

Who is Jesus?

Matt 1:20-23

WHO IS JESUS?

How do we define people? We define them by their name. Names can sometimes attract or repel. Recently there was a report on racial discrimination in recruitment, that showed that women who had ethnic names were less likely to get a job than women who had "English" names. In fact the BBC gave two examples of women, one from a Caribbean background and another Nigerian who changed their names and found that immediately they started getting job interviews once their name had changed.

Similarly, the BBC also noted that Asian businessmen who changed their names or adopted "English" company names often found that names made a difference too.

I remember a story I heard in London of a German born-businessman who went by the surname Knight-Rutley. He came up with the surname after the name of the letting agents of his family's first house in London, Knight, Frank and Rutley. When asked whether it was really necessary to have changed their name, after all there were many German named companies that were well respected in the UK like Seimens, Volkswagen, Grundig and the like, the businessman replied "you try doing business anywhere if you're surname is Hitler!"

Names tell us quite a lot about somebody, about who they are and who they are trying to be. If you want to understand who Jesus is, all we have to do is look at the names He has been give. We looked at some this morning and this evening I want to look at just a couple. Both come in the first chapter of Matthews gospel where the angel reveals to Joseph just who Mary was pregnant with:

Matt 1:-20-23 "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. 21 She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus--because he will save his people from their sins." 22 Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet, 23 "A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel" (which means, "God is with us").

There are two names here Immanuel and Jesus. Let's explore them.

IMMANUEL – GOD WITH US. What a massive name! God with us. 700 years before Jesus was born we read how a virgin would conceive and bear a child names Immanuel – God with us. For a virgin to conceive and bear a son is biologically impossible. It can't happen. So when it does, people need to sit up and pay attention because God is doing something.

And 2000 years ago, it happened – a virgin conceived and bore a son. And He was Immanuel – God with us. God became one of us. The Eternal Son took on humanity and started life as we did – being born. It's that amazing truth we celebrate at Christmas. How could God in all His vastness become human? I don't know – all I do know is that He did it!

Whatever you may think about Christmas, that's the central truth of the season. God became human. He lived a life, just like us. He knew all the stresses and strains of being part of an ordinary family, having brothers and sisters, doing a job, having all our emotions,

pressures and the rest.

Even more significantly, why would God want to put Himself through all that? The second name reveals what it's all about.

JESUS – YESHUA: YAWEH THE SAVIOUR

The name by which the Eternal Son was known, and the name He is now known by and will do so for all eternity is Jesus. Actually Jesus is His Greek name. In Aramaic and Hebrew His name is Yeshua or Joshua as we would say in English. It was an ordinary name, there are lots of Joshua's in the Bible. I guess that's why we use the Greek version as it makes His name special and stand out. In other cultures it's much more common for people to call their boys Jesus. There's even a town in Peru called Jesus. But by and large, in Britain and the western world, say the word Jesus and just about everyone knows who we are talking about, but they may have a different conception of Jesus to me.

Jesus in our modern society engenders all kinds of pictures to people – a good man, a religious teacher, a “false” prophet, a swear word, or “who?” But to people that know Jesus and follow Him, He is Yahweh the Saviour. Yahweh is the OT word for God. It was regarded as the most holy name ever, but the name was found in reduced form in men's names as Yeshua/Joshua. Even more important is what Joshua means – He was Saviour. There are some great Joshua's in the OT. There was Joshua son of Nun who led the people into the Promised land. There was another Joshua who was leader of the first Exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

They were saviours, rescuers, people who ushered in a new age. And now there was to be another Joshua. Another Saviour was coming. His was going to be a different rescue altogether. He was going to get rid of what separated people like you and me from God – the things we do wrong, the things we think wrong, the times we have failed ourselves and others, the times we have ignored God – God calls these things sin and they keep us from Him. It wasn't in His birth that Jesus rescued us, but in His death on the cross where He took the punishment for sin that should have been ours. Now He offers forgiveness, friendship with God, a way by which we can start to get answers about life and eternity. And the cost? Jesus paid it. He offers it all as a free gift to each man and woman. It is down to us to accept it or reject it.

Jesus offers all these things to you this evening? Will you accept Him? Will you get to know Him as a friend, a saviour and as Lord? Will you follow Him? He did it all because He loves you. And He holds out His hand to you this evening. Will you reach out and find Jesus this Christmas.

Christmas is about the giving and receiving of gifts. Why? Because God gave us the gift of His Son. Because of what Jesus did, we are now offered forgiveness, relationship and eternity? What's stopping us?

Appeal

Prayer