

What's in a Name?

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[0 : 00] Well, if you are a parent, how difficult was it for you to choose names for your children? Was it easy? Did you just, like Gina and I did, just like the first chapter of the baby names book, letter A?

Or did you think hard and long about what you were going to name your children? What criteria did you use? Why did you choose the names you did if you're a parent?

Well, some parents have interesting reasons for choosing names, like Elon Musk and his son X-Ash-A-12 and his daughter Ex-A-Dark-Siderial.

These apparently are supercomputing terms and he's quite a nerd, so that's what he named his children. Or the football fan who named his daughter FIFA. But I think the prize for odd baby names must go to American rock star Frank Zappa with his four children, Moon Unit, Dweezil, Aim It and Diva Thin Muffin.

Well, naming children seems to be a bit of a novelty among celebrities. And after all, what does it matter exactly, you know, what you name your child? It's just a label after all, isn't it?

[1 : 18] As Shakespeare's Juliet says, what's in a name? Well, it turns out that in the Bible, there's a lot in a name. See, in the Bible and in Bible times and in that culture, names were not chosen arbitrarily just because they sound nice or because it was the father's favorite soccer team or something.

In Bible times, in that culture, names expressed the desires often of the parent for their child. Where the parent wanted their child to go, what they wanted them to become. And often the name would be considered the commission from the parent to the child.

And it kind of set the direction and focus in their life. And often in that culture, people would have the responsibility to live up to the name they were given. And it's because of this that I think we often miss the importance of the naming of Jesus.

Because we don't live in that culture, we don't realize how deep and important the naming of a child was. But we need to do that this morning because the naming of Jesus is a very important part of the Bible.

[2 : 31] And it's the very next thing in Matthew's Gospel. As he begins his Gospel, which in this part of it, the first few chapters of Matthew, is all about getting to know who Jesus really is.

One of the first things Matthew does is he introduces his name to us. And he wants us to understand the significance of it. Because not only was this a name we saw in the passage that was chosen by God, and therefore God considered the actual name of Jesus as important.

But if you want to get to know the real Jesus, the first step, like I guess the first step with getting to know anyone, is to get to know his name.

And what it means, not just for him, but for you. And so what I want to do this morning is simply look at the two names that Jesus was given in this passage and what they teach us.

And so the first name that Jesus would be known by, and the one we're used to calling him, is Jesus. And it is such a significant name, that name, that God sent an angel to make sure that he got that name.

[3 : 46] So we pick it up from verse 21, and the angel is telling Joseph what's going to happen to his fiancée Mary. And he says, She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Now Jesus, you know he was never actually called that by the people of his time? The word Jesus, that's actually a translation of a translation.

So Jesus, the English word, well, the English translation, Jesus, the name is a translation of the Greek, which is what the New Testament is written in, Iesous, which is a translation of what his name

was, which is Yeshua, which we call Joshua.

That was his name. So the Joshua in the Old Testament was Yeshua, and Jesus is Yeshua. That was his name. That's what people called him. And what it means, that name is God saves, or God is salvation.

And so, Joshua, the Old Testament hero, was the man through whom, if you know the story of the book of Joshua, it's a very rip-roaring, adventurous war story.

[5 : 05] It's the man through whom God saved Israel from the enemies in the land when they entered the land of Canaan. And you can find out, by the way, all about that in our sermon series on Joshua.

If you haven't heard it, if you weren't here for it, then do go to our website, or connect app, and you can go to our sermon library, and listen through our series in Joshua. Very important and exciting story in the Bible about how the Israelites entered the land that they were promised through this hero of Joshua, through whom God saved them from all these crazy enemies that they faced.

And so, the Jews, you see, expected, when the Messiah would come, that he would do a similar thing as the hero Joshua did. that he would liberate them from the oppression they were under, the enemies they faced.

And they faced many enemies in their day, especially the empire of Rome, who they suffered under. And that's what they would have expected the Messiah to do, to rescue their country from their enemies, and to rescue their country from corrupt leadership, and to bring about this new government, this new kingdom.

And we saw from the genealogy last week, that's of course, the expectation. But that's also why the angel had to specify just what Jesus had come to save them from.

[6 : 33] Because they would have expected he had come to save them from like what Joshua saved them from. But that's why the angel had to qualify it. And notice what he says.

He'll be called Jesus. You are to call him Jesus. Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. This was unexpected. That he's come to save, but he's come to save people from their sins. Sin. The natural inclination that they had, that we all have, inside us, to reject the God who made us. Sin. You see, they didn't know that that was actually their greatest enemy.

More threatening and lethal than any other enemy they ever faced in history. Their actual greatest enemy, they didn't realize, was the sin inside them.

