

his name is jesus

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Scripture Passage Matthew 1:18-25

One of the very first tasks that new parents have is to name their new son or daughter. It is a very important event, tradition used to dictate that they followed some name within their family. Perhaps not so much now.

I am called after my grandfather, also called Thomas. My parents had great affection for him. My wife Harriet is called after an uncle Harry who was killed in the second world war.

This practice of naming is very important. Our desire or intent, our hope, is often to see the character and identity of the name we chose imbedded and reflected in the life of the new baby.

What names mean can also be revealing. I wonder if you know what your name means?

Thomas = twin. I cannot imagine there being two of me!

Harriet = from its German root means **ruler of the house**. I wish I had known that earlier. I guess it's too late now!

Names are very important in the Bible. People who have a strong encounter with God often find that they get a new name. It means that their life has a new starting point.

Abram – Abraham

Simon – Peter

Saul – Paul

The idea of name involves a sense of identity, who the person is at the core of their being, also involves the sense of their character.

In Proverbs, the word name is associated with this idea of character. E.g., **a good name is better than riches**. Obviously means that a person's character is more important than how much money they have in the bank.

Definition of character: Character is what you are when no one is looking.

This morning, we begin a new study series based on some of the ways in which Jesus is introduced or that He describes himself. We will track some of the names of Jesus or some of the ways in which Jesus says, **I AM THE . . . BREAD. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**, the good shepherd. It will take us all the way to Easter, when Jesus declares, I am the resurrection and the Life.

To be honest, standing before this new series these weeks, meditating on it and preparing for it, I have felt that I was standing in front of a tidal wave of immense truth. I felt that it could overwhelm me in its power and depth. As I often say, we will leave so much behind.

In these statements, we will discover more than just a name. We will be digging our way into His identity. We will be exploring His character.

This is vital because as the study guide says, Christianity must be about Jesus Christ or it is nothing at all. Christianity is not a philosophy or some practical guide for a better home or family or principles for marriage. It will help us in these areas, but at its core, it must be about Jesus Christ or it is nothing at all.

Paul, in Philippians, a great prayer: "10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

We begin our understanding of the identity of Jesus in the Christmas story. And as we will see in a moment, we have to go back far far before even that.

Matthew 1:20-21

20But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[a] because he will save his people from their sins."

Joseph is told, His name is to be Jesus, because he will save their people from their sins.

Jesus is the New Testament form of the OT name Joshua. He was the great military commander who took over after Moses and who led the people of Israel into the promised land.

It is not a name that Joseph or Mary come up with. There is no human discussion with them. So, what do you think we should call him? The name is given to Joseph by the angel. It is not a suggestion or an idea for discussion. It is really an order, an instruction, and the order does not really come from the angel. We have to assume I believe rightly that the direction comes from God. The angel is simply the messenger.

He simply passes on to these two humans the word, the name, that he brings from God.

So Who is this Jesus of Nazareth, who is on the one hand this simple carpenter from Galilee, but also at the same time, this immensely complex person? Who is He?

This idea of **NAME** is a shorthand for such things as character, identity, integrity, purpose, all rolled into one. The name of Jesus is to be used with carefulness and also with authority.

When I was a student in Scotland I used to be a truck-driver. I have heard everything, but I am still offended when I hear someone uses the name of Jesus as a swear word.

Think with me, what was his name before he was called Jesus? The Bible gives us some insight into that. He is known simply as Son. This is what God the Father calls him. We learn this from Hebrews 1:

1-4

1In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Then as the chapter goes on -

5For to which of the angels did God ever say,

**"You are my Son;
today I have become your Father[a]"[b]?**

Or again,

**"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son"**

We see this echoed in the baptism of Jesus. The voice from heaven says, this is my beloved **SON** whom I love... (Not, this is Jesus) Again at the transfiguration of Jesus, the voice from heaven, this is my son whom I love. God's preferred name for Jesus, what he prefers to call him is, **SON**.

