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WHAT'S IN A NAME?



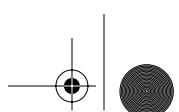
MENTALLY GLANCE AT YOUR CHURCH BULLETIN for this Sunday morning. Most likely it identifies you as the minister or pastor. It may also have a reference to the people of the church as the ministers. I do not recall ever reading in a church bulletin *Minister: Jesus Christ*. The necessary name is missing!

In whose name will we do ministry? It is the same question which the Jerusalem temple tribunal asked Peter and John. "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7). On one level it is not a complicated question. Obviously we all do ministry in the name of Jesus and not in our own names. But how do we understand ministry in the name of Jesus?

We might answer that the Lord has authorized our ministry. For example, at the end of his parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus said "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). Left on this level, ministry looks like something we do in obedience to a command. Obedience has its proper place in the theological scheme of things. However, I am trying to build on a different foundation. I want us to build on what the Lord is doing before we rush to consider what it is we must do.

MINISTER: JESUS CHRIST

On a deeper level I am asking a more radical question that goes down



to the roots of ministry. In whose name do we do ministry? What does it mean for the understanding and practice of ministry that the name of Jesus, as it was understood by the Christian community of the fourth chapter of Acts, indicates a present, acting and reigning Lord?

I am determined to ground our reflections about ministry in the person of Jesus Christ. Even before we reflect on the ministry of the Lord, we must grapple with his identity and his person. In every sense he and he alone is the authority for ministry and the actuality of ministry.

A THEOLOGY OF THE NAME

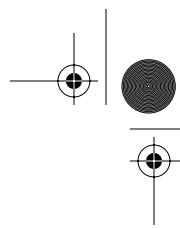
The fourth chapter of Acts, with its theology of the name of Jesus, helps us come to terms with the priority of Jesus for the understanding and practice of ministry. Three name verses will guide our thinking: Acts 4:7, Acts 4:12 and Acts 4:30.

In this chapter I will reflect on the theology of the name of Jesus as it unfolds in Acts 4:7 and Acts 4:12, where we find established the singular authority of Jesus Christ. The rest of this book will be an extended reflection on Acts 4:30, where we read that ministry is performed through the name of Jesus. Such practical theology is truly radical, and I will try to unpack it as clearly as possible as we go along. While I will illustrate how the theology is lived out in ministry, this is a book about theology because it is a book about Jesus.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS

We will start with the basic story outline of Acts 3–4. Peter and John are going up to the temple for the midafternoon service of prayer. “A man lame from birth was being carried in” (Acts 3:2) to be placed at the entrance so he could ask for alms. Peter and John have no disposable income to help the man, but Peter offers him something he did not ask for. “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). And he does!

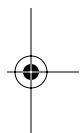
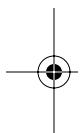




Needless to say the healing greatly excites the crowd. Peter seizes the opportunity to preach. He interprets the Lord Jesus as the fulfillment of the faith of Israel and calls on the people to repent and believe that Jesus is Israel's Messiah (Acts 3:11-26).

Naturally the temple leadership is upset. They arrest Peter and John and the next day bring them before a hurriedly assembled tribunal of religious leaders. The scene is not hard to imagine. The religious authorities had thought that the Jesus movement had been dealt with by his execution. *We killed him; he's done with.* Now here are his apparent disciples healing people and saying that Jesus somehow is alive and doing deeds of power. They say he is *resurrected*.

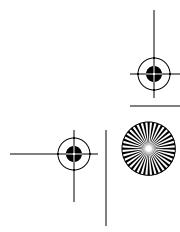
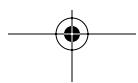
The charge against Peter and John is the proclamation that "in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 4:2). In the fervid theological and political atmosphere of occupied Jerusalem, upsetting the religious peace is a dangerous game. This spiritual insurrection must be put down once and for all.

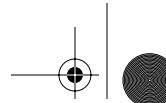


WHICH GOD?

The public interrogation of Peter and John begins with the question "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7). Notice the correlation between *power* and *name*. Perhaps it is not such an obvious correlation. They were asking "To what authority do you appeal? In whose name do you act? Which God do you represent?"