And people still don't realize that today. We don't tend to see sin as our greatest enemy. We don't tend to see sin as the greatest threat to our lives.

[7 : 47] I mean, our lives are threatened by many things. Think about it. What do you consider the biggest, some of the biggest threats in your life? what do you consider some of the biggest threats to your life and your happiness?

Well, that becomes apparent by looking at what you put effort into protecting yourself against. So, in your life, you put effort into protecting yourself against a lot of things.

You put effort into protecting yourself against criminals by installing alarm systems, by getting gates, doors that lock. You know, because that is, especially in South Africa, that is a threat to our lives.

And it's a threat to our safety. It's a threat to our families. It's a threat to our happiness. And so, we make an effort to mitigate that threat, to protect our lives against it. We all, in some ways, make effort to protect ourselves against crime, against criminals, whether it's locking your doors when you leave your home, not storing valuables in sight, in your car.

Whether you know it or not, you make efforts to protect against the thing that you consider is threatening to you. Bankruptcy is a threat to our lives and so we go and work and earn a salary and save.

[9 : 01] We don't want to run out of money one day and have nothing. And so, we guard against that threat. We make efforts to guard against that threat. Sickness is a threat that threatens all of us, right?

So, we guard against it by trying to eat well, by exercising, by doing the things that our doctor says we must do and we put efforts into those things because we perceive that thing as a threat.

We put effort into protecting ourselves and our families from the things we perceive as threats in our life. So, let me ask you, what efforts are you making to guard your life from sin?

What efforts are you making to guard your family from sin? Not the sin of others, but your sin. You see, because look at the verse again.

He will save His people from their sins. Not other people's sins. Jesus has come to save His people from their own sins.

[10:07] Your sin that resides inside you is a greater threat to your life than all these other things that I've mentioned. Crime, bankruptcy, sickness.

Your sin is the greatest threat of them all. As Jesus says in Matthew 10, verse 28, Do not fear the one who can destroy your body, but do no more.

The criminal, the invading army, whatever it is. But Jesus goes on to say, Fear the one who can destroy both your body and soul in hell.

God Himself. That is who you should fear. That's what Jesus says. And sin results in hell. That's why it's the greatest threat in our lives.

Because when we sin against the God who made us, then the penalty for that is to face His wrath, to face His justice in hell.

[11:19] And that is why it is our greatest threat to our lives, but that is also precisely what Jesus came to save people from. That's why He came.

That's why He came. That's the primary reason Jesus came. not to improve your life, not to fix your problems.

Much as you want Him to and much as He often, using His power and His position in heaven, might do, that is not why He came. And a lot of people who call themselves Christians still look to Jesus thinking that that's why He came.

To fix their lives. To give them power to live. To motivate them to have a more powerful life, whatever it is.

And you know what? A lot of people give up on following Jesus when He doesn't do these things because that's what they think He's there for. But according to this, He's not.

[12:24] Those people do not yet realize that sin is by far their greatest problem. If people give up on Jesus because He doesn't fix their lesser problems in life, it's because they don't realize their greater problem.

The problem of their sin, which is what He came to fix. And only when a person realizes that, only when a person comes to really realize and appreciate the fact that sin, their sin inside them, is the greatest threat to their life, only then will they really cling to Jesus.

Only then will they really follow Jesus. Until they come to that point. Before they come to that point, they might come to church, they might tick the boxes, they might be a Christian in all the ways that are apparent, and sing songs, and say the Apostles of Creed, and join a church, and be a member. But until they come to the point of realizing that sin, the sin inside them, is the most threatening and lethal thing that they will ever face, they will never truly devote their lives fully to following Jesus. Jesus. But those who do, those who follow Jesus, those who actually turn around and give their lives wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ, are those who realize not only that he can save you from your sin, but he's the only person who can.

[13:56] He's the only person who can do that in any religion, in any culture. He's the only person in history who is able to save you from the sin that's inside you.

And we see that in his next name. That's the reason why he was given and known as that other name, which we turn to now, Emmanuel. And we'll see in this name why he's the only person who could ever save you from your sins.

Look at verse 22 to 23. Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, see the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son and they will name him Emmanuel, which is translated, God is with us.

So this famous Christmas prophecy that I'm sure you've heard before if you've been at church at Christmas time. But do you know something about this prophecy that a lot of people don't know? Is that it wasn't originally about Jesus. It wasn't originally about Jesus. It was originally actually about the birth of a child in the time of King Ahaz, who was the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, who God still had a covenant with in the line of David.

[15:20] And two kingdoms, so this is what we see in Isaiah 7, two kingdoms were about to destroy the southern kingdom of Judah.

