.

Kimberly. And it's only when people used to say, Kimberly, I knew I was in trouble. That was the importance of that name. And then if they said, Kimberly Ann, I knew I was in a great deal of trouble. Which was most of my childhood, to be really honest with you.

[1 : 12] Things haven't changed at all. But this week, I get to speak about a different group of people. We've been talking about people, their names, the name of God, the name of Jesus, and just how powerful and meaningful those names are.

But I get to speak now about those who are significant enough to be named, to be, their stories to be told in the Bible, but actually not to be named.

They are the unnamed or the anonymous. They're the ones whose name, we know all their story, but we don't know what their name is. And that's who I'm going to talk about today.

And I put anonymous up there, because I think it really, it's really a good description of the unnamed. Because anonymous means having an unknown or unacknowledged name.

An unknown or unacknowledged name. And those are the people that I'm going to speak about today in the Bible. And I want to focus in particular about one person in particular in the Bible, in the New Testament.

[2 : 14] And I'll do that in a little while. And somebody who's very close to my heart, because it's close to my story, of how I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Saviour.

So, unknown or unnamed. Unknown or unacknowledged name. Isn't it great, though, when you go somewhere and people know your name?

Isn't it great when, you know, somebody goes, Oh, hello, whoever, Kim, whoever, your name, add your name into this. How lovely to see you.

Now, that happened to me recently. I had an encounter with somebody in Tamworth. I met somebody that I hadn't seen for ages. And I was just coming out of a shop.

And a voice went, Kim. And I turned round. And it was somebody I used to go to church with a very long time ago in Tamworth. And it was just lovely. And one of the lovely things was, was that she remembered my name.

[3 : 15] And I stood there and thought, Leslie. That's your name, Leslie. And I did remember her name. And so I thought, thank you, Lord, that I remembered. Because it's good to remember other people's names as well, isn't it?

So I did. It was really lovely. And it made me feel valued and accepted that, obviously, I'd made an impression on her as she had on me.

And I remembered her name and she remembered mine. So it's important, isn't it, to remember names. And that's an important thing. Because your name is a vital part of your identity, isn't it?

Now, I'm very grateful. I don't know whether I've told you this before. But when mum and dad were expecting me, they wanted to give me a Welsh name. Because I've got a Welsh surname of Thomas.

They wanted to give me a Welsh name. So they were going to call me Blodwin. Or Mavanwy, which is probably a little bit better than Blodwin. I'm not a Blodwin, am I? I'm not a blod. And then they went to the cinema.

[4 : 15] And they saw a film. And in there, there was a girl called Kimberley. And my mum said to my dad, oh, isn't that a lovely name? If this is a girl, should we name her Kimberley? I'm so thankful for that.

And it is. It's part of your identity. I have to fight long and hard with organisations not to call me Kimberley. Even the doctor's surgery now says on my notes, Kimberley Thomas, known as Kim.

And I say, my name's Kimberley Thomas, but I'm known as Kim. And now they call me Kim, which is good because it's my identity. And remembering somebody else's name and their identity is good because it connects you to them, doesn't it?

It connects you to them because it shows respect and it shows you're interested in them. But do you know what? It has an impact on your brain. It has a neurological effect as well.

Because, and I've looked this up, when your name is mentioned, even if you're in a crowded room and you hear your name, and there might be lots and lots of conversations going on, your brain has the ability to filter out irrelevant information when you hear your name and you focus on that conversation and what's being said.

[5 : 31] It turns out that our brains are particularly attuned to personally relevant information. Your name, being one of the most personal sounds you can hear, gets fast-tracked through your auditory processing system, you know, through your ears into your brain.

And it's like your brain has a secret password and that's, and your name is your secret password. And our ability to focus might have come through times when we needed to hear or suddenly be alert to danger, you know, so, ooh, danger, danger, their name.

Now, in the 1980s, there was a really great comedy programme set in a bar in Boston. And the name of the bar was Cheers.

Now, I've been talking to some younger people this week about Cheers and nobody knows it. So, I'm hoping at least some of you will be able to remember this. And there was a very catchy signature tune.

Oh, my God. I love it when it works. Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.

[6 : 47] Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot. Wouldn't you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name.

And they're always glad you came. You want to be where you can see our troubles are all the same. You want to be where everybody knows your name.

You want to go where people know people are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name.

Now, I don't know if you remember that. If you remember that place where everybody knows your name. The bar, Cheers. And I just love that program because people were accepted.

You know, most people were accepted as they went into that bar. And it reminded me of my childhood and growing up because my mum and dad were publicans. And I knew everybody's name in the pub.

[8 : 02] But only their first name. Because that's all you used was their first name. And it was good because it was a place where people were accepted. You know, people would come in.

And my son, when he started to talk, he called his granddad Frank. And we were saying, why do you call your granddad Frank? And he said, well, that's his name, isn't it? And they went, yeah, but he's your granddad. And they went, yeah, but he's granddad.

No, everybody else calls him Frank. So he became Frank. Dad thought it was marvellous. So, you know, it was one of those places. And there was a guy that used to come in.