What is going on here is not a local squabble over fine points of theology. It is not the equivalent of a denominational debate or a theologians' roundtable. We have to appreciate that everything the old order stands for is assumed in the question "By what name?" The authorities' question expresses profound anxiety over the apparent emergence of a counter-word which might displace the existing systems of authority, meaning, power and control. The leaders realize that everything is at stake: their job, their faith, their nation, their identity and their worldview.





If the name of this man Jesus is the name of power, if it means the actuality of God in present experience, then it is a fundamental challenge to the status quo. Everything apart from the name of Jesus is profoundly called into question, including every claim to power and authority, whether political or religious, social or personal, intellectual or moral.

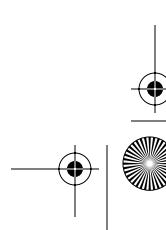
We see the magnitude of what is at stake in the distinguished company who are assembled: Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander and all who were with the high priestly family, along with the rulers, elders and scribes. Everyone who has a stake in the old order has arrived for the questioning. Everything depends on the answer to “By what name?”

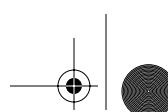
GENTLE JESUS?

Perhaps we must stretch our imaginations to comprehend the radical quality of the threat posed by the resurrected Jesus to the political and religious authorities of the day. As North American Protestants we are quite comfortable with Jesus. How much do we allow him to threaten anything or anyone anymore? Certainly we have our moral issues where we challenge our culture’s assumptions and behaviors in the name of Jesus. But I suspect for a broad swath of Christians, Jesus is a Lord at home in our celebrity-oriented culture: Jesus Christ, superstar. No tables get overturned. Rarely are demons denounced. No brood of vipers gets condemned. It is unlikely that authorities get provoked. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. But that’s not what is going on in the Scripture passage before us.

SAME QUESTION, DIFFERENT FORMS

The interrogators’ question gets to the heart of things. “By what name?” The question ripples throughout the New Testament, though in different words, as the ultimate urgent question. Within it is em-





bedded a total claim upon our lives with nothing excepted. John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come?” (Luke 7:19). The fulfillment of the whole history and theology of Israel lay behind John the Baptist’s question. Jesus asked his own disciples by the villages of Caesarea Philippi, “Who do people say that I am?” (Mark 8:27). In John’s version Peter responds, “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:69). Paraphrasing this: “Your name is Yahweh, Yahweh saves.” It is either the most appalling blasphemy or the *logos* of truth alongside whom there is no other truth.

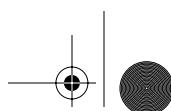
Jesus is Lord. Are we anymore capable of being stunned by that claim? Frankly I am not sure that we are. The unfamiliar has become all too familiar. What if this Jesus is not at home in our church, our culture or our worldview? Then we might understand something of the threat which the name of Jesus poses to all other claims to ultimate authority.

WHO ARE YOU, LORD?

“Who are you, Lord?” It is the question of Saul on the road to Damascus when he is confronted by the light and the voice from heaven (Acts 9:5). The question will provoke our reflections well beyond this chapter. Not only faith itself but the whole of ministry turns on the answer.

For Saul the question totally devastates him and changes his life and his ministry forever. Like Elijah before him, Saul is commissioned for ministry by the Word of God. The question he asked concerns the identity of truth, meaning and reality in no disguise. Saul asked it with a willingness to deal head-on with the answer. I will address the question “Who are you, Lord?” under the Acts 4:12 declaration of “no other name.” In the next chapter I will reflect on the appropriate priority of asking the “Who?” question in Christology.





For now let us stay a little longer with the question “By what name?” because it opens up aspects of the deep confusion within both church and society concerning truth, authority, meaning and value. *By what name* will I live and act? *By what name* can I accurately interpret history? *By what name* is there a ground for hope beyond the ravages of divorce, cancer, abuse, war and death?

BETWEEN TWO EXTREMES

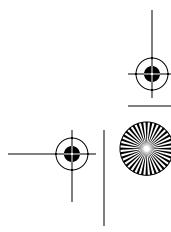
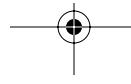
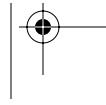
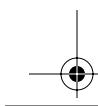
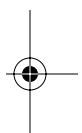
We walk a fine line here because we must pick our way between at least two competing worldviews. The clash between them and the success of either will form the potentially tragic history of the twenty-first century.

