

Since my name is JR., people have always had a tough time with it. I get called “Junior or RJ more often than you might think. Once some of the other staff and I went out to karaoke, and I wrote my name – JR. Forasteros – on the paper. When it was my turn, the DJ announced me as “Junior Foresters”, much to the amusement of my friends. And of course it stuck, so it’s not uncommon to hear me referred to as “Junior Foresters” when I show up somewhere.

I always enjoy showing up somewhere where someone else has made the nametags, because I never know what’s going to be on my nametag. I’d say my name is correct on nametags other people make for me about 25% of the time.

Some of you with tough names know what I’m talking about. Right? It’s an odd experience to walk around with a name that’s not really yours on your nametag, a name that someone else gave you.

But it's true that we wear labels other people have put on us.

We usually call this “victimization”. And I don't think it's possible for us to live in this culture without becoming victims at some point. I've shared before about how I left my previous church, when a pastor at a neighboring church decided he didn't like what I taught, so he misrepresented me online and in person to dozens of other pastors. I ended up having to leave my previous church position over it.

I felt like he'd slapped a big "Heretic" sticker on me, and that all these people who didn't know the first thing about me saw. And the crazy part is that he still sort of lives up in my head. When I meet new people and they want to talk theology, I get a little shy. Because even though most people don't see it, even though I don't think it's true or right, I still wear that nametag sometimes.

What's your label? You may have a worse story than I do. Maybe you're the victim of some kind of abuse. Abuse is shockingly common in our society. And when you're the victim of some kind of abuse, it scars you. I know that because what I endured was relatively minor, especially in the grand scheme of things. And I know what I felt.

I have close friends who have been verbally or physically abused by parents or significant others or spouses. I have several close friends who were sexually abused. And between the Priest scandals and the Penn state stuff, we know that abuse is far too common in our culture. Even the abuse of children. You want to talk about what it means to be a victim? To be on the receiving end of violence? Those kinds of abuse scar you. You leave those experiences with labels that other person has given you. They stay in your head, telling you lies about yourself. Make you feel weak. Violated. Afraid. Like damaged goods.

Worst of all, when you're abused, when you are the victim of someone's violence, you feel totally isolated. Alone. You feel trapped under this label that's been put on you. Trapped by what that person has done to you.

The good news is that you're not alone. Did you know that one in seven men was sexually abused as a child? And for women the number's much higher - one in three. That means that in this room, at least 80 people are the victims of sexual abuse. If you're one of them, you're not alone.

And even if you're not the victim of abuse, know that we all get what it's like to be a victim. You're not alone. Not even a little bit. And today, we meet a woman who was the victim of sexual violence, too. Someone else's choices *ruined* her entire life. But she refused to give in to despair, to let his choices define her.

In fact, I'm sure it hasn't escaped your notice that all the women we've been learning from in this series are part of some dysfunctional or tragic family systems. And since human nature hasn't changed in the past 3,000 years, you know as well as I do that the systems they were a part of saddled them with labels. People talked back then the way people talk today. Tamar was a Black Widow - the woman whose husbands kept dying. She was poison. Toxic. Rahab was a prostitute. Shameful. Ruth was a foreigner. An immigrant. She was the Enemy. [let's make "name tag" graphics for each woman... maybe a painting of each woman with the name tag slapped over it or something. Or even better it could be a combined graphic.]. And this week, we meet a woman named Bathsheba. Except that's not what Matthew calls her. Let's read:

"This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).

Jacob and Judah and his eleven brothers and all their families moved to Egypt. Their descendents were enslaved, and eventually Moses freed them and led them to the Promised Land.

Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Moses handed leadership off to Joshua, who led Israel into the Promised Land, which is where we met Rahab. And then after they settled in the Promised Land, they were a loose confederation of tribes ruled by Judges. It's during this period we meet Ruth:

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was the wife of Uriah)." -- Matthew 1:1-6 (NLT)

David was the father of Solomon. Solomon who? Solomon (whose mother was the wife of Uriah).

Bathsheba's label was "The wife of Uriah". A weird label, since she's married to David and the mother of David's successor, Solomon. Her story's in 2 Samuel 11 (if you want to go ahead and turn there).

The time of the Judges ended when the last Judge Samuel anointed Saul as the first King of Israel. But Saul ended up being all show and no go, so God replaced him with David. David was sort of the ultimate king. He was an artsy poet, but also a fearsome warrior. He had a whole squad of guys in his army called "David's Mighty Men". And they were almost as insane and tough as David himself. Imagine if Bob Dylan and Chuck Norris were one guy, and they led a whole squad of ninja assassins. Under David's rule, Israel expanded its borders and enhanced their national security. In short, David was the man. Even more than that, David was a very faithful, godly

person. He loved God and took his relationship with God seriously. The book of Psalms is filled with poems he wrote expressing his love for God.

Which is what makes 2 Samuel 11 shocking. It's one of the lowest points in David's life, and one that has reverberations throughout the rest of his life, but for no one more than the woman we meet here: Bathsheba.

"In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem. Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath.

