



**At the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue
should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.**

Phil 2:10–11

The Names of Jesus

Sometimes when we study the Bible, we get so caught up in the information it provides that we forget the purpose for our study. The essential purpose of reading the Scriptures is to know a person—Jesus Christ—more personally and more intimately. Paul expressed his intense desire to know Christ in his writings: “I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8). Paul wanted to know Jesus more and more so that he could live more fully in Jesus.

There is a profound difference between “knowing about Jesus” and “knowing Jesus,” just as there is a difference between watching a dance and entering the dance ourselves. We can read the Scriptures, read other books about Jesus, study for years, and even attain degrees in theology, and not really know Jesus. To know Jesus means to establish a personal relationship with him, to know him not just as a historical figure but “in person,” as one who is real and alive, powerfully influencing our lives here and now.

Reflection and discussion

- What is involved in truly coming to know another person?

- What gives me a burning desire to know Jesus more personally?

What's in a Name?

In the ancient world in which the Bible was written, an essential aspect of knowing a person was to know the person's name. Knowing the name was far more personal than knowing information about the person; in fact, it was synonymous with knowing the person. When Moses wanted to know who God is, the book of Exodus recounts: "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, The Lord" (Exod 34:5). "The Lord" in Hebrew is YHWH, a name that is hardly translatable, but is traditionally translated as "I am who I am."

Names in the ancient world of the Bible carry far more importance and value than they do today. Today we think of a name as a way to identify a person. In the Bible knowing someone's name, whether it be that of God or of a human being, allows a relationship to be established with that person. As the psalm proclaims: "Those who know your name put their trust in you" (Ps 9:10). Honoring and cherishing the name of God creates a personal and trusting bond with him.

Words in the biblical world have a vitality that is far greater than simply designating a person, place, or thing. God's naming other beings brings creation into existence: "He calls them all by name" (Isa 40:26). The words that form a person's name signify the very existence of that person. A person's name is kept

in memory through posterity; to cut off a person's name means not only the death of the person, but the end of his or her existence. As the psalms declare: "You have blotted out their name for ever and ever" (Ps 9:5), and "May his name be blotted out in the second generation" (Ps 109:13; see also 1 Sam 24:21).

Reflection and discussion

- Why is it so wrong to misuse the name of God? How can I better honor and cherish the name of God?

- What is the meaning of my name? Does my name in any way characterize who I am?

The Power of Jesus' Name

The names of Jesus express his very nature and person. His names express and convey all of his saving deeds: "You were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 6:11). We participate in his saving power and authority when we act in his name. Peter healed in his name: "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk" (Acts 3:6). The name of Jesus, the Nazorean, the Messiah, gave the crippled beggar something more than riches could purchase. James instructs the presbyters of the church to anoint the sick with oil "in the name of the Lord," and he states that the Lord will raise them up (Jam 5:14–15). When the church acts in the name of Jesus, he himself is at work in his ministers.

In his testimony before the Sanhedrin, Peter proclaimed the power of the name of Jesus. Peter was asked by the assembly, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Peter answered them, "If we are questioned today

because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:7–12). Jesus is the expected Messiah, the Nazorean, the cornerstone of God’s new temple. These names of Jesus convey his authority and power even when he is physically absent. When we speak or act in his name, he himself is at work among us.

The Bible is filled with a wide variety of names and titles of Jesus. We will reflect on thirty of these, each of which reveals something unique about who Jesus is. The more we reflect on these names, the better we will know him. As we call upon Jesus under his many names and titles, we will comprehend and experience more and more the fullness of who he is. Knowing Jesus better is reason enough to study his many names.

Yet, knowing Jesus is not the only reason for studying his names and titles. The better we know him, the better we will grasp the richness of his power at work within us. The more we know his names, the more we will be able to understand what he has done for us and what he can do for us today. We reflect on his marvelous names for this reason: every name that he bears is a blessing that he shares.

Reflection and discussion

- What are some of the names and titles of Jesus I have used in prayer?

- What does each of these names say about who Jesus desires to be in my life?

Honoring the Many Names of Jesus

No single name or title of Jesus can integrate the fullness of who he is. That is why biblical literature offers us a kaleidoscope of names. Each of them conveys one aspect of his person and power, yet none of them contains the fullness of who he is. The variety of these multifaceted names expresses the all-encompassing reality of Jesus.

Some of these names of Jesus originated with Jesus himself; others were crafted by the early church as they grew to understand Jesus more fully under the Spirit's guidance. Some of these names are unique to the New Testament writings; others have their origins in the Old Testament as names for God, Israel, or the Messiah.

Names such as the Nazorean, Carpenter, Messiah, the Son of Man, Prophet, and Rabbi most probably originated during the earthly ministry of Jesus. Titles such as the Word, the High Priest, King of Kings, and Alpha and Omega come from the early Church as they understood Jesus in the fullness of his risen glory.

Some names of Jesus are human images, such as Bridegroom, Shepherd, and Carpenter; others are images of transcendence, such as Word of God, Son of God, and Lord. Still other names express images of care and nourishment, such as Bread of Life, Living Water, Light of the World, and the True Vine.

Titles that are rooted in the Old Testament, such as Firstborn, Emmanuel, Prince of Peace, Son of David, Lamb, and Suffering Servant are given new significance when they are made names for Jesus. In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd, Light, Bridegroom, King, Lord, and I Am. As these images of God become titles for Jesus Christ, the New Testament is proclaiming that Jesus is the manifestation of God himself and that he shares in God's divinity.

The Old Testament imagery fulfilled in the names of Jesus is memorably summarized in the words of F.F. Bruce in *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes*: "In Jesus the promise is confirmed, the covenant is vindicated, salvation is brought near, sacred history has reached its climax, the perfect sacrifice has been offered and accepted, the great priest over the household of God has taken his seat at God's right hand, the Prophet like Moses has been raised up, the Son of David reigns, the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, the Son of Man has received dominion from the Ancient of Days, the Servant of the Lord, having been smitten to death for his people's transgression and borne the sin of many, has accomplished the divine pur-

pose, has seen light after the travail of his soul, and is now exalted and extolled and made very high.”

We honor the names of Jesus because he is our Lord, our Savior, our Messiah, our King. As Paul proclaimed in his New Testament hymn: “God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2:9–11). May we glorify and worship him as we ponder the mystery of his holy names.

Reflection and discussion

- What is the most difficult challenge I face as I begin this Bible study?

- What is my purpose for completing this Bible study?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you are called by manifold names throughout the Scriptures. I know there is healing, power, and grace in each of your holy names. As I study the many names you have been given during your earthly life and within the early Church, teach me about yourself. Help me to know you truly and personally. May all that I do be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.