On the one hand we see around us a culture, both popular and intellectual, tipping headlong into postmodernist relativism. It insists, *Leave me alone with my truth*. That is the genesis of the diversity gospel we hear everywhere today. At its deadliest it ends in nihilism. Consider the body-pierced, tattooed images of the rock and sports stars who are thrust in front of our children on mainstream media. Who can doubt that we are rushing headlong into the moral abyss?

On the other hand, we also see around us a world grasping at absolutes and even killing for them. We see it in the amazing and deadly appeal of various religious and political fundamentalisms.

We ride the pendulum as it swings between two extremes. On one side is metaphysical chaos with its culture of self-destructive hedonism and dumbed-down ethics, summed up in the ubiquitous catchword *Whatever*. On the other side is metaphysical rigidity with violent, sometimes deadly consequences for disobedience.

The impasse between the two extremes locks churches and society in its grasp. Indeed the contemporary world with its intensifying internecine warfare is in part the result of this partisan bifurcation of experience. As the philosophical structures of the modern world col-





lapse, is the only choice between chaos and absolutism? Is there another option? Is there another way?

WHO IS TRUTH?

“By what name?” The question does not pose the issue of truth in any abstract manner. It does not lend itself to either ideological deconstruction or exclusive doctrinal affirmation. The question of truth is now posed as a personal question.

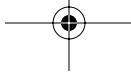
Suppose that the central issue of truth is not the nihilistic claim that there is no truth or the liberal query “Which truth?” or the absolutist claim of this truth and no other. Suppose those are all false options and the real question is *Who is truth?* What if truth at its heart is about a relationship with a person before subscription to an idea?

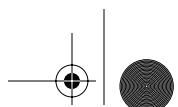
If priority is given to the “Who?” question, it is appropriate and even necessary to ask, *What then is the truth's name?* We should not merely ask, “In what do I believe?” Instead we should ask, “In whom do I believe?” Truth is about being in love rather than being right. Truth is lived in terms of a relationship with God and not in terms of vindication.

Christians understand that we are not right, for no one is righteous. Only God is right. Because Christians understand truth specifically in terms of the *name*—that is, the *person*—of Jesus, truth is about a person and a relationship with that person which he has established from his side.

COMMUNION WITH GOD

Christianity at its core is not about subscription to a theological system or the authority of a sacred text or ethical perspectives, although they are all important. Christianity at its core is about the self-referenced claim by a person who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). That person calls us into relationship with himself, which means communion with God. He showed and taught





us that his way is love and mercy and forgiveness. His truth is not just his teaching but his person. His life is life indeed because in union with him we have communion with God.

The Christian claim is that at the end of the day, at the end of life, you and I have to deal with Jesus. Christianity is about a person and therefore it is about personhood. That means a great deal when we deal with other people, especially people who differ from us in their faiths, ethics, political ideas and worldviews.

JESUS WAITS AT THE BEGINNING

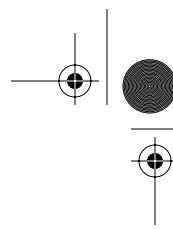
Recently I heard a lecture by an English Methodist who is both a scientist and a Christian theologian. He was talking about the scientific debate over the Big Bang, and he used an image that I found quite arresting. He told us that physicists have pushed backwards in time to 10^{-47} of a second after the Big Bang. I am not a physicist; I am not sure what that figure means other than that it is an infinitesimally small period of time. As physicists push back to the beginning of everything, the models of the laws of physics seem to unravel. Our mathematics can't cope. Then he said something like this: I imagine some brilliant theoretical physicist sometime soon pushing back to the beginning of all things. It will be like climbing a huge incredibly difficult mountain. And as the physicist struggles over the final intellectual ledge to see the beginning of creation in all its staggering immensity and intensity, that physicist will see Jesus sitting there waiting with a smile of greeting and welcome.

If Jesus is the eternal *logos* come in the flesh of his humanity, as we believe he is, then such a scenario is quite plausible. Ultimate truth is a person who has a name, whether in physics or in theology.

NOT WHAT OR HOW, BUT WHO?

