

What's in a name? That's a question, of course, that comes from Shakespeare, from Romeo and Juliet. In a very famous scene where Juliet is talking to herself, she says: "What's in a name? that which we call a rose / by any other name would smell as sweet." And in that scene, Juliet is upset, of course, because she can't be with Romeo. His name is what's keeping them apart. The family feud between them is preventing them from being together. And so she says, just get rid of your name, Romeo! Just get rid of it, and then everything will be better. Then we can be together, and things will be just perfect. Because, after all, she says, it's just a name. If you were called anything else, you would still be Romeo. You wouldn't be any different. It's just a name, and it doesn't mean anything beyond that.

Now, do we think of names in the same way? As something that doesn't really mean anything? We often have our names chosen by our parents because they liked the way that it sounded. Or perhaps it was a family name, or for whatever reason. But that's it. We could have literally any other name, we think, and we would still be the same person. Because a name is just a name. So why would we get hung up over it?

But when it comes to the Bible, names are much more than this. They are very important, because they're not just nice sounding or things that can just change. Names say something. Sometimes they say something about the person. You think of Naomi, for example, in the book of Ruth, who wants to be called Mara. Mara means "bitterness," and she wants to be called that because she feels that her life has become bitter. So it says something about her. You think of Nabal, Abigail's husband in 2 Samuel. Nabal means "fool," and he certainly lived up to his name, because he did lots of foolish things that led up to his death. You think of Jacob. The name Jacob means "grabber" or "deceiver" or "trickster," and he certainly lived up to that name too when he tricked his brother Esau out of his inheritance and out of his blessing. He is truly named Jacob. Sometimes names say something about what's going on in the world around somebody. Peleg in the book of Genesis means "division," because in his days the world was divided. Or you think of Naphtali, one of the sons of Jacob. Naphtali means "wrestling," because the two wives of Jacob were wrestling with each other, fighting each other over their husband. Sometimes names say something about God's promises. Abraham means "father of many nations," because that's what God had promised would happen through him. And sometimes a name says something about God. Michael means "who is like God." Daniel means "God is my judge," and so on. So what this shows us then is that we shouldn't overlook names in the Bible. They mean something, and they often have a lot to teach us.

So that's why it's so important then to see that in Matthew chapter 1 Jesus is given two names. Names that were not given because they sounded good, or because they were family names, or they found them in a book, or anything like that. These two names were given to him by God, because they tell us something about this child. This baby is Jesus and Immanuel, and that is very good news for us!

Because that first name given to him is Jesus. As the angel says in verse 21: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." His parents didn't just give this to him. It was a name given to him from heaven above, a name given to him by the Father. And that name Jesus means "Savior." As the angel goes on to say in verse 21, "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." In fact, if you break that name down, the name Jesus, it's two

different words. You have "Je," the J and the E, which is a way of translating a word which means "God." And the "sus" is a way of translating a word that means "saves." So Jesus "God saves." It says something about who he is. Because this isn't just a baby who happens to be named Jesus. This name says something about him. He is Jesus. He is "God saves." God has become man in order to save us. Jesus was born to take away our sins. Jesus was born to bring us back to God.

And what good news that is for you! You who have been separated from God by your sins, you have been brought back by Jesus, who is "God saves." You who have deserved judgment because of your sins, you have been forgiven through Jesus, who is "God saves." You who are caught in your past sins, who can't seem to shake them, have been set free through Jesus, who is "God saves." Jesus is a name that calms our fears. Jesus is a name that brings us joy. Jesus is a name that makes us new. Because Jesus is the name above all other names, the name of God himself! So hold on to that name, because it is your life!

And the other name that he is given is Immanuel. That's also not an accidental name, as if they just liked the way that it sounded. It is the name given to him all the way back in Isaiah chapter 7, seven hundred years before he was even born. And this name Immanuel also says something about who he is. Because that "Immanu" is a way of saying "with us," and "el" means "God." So Immanuel is "God with us." It says something about him.

And what good news that is for us as sinners, to know that God is with us! When we know that, we can face all things. Because we could look at nature, and we would see that God is above us. But he would seem to be far away. And knowing that God is far away from us, how could we ever face the troubles in our lives? We could look at God's law, and we would see God against us. And rightly so because of our sins. But how could we ever find hope, knowing that we were just getting what we deserved? But when we look at this child, we see God with us. God who is near, God who has come to save us in Jesus. So we can face all things knowing that, because if God is for us, who can be against us? And what could possibly separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord knowing that he is near?

So when we are facing an evil world, we have Immanuel, God with us, and we can face all things. When we are worried about losing our job, or disease, or whatever the future may bring, we have Immanuel, God with us, to comfort our fears. When we are suffering as Christians, we have Immanuel, God with us, so that we know that our suffering is not in vain. Immanuel is the name of God, a God who is near us, a God who is not far off. And we can confidently face all things knowing that we have Immanuel.

So what's in a name? Everything. Because this child is named Jesus. This child is named Immanuel. This child is God. And these names which he has are the greatest good news of all.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, as Immanuel. We pray that you would strengthen us through him, so that we would follow after him all the days of our life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.