

Emmanuel: Jesus Christ, Restores us to the Father

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Scripture 1: (Matt. 1:18-25 ESV)

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

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. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). **(Isaiah 7:10-14)**

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Scripture 2: (Jn. 10:24-42 ESV)

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.

Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?"

The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came-- and Scripture cannot be broken-- do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained. And many came to him.

And they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." And many believed in him there.

Scripture 3: (Heb. 9:11-15 ESV)

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Sermon:

We have finally come to the point in Scripture regarding Emmanuel which is familiar to most everyone.

We hear these words every Christmas tide. We sing that name in song, like we just sang (O Come, O Come Emmanuel) “O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel”; but, do you ever stop to think about the words we sing? Do you stop to think about what message that hymn is conveying? What does it mean for us, for Christ to “ransom captive Israel”?

Then, there is also the *appearance* of incongruity within our Matthew passage, regarding the Name of our Savior: Was His name Jesus or was it Immanuel? Was Isaiah's prophecy actually being fulfilled, or do we just try to “make it fit” our *{hermeneutical}* expectations? The two different names always concerned me, both as a child and as an adult. Is this question of names something we must take on faith, or do we merely assume that it is true; taking it for granted that since it is written in the Bible; therefore, it must be correct?

Well that answer is yes. It is something we take on faith. However, faith in Christ is not a blind faith, it is a reasoned and reasonable faith; for even though the two names: Jesus and Immanuel; sound nothing alike, both are appropriate, correct, and true names given for our Savior; but to know why, we need to understand a bit about how and why people were named, or called as they were.

Culturally, children's names were often given as a word of “hopeful promise” or to be a wish for them in their life. The name of Jacob's son, Joseph, meant in Hebrew *{Yosef}* “he will increase”, and Joseph eventually oversaw the increase of blessing and fortune for Egypt during a time of prosperity and one of famine, he also oversaw the increase of his own family once they had settled in the land of Goshen. Children were also named for their appearance, or for an event surrounding their birth. When Rachel lay dying, following childbirth, she wanted to name her son *Ben-oni* meaning “son of my sorrow” *{or “son of my strength”}*, because she traded her life for his birth, but instead Jacob named him *Ben-yamin*, Benjamin, meaning “son of my right hand”, because he was the favored son, a position which he would enjoy his entire life, being the last child born of Jacob's beloved Rachel (Gen 35:18). Still another example was Esau, whose name meant “hairy”, although he was also called Edom, which meant “red”, for his reddish hair and or skin; meanwhile Jacob's name came from the Hebrew word for “heel”, for he was born grasping his brother's heel. *{Additionally, the root word from which Jacob's name derived came to also mean “deceitful”, which was descriptive of his character during his early life (Gen 25:25-26; 27:1-40).}*

Hebrew and Jewish names were important to both child and parent. They were often intended to be descriptive and/or prophetic. The names of Jesus and Immanuel, provided by the Angel for the son of Mary, is clearly intended to be both.

So, what does the name Jesus mean? Our anglicized name of Jesus comes from the Greek form, *Iesous*, which itself was a transliteration *{writing of how a word from a different language sounds}* of His Hebrew name, *Yehoshua* or *Yeshua*, *{alternate spelling with an a instead of an e}* meaning “Yahweh Saves” or “Yahweh is my Salvation”. *{The Hebrew “y” (yod) sound became written as an “i” (iota) sound in Greek (like the y in reply) because there was no appropriate character. Later during or following the Renaissance, the iota became the Latin “i”, then the “i” became a “j” as, while Latin characters were being used by the Germanic languages, the “i” took on a different sound while the “j” took on the old yod/iota sound; thus the German word for “yes” is “ja” spelled j-a. Since English speakers destroy, butcher every language we encounter, that soft “y” sound became a hard “j” sound, leading to “Jehovah” as opposed to “Yahweh”, and Jesus instead of Yesus.}* Two other very important individuals from the Old Testament also carried names from this same root: the prophet Hosea *{hosea plainly meant, “salvation”}* whose message was ultimately one of salvation and the redemption

of God's people Israel *{the entire book of Hosea}*; and Joshua, the son of Nun, who succeeded Moses in leading Israel, had his name **changed** from Hosea to *Yehoshua*, becoming Joshua, by Moses (Numbers 13:16). The change was made to remind him and everyone that Yahweh, the LORD, is the source of their salvation; that it is the LORD God alone who saves, and not the work or might of men. But, neither of those men were Emmanuel, Jesus Christ is different. These men were a type of *christ*. They were men called and anointed by God for His special purposes. They were men whose ministry and lives pointed to the Christ who was yet to come: Jesus Christ.