Pontius Pilate asked the wrong question when he confronted Jesus





and asked "What is truth?" (John 18:38) The question of truth is a not a *What?* or a *How?* question but a *Who?* question. Ultimately physics and every other sphere of human inquiry will end up having to give the answer *Truth's name is Jesus.*

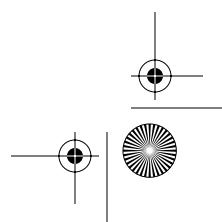
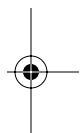
Now I will go where wise angels fear to tread and take the risk of saying something quite provocative. One of our evangelical sins arises because we forget that our savior is a Person rather than an idea or a list of propositions or a moral code or a creed. We commit the sin of *essential tenetism.*

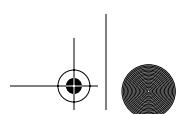
Essential tenetism is a form of idolatry. It arises out of giving priority to the *What?* question rather than the *Who?* question. *What* do you believe? Well, I don't believe in what I say, the form of words I use or my manner of expression. I don't believe that the central mystery of faith is reducible to words, as if I can capture the living Lord Jesus with my theological concepts. To claim such would be the height of theological arrogance. I don't confess "I believe in the Nicene Creed and all it stands for." Rather in confessing the Nicene Creed I am directed away from the words to the One in whom I believe, Jesus Christ, Lord of all.

In heaven there will be no theologians as theologians and no creeds because there will be no need for theology. There will be only brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus, all of whom will see the Lord face to face. Theology, creeds and denominational traditions will all pass away.

I believe in the One to whom my words point, just as I believe in the One to whom Scripture points, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course some words point to him more accurately and faithfully than others. It is right to fuss with that. I do that for a living as a professional theologian. But don't confuse the words with the real thing, the person of the Lord.

Independently of Jesus Christ, whose name alone we plead, there is no other or prior authority. All metaphysical notions like authority





and tradition are under his rule. All things are under his feet, under his judgment and under his grace. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow.

AN UNEXPECTED NAME

A few years ago when I was renewing my British passport, I dug out my birth certificate to make a copy for the application process. On the front of the certificate in beautiful calligraphy is my name, Andrew Purves. All my life I had been told I had no middle name. I was told that since I was born six weeks prematurely, there was no time to decide on a middle name. My parents had not even agreed on a first name for me. I was not expected to live. My Irish Catholic mother sent down to St. Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh, and on the second day of my life a priest came to the hospital to baptize me.

As I pondered my birth certificate, I turned it over and found in the top right corner the cramped notation in Latin of my baptism. To my utter amazement I discovered I had a middle name! I ran downstairs and announced to my three teenage children that I had a middle name.

"What's your middle name, Daddy?"

"Well, it's my father's mother's maiden name."

"What's your middle name, Daddy?"

"Well, it's the name of a minor nineteenth-century Scottish novelist."

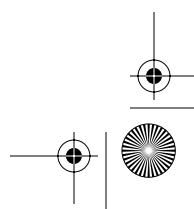
"Daddy, we don't care. What's your middle name?"

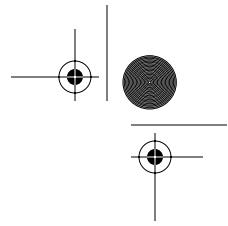
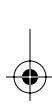
"In fact, it's quite a common name in the border region of Scotland."

Voces were now raised. "We don't care! What's your middle name?"

I replied, "Hogg."

At that point my children took great delight in snorting out, "Daddy's a pig!"





A PERSON'S DEEPEST IDENTITY

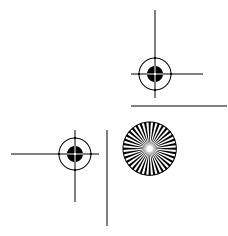
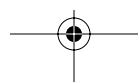
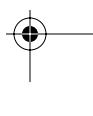
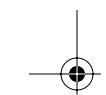
Names mean identity. People are formed by their names. The question *What's your name?* is an inquiry into a person's soul. It ventures into the person's deepest identity and personhood. To know someone's name is to know him or her. To call a person by name is to be in relationship with that person. That's why it is such a violation when the car salesperson or insurance salesperson calls me by my first name on first meeting. It is a violation of my personhood for the sake of a sale. It is manipulated intimacy. I protect my own name as I must honor other people's names.