When I moved down to Kent, my dad told me there was a guy who used to come in. He was a Christian. And his name was Neil. And he made it obvious.

He wasn't one of those cringing Christians about, you know, do you know Jesus? And is Jesus your Lord and Saviour? And, you know, how you can talk to some people who are not Christians. But he was just a very natural, normal guy.

[9 : 02] And his name was Neil. So my dad being my dad called him Neil and Pray. And so when I moved back to the Midlands and I went to church in Tamworth, I got to talk to a guy called Neil who actually worked for the diocese.

Who talked to this guy called Neil. And he said, ah, you're Frank and Julie's daughter. I go and drink in the pub. And I went, you're Neil and Pray. And he went, yeah, that's me. But Neil is a lovely Christian man.

And his faith was lived out in the pub as well as in his wider work within the Litchfield Diocese. So far, okay. Having said, having introduced this now is I'm going to talk about the unnamed in the Bible.

All I've done is talk about names. And nothing about anonymity. So let's redress this balance. So having focused on the importance of names, what about the opposite?

What about the opposite? What about people whose names we don't know? What about people who have often made a difference, but we don't know what their name is?

[10 : 10] So in the Bible, as we know, people are often referred to by name or at least given a familial relationship. You know, the wife of, that's usually it, isn't it?

The wife of or the son of or whatever. Because it sets them in place and gives them an identity and confirms who they are and their value. But what about these people who aren't named?

There are many people whose name we don't know. And their story is still significant enough to be in the Bible. So what about them?

Now, in his notes, Matt very kindly gave us some examples about what he'd like to think about in these sermons. So it would be rude not to use them. So I don't want to steal anybody else's thunder.

This is Matt's suggestions. He said, what about the unnamed in the Gospels? Because there are so many. We've got, like, the woman who had the issue of bleeding, who came to Jesus and touched his robe, if you know that story.

[11 : 12] The widow from Nain. The woman caught in adultery and the crippled woman. None of those names we know.

The widow of Nain, we only know her because she came from Nain. But it wasn't just women as well. It was men as well. There are men that are mentioned in the Bible. There was a man by the pool of Bethesda, the boy who they thought had an evil spirit and the Gerasene demoniac, demonic, and many, many more.

I like the Lego picture there of the guy who they thought had a demon in him. And he's got this big hairy beard and that. And I thought Lego just reflected it very well.

So one of these people, does it mean that because they weren't named, they weren't important? Does it matter that we don't know their names? So I'd like to say, like I said at the beginning, I'd like to focus on somebody whose name we don't know, but whose experience can perhaps shed light on knowing and being known.

Like I said, this is a very personal story to me. And it's taken from John's Gospel. And it's Jesus meeting with a woman. Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John.

[12 : 39] Although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there. And Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, Will you give me a drink?

His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?

For Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

[14 : 10] Sir, the woman said, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father, Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?

Jesus answered, Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life.

The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water, so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water. He told her, Go, call your husband and come back.

I have no husband, she replied. Jesus said to her, You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.

[15 : 38] What you have just said is quite true. Sir, the woman said, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

Woman, Jesus replied, Believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know.

We worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming, and has now come, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth.

For they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and His worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. The woman said, I know that Messiah, called Christ, is coming.

When He comes, He will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, I, the one speaking to you, I am He.

[16 : 57] Just then His disciples returned, and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, What do you want, or why are you talking with her? Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, Come, see a man who told me everything I have ever done.

Could this be the Messiah? They came out of the town and made their way towards Him. Meanwhile, His disciples urged Him, Rabbi, eat something.

But He said to them, I have food to eat that you know nothing about. Then His disciples said to each other, Could someone have brought Him food?

My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work. Don't you have a saying? It's still four months until harvest.

I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest. Even now, the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

[18 : 17] Thus the saying, One sows and another reaps, is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony. He told me everything I have ever done. So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days.

And because of His words, many more became believers. They said to the woman, We no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the saviour of the world.

A very long clip, but I think you'll agree a really powerful story of Jesus meeting with this woman, a Samaritan woman, as the clip said, in the middle of the day at a well.

Now, if you've been around church a long time, you'll have heard lots of sermons about this lady being at the well, and what happened to her, and things like that. And much will have been said about her condition.

[19 : 37] Things like that she came to the well in the middle of the day, not at the beginning of the day, or at the end when it was cooler with all the other women, as would be usual. So does that mean that she was shunned by her community?

She was a Samaritan woman, and it would not be unusual for a Jewish man to talk to her. Not only did he talk to her, but he asked her for a drink.

That was the opening gambit. Jesus asked this woman for something, something that she was able to give him, and that was the opening of the conversation. And then he went on to speak about water as a gift of life, a gift from God.

And the water that he will give himself will become a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. What Jesus was doing was offering this woman new life.

new life from the life that she knew. New life from whatever situation she was in. Maybe she was somebody who wasn't good at relationships.

[20 : 40] As Jesus said to her, you've had five husbands, and the man that's with you now isn't your husband. And so maybe she wasn't that good at relationships. Maybe she wasn't just good at anything very much.