Now Jesus was not merely one whom the LORD saves, Jesus Christ **is** the LORD Who Saves. Jonah declared that, *"Salvation belongs to the LORD!"* (Jon. 2:9 ESV); well, Jesus Christ is the salvation of God, given for and to mankind. Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man; the God-man who came down from heaven to earth, to be physically present with us. He was named Jesus, *Yehoshua*, because that name describes the work He does/did/will do, being the "LORD who Saves"; thus He is also rightly called Emmanuel, because that is Who He is: The LORD God, living physically with His people.

However, why do we need the "LORD Who Saves"? Why and from what does Mankind need saving? Our sin. We are separated from the LORD because of our unrighteousness, and we make this separation worse and even more deserved, with our every breath, thought, word, and/or deed.

We are all sinners against the only Holy God, who cannot remain in the presence of sin.

We are sinners, who preferred our sin to His gracious blessing and so did our damnedest to drive that same Holy God away. So, He removed His presence from our midst, in judgment; He abandoned the Temple in Jerusalem and gave Israel what they asked for. The removal of His Presence further allowed people to devolve and degenerate into great depravity and deviancy; until some may finally recognize our need for Him, until some will finally hear His voice calling, and then return to Him in repentance, by the gift of faith in Jesus Christ.

That is why we need "the LORD Who Saves". That is why we need Jesus to be the object of our faith. Being God made flesh; we needed Him to "bridge the gap" caused by our sin; to restore us to a good relationship with the heavenly Father; to bring us back to God in a way which we are unable to do ourselves. We needed Him to "ransom" us from our captivity to sin (Romans 7:23); to pay the price which we could not afford to pay.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, we have been a people living in exile, away from the LORD, but God is the One who draws near to us, again and again. He draws us near to Him, to bring us back home, to bring us back into His glorious Presence. We were unable to go to Him, so Emmanuel had to come to us.

We sinned against God and nothing we could do would make it right. We cannot undo our past. We cannot "un-sin". We transgressed His Law. We offended God and His holiness, so only He could forgive us. The Sovereign LORD sent us away in His mercy, so only the Sovereign LORD could bring us back.

{Our sin saw us cast away from God's Presence. Our sinfulness and resultant sins {RC Sproul used to be fond of saying, "We are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners." meaning that we sin because our nature was changed to predispose us to sinning, we rigged our deck to always turn up the "sin card".} prevented us from looking back. It prevented us from turning around and returning to Him, to seek His forgiveness. Thus, in Adam, we were dead in our sins and trespasses (Ephesians 2:1-3), and having the world before us there was "no turning back, no turning back".}

God calls to us, Jesus still calls to us, and those who hear His voice are now able to respond, and turn around.

Jesus said, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*” because the prophet Isaiah called us as exactly what we are, sheep in need of a shepherd, for “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way...*” (Isa. 53:6 ESV) Both Matthew and Mark also describe the crowds who came to follow Jesus, as being like “*sheep without a shepherd*” (Matt 9:36, Mark 6:34).

Today, we do not think of shepherds as being very great or important people, but historically shepherds were people of great import to society *{albeit rarely of great social importance or influence}*. Nomadic societies, like those found in the ancient Near/Middle East, lived constantly on the move. Israel and the patriarchs, most assuredly followed this social structure (Deuteronomy 26:5) and lifestyle. *{Before the four hundred years living in Egypt, during the forty years in the wilderness, and even still, to a degree, once they had become established in the Promised Land.}* Why is being nomads significant? It is significant because they do not plant crops, or build fortresses and towns; they do not construct storehouses for their wealth because it always travels with them.

What do you think was their greatest, most useful, most valuable, and most portable form of wealth? Livestock: sheep, goats, oxen, donkeys, etc.

Who do you think it was that guarded, guided, and protected this wealth? Shepherds.

Shepherds were important and influential because they were the guardians of wealth. They were made responsible. They were trusted, and they were critical to the fabric of society. These animals were more greatly valued than precious stones, or gold and silver, because they were a necessity for survival. They were a principal source of meat, of milk, and other needed products: like clothing made from hide and wool. They they were also used for sacrifice: for atonement and for giving thanks to God. Sheep and goats were especially prized because they could easily travel the rough terrain, they were easily led, and they could survive on the sparse foliage and reduced water supplies available.

