

# Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus

## Chapter 6: The Mystery of the Name

1. Tverberg rightly points out in this chapter that when Scripture speaks of “God's name” it means also God's reputation, and even God's self. In the OT, God's name is the one through whom we are saved (e.g. Ps 9:10; 44:5; 79:9; 91:14; etc.). In the NT we learn that Jesus' name is the only one through which we are saved (Acts 4:12). There exists an intimate connection between the name of the Father and of the Son, and both glorify the other.

Peter, an acquaintance of mine, decided to become a Christian after three dramatic dreams. These dreams followed more than a year of studying the Bible with both a Christian and one or more Jehovah's Witnesses. In one of these dreams, he says he met a friend from college. This friend engaged him in an intellectual discussion, asking what the world would be like if God were evil. Peter answered that the world would be filled with sin, it would be hard to find the truth, people would be suffering, etc. By pointing to the pain and sin in the world, his friend was succeeding in arguing him into believing in an evil God. Even though Peter wasn't a believer at the time, in his heart he knew God and Jesus weren't evil, but he was finding it hard to refute his friend's reasoning.

At this point in the dream, something dramatic happened: God turned his face from him. It was as if the warmth of the sun, previously unnoticed, disappeared and was replaced by darkness and a cold, howling wind. Peter, frightened, awoke, unable to move (as sometimes happens when one wakes suddenly from a dream). The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is a created being, the same being referred to in Proverbs as Wisdom, and they believe on the basis of certain OT passages that God is our only savior, not Jesus. So Peter prayed as they had taught him, saying “Jehovah save me.” Nothing happened. Peter then prayed, “Jesus save me” and then the warmth of God's countenance returned and he able to move, considerably shaken by the experience.

What role does the name of Jesus play in the above experience? Compare this to the use of “the name” in chapter six.

2. Tverberg equates the name of God with his reputation. What examples does she give of those who “hallow” God's name through their actions? Can you think of other examples of people who have done this? Is there *any* branch of the church in America which is bringing glory to God through its deeds?
3. Craig Keener, in his two volume work *Miracles*, describes many prayers in Jesus' name, including the following:

In one recent case, around noon on January 7, 2009, Dr. Mervin Ascabano, then the municipal health officer for the municipality of Dumanlinao in the Philippines, was summoned back urgently to his primary care clinic because a woman was dying. When he arrived, she was already stiff, motionless, and gray, covered with saliva. Her male

companion was crying to her, "Don't leave me!" Lacking emergency facilities, they began looking for a driver to take her to the hospital. As Dr. Ascabano examined her, however, he lost hope: she was already "cold and clammy," with neither pulse or heartbeat, and his primary care clinic lacked the emergency supplies needed to resuscitate patients in this state. She had already been unresponsive for three or four minutes by the time she was laid on the bed, and there was nothing he could do except attempt CPR. Unfortunately, this attempt was proving fruitless, and, noticing "that the patient's pants were already wet with urine," the midwife observed that there was no hope.

Now desperate, Dr. Ascabano began shouting, "In Jesus' name!" while still trying to administer CPR. The third time he shouted this, the patient began coughing "out fluids" and moving, "and her skin turned pink." At this point she "tried to get up," and he had to stop her; she had, after all, just been dead. When her male companion, who had left in dismay that she was dead, returned, he was dumbfounded. Dr. Ascabano recounts that his nurse and midwife, who accompanied her to the hospital, noted that she was moving around freely on route to the hospital "as if nothing had happened! And when they arrived at the hospital, the patient was almost not admitted because her vital signs" (pulse, blood pressure, heart, and respiration) "were all normal." She had been "gray, pulseless," and cold for four or five minutes. Admittedly the dead who were raised in the Gospels had been deemed dead for beyond five minutes, and there is no thought of Jesus having performed CPR before commanding anyone to rise. Nevertheless, this is not a usual occurrence, and Dr. Ascabano is convinced that this patient returned to life especially through God's power. Could it not be more than coincidence that the distinctive factor in this resuscitation was Dr. Ascabano's invocation of Jesus' name, and that the woman recovered so rapidly?<sup>1</sup>

In his large work on miracles, Keener also describes many prayers answered without such an invocation of the name of Jesus. Further, while some of those in which Jesus' name is used are for a person who can hear and understand the name, others are for those who are unconscious or unable to understand the name.

- (a) Tverberg says that when her grandfather invoked Jesus' name he was acting as Jesus' representative. Is that what is happening with Dr. Ascabano?