

Jesus, the Name

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Date: 25 December 1996

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- [0 : 0 0] What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. So of course said Juliet to Romeo, urging him to think about changing his name because he came from the dreaded opposition family. Yet names are significant. And Juliet's request that Romeo be able to change his name because names are unimportant is not really right. Names are very important. And indeed names are the key to the reading we've had about Jesus' birth in Matthew's Gospel this morning. The angel said to Joseph, Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus. Not Kevin and not Tom, not anything else, but Jesus.
- [1 : 0 2] The name mattered. It was a common name in Jesus' day. And yet, for this baby, the name Jesus mattered. It wasn't a matter of personal choice, but something of divine significance. God, through the angel, commanded Joseph to name the baby Jesus. Jesus. Why? Why was that name so important? Why was that name significant for this baby? Well, the name Jesus is the same name as the Hebrew word Joshua. A fairly common name in the Old Testament. And as I've said, common in the time of Jesus as well. And it means God saves or God is salvation. Strictly speaking, it's Jehovah or Yahweh, the Old Testament name for God, saves or is salvation. That is, it means God is to the rescue. That's what the name Jesus means. God to the rescue. And just as Clark Kent rushes into phone boxes and Bruce Wayne slides down bat poles, the name Jesus conjures the same idea of rescue.
- [2 : 1 5] God to the rescue. And yet, of course, it's not quite so dramatic as we see on those television cartoons. It's just a baby in a manger. And yet the name and the mission is about God to the rescue. But notice also that it's not an agent of God. It's not a representative of God. It's not God's publicity manager or a friend of God or one of God's many minions who is coming to the rescue. It is God to the rescue. Not anybody else or an agent or anything else. But God himself to the rescue. That's what the name Jesus means. God to the rescue. In the Old Testament, one of the Psalms says that God himself will save or redeem Israel, the people of God, from their sins and iniquities. God will save his people from their iniquities and sins. But when the name Jesus is to be given to this baby born in Bethlehem, the explanation given to Joseph by the angel is that he will save his people from their sins and iniquities.
- [3 : 2 9] What is promised of God in the Old Testament is fulfilled by Jesus in the New. What God says that God will do, Jesus does.

Another indication that this baby is not just an agent, not just a semi-God, not something halfway between God and humanity, not an agent, a representative or a minion, but God himself.

Jesus is God to the rescue. God doing what God said he would do. That's Jesus. And it's not a military rescue, like the Gulf War was.

It's not a nationalistic rescue, such as the Falklands War. Oh, how the Jews wanted a military nationalistic rescue. They were crying out and looking for and longing for a Messiah who would rescue them from the overbearing government of Rome of the time.

We know that in Jesus' day and in the years immediately preceding his life and birth, there were many people who claimed to be the Messiah who would liberate Palestine from Roman rule.

[4 : 40] But that's not this baby's mission. This is not God to the rescue to save people from Rome. This is God who will save his people from their sins and from their iniquities.

It's a spiritual rescue. Not military, not nationalistic, but spiritual. God saving people from their sins and failures.

And we know if we keep reading the story of Jesus in the New Testament, we know how he did that. By dying on a cross, he saves people from the guilt of sin because he died in our place.

By sending his Holy Spirit to live in those who turn to him with faith and repentance, he liberates those people from the power of sin. And by taking his people ultimately to heaven, to God's place, he liberates those people from the presence of sin and its consequences.

This is absolute salvation from sin. Firstly from its guilt, then from its power, and then from its presence and consequences. That's what the name Jesus is all about.

[5 : 55] That's why he was born. That's why he lived. And that's why he died and rose from the dead. The name Jesus is all important.

The angel went on to explain this name in terms of fulfillment of another of God's promises earlier in the Bible from the prophet Isaiah, 750 BC.

A long time before Jesus was born for somebody to prophesy that he would come. Yes, it takes God sometimes a long time to keep his promises, but nonetheless he keeps them. And 750 years later, the words of Isaiah were fulfilled in a birth in Bethlehem.