They were threatening it and they were huge and scary and they had big armies and they were about to come and destroy Ahaz's kingdom and the last vestiges of God's covenant people. And they were too powerful. By any measure, they were going to lose and these two kingdoms were going to destroy them. But this is where God through the prophet Isaiah promises that what he's going to do is intervene in the normal course of history.

The normal course of history, it should have gone that they get destroyed. God said to them through Isaiah, I'm going to intervene, I'm going to come into that and I'm going to change the normal course of history and the sign that I'm doing this will be the birth of a special child. And this prophecy of the birth of this child, which would indicate that God is coming in to intervene in the course of history and save his people from an overwhelming enemy that they couldn't defeat themselves.

[16:28] The sign would be this child and that prophecy was partially fulfilled in the birth of Isaiah's own son and we read that in the very next chapter in Isaiah, whose name was Maheshal Hashbaz.

If you felt sorry for Elon Musk's children, then just be glad you weren't born to a prophet in the Old Testament. And sure enough, after the birth of this Maheshal Hashbaz, we went to college just to learn to say that name, by the way.

God did what he said. And he did exactly what he said. He saved Judah. He destroyed those two kingdoms before that child had even grown into adulthood.

But this prophecy, when people look back on it, they realize it wasn't fully fulfilled in every detail. It was partially fulfilled. And that's often what happens with Old Testament prophecies. Many times they don't just get fulfilled once.

When there's a prophecy about something that's going to happen, sometimes it's fulfilled, but it's not fully fulfilled. And then later on it's fulfilled in a more full way. And that often happens, and this is one of them.

[17:40] And what that means, the fact that it wasn't fully fulfilled that first time around, means that there is still to be a bigger fulfillment. It is still to be fulfilled.

this prophecy about this Emmanuel that would be born to a virgin is still to be fulfilled in a bigger way after Ahaz's time, when God will again intervene in history to save his people from an enemy that they could never defeat in their own power.

And it turns out that that enemy is sin. And the birth of Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah. Isaiah. Because you see, the reason why we needed to see it fulfilled in its context first is because we've got to realize that sin, just like the enemies Judah was facing in Ahaz's time, is an enemy we cannot defeat.

Just as much as Judah were unable, they were powerless to defeat this great enemy, that's how we've got to see sin. We've got to realize it's an enemy we can't defeat in our own strength.

It's too powerful. You know that. Your sin is too powerful for you to overcome. It's too powerful for any of us to overcome with a few good habits and religious disciplines and coming to church every Sunday.

[19:04] So many Christians still think that, by the way. So many Christians still think that if I just get the right habits in my life, and if I just mix with the right people, then I will overcome the sin.

That their own habits and their own disciplines will save them from their sin. It won't. Your sin that resides inside you is too powerful for you to overcome.

We need to realize this, and that's what this prophecy points to. If we're ever going to be saved from our sin, we need God to intervene. We need God to come down and intervene, in the world and in our lives.

That's the only way we will be saved from sin. You can cover over it, you can try to live a good life, and you can actually get away with living a life that the world will call good, but that is just putting plasters over the disease.

It's not actually curing it. The only way that our sin will be dealt with, we will be saved from its power and penalty, is if God intervenes in our lives.

[20:14] And if God intervenes in our world, from the normal course that it was going, and that's what he did when Emmanuel came. Because again, just like he did in Ahaz's time, when Jesus came, it was God intervening in the course of history.

The fact that he was called Emmanuel, the fact that he was given that name, was an indicator that God is now, again, coming into history and changing its course from where it normally would have

gone.

He's coming into people's lives and changing the course of their lives from where it would normally have ended up. But God, this time, is coming down to intervene in history in a much more profound way than he'd ever done before.

And we see that in the mystery of the virgin birth. Look again at verse 20. So the backstory, as I'm sure you know, is that Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married.

And engagement in that culture was pretty much like marriage. They had already a contractual agreement, but they had not had sex yet until marriage, until they consummate the marriage. And now Mary was pregnant.

[21 : 25] So Joseph immediately, like anybody, would think she's fooled around. She's had sex with some other guy, and that's why she's pregnant. And so he was in a crisis. He's got to divorce her, but that's a big, serious thing.

You have to divorce even when you're engaged in that culture. But that's when the angel comes down and intervenes. And we pick it up from verse 20. An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Is from the Holy Spirit. And so this child the angel is telling Joseph, is no ordinary child.

It's no ordinary human who needs a sperm and an egg to be conceived. Because what's happening here is this is God himself entering into the womb to take on human flesh.

flesh. And he did that so that he could come right into the world as one of us. Not just intervene from heaven. You see, this time, God is going to intervene by becoming one of us.

[22 : 41] Come right into the world, right into our mess that we have made to save us from it. like you see one of those rescuers.

If they're really going to rescue someone who's in a terrible situation, a fire, a fireman has to go into and risk himself and he has to go into that fire. He can't just stay outside the building.

