

## II. Christmas Eve in Biblical Perspective “Name Above All Names”

Philippians 2:5-11

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As we allow God’s Word to direct us to the Table I want to take this time to focus on why we would gather together and come to the Table as a part of a Christmas Eve service. In Philippians 2 there is this wonderful, beautiful declaration about Christ our Savior. Philippians 2:5-11 says *[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

During this Advent season Pastor Reeder has been working through Isaiah 9 with a particular focus on Isaiah 9:6 which is a familiar passage read at Christmas but this is the first time I have ever heard someone preach their way through this verse. Isaiah 9:6 says *[6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Pastor Reeder has pointed out that these are throne names given to Christ as the name of Jesus is exalted. Isaiah is prophesying what is going to happen and he is giving us these names as a description of this One that is to come. Isaiah is a Prophet and as a Prophet of God he is repeating what the Holy Spirit has put into him to record. He is declaring that which has been received and he is telling us who Christ will be when He comes – that Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

I remember when each time my wife Sonya was expecting a child and we were trying to figure out names, we would have many conversations about those names and have much prayer. I think most of my wife’s prayers was that I would forget some of the names that I had mentioned. I would do research on the names and come back with them and I’ll admit some of them were really bad ideas for names. My children should really hug my wife for some of the names that she prayed out of my mind but we were not like Isaiah who was a Prophet so we didn’t have this inspirational necessarily that we could give them a name that they would prophetically fulfill in their life. So we tried to give them names that would give them hope for a spiritual heritage. We reached for names, whether it would be a family name or friend name or from Scripture, so that when they asked why we chose that name that it might set a path, a place to walk, a heritage to embrace.

We came up with the name Jacob Enoch and that is one of my favorite names so I have to apologize to the rest of my children. Then there was Mary Catherine, James Benjamin and Mary Elizabeth. We would tell them why we gave them that name and then we’d pray really hard that they were some version of those people we named them after and that they would honor and glorify the Lord, specifically that they would please the Lord. My wife is angelic so that makes me married to someone who is angelic and that is about as close as I get but one of the things that God has made very clear to us that in the process of naming them, we didn’t necessarily get

all those names right. Once the children began to grow up, develop personalities and act certain ways, (I'm speaking positively at this point) we'd look at them and realize we were trying to be prophetic so since our children are older now, this Christmas we have decided instead of giving spiritual gifts we're going to change their names.

My wife and I have been talking about this and thought, 'so what would we name them now that we know them.' We now have a distinct advantage. At Christmas tomorrow, we're going to go around and give them new names. I'm sure this is going to go wonderfully and that they will embrace these new names. We will tell them that we name them this because of who they are. I'm betting that right now my children are betting what they think the names will be. Two of them at least are probably thinking this is real because stranger things have happened in our family. They probably also have an opinion of what we should call their siblings as well because they all have different experiences with each sibling. I might even get some nominations after this sermon. I would encourage all the parents to follow me on this so let's start a trend.

I have a Biblical precedent for this and my children hate when I say that because that gives them fear that I'm actually going to do it. If it happened in the Bible then their dad may very well do it. God changed names, right? He changed Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, Saul to Paul and one of the most definitive name changes is when Jesus Himself changed Simon Bar Jonah's name. This was in response to two questions He had. The first question was 'Who do the people say that I am?' We see this in Matthew 16:13-14 as it says *[13] Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

Remember that any time Jesus asks you a question He is making a point to you. He is not hoping you will give Him information that He doesn't have. So, the point He is making in Matthew 16 with this first question is that He is telling them that the people may not know Him for who He really is. In the follow up question He changes Simon Bar Jonah's name so here is the second question.

Matthew 16:15-20 says *[15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [20] Then He strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ.*

Since Jesus already knows the answers to all His questions, why would He ask them 'who do the people say that I am?' I think He wanted to point out to the Disciples that the people who interacted with Him had very different experiences with Him and the experiences they had with Jesus were amazing experiences to the extent that they could have actually missed who Jesus really was based upon their actual experience they had with Jesus. Everybody reading that has had different experiences with Jesus and I would never be able to list all those experiences, but the danger would be to miss who Jesus really is based upon what Jesus has actually done in our lives.

To some, Jesus was a great prophet or great teacher. The Disciples even named some of the Prophets people that He might be. Jesus was astonishing people in the temple with how He

answered questions when He was 12 years old, especially religious leaders of the day and people even then thought He might be a prophet. Religious leaders were constantly trying to attack Jesus, trick and catch Him with how He would answer difficult questions. Jesus always had that insightful right answer. Even the political leaders would go after Him and still Jesus would have the right perspective in the way He answered them. So, those that witnessed that could walk away and say something like ‘I’ve never met a teacher like Jesus. I’ve never met a prophet like Jesus and as a matter of fact, I think He could be our earthly king. I think He could run this place and turn religion upside down. I think He could rule the world.’ They not only thought that in their heart but they rallied to see it happen because that was their perceived greatest need – was that they would have an earthly king, one who would have the right answers to shut the mouths of the Pharisees and Scribes.

To others, Jesus was a miracle worker for many saw and experienced Him performing miracles. At the wedding He changed the water to wine and met a need that was there. He caused the Disciples to catch more fish they had ever caught in their life when they had gone all night before and caught nothing. People either saw or heard of Him walking on water and telling the storm to be calm. So, people were amazed at all that He could do and how that might affect them if He was their king – where He could stop any natural catastrophe with His spoken voice at any part of the world. They saw, heard or even experienced Him feeding five thousand people with just a few fish and loaves. They thought this Man could end world hunger and to them that was their greatest perceived need. So, with Jesus being a miracle worker they meant that as positively as you can imagine where He could do anything and it’s easy for Him to become that for us. Our greatest perceived need perhaps is that He fixes something in our society or He ends some controversy or fulfills and fixes some mess that we have created and we would need Him to fulfill it or fix it which would take a miracle. We know He has the power to do it.