Just in the first couple of verses, we know this story isn't going anywhere good. David, the warrior king, is slouching about the palace while his armies are out fighting. He should be out there with them. But he's not. He's just sort of meandering about his palace. And he spots a woman taking a bath.

And instead of ignoring her, going back inside, David decides he wants to know more:

He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite."

The woman's name is Bathsheba, which means "Daughter of the Oath". And her father is Eliam, who's one of David's Mighty Men, one of David's elite soldiers. And Eliam is the son of a guy named Ahithophel, who was one of David's trusted advisors. So we know that Bathsheba comes from a wealthy family with a good reputation. A family that's close to the king. And she's married to a guy named Uriah

Because of how men and women interacted in those days, David probably knew who Bathsheba was, but he wouldn't have recognized her. Outside the home, women were dressed very conservatively, often veiled, and they did not interact with men with whom they weren't related.

But now David knows exactly who this beauty is: the granddaughter of one of his closest advisors, daughter of one of his special ops guys, and wife of one of his best soldiers. So what does he do?

Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period.

That's right. David slept with her. And let's be clear here: Bathsheba had no choice in the matter. I'm shocked by the commentators who try to make up for David. They claim that Bathsheba shouldn't have been bathing on a roof, that she was "putting herself out there", tempting David. One Christian writer even imagined that Bathsheba had always had a secret crush on David, so it's really not so bad what he did to her.

Wrong. Dead wrong.

David was king, and as a woman, she had no rights. And it's clear that David had no interest in a long-term relationship. He saw something he wanted, he took her, used her, and left her to herself. David the king, David the man who had all the power, used and abused a person who had no power, no choice. You can call it sexual abuse. You can call it rape. Whatever it is, it's wrong. It doesn't matter if Bathsheba consented or not (though from what the text tells us about her and Uriah, it's unlikely she would have). What David did to Bathsheba was Flat. Out. Wrong.

If you're the victim of sexual abuse or assault, it's *never* your fault. You didn't "have it coming." You weren't "asking for it." Never. Ever.

There is no excuse for abusing someone. For victimizing another person. For taking advantage of someone who is smaller or less powerful than you. It's sick. It's wrong. It's sin. For us today, and certainly for Bathsheba.

And just like so many unreported abuses and assaults today, we might never even have heard the story except for the fact that Bathsheba had just finished menstruating. Her bath was a ritual bath of purification (every-day bathing wasn't a reality back then). That matters because that means Bathsheba was very fertile. So guess what:

Then she returned home. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, "I'm pregnant." -- 2 Samuel 11:1-5 (NLT)

David has a problem now. He's used and abused this woman, and now she's pregnant. So what does he do? He calls her husband Uriah home from the war, and casually, slyly encourages him to go home and take a load off. Specifically to go home and sleep with his wife. You know, to cover up David's role in the pregnancy.

But Uriah won't. The Israelites have the Ark of the Covenant out in the field with them, which means that their campaign is a holy war. And during those campaigns, the soldiers are required to be sexually abstinent as a way of dedicating themselves fully to God. So Uriah tells David he wouldn't dream of breaking his Oath to his king and his God by sleeping with Bathsheba, the Daughter of Oath.

David even tries getting him drunk, but Uriah is faithful, loyal.

So David has him killed. He sends Uriah back with orders for his commander. That the next time Uriah's regiment heads into battle, Uriah should be placed up front. And then during the fighting, the regiment should pull back, leaving Uriah alone on the frontlines.

No surprise, it works. Uriah dies and David takes Bathsheba as his wife. He thinks he's gotten away with it scott free.

But God knows what David did. He sends the prophet Nathan to confront David. To his credit, David finally stops trying to cover up his sins and repents. But God declares that the child David conceived out of his sin will die.

And he does.

Can you imagine what Bathsheba would've felt like? She was minding her own business. Following God's law by keeping to her ritual bathing, even with her husband away at war. And then she's abducted, sexually abused by a powerful man who'd always been a friend to her family.

Then she gets pregnant.

And that results in that same man murdering her husband.

And then she's forced to *marry* that murderer.

And then she loses her baby.

In a matter of weeks, her entire life has been destroyed by someone else's sinful choices.

That's what Matthew wanted to remind you of when he called Bathsheba "the wife of Uriah."
[Let's put up the name tag image of Bathsheba again.]

I bet a lot more than just 80 of us can relate to that. Bathsheba probably has it worse than any of us, but we know what it means to be a victim.

And when we are victimized, we tend to get stuck. We let what's been done to us define us, become the source of our identity. Our experience as victims can trap us, control how we act and react in the world. With new people. With friends and family.

Our whole lives can end up being defined by what someone else has done to us. We end up living lives in the shadow of our victimizer. Even if we don't want to.

But that doesn't have to be where we end up. We can choose to become victors, instead of victims. We can choose to forgive the person who wronged us. To let the ways they've violated us fade into the background of our lives.