We must understand from this, the name Jesus is the human name that envelopes the identity of

the one who is the son of God, who shares the same essence as God, who is God, who speaks with the authority of God. This is important, in fact critical in our understanding of who Jesus is and what the name of Jesus means.

5 headings that address this name of Jesus.

1 The name of Jesus is the stimulus for our worship.

As I have shared with you before, I believe that the primary calling of the church is not evangelism, important as that is. It is vital that we invite people to follow Jesus. Nor is our primary calling edification, building up Christians and strengthening them, important as that is. Above everything else, I suggest to you that more than anything, we are called to be worshippers, people who worship God in spirit and in truth. We are to be people who are in love with Jesus.

Worship is far beyond what kinds of hymns we like to sing from the hymnbook or off the wall. Worship is far beyond our personal preferences.

Worship is about focusing on the life and spirit of a person whose name is Jesus. It is about falling in love with this Jesus, and falling at his feet in love and adoration.

Phil 2:5-11

5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

**6Who, being in very nature[a] God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,
7but made himself nothing,**

**taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

**8And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!**

9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

**and gave him the name that is above
every name,**

**10that at the name of Jesus every knee
should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the
earth,**

**11and every tongue confess that Jesus
Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Before anything else we are called to be worshippers, people who are in love with Jesus, who are not ashamed to declare that, who love the name of Jesus and all that it holds. Worship is not just what we sing or how we sing. Worship is how we live and love.

There is something more important than raising our hands. Fine if you want to do that. It is about kneeling before this Jesus. One day we will do that. There are times that we should not be afraid to do that now.

I know that we all have a great desire to see VCBC grow in the days ahead. It is not a case of finding some new technique. Jim Houston reminds us: technique is the Trojan horse in the city of God. Somewhere at the heart and core of our identity, we must be people who live out of being authentic worshippers in all of life.

2 The name of Jesus is our authority for ministry.

Matthew 18:20

20For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

This is one of these verses that gets misquoted and misused. We usually use this verse when fewer people turn up at the church meeting than we expected. So we say, well no problem, when 2 or 3 show up, Jesus promises to be here anyway. And so we go on with the small meeting.

That's not the point of the verse. It is a verse about authority. The authority if Jesus being present when we meet in His name. That means we do not meet to hear my opinion or yours. We do not meet to do what I want done. Or what you want done. We meet to hear the word of Jesus. We meet to hear what Jesus wants done. We don't meet in the name of Vancouver Chinese Baptist church or anything else. We meet in the name of Jesus. It is not less than that. And it is not more than that. The name of Jesus is His authority. His word. Not mine. Not yours. It is not the word of the majority. It is His, the word of authority.

One of the ministries of the church is ministry to the sick.

James 5:13

13Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of

praise. 14Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

Over many years at times with other people, Harriet and I have done that. Sometimes in homes. Sometimes in ICU rooms. We have anointed people with oil, laid hands on them, prayed for them in the strong name of Jesus. We appreciated the opportunity to pray with some last week as we invited people to come forward and we prayed and served communion.

As we have prayed for people, some have lived in God's goodness some have not. I do not know why. Several years ago, we prayed intensely for our daughter-in-law and God took her home. We do not know why. When we have done this, we do so in faith and obedience.

We must always do this in the name of Jesus. He is the one who stands beside us in these moments. It is really his hands that pour the oil. It is really his hands that are laid on people's heads. He is the one who hears the prayers.

I do not know if VCBC does that much. I am not advocating that we start healing services, but I would gently say, let us not be afraid of the ministry of anointing and prayer in sensitive ways and times.

Whenever we do this, we can only do it is the authority of the name of Jesus.

3 The name of Jesus is the basis for our prayer.

We usually end what we pray for. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus. Is that just a nice formula or like saying we're finished?

John 14

13And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Ask anything in my name. Sounds like Jesus is giving us a blank cheque. Yet we know all we ask for in prayer is not always answered. At least not with a **YES**.

