

## The Names of Jesus: The Context-Relevant Saviour

Rev. Dr. Rick Griffith

DMin Director & Assoc. Professor of Biblical Studies

"Pray for Us" Newsletter, Singapore Bible College, Nov-Dec 2016, p. 2

We all want to be current. No one desires to be out of date. Who seeks to use the oldest software possible? Doesn't everyone like being informed and in touch with the news and other people?

Sadly, the popular myth is that God is "dated" and "irrelevant." Unbelieving humanity sees the Creator of the Universe out of touch, needing to be "brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Nothing could be further from the truth. The most up-to-date one on our planet is God himself. Good thing. Earth would spin out of orbit if he weren't involved and relevant (Col 1:17).

This is the purpose of the Incarnation: God becoming man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see this in this very designation: "Lord Jesus Christ"? Before reading on, can you explain the significance of these three terms: Lord, Jesus, and Christ? This designation appears 60 times in the New Testament, yet most Christians cannot express what the very name of their Savior means. Can you? Do it now before reading further.

Many of us have three names, so we answer this way. "This is easy! Lord was his first name, Jesus was his middle name, and Christ was his last name!" If that was your answer, you better read on.

### LORD

What do we mean when we say, "Jesus is Lord"? The Greek word for "lord" is *kurios*, which refers to "1. **one who is in charge by virtue of possession, owner**" or "2. **one who is in a position of authority, lord, master**" (BDAG 577). Jesus as "Lord" means that he is **in charge as the ultimate authority**. His authority comes as the owner of this world, and no position is higher than his as God.

This got the early Christians into trouble. Rome recognized the emperor as the highest authority, and in the reigns of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, loyal citizens worshipped the emperor as a god. However, believers in the lordship of Christ could worship no other god. As they recognized no higher authority, and as we remember the humility of Jesus laid in a manger this Christmas season, let us not forget that this same Jesus is indeed the highest authority of all. Don't be fooled by his quiet entrance into our world with the weaknesses of a baby. He alone is Lord.

### JESUS

What about the name "Jesus"? When announcing his soon birth to Joseph, the angel declared, "...you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21b). This verse confuses most of us. We know his name is Jesus, but (at least in English) we don't see the connection to the following phrase, "for he will save..."

The link is straightforward. "Jesus" means "Saviour," so the verse means, "...you are to name him *Saviour*, for he will *save* his people from their sins." Now *that* makes sense. The name comes from "Jeshua," which was a later form for "Joshua" (BDAG 472). As Joshua delivered Israel from the enemies in Canaan, so Jesus delivers us from sin itself. Calling him "Jesus" points to his later atoning work on the cross, where our sins were forgiven.

### CHRIST

The designation "Christ" is probably the most misunderstood term about our Saviour. The Greek *Christos* means "1. **fulfiller of Israelite expectation of a deliverer, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ**" and "2. **the personal name ascribed to Jesus**" (BDAG 1091). First-century Gentiles often confused *Christos* with the similar-sounding name *Chrestos*, which was simply a surname, but it means far more!

So what does it mean that Jesus is the "Messiah" or "Anointed One"? At their appointments in the OT, both priests and kings were anointed, yet here it means that Jesus is the Anointed King. The magi saw

this clearly since they sought the “king of the Jews” (Matt 2:2), and Herod confirmed that “Messiah” means “king” when he asked where the Messiah would be born (Matt 2:4).

### **CONTEXT-RELEVANT**

One core value of SBC is to be context-relevant. We present the unchanging Lord Jesus Christ to our ever-changing world because no one is more relevant than him. How do we do this? We proclaim that he is the ultimate authority as God (Lord), yet took on humanity to save us from our sins (Jesus) and will rule over all (Christ). This Christmas, worship him fully as Lord Jesus Christ.