If he's going to rescue people inside, he has to go into it. One of those rescue swimmers that jump from helicopters to go and rescue people who are drowning in the sea, they don't just stay in the helicopter and shout, advice.

Oh, no, no, just put the other arm in. No, that's good. Well done. They jump in because they know that that person can't save themselves. And so they jump in, they go right into their situation so that they can save that person from what's going to happen.

That's what God did in the virgin birth. That's why it's so important. Because that is God coming right into our world as taking on flesh, as a human being.

[23 : 46] And the reason we needed him to do that, the reason we needed God to become a human in this mystery of the incarnation, we call it. The reason that that was so necessary is because only as a human could he represent us and take our sins, human sins, on himself, which he did on the cross.

when he died on the cross, taking the justice for sins. But only as God could he fully pay for the sins of other people and satisfy his own infinite justice to free us from them.

That's why it had to be man and God in one person. And nowhere else can you find that but in Jesus Christ. And that is why Jesus Christ is the only person who can ever save you from your sins. it's the only way any of us can ever be saved from sins because we can never save ourselves. And God knew that and he knew that this would be the only thing that would work.

And he had been planning it from eternity past that he would come down, become one of us, take on our sins and die for us and pay his own justice, his own penalty for our sins.

[25 : 07] And so if you want to know who Jesus really is, if you want to know why Jesus came, lots of people think they know who Jesus is and they have all these different ideas and expectations for Jesus but if you want to know who Jesus really is, you need to know his name and you need to understand that he came because your greatest enemy is your own sin and it is too powerful for you to defeat.

All of that is encapsulated in his names that he was given and so he intervened in the course of history to save you. But I want to ask you, has he intervened in the course of your life yet?

He intervened in history to make salvation possible for you, but has he intervened in the course of your life where it was going and changed that course yet? Has he saved you?

Are you his? That's the most important question you could ask. Do you belong to him? I'm not asking do you call yourself a Christian? I'm not asking do you come to church? Do you belong, body and soul, to your Lord Jesus?

Are you his? Is your life for him to decide what to do with? Are you his? Because, look again at verse 21, look at the, what does it say about the people he had come to save?

[26 : 37] He will save who? From their sins? His people. His people. Not all people. His people.

Those who belong to him. Those who bow the knee to him as Lord and Savior. His people. Are you one of them? If you are, then I have one final word before we end this morning.

One final word for those who are his people. And that is that God is still intervening in history. He hasn't stopped. God is still intervening in history.

You know what's really interesting? Is that this phrase, God is with us. Is right at the beginning of Matthew and right at the end.

And that's deliberate. Matthew uses that idea as two bookends for his whole gospel because it's so important. It's such an important concept that he puts God with us at the beginning, right here where we're reading, and God with us at the end.

[27 : 46] In Matthew 28, the very last verse of Matthew's gospel ends with the great commission, Jesus giving the commission to his disciples, to God and to all the world, and to share the gospel, and he ends by saying, and I am with you.

To the very end of the age, I am with you. In the Greek, it's almost identical phrase to what we read in our passage here. And when Jesus says that in the great commission at the end of Matthew, I am with you, you know what that is?

In light of what we're reading this morning, it's a been in history. He would continue to enter into the mess of sin that people can't save themselves from, but the way he does it now, is through you and me.

It's through us. When we, Christians, are willing to do what he did, and enter into the mess, and be involved in lives where salvation is needed, rather than stay comfortable in our own nicely curated comfortable bubbles that we're so good at making.

But that's not, if God did that, imagine God decided to stay comfortable in heaven. We would never be saved. And if we decide to stay comfortable, God will never intervene in the lives of the people around us.

[29 : 23] it's when Christians are willing to step out of their comfort zones, that God continues to be present, and through us and our friendships with people who don't believe, and our conversations, significant conversations we have with them about Jesus, through us, God continues to intervene in the normal course of people's lives, so he might save them from their greatest enemy.

Let's pray that we will be those people. Will you bow your head with me? Lord, we're overwhelmed when we think that we think of all that you've done, that you decided to enter into our mess through the incarnation so that you would save us from an enemy we could never defeat ourselves, our own sin.

And Lord, we thank you that you continue to intervene in this world to save people from sin and you do it through us. Help us to be people who are willing to do what you did and enter into the mess of other lives so that we can bring the saving gospel that saves others from their greatest enemy.

And I pray for any here or any listening who are not yet your people, who do not belong to you, and they know they don't, they still belong to themselves. Lord, would you help them to realize they can never defeat their own sin?

Would you help them to realize they can never have life outside of trusting and repenting and giving their lives to you? And would you change the course of their lives?

[31 : 09] In Jesus' name, Amen.