To others, and probably one of the things He was most known for which certainly got Him the most attention at times was that He was a healer. So, when you know a person from birth who was blind and find out they can now see because someone healed them or a boy who was crippled his whole life and was healed just by Jesus’ words and now he walks, plays and runs, people were amazed. People saw Jesus had the power to heal. There was no cure for leprosy and He healed people with leprosy.

Matthew 4:23-25 says [23] *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. [24] So His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought Him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and He healed them. [25] And great crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.*

People heard He was a healer and many had perceived needs to be healed or to see others healed so they would listen to the One who was the great Healer. Matthew and Mark record the account of Jairus’ daughter being healed so think of how Jairus may have felt when he heard his daughter died before Jesus got there. The account of this in Matthew 9:18-26 says [18] *While He was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” [19] And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. [20] And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, [21] for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.”*

*[22] Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. [23] And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, [24] He said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. [25] But when the crowd had been put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. [26] And the report of this went through all that district.*

Can you imagine what Jairus and his wife would have told people about Jesus? It would be a wonderful story but could have actually missed the real reason Jesus came to this earth. The purpose Jesus came to this earth wasn't to raise people's children from the dead for He did those miracles for a greater purpose, but if you were Jairus or his wife, their greatest perceived need is their sick daughter. When Jesus heals her they have to be careful to understand who Jesus actually is.

Jesus knew that people were going to embrace Him as something other than what He actually came to do. He knew when He did the miracles He did that that would cause a stir among the people for various reasons. I think people who saw Him as a healer would end up thinking He was just that – a healer and not something else. I think He dealt with this very specifically in an interesting interaction He had in a home where He was teaching and there were so many people that these four men have to go to the roof to get their sick friend in front of Jesus. Interestingly, He doesn't say what most would have thought He would say when the paralytic was lowered in front of Him. Most would have thought He would say 'be healed' but He doesn't say that for He first makes a point about who He is and what He came to do.

Mark 2:3-11 says *[3] And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. [4] And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. [5] And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." [6] Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, [7] "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" [8] And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? [9] Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? [10] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— [11] "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." [12] And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*

Initially to hear 'son, your sins are forgiven' may not have been what the four men or the paralytic wanted to hear but Jesus knew that was the paralytic's greatest need and He is declaring to those around Him that He has the power to forgive sins. Because Jesus perceives what people are thinking when He does that, He decides as a by-product, an example to show them a lesser power which was to heal the paralytic. What they thought was their greatest perceived need was actually secondary.

When the angel appears to Joseph this is what the angel says in Matthew 1:20-21, *[20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Jesus came to meet our greatest real need, not our greatest perceived need. As you think about the question Jesus asked, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ it would be easy to call Him a miracle worker, a healer and a great prophet and He is all those things, but it’s not the essence of who He is and it’s certainly not the reason that He came. He came to be the Savior.

I’m going to assume that if you are attending an 11pm Christmas Eve service serving the Lord’s Supper that you have a favorable disposition to Jesus and if you don’t, I would love to talk with you about Jesus because you will when we get done talking. Please contact me at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 if you’d like to talk. If Jesus to you is simply the person who has the power to better your life or has the ability to address your greatest perceived need then I have the joy to tell you that He is more than that. He is not less than that but more. He may look at you as a paralytic and not say ‘be healed’ but say ‘your sins are forgiven, place your trust alone in Jesus Christ’ but it’s possible that even as believers we can miss who Jesus is.

Jesus not only asks the Disciples who others say that He is but He asks them who they say that He is. Once again when Jesus asks a question, He is making a point. He is telling the Disciples that they can follow Him as a Disciple and love Him with their heart but that they can still miss the essence of who He is. You can shift from having your sins to be forgiven to now wanting to find and have a need for a Jesus who will fix the issues in your life and focus more upon Him as a miracle worker, a healer, a prophet or leader.

As we come to this Table, we come proclaiming His death and acknowledging that Jesus came to meet our greatest need and that is for us to have our sins forgiven. So, if you are a child of God don’t take communion with a focus upon the Lord and Savior as a healer, a miracle worker, a prophet or as anything other than Yeshua (Jesus) – Jehovah saves. The prerequisite for Christmas is our sin for our sin is the occasion for Christmas – without our sin there is no Christmas. We have Christmas because God is responding to our greatest need – our sin. So, we come to this Table as sinners who have been saved by grace, embracing fully the Name that is above every name. Jesus has been given so many titles and I believe all are true. I believe when we get to heaven and experience Him our understanding of Him will grow immensely, but to us now in our life He is Jesus because He has saved us from our sins. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank You so much for the work of Your Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds. I thank You for Your Word. Lord, I thank You that as You draw us to Your Table You draw us as sinners and dealing with the greatest need in our lives. Lord, I confess and acknowledge to You that it is easy for us even as it was for the Disciples to define You in some way other than the Savior of our sins so we come humbly before You acknowledging and confessing our sins before You. We come to this Table to proclaim Your life, Your death and to look to Your return because You have come and saved Your people from their sins – Jehovah saves and that is who we celebrate. In Your Name we pray, Amen.