Sheep are easily led and controlled because, in short, they're dumb; very dumb. Valuable yet incredibly dumb animals. Sheep become frightened quite easily, and they only care about their immediate needs and desires. Instinctively, they follow their fleshy nature, their stomachs generally; so, when left alone to their own devices they will always get themselves into all sorts of trouble, misfortune, and disaster. Thus, when the prophets, Jesus, and the Gospel writers describe folks like us as sheep, it is truly and often all too uncomfortably, appropriate. Left to our own devices we are like lost sheep, sheep without a shepherd. We are destined for trouble and disaster apart from God.

But God, has given us Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd!

Shepherds will guard and protect the sheep from predators, and their own worst inclinations. Shepherds will go out to find and collect lost or missing sheep, restoring them to the fold. Shepherds will lead their sheep to good pastures for food and rest. They will lead them to good sources of water *{still water so that they do not become frightened by their moving reflections}* to keep them hydrated and healthy. Shepherds will rest with and remain in the midst of their sheep, preserving them and keeping them safe. Shepherds will spend so much time caring for their sheep in the fields, that they will recognize each individual animal *{even naming them}*; also, the sheep will recognize the sound of their shepherd's voice and follow only them, because he has spent so much time with them and they trust him. Most importantly, when the work is done, shepherds will return them to their master's home. Good shepherds bring them home, to where they belong.

Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”*

We are the sheep of Christ's pasture. We hear His voice, so we turn to follow Him, and follow Him alone. He guards us. He feeds us. He preserves us to the end. He has given us eternal life, and He will surely bring us home to Himself and our heavenly Father. No one will “snatch us” out from their hands, for we are their own; we are God's treasured possession (Exodus 19:5-6). The **“LORD Who Saves”**, Jesus, is **“God with us”**. He is our Redeemer, our Savior, our Hope, our Shepherd, and our King; He is our Emmanuel.

How does Jesus save us? How did He ransom us from our captivity to sin and death? The cross.

We speak of the “Three-fold Office of Christ”, of His role as Prophet, Priest, and King. We like to consider Him as King, being a descendant of King David, because of the authority given to Him by God the Father, because of His current enthronement in heaven, and because of His impending return to judge all things at the end *{the eschaton}*. We also think of Him as a Prophet, for His words spoken in the four Gospels, for His message proclaiming the nearness (Matthew 4:17; Luke 10:11) of the Kingdom of God *{(Mark/Luke) or Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew)}*, for His healing miracles, and for His condemnation of the religious “works-based” order. Lastly, but often less frequently, we appreciate Him in the role of Priest, a work that is difficult for us to comprehend without a deep understanding of the old covenant sacrificial system, but fortunately it is well explained and interpreted for us by the author of Hebrews.

Under the old system, the priests and temple workers were all Levites, being descended from Jacob's third son, Levi; yet Jesus was not a Levite, for His lineage is traced through the line of Davidic Kings (Matthew 1; Luke 3:23-38) and was part of the tribe of Judah, thus He was not eligible to serve in the Temple as a priest *{although His maternal cousin, John the Baptizer, was eligible for temple duty, being the son of Zechariah, a Levite of the division of Abijah.}* How then could the author of Hebrews call Jesus, *“high priest of the good things that have come”*? Jesus never performed any priestly function during His earthly ministry, did He?

Well, He did. The author of Hebrews writes, *“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence {consider His intercessory prayer in John 17}. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”* (Heb. 5:7-10 ESV) Melchizedek was a priest of the LORD God Most High *{El Elyon}* (Genesis 14:18-24) from Genesis and was outside of the Levitical priesthood. It was to him that Abraham *{still called Abram at the time}* paid a tithe *{10%}*, and from whom Abraham received a divine blessing. Levi, being Abraham's descendant, is considered to be “lesser” than Abraham; and since Abraham is lesser than Melchizedek, for *“It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.”* (Heb. 7:7 ESV); the priesthood of Levi is therefore less than that of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:1-17) and so is lesser than Christ's.