But she needed water, and she came to collect water on her own. She did things on her own. But Jesus let her know that he knew all about her circumstances, and he still wanted a drink of water from her.

He let her know that he still wanted something from her, even though he knew all about her. Because he did. And she said, you're a prophet, obviously. But you know, Jesus then lovingly and gently draws her out to explore who she thinks she is, and who she thinks she's talking to.

And she gets, and he gets right to the heart of who she is, and what she believes. So we asked her questions, and she said, the woman said to him, I know that the Messiah is coming.

So she clearly knew that there was something better coming. And Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am he. Now, the Samaritan woman, whose name we don't know, then left what she'd come for.

[22 : 07] She'd left behind the thing that was important to her, her water jug. She left it behind and ran off into the village to tell everybody what had happened in this meeting.

She ran off to say that she had met with the Messiah. She left behind her security, and she ran off to tell people who might or might not accept her message what had happened when she was meeting with Jesus.

We don't know what had been said to her in the past or what kind of a life that she had, but we do know that she went to these people and said, come and see, come and see.

Because you see, that meeting with Jesus made such a difference in her life. She left behind the important stuff at the well and ran off to tell people to come and see.

Come and see what I've found. And that's, like I say, that's part of my story too. That's part of my own experience of somebody who's really rubbish at relationships with men.

[23 : 12] somebody who thought that I could never ever find any peace and contentment. But then I met with Jesus. Then I met with Jesus and he accepted me just as I was.

Just like that woman at the well met with Jesus and he accepted her just as she was. Now, you, I see there's lots of married couples here, you might be absolutely brilliant at relationships.

You are, and God bless you and well done because it takes a lot of hard work. And there are a lot of single people here who are also equally good at relationships. But there are people like me who are damaged, who feel damaged, who feel like I'm rubbish at relationships with men.

But do you know what? The best relationship I've got is a relationship with Jesus. That man is everything for me. That he is everything for me. And that's the best relationship with a man I've ever had in my life.

And it's one that I hope will last forever and ever and ever. Now, this woman at the well, she met this extraordinary, incredible, holy, loving, all-seeing man.

[24 : 31] And the woman was given boldness to leave behind the things of the past. That's what happened to me. I was able to leave behind the things of the past. There was nothing in my life I'd ever done that I couldn't be forgiven for.

That's what I heard at a Billy Graham conference. And I gave my life to Jesus because I knew I was safe and I was secure with him. And then I went on to tell other people about it.

And then I went on to say, this is what's happened to me. This is what, when I've been asked, this is what's happened to me. And do you know what? This woman, it didn't matter how she'd been treated by these people in her community.

She still wanted to share that brilliant good news with them. Now we might not have known her name, but we know how the meeting with Jesus changed her. We know she was different after her encounter with Jesus.

She was allowed to be her authentic self. And even though she remained anonymous in history, her experience and her action changed the lives of those around her.

[25 : 38] Instead of letting her life's experience, and this is important, instead of letting her life's experience make her bitter and angry, her encounter with Jesus helped her to become her true self.

And she didn't keep that blessing to herself. She shared it. Now you and I have power by knowing ourselves loved.

Because whatever happened in your life, you are loved by Jesus. Whatever the world and whatever life has done to us, you are loved by Jesus.

However we are treated, we are not diminished by our experiences. You are loved by Jesus. completely and utterly.

You are loved by Jesus. And he knows us in a deeper way than we can ever know ourselves. I want you to take that home with you, knowing that whatever your life experiences, whatever has happened in your life, or whatever you think of yourself, you are loved and accepted.

[27 : 02] And just as that woman who met with Jesus at the well, and he asked her for something, just as that woman at the well met Jesus and it changed her life, the same can happen for us.

And all we have to do is be prepared to talk to Jesus, be prepared to listen to him. and maybe it might, well, definitely, it will change our lives.

Now, one of the things that changed my life was, like I say, somebody saying to me, there is nothing in your life that you have ever done that you can't be forgiven for because of Jesus.

Jesus. And then, when I started going to church, I sang this song with all the other people in church, a Charles Wesley song, And Can It Be?

And there's a verse in that, oh no, oh no, I've confused, oh sorry, have I sent you the wrong one? Right, there's a verse in that, a beautiful hymn, from And Can It Be?

[28 : 10] he says, long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night. Thy nine diffused a quickening ray, I woke the dungeon flamed with light.

This is the bit that made such a difference to me. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed thee. Just like that woman left the water jug behind, all her security, all the thing that she needed, just as she left and went off to tell everybody about this man that she'd met, that's how I felt.

I felt that the chains had fallen off me and I could be a new person through, because Jesus who knew me, knew me completely.

And my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed thee. Amazing love, how can it be that thou my God should die for me.

That woman might not have had a name, but boy was she important. Was she important in the Bible, in the lives of others, in my life, in your life, in everybody's life.

[29 : 28] So if you feel at times that nobody knows your name, well that you're not important, I want to tell you, meet with Jesus, let the chains fall off, let your heart be free, and you'll be able to follow him.

Amen. Amen.