As the angel said to Joseph, all this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet. Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.

Now there's something wrong here. Joseph's just been told to name the baby Jesus. How can naming the baby Jesus fulfill a prophecy that a name of a child will be Emmanuel?

[7 : 08] Maybe Isaiah got it wrong. Maybe he heard God's message wrong 750 years before. Maybe he said Emmanuel, but he should have said Jesus. Or maybe Joseph's got it wrong. Maybe he misheard the angels.

And he should have named Jesus Emmanuel. Emmanuel, we're told here, by the angel means God with us. Another Hebrew word. Fairly common expression.

Even in the Old Testament in various ways. And generally speaking, we understand this name of Jesus Emmanuel to signify who Jesus was. Both God and man.

Divine, yes, and fully, yes. But also fully human. God incarnate. God in flesh. God as a human being. God, both God, and man.

and therefore God with us. But the significance of the name Emmanuel, God with us, is far greater than just who Jesus was. For it points to what he does.

[8 : 12] Our failure in the eyes of God separates us from him. It fractures our relationship with him. It impairs our fellowship with him.

Just as somebody who wrongs you, you suddenly feel something's come between you. And your relationship with them is not quite as good as it was. So also with us.

When we fail God. And all of us fail God no matter how good we are. Earlier on we heard read the two great commandments.

Love God with all your heart, soul and strength. And love your neighbour as yourself. And in the light of those two commandments if we're all honest we acknowledge our failure before God.

For none of us has loved him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength all the time and none of us has loved our neighbour as ourself all the time. All of us fail God then. All of us are what the Bible calls sinners.

[9 : 12] And our sin separates us from God. It's a barrier that comes up between us and God. It leads to our estrangement from God. And just as in the very first chapters of the Bible Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden because of their disobedience to God symbolising the fracture of relationship between God and them.

So the Bible is the story of all people estranged from God. But God on a rescue mission to change that situation and where there is estrangement to bring reconciliation between God and people.

all humanity is estranged from God and all humanity needs to be rescued and reconciled to God.

And that's why Jesus came. That's what he was all about. That's why he was born and that's why we celebrate his birth over 2,000 years later.

Only because Jesus saves his people from their sins can we say that God is with us. For our sins are the barrier between us and God and it's only when they're dealt with and taken away that we can say that now God is with us.

[10 : 24] So the name Jesus and the name Emmanuel fit together because it's God who saves us from our sins that we can say yes indeed God is with us Emmanuel. The two fit together.

And the quote from the prophet that the angel told Joseph and they shall call his name Emmanuel that they is those whose sins are saved by Jesus. For only those people can say that God is with us.

Now that's a fairly strong statement to make and it flies in the face of much of what we think today. For so often we hear of people or see people or we are people who think that we're with God or we find God in nature walking in the trees or along the beach or we see God or we're with God in other people or we find God in church buildings or other places.

But this is making it clear that we find God or that God is with us only one way in Jesus Christ who deals with our sins and saves us from them.

You may have read two days ago a letter to the editor of The Age by a self-confessed atheist. Despite his atheism he finished by saying that he upholds true principles of true Christianity.

[11 : 42] What a lot of nonsense that is. As the reply in yesterday's age said you cannot uphold the principles of true Christianity without upholding and knowing and worshipping Christ.

For Christianity is not just good advice about morals it is good news about God and that's what the birth of Jesus is about as well. It is good news about God because it is God on a rescue mission and we all no matter how good we are need to be rescued and saved from our sins forgiven and reconciled to God and it's God who comes to be born to do just that very thing and that's why we celebrate Christmas for God is only with us when our sins have been saved and they're only saved by the Saviour Jesus Christ.

No wonder the heavenly angels sang glory to God in the highest for God indeed has come to save his people from their sins in order that we can say God is with us.

May this Christmas be a time for all of us to turn again to this great God to confess ask for forgiveness and to know that in Jesus Christ God is with us.

Glory to God in the highest. Amen.