Priests served the role of mediator between man and God: acting on our behalf, acting in our stead, doing for us that which we were unable to do ourselves. They were the ones who made the sacrifices required for redemption. Only by their sacrificial work, could any person dare to approach the LORD's Presence, but there were still barriers in place between us and God. Nothing a mere man would do could penetrate those barriers; only God is strong enough to open the way through, but only a man open the barrier to enter the Holy Presence. This is why Jesus needed to be both God and man; because only man generated the debt of sin, but only God could afford to pay the price for redemption.

Jesus, our Emmanuel, God made flesh, was not born a priest but instead He was divinely made to be one; He was declared to be such by the LORD (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:8-10), for only then according to the Law, could “Yahweh Who Saves” redeem us by offering up a sacrifice for atonement.

Christ was born without sin, He lived without sin, and was the “perfect” human being: truly human and truly God. He possessed both natures, neither mixed nor mingled, yet also inseparable. John the Baptist {*a Levite, as a Levite one of their duties would be to inspect the sacrifices being brought to the Temple and declare their suitability and acceptability*}, declared Jesus to be, “...*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (Jn. 1:29 ESV); perfect and without blemish: He was judged sinless. He alone was able to do what Adam did not, be and remain totally obedient to the LORD.

So, as our Great High Priest, He offered up His own life as an atoning sacrifice to ransom us. Man did the crime, so a Man had to do the time. Only by the death of a man could the debt of our sin be settled. Paul writes, “*For the wages of sin is death...*” (Rom. 6:23 ESV), but only God Himself, only He who gives life, could afford to pay the whole amount of death required, to retire the debts of all His chosen Elect. It is only those called by God, who receive this gift of forgiveness of sin, regeneration of the heart, eternal life, and restoration of relationship to the Father, having it applied to them by the Holy Spirit.

The blood of Jesus Christ, the God-man, which was shed for our sins is far greater and more powerful than the blood of animals, for while the life of an animal is believed valuable, the life of a man is exponentially more valuable to both God and man. The old covenant sacrificial system foreshadowed the single, sufficient sacrifice of Christ's blood to sanctify our souls by animal sacrifice for the sanctification of our sinful flesh.

Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King mediated the new covenant, the greater covenant of grace with God. In the new covenant, He has eternally redeemed us, ransomed us, from our sins under the old, by satisfying God's requirement for justice, and now freely gives us His grace.

By His grace, in His divine mercy, our account has been settled; our balance has been transferred from the ancient Adam of Eden, to the new Adam, Jesus Christ. We have been marked “PAID IN FULL”; as the English Puritan, Richard Sibbes, wrote, “There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.”¹. Dying on the cross for us, our debt was paid by Jesus. The divine transaction was finished, *tetelestai* (John 19:30). Praise God!

Now we are the redeemed and have been restored to a right relationship with the Father.

Now we may truly “*Enter His Presence [gates] with thanksgiving and His courts with praise...*” (Psalm 110:4).

Now we may “...*boldly approach His throne of grace that we might obtain mercy...*” (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus, as our Emmanuel, is the perfect expression of God being with His people. He alone was the perfect and true Temple of the LORD, on earth (Hebrews 10:19-23). Speaking of His body, He told the Jews, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” (Jn. 2:19; 18-22 ESV); in His resurrection, He “*crushed the head of the serpent*” (Genesis 3:15), Satan, and by His perfect obedience (Philippians 2:8), He undid the spiritual damage done to us by Adam, according to the terms of His eternal covenant (Ephesian 1:3-10). Now He has ascended into heaven, where He has gained entrance into the heavenly Courts, through the Temple of His flesh, where as our High Priest, He is forever advocating and interceding with the Father for us. Now washed in His blood, we can follow Him, for He has opened and prepared the way for us to return to our heavenly home and Father.

¹The Bruised Reed, sermon titled “Christ will not break the bruised reed”

Jesus Christ has mercifully ended our exile from the LORD's Presence by His death, now we may return. He calls us home to heaven, to be where He is, entering the LORD's Presence through the washing of His blood (Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 33:8; Ezekiel 37:23; John 14:3).

Jesus is the “LORD Who Saves”, and He is the greatest, visible sign of God's presence with His people, the perfect Temple.

He is our LORD, Emmanuel. God has not abandoned us, He has not left us as orphans (John 14:8). He has only gone to prepare a place for us, and He is returning soon.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

O Come, O Come Emmanuel, thank You for ransoming Your captive Israel.

AMEN