Saul asked "Who are you, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). He meant "What is your name?" Peter told the assembled Jewish authorities "There is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

So what's in this name of Jesus? The Savior has many titles besides the main ones *the Christ* and *the Lord*. I have counted thirty-nine names for him in Scripture. Some are rather curious, such as the Bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16), the Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20) and the Guarantee (Hebrews 7:22). Others are more familiar: the Lamb (Revelation 5:6), the Word (John 1:1) and the High Priest (Hebrews 8:1). But he had only one name, *Jesus*, and his name designates the only One in whom there is salvation. It is the name that is above every name, the name before which everyone and everything shall bend the knee and acknowledge him for who he is.

AN EARTHLY NAME

In the Gospels our Lord is called *Jesus* almost six hundred times. The expression *Jesus Christ* occurs only four times. *Lord Jesus* occurs only twice and both are disputed texts (Mark 16:19 and Luke 24:3). Please refer to William Barclay, *Jesus As They Saw Him* (SCM Press, 1962) for some of what follows.





When the Gospel writers thought about the Lord, they did not use lofty theological terms. They simply called him by his name, Jesus. He was not an abstract idea or a moral principle. He was not the subject of a theological oration or creed. He was a man with a given name, flesh and bones, born of a woman called Mary, born within the religion of the Jewish law during the time of the Second Temple and military occupancy by the Romans.

The sheer use of his name Jesus carries the significance of his earthliness as opposed to otherworldliness. In later centuries the church would struggle to hang on to his blunt actual humanity. But in the Gospels it is not a problem. His name connects him to earth and to actual carnal flesh, incarnation.

Jesus was a common name at the time of his birth. It is still common in Spanish-speaking cultures. It is the Greek form of three Hebrew names: Joshua, Jehoshua and Jeshua. In his history of the Jews, Josephus mentions about twenty men called Jesus, ten of whom were our Lord's contemporaries. Yet by the second century the use of the name had all but vanished. It disappeared among the Jews because it was hated, and it disappeared among the Christians because it had become singularly holy.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES

My name tells you about me. My name Andrew was my paternal grandfather's name. My baptismal middle name Hogg roots me in my paternal grandmother's family. It has the effect of locating me. It says I belong. It identifies me as somebody.

In the biblical world names also carried significance. Now and then they also carried a message. As an extreme example, think of the names of Hosea's children. Jezreel means "the Lord will punish"; Loruhamah means "the Lord will not have pity"; Lo-ammi means "not the Lord's people."





Jesus was given his name by the direct intervention of God. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, telling him to take Mary for his wife, for her child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. "She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The rabbis had a saying: "Six persons received their names before they were born, namely, Isaac, our great lawgiver Moses, Solomon, Josiah, Ishmael, and the Messiah" (Barclay, p. 11). God himself would name his Messiah. The name would tell us who he is. It would be a one-word summary of everything he stood for. His person and his work would be gathered up in one word, his name. He would be called Jesus.

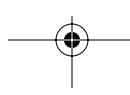
GOD NAMES HIMSELF

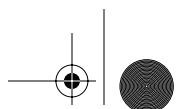


God names himself, a point some people have a hard time getting their minds around. God's name is not something we dream up to satisfy our theological fancies or ideological proclivities. "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). The theme that God names God is perfectly consistent in Scripture from the I Am of the burning bush to the name of the Savior to the name Father.

In Hebrew the name Joshua means "the Lord is my help" or "my rescue." As the angel said to Joseph, "he will save his people from their sins." The name tells us who he is; he is the Savior.

In Greek the name is *Iēsous*. The Greek theologians connected the name with the verb "to heal," *iasthai*. There is no real connection except vaguely in sound. Nevertheless it allowed the point to be made that there is healing in the name of Jesus, for he is *ho iomenos*, the Healer and the Good Physician. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, declared before the examining tribunal that the lame man had been healed "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 4:10). The notion that Jesus is the healer has obvious New Testament grounds. So





the Greeks regarded Jesus as the great healer of both souls and bodies. With this point we draw closer to the center of his ministry. We too are often bold to say, “In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven; in the name of Jesus, be healed.”

Charles Wesley exalted the healing name of Jesus in his hymn “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing.”