Bathsheba chose to be a victor. We don't get to see much of how this happened. But we know that she and David had another son - Solomon. And we know that nearly 30 years later, when David was on his deathbed, Bathsheba is the one who got Solomon named as David's heir. The Bathsheba we meet in 1 Kings takes control of her situation. She chooses to act rather than react. It was Bathsheba's decision to live as a victor over David's sins rather than as a victim of them that ensured her inclusion in Jesus' family tree.

And what about you? You too can choose to live as a victor instead of as a victim. And it begins with forgiveness. Dr. Martin Luther King wrote that "**Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.**"

Some of you know that deeper darkness. Some of you are trapped by your hate. I ask you to consider the rest of Dr. King's words:

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

Only light can drive out darkness. And with that in mind, I want to introduce you to two friends who have been a part of our family here at Beaver Creek Nazarene for a while now:

<Interviews with Nilah and Jeff >

1. Share with me a time in your life someone made you a victim.
2. How did being a victim affect you? What did your life look like when you were living as a victim?
3. Tell me about how you are choosing to live as a victor. How have you found freedom and victory in Jesus?

They've chosen to live as victors, not as victims. That's not an easy choice to make. It's not fun. But it's the only way to live free of the labels that have been put on you.

And what makes Bathsheba's story different from a self-help book is what has made each of these women's stories so beautiful: we don't see only the redemption of Bathsheba's story. We also see the redemption of David. Tamar didn't just save Tamar. She rescued Judah and his whole family. Rahab rescued not only herself, but her whole family. Ruth redeemed Naomi and Boaz, too. David realized that he'd become a victimizer. He repented of his sin and changed. He quit victimizing. He found redemption along with Bathsheba.

The Gospel is good news to both the victim and the victimizer. Because both are broken. Both need to be rescued, to be saved. Both need to find home.

Bathsheba's home was destroyed by David's dark decisions. But rather than remain a victim of David's choices, Bathsheba chose to make a new home where she was. To move forward. She made herself a home in the family of God, and found welcome. She found a new name.

She is no longer Bathsheba, the Wife of Uriah. She's Bathsheba, mother of Solomon the Great and great-great-great-grandmother of Jesus, who is God made flesh and the savior and king of the world.

So what label do you carry with you? Are you like Bathsheba, wearing a name tag someone else gave you?

Know today that you don't have to live as a victim anymore. That person doesn't have to live in your head and heart forever. The name they forced on you doesn't have to be how you're known in the world.

Or maybe you're a David. Maybe you're an abuser and victimizer. Know that what you do is wrong. But that doesn't have to be the end for you. God offers you redemption – the same redemption David found. Did you know the Scriptures speak of David as a man after God's own heart? That can be you, too. God can redeem and restore and remake you and those you've victimized.

God makes all things new, and God gives those who choose to follow Jesus a new name. We're called beloved. Saints. Chosen. Friends of God. *Children* of God. Ambassadors of Christ. Agents of Reconciliation. New creations. Citizens of Heaven.

So today, choose to live as a victor, not a victim. Throw away the label you've been given. Choose to live in the new name God has given you.

Communion Set Up

To celebrate our new names, we share the communion meal together. Because this meal is where we find our home. In Jesus' death and resurrection, we are made new. Everything in our past is forgiven and cleansed, and even our scars are redeemed.

Jesus broke bread to remind us that his body was broken for us. He gave us wine to remind us that his blood was poured out for us. This table is where we find healing.

You were given a name tag as you came in. And in the pews should be pens and markers. I want to ask you to consider a name you've been given. A label someone put on you. A name that represents your victimhood.

I want to invite you to write that name on your name tag. And then I want to invite you to Jesus' table. Bring your label to the table and throw it in the basket under the table. It's gone. Over. Let it go.

Release the nametag as a symbol of your commitment to live as a victor instead of a victim.

As you receive the body and blood of Jesus, you will see on the tables new nametags with new names written on them. Take one with you. Keep it. Put it somewhere safe. And let it be a constant reminder to you that your Home is now in Jesus. Just like Bathsheba, you have been welcomed into the Family Tree of Jesus himself. You belong to God now.

And no other label matters.

Let's Pray.

UPOV: Our past & position don't define us. We are defined by our choices moving forward.

At Stake: We can be defined by what's in our past instead of choosing to make our own future.

Big Idea: Choose to respond as a victor, not as a victim.

INFO: Bathsheba had little choice in what happened in her life. Her home was ruined by another person's sinful choices. But rather than let that define her, she chose to be faithful in her place, and so was incorporated into Jesus' genealogy. We too, often suffer at others' hands. Just like Bathsheba, we can choose to let that define us or we can choose to rise above what's been done to us. To act as victors instead of victims, and thereby seek redemption not just for ourselves but for our victimizers.

MOT: Too often we are defined by who we've been, by what's been done to us. This traps us in our past, puts us at the mercy of our victimizers. We can't control them. We can only control us.

APP: Choose to live as a victor, not a victim.

INSP: Choosing to live as a victor opens up the possibility of redemption not only for us, but for those who hurt us.

S Live as a victor, not a victim.

U A good, godly person hurt an innocent person.

C Name tags

C 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Nilah? and Jeff

E Become a source of healing for yourself, your family and the victimizer

S Nilah? and Jeff