

## WHAT'S IN THE NAME JESUS

Text: Matthew 1:18-25; Acts 4:1-12

Lord's Day 11

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What's in a name? In any one day I could be called 'Rev Douma', 'Dr Douma', 'Mr Douma', 'Leo', 'Dad', 'Sir', 'Mate' or 'Hey you!' Why all the different names or terms for one person? Well they represent different relationships. For example being called 'Rev Douma', or 'Pastor ' implies an official relationship, a minister with a church member. Being called 'Leo' implies more of a friend to a friend, being equals. So the names we use depends on the relationship we have with each other. That means not everybody can use the same names. Only my children can call me 'dad'. Only my grandchildren call me 'poppa'. And only Liz should call me 'honey'. If anyone else does then we have a problem!

Now the Catechism in Lord's Day 11,12 & 13 is interested in name calling. The Catechism wants to have a look at the names by which we address our 'Lord Jesus Christ'. It is a unique way of dealing with the first line of the second article of the Apostles Creed *"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord..."* There is a shift in the Apostle's Creed here from what we believe about God the Father, *"...maker of heaven and earth"*, to the second person in the Trinity, to God's Son. In doing a word study of the names of the Son of God it shows the different relationships that are expressed by each name. 'Christ' refers to his office. It is his official title. 'Christ' or the Old Testament word 'Messiah' means 'the anointed one of God'. In the Old Testament kings and priests were officially appointed to their position by anointing with fragrant oil. So 'Christ' refers to the official tasks of Jesus as prophet, priest and king. 'Lord' refers to the relationship of master and servant. It points out that the whole universe is under his lordship. It also points out that we belong to him and that we are to obey him. 'Jesus' is his personal name. It is the name given by his Father at his birth. It is the personal name that expresses the close relationship between him and us.

Now the significance of God himself giving the personal name, and not just letting Mary and Joseph choose a favourite name, is that Jesus' name is a revelation. It reveals who he is and what he does. In our culture a name is just a tag, a way to identify a person. How did you get your name? What does it mean or signify? My father did the traditional thing and named me after his father. But beyond that there is no significance. But in the Bible a name reveals the character of the person. The name 'Nabal', for instance, means 'fool'. And when we read 1 Samuel 25 we see Nabal lived up to his name. 'Isaac' means 'laughter' and recalls the laughter and joy of Abraham and Sarah when they received a son in their old age. Abram was given the name 'Abraham' because he was the "*father of many nations*". God reveals himself to us as 'YHWH,' 'I am who I am'. It's the name that tells us God is eternal, unchanging. He keeps his covenant promises. And he is the source of life and all there is. So, in the Bible, a name reveals something about a person.

The name given to the Son of God is no different. God gave a carefully chosen name to his Son. God did not just pick any name out of a hat. The name Jesus is rooted in the Old Testament. The name 'Jesus' is the Greek version of the Hebrew 'Joshua' which means 'Jehovah saves'. By giving his Son that name, God was saying Jesus is the New Testament Joshua. The Old Testament Joshua led God's people into the Promised Land. Jesus would also do a mighty act of rescue that brings us to the land of hope. Imagine Mary calling out to him when he was a young boy. 'Joshua where are you? Jesus, come here please. 'God our saviour' what are you doing?' Actually the name 'Joshua' was a very common name in those days. Scholars estimate about 1 in 20 boys was called Joshua. So by being called 'Jesus' it revealed he was God who came as an ordinary human being for a particular purpose. As the angel said to Joseph "*You are to call him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins*".

The Catechism, highlighting this, asks "*Why is the Son of God called 'Jesus,' meaning 'Saviour'? Because he saves us from our sins.*" Now that of course has ramifications for us. It means we admit we needed saving. We needed to be rescued from eternal hell. It means we are sinners in need of forgiveness. It means that all that we say Jesus went through on the cross, suffering hell, rising from the dead he did for us. We are the ones who caused Jesus to suffer. We needed saving. Now being saved from our sin is the most significant thing that can happen to us. We are not just saved from poverty, or

a stock market crash, or from abuse or terrorism or natural disaster or whatever are the very real and great concerns in our current world. We have been saved from our greatest need. We are admitting we have been saved from eternal condemnation because of our sin. So when we say the name Jesus, we are talking of the one so close to you and me, whose love for us is so deep, that he sacrificed his life for us. He went through hell to draw us to himself by his love. 'Jesus'! Doesn't that name itself just stir up your devotion as you think of him? Do you remember when you were first in love? All you needed was to say their name or hear someone else mention it and it stirred something inside you. Something like that should happen to us when we hear the name 'Jesus'. There should be a stirring of devotion and worship for our 'saviour'. And there should be a stirring of anger if someone uses his name in an abusive manner.

Now you might say 'But I don't feel that way. I don't feel anything with that name Jesus'. If that is the case, is it possible you don't feel anything because you do not know Jesus personally? Perhaps you have not experienced Jesus as a living person. A person to whom you have confessed that you needed rescue. A person in whom you have placed your full trust. Or perhaps the name Jesus doesn't say much to you because you have heard it so often. Your relationship with him has gone stale. You take him for granted. The devotion is gone. The wonder of his grace in saving you has been lost. Perhaps you are committed to church activities or a church tradition. But you have forgotten, or perhaps never really knew, the one behind it all. You may go to church but do you know Jesus? Do you know him personally? It is very possible to grow up in a Christian family and church lifestyle, and even adopt that lifestyle, but not know Jesus himself.