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

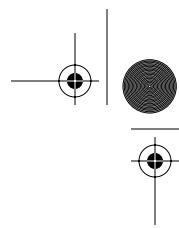
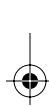
THE ANOINTED ONE

The name of Jesus carries the hope of history. It also carries hope for each one of us. Thus he has the supreme title “the Christ,” which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word that means “the Anointed One.” It is a title rather than a proper name. Jesus Christ means “Jesus the Christ” or “Messiah Jesus.” The title fleshes out everything that is contained in his name, linking it all specifically with the history and expectations of Israel, now universalized to include every nation and people within the scope of his ministry.

Now it is but a small step to the big claim. If Jesus is the Lord’s anointed, if he is God’s salvation present here in the flesh of his humanity, not as a representative of God like the prophets of Israel, not as an earthly agent of mediation like the Old Testament priests, not like the kings who led God’s people on God’s behalf, not as an intermediary being who is not quite God and oddly human as the heretic Arius taught, not only as a brilliant religious and moral teacher, then . . . With overwhelmed senses and inadequate theological categories we can only stutter aloud along with Paul, “Who are you, Lord?”

We are staggered at the immensity of the claim as we first mutter



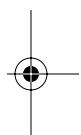


the words with our hands clasped over our mouths. Yet the words must also be shouted from the mountaintops and spoken to every person on the face of the earth. We proclaim that Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is Yahweh Sabaoth. Jesus is God!

NO LONGER SHOCKING?

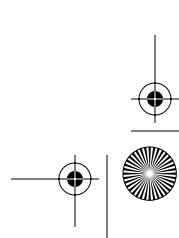
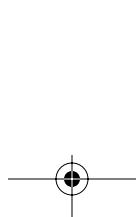
Jesus is God. We hear it so often that it becomes old stuff. We are no longer shocked by it. How do we make the familiar unfamiliar again, as Karl Barth once asked, so that we might drop to our knees overcome with spiritual gratitude for who it is that we meet here? “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

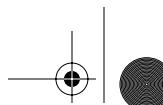
It took the church over three centuries to begin to get her mind around some of what all this means for the understanding of God. Great creeds and long complex theological treatises were eventually written. The debates were enduring, often violent and frequently deadly. Perhaps the conclusion is well summed up in a statement of St. Athanasius of Alexandria in the 360s. Writing of the meaning of Jesus, he said that not only was God in Christ, not only did God work through Christ, but that God came as the man Jesus. *God as the man Jesus.* That is the staggering immensity of what we are considering. That is the mighty claim which defines the heart of Christian faith. That is the sole content and non-negotiable center of Christian doctrine and ministry.



DEALING WITH GOD

When we deal with Jesus as he is attested for us in Scripture and proclaimed in the worship and teaching of the church, we are dealing with God. Jesus is not someone who tells us about his insights into God. He is not a wonder worker for God. He is not a moral genius. He



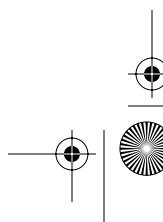


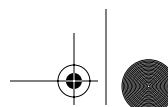
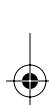
is not the greatest religious teacher who ever lived. He is not a wandering eastern sage of great wisdom.

Jesus is worshiped because he was and is God. He is the creator Word, the saving Lord, the reign-of-God-establishing *pantokrator*, Lord of all. There is no secret God hiding behind the back of Jesus, furtive and unknown, whom we must periodically reimagine to suit our changing ideology. Jesus, in the flesh of his Mary-given humanity, is God. God is none other than who he is for us and for our salvation in, through and as the man Jesus. Through him, in union with him, which is the principal work of the Holy Spirit, we know the Father, serve the Father and worship the Father in spirit and in truth. That is what “no other name” means.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

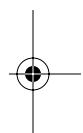
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,





he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also 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,
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

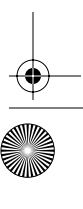
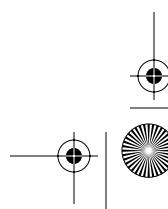
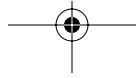


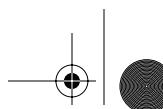
HE'S THE WHOLE DEAL!