Briefly, here is why. Greek has 2 different words for **ASK**.

One when an equal is asking an equal. E.g., when a doctor talks to a doctor.

Another word for ask, when someone who is lower down asks someone.

When Jesus says he will ask the father, the word that is used is always when one **ASKS** someone who is an equal.

When Jesus says we can ask the Father, the word changes, and is the word for someone who is lower asking someone who is higher. It is never used when Jesus says he will ask the Father.

It is one of the subtle ways in which we find the divinity of Jesus explained by John. When Jesus talks to the Father, he speaks on the same level as the Father. The point is Jesus asks the Father as someone who is on the same perfect wavelength as the Father. He knows how he thinks, feels, what he desires, so his prayers are answered.

When we ask the Father, our prayers, what we desire is imperfect, needs to be filtered and matured by the name of Jesus, by his heart and spirit.

4 The name of Jesus may be the reason for some injustice.

None of us likes to struggle and to face some adversity, especially when it does not seem to be fair. Then our moral outrage rises to new heights. But what if we lived in a place or in a culture that said, you will not get this promotion, you will not get this house, your children will not get into this better school because you are a Christian. How would we respond then?

It was not easy to be a Christian when Peter was writing his letters. Emperor Nero was not a nice man. When he needed more lights for his evening orgies, he tied Christians to stakes, covered them with oil and used them as lanterns.

1 Peter 4:12-16

12Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15If you suffer, it

should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

The name Christian is used only 3 times in the NT. There is a sense that it is sort of a derogatory title used by outsiders when talking about these "Christian" people.

If we suffer says Peter, it should not be as a thief or a murderer. Obviously not. I am glad that he did not mention speeding or whatever. But if you suffer as a Christian, in other words the only charge that can be brought against you. The only accusation that you face is you are Christ-follower, then Peter says, praise God that you bear that name – the name of Jesus.

5 The name of Jesus is the power of our message.

Joseph is told that his name will be Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

Embedded in the name of Jesus is the purpose of his coming. And we will not know Jesus if we separate his name from his purpose, bringing the message of salvation to the world.

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Son of man, a title from the Old Testament, used some 80 times in the New Testament, 77 of them by Jesus. It is the way in which he identifies himself fully with all of humanity.

Many people would agree with the opening part of that verse. We need people in our world who come not to be served but to serve, that's exactly what we need. We do not need takers. We need givers. Then Jesus adds this last phrase that changes things: and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That is a different deal. People may be willing to serve, but who would want to go that far!

Jesus knew that embodied in his name, the name of Jesus, was the truth that he came to die for the sins of the world. This sacrifice is woven into his name.

So when the angel tells Joseph, you will give him the name Jesus, it is saying a great deal because embedded in his name is the focus of our worship, the authority of our ministry, the resolve against some injustice, and the authority of our message.

Jesus is not afraid of the pressure of pluralism that Christianity and the church faces today.

When the psychologists debate and define what it means to be healthy and whole, Jesus will come to the podium and he will have the last word.

When sociologists debate how we can make our world a better place, Jesus will come to the podium and he will have the last word.

When philosophers debate and argue about truth, whether everything is relative and even if truth exists, Jesus will come to the podium and he will have the last word.

When government and world leaders discuss how we can have peace and stability in our world, how we can end hunger and bring an end to injustice, Jesus will come to the podium and he will have the last word.

So when we take the name of Jesus, the one who is the son of God and the son of man, and say that we will be a Jesus-follower, we are following the one, the one and only, who has changed the course of the history of the world by changing the lives of men and women by the power of his name.

One Solitary Life:

He was born in an obscure village, the son of a peasant woman.

He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter's shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he became a wandering preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of those things one usually associates with greatness.

He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away.

He was turned over to his enemies and went through a mockery of a trial. He was executed by the state. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of mankind on this earth as much as that **One Solitary Life**.