You see between the believer and Jesus there is a living relationship. It is something existing and ongoing now. As a church we do not worship a dead hero. We do not think of the one who set it all up 2000 years ago and now we do 'churchy' stuff in memory of him. Our Christian faith is not just a matter of following the teachings of the prophet or the writings of the master. A United Nations Secretary- General once said at the UN Millennium Summit of Religious Leaders: '...to be merciful, to be tolerant, to love thy neighbour- no religion can claim a monopoly on such teachings'. Now with that is he also implying all religions have equal standing? That all religions follow the teachings of their past prophets and teachers? Then he has missed something. The heart of the Christian faith is the living Lord Jesus himself. He is the one to whom we are personally

related and with whom we fellowship every day. Take the living Jesus out of Christianity and we have nothing left, despite all the writings and teachings. No other religion has that. No other religion has a saviour who has personally paid the price for reconciliation with God. And who lives with us daily. To put Jesus on equal footing with other religions is to deny him as Son of God, our living Lord. Peter said to the Sanhedrin *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* For preaching that he and the others were persecuted. It's the claim for which Christians have been persecuted ever since. And it's going to happen again. We confess as the Catechism says *"Salvation cannot be found in anyone else; it is futile to look for salvation elsewhere."*

We worship the living Jesus, the Son of God who saves us and whose Spirit now lives in our hearts. You notice the tense of the verb in the Catechism answer. *"Why is he called Jesus? Because he saves us from our sin..."* 'Saves', not 'saved' or 'will save'. It is a present tense. He is working his saving grace in us now. Salvation is not just about going to heaven, being with Jesus then. Nor is salvation simply a matter of having been forgiven and now we continue on our own. I am caricaturing it, but sometimes that is how we live. We hear it in the statement 'I am doing my best to follow God's commands'. But that is not the Christian life. Christian life is about living with Jesus. It is walking with him in everything. So it is not 'I on my own', but us, 'Christ and me together'. To the person who trusts in Jesus, he says 'My brother, my sister, it's all forgiven. Now we can live together, you and I through my Spirit. We shall work together on your life. Together we shall struggle with your sin. And together deal with life's hassles and temptations. Through my Word and Spirit you will learn new things. Make changes to old habits. And get to know me more and more. All the areas of your life will experience my grace because you live my life. My Spirit and power reside in you!'

Now if you know all this and have experienced Christ's love in your life, but still you feel unmoved at the name of Jesus, then maybe something else is the problem. Maybe your mind or heart are drifting somewhere else. Maybe you're guilty of idolatry. Or is it adultery, spiritual adultery? When you marry someone they are the only one for you. No one else. You don't need any one else. When Jesus is our saviour then we do not need any other saviour. He is the perfect saviour. He is our all and everything. He alone. However there is our human tendency to doubt; to want to do our own bit rather than trusting Jesus completely. There is always the temptation to look in other directions just

in case Jesus isn't everything. You know, in case the grass is greener over the fence. The Catechism is showing its age, not by raising that concern, but with its specific example. In Q30 it asks *"Do those who look for their salvation and security in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only saviour Jesus?"* The concern here is with the perceived Roman Catholic tendency to rely on the saints and our own good works, as well as on Jesus. The Catechism points out that such 'looking elsewhere' is denying Jesus as the only saviour. It denies that he is the only one in our life. It is betraying our relationship with our saviour. For really it is saying that Jesus is not good enough. We want something in addition to feel secure. That is why the Reformers were critical of Roman Catholic theology.

Now we may feel that is a past theological issue and does not concern any of us personally. We don't have those inclinations. But let's be careful for the tendency to be unfaithful to Jesus is there with us as well. We may put aside the Roman Catholic example in the Catechism. But not what it is getting at. We show the same attitude when we doubt our salvation even though we say we trust in Jesus as our saviour. For example when someone says 'I hope I am saved. I am not a very good person'. That is a subtle self-works attitude. It says 'I have to be good enough'. The reality is that you are not good enough. But that's not the point. Only Jesus is good enough. And he has done it all for us to make us right with God. Or when we become like the Pharisees and think we are better than others. 'We are decent middle class people and are very busy in the church'. That is again a self works attitude. Maybe we tend to think that way because our parents intimated that they loved us when we were good. But Jesus loves us despite our failure. It is his love that draws us to obedience. We commit spiritual adultery when we bow the knee before the world's gods of wealth and success. We are unfaithful to Jesus when we feel a great need for money, things, status and develop a dependency on them at the expense of trusting Jesus. And at the expense of spending personal time with him. Surely this last example is the idolatry of our age. This is why the church is so weak in western society. We can have it all by our hard work. And we do. But we end up so busy with work and demands we say we have no time for devotions and prayer. Church attendance slips because we are too tired on Sundays. But here's the thing. If we let slip our personal relationship with Jesus and fade away in our faith we lose more than a church culture. We lose our hope. We face eternal suffering. That's because *"Salvation cannot be found in anyone else..."* To say this is not to judge. But in grace to remind us of the wonder of Jesus, our saviour. When we " *...in true faith*

*accept [Jesus we ] have all we need...". Get to know Jesus personally. Hold onto him and enjoy life in true joy and hope.*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

*These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.*

- What does the name 'Jesus' mean? Do you know him personally? Has he saved you?
- What do we mean when we say we don't worship a dead hero? How is Jesus alive and with us today?
- How is your relationship with Jesus: 'devoted', 'taken for granted', 'slipping', 'never known him'? Why is that? What will you do?
- Do you recognise where you might be in terms of trusting in something or someone other than Jesus for salvation? Why has that come about? What will you do?