

Call His Name Jesus

Thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins — Matt. 1:21

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No single word grips the hearts of men like the name of "Jesus."

Life would be intolerable without the message of Christmas. It would be unbearable without the angels' song. It would be unrelieved darkness if the light of Jesus were snuffed out of it.

Therefore the grateful heart must exclaim with Newton:

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

In a believer's ears;

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,

And drives away his fears."

Such music is ours because one quiet day, long ago, an angel said to devout Joseph: "Take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Let us think of our Lord as He appears in the light of these gentle words which fell that memorable day upon Joseph's hearing.

Consider, for one thing, the title He bears. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus." For sheer distinction in the superlative degree the name of Jesus is history's classic and humanity's rapture. It has heavenly overtones to be caught by earthly ears. The very word is a gift from heaven. Mary and Joseph did not choose it. It was chosen for them. It was the angel of the Lord who said, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus." Obediently they bestowed it upon the virgin-born Child.

In that NAME is the overtone of sinlessness. Quietly, unflinchingly, He challenged His critics: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46). Peter was in a position to speak with authority and full candor when he said of Jesus. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:21). "Christ's life," wrote Robert Speer, "bore no scars. There were no memories of past failures or mistakes. He came to each of the choices and tests of life bearing no handicap from the past." So the name He bears rings with the music of His flawless holiness.

In that NAME, moreover, is the overtone of masterfulness. Winds obeyed Him. The sea was calmed by Him. Devils fled before Him. Disease withered under His touch. Sins are forgiven at His word. Death was conquered by His power. A world conquest was boldly announced as His purpose: "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and teach (or "make disciples of," as the margin has it) all nations" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Then, however paradoxical, there is the overtone of humanness in the NAME of "Jesus." Again and again He spoke of Himself as "the Son of Man." Though the mysterious doors of human childbirth He came among us. By tasting our griefs, feeling our hungers, sharing our sweat and toil, He identified Himself with us as "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."

At the same time He took this real but sinless humanity of His and, by constant reliance upon the Holy Spirit, demonstrated how glorious man's life can be when it is conformed to the will of God.

And let us never forget that this winsome humanness of the divine Jesus belongs as much to Him now as it did when He walked visibly among His disciples. I give you the Holy Spirit's word for it: "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest . . . For in

that He himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:17, 18).

"Call his name Jesus!" The angel bade them do it. They did it. And now, after nineteen centuries, the overtones of the title are heard everywhere. Sinlessness, masterfulness, humanness—these are combined in Jesus as they have never been united in any other figure. They give us, as heaven's beneficent boon, earth's sweetest, purest music.

"Jesus, the name high over all,

In earth, or hell, or sky

Angels and men before Him fall,

And devils fear and fly."

Let us pass now to examine the task He performs. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

Dean Shirley Jackson Case once suggested that the religions of the world could be divided into religions of achievement and religions of rescue. There is much to be said for this distinction. In a religion of achievement man is his own savior.

On the other hand, in a religion of rescue you begin with an acknowledgment of man's sinful failure and his inability to recover and redeem himself. God must move to his side or he is lost for ever. God must extend a hand or he will sink into the abyss.

You and I don't need to be told that of these two types of religion Christianity belongs to the latter: it is a gospel of rescue! Its message is not primarily that of man's goodness but of his badness. It is not primarily that of God's goodness either, but rather the message of His redeeming graciousness.

We are told today that Christ as Saviour does not make as strong an appeal as Christ the Teacher, the Example, the Inspired, and this for the simple reason that men are no longer worrying about their sins.

Perhaps so. But nobody should be fooled by this very "modern" situation. It may be true that the typical American is not worrying about his sins as sins, but nothing can alter the grim fact that he is worrying. In fact, his worry complex is so huge and stubborn that he has the psychiatrists worried. "Stop Worrying and Start Living" is the message these experts are trying to get across to him. But the effort is not too successful. We go right on worrying because we go right on in our sins.

Only, of course, we are no longer honest enough to call them sins. Someone needs to stand up and call the bluff that the modern man is playing with himself. He says that the old terms of the theologian—such terms as "sin," "iniquity," "transgression," "wickedness"—are no longer understandable and are therefore no longer acceptable. How then describe man's selfishness, crime, and unhappiness? You must have a vocabulary, must you not? Certainly. So this modern man, just as full of pride as man has ever been, looks at you knowingly and says, "Why do you not get up to date? Have you not heard of psychology, and psychiatry, and sociology? They have supplied us with a new and more enlightened vocabulary. Man is not wicked; he merely has "complexes." Man is not a transgressor; he simply is "maladjusted." Man is not depraved; he only has "aberrations." Man is not evil; he just develops a "neurotic" mind.

Let two comments suffice where a dozen are clamoring for expression: (1) I should hesitate to argue that the

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