Let us be bold to draw some provocative conclusions from our key verse, Acts 4:12: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

First, we sometimes hear the rumblings of the silly question "What's the big deal about Jesus?" It was a question that recently rocked my own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA). The answer, of course, is that Jesus is not a big deal; he's the whole deal! He's not a name on a list; he's the whole list. That is what it means that he is Lord. The whole list is under his grace and judgment. Everything else in faith, life and ministry has truth only in relationship to him. All other questions and issues pale into insignificance beside the New Testament's cosmic and historical claim concerning Jesus.

Christians are defined by being grounded in and committed to this one name, the name of Jesus as Lord. We understand everything else in faith and life in terms of that name. If we lose ground concerning the single, saving lordship of Jesus Christ and his significance, the church will truly be apostate.

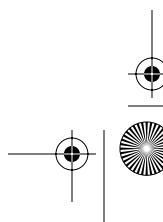
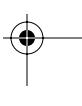


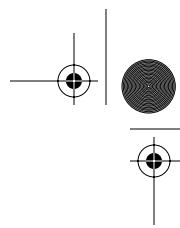


PREACH CHRIST

The second conclusion I draw is that the only mission strategy which will encourage our congregations, usefully employ our clergy, enable history-changing and kingdom-of-God-anticipating ministry, and enable us to evangelize with any degree of faithfulness and power is the preaching that there is salvation in no other name. To ministers let me say this as strongly as I can. Preach Christ, preach Christ, preach Christ. Get out of your offices and get into your studies. Quit playing office manager and program director, quit staffing committees, and even right now recommit yourselves to what you were ordained to do, namely the ministry of Word and sacraments. Pick up good theology books again: hard books, classical texts, great theologians. Claim the energy and time to study for days and days at a time. Disappear for long hours because you are reading Athanasius on the person of Jesus Christ or Wesley on sanctification or Augustine on the Trinity or Calvin on the Christian life or Andrew Murray on the priesthood of Christ. Then you will have something to say that's worth hearing.

Remember that exegesis is for preaching and teaching; it has no other use. So get out those tough commentaries and struggle in depth with the texts. Let most of what you do be dominated by the demands of the sermon as if your whole life and reason for being is to preach Christ, because it is. Claim a new authority for the pulpit, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, over you and your people. Commit yourself again to ever more deeply becoming a careful preacher of Christ. Don't preach to grow your congregation; preach to bear witness to what the Lord is doing, and let him grow your church. Dwell in him, abide in him, come to know him ever more deeply and convertedly. Tell the people what he has to say to them, what he is doing among them and within them, and what it is he wants them to share in. He is up to something in your neighborhood, if you have the eyes to see and the





ears to hear. Develop a christological hermeneutic for all you do and say. Why? Because there is no other name, that's why.

SPEND TIME WITH JESUS

The third conclusion I draw is that we must spend time with Jesus. If he is as important as I am suggesting he is, as the faith tells us he is, as you know he is, then he is worth our time. In fact he demands our time.

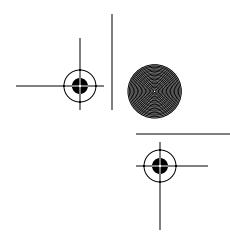
To repeat the result of a recent survey by Michael Jenkins of Austin Theological Seminary: 62 percent of the Presbyterian ministers interviewed had no or little spiritual life. That is alarming to me. Henri Nouwen, the late Dutch Roman Catholic priest, once wrote that you cannot minister in the name if you are not living in the name. Take John 15:1-11 to heart. Abide in the Lord, for apart from him you can do nothing. I take Jesus' statement to be not hyperbole but a matter of fact. The Lord will transform you and your congregation. The real thing is Christ. Abide in Christ.

REJOICE ALWAYS

Finally, because there is no other name and because we live in that name, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). The creed got this right: the chief end of man is to give glory to God and to enjoy him for ever. The angel said to the shepherds, "I am bringing you good news of great joy" (Luke 2:10). Jesus said, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). We have been named by the Name; we have been claimed by the Name; the Name will not forget our names.

Whatever the evil one hurls at us, rejoice. Whatever the travails of ministry, rejoice. Be of good cheer; the Lord has the victory because we are held unto all eternity by the one who has the Name, who is the





Name, the Name that is above every name. Again I say rejoice, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.

Now what does it mean that ministry is *through* the name of Jesus? The rest of the book is an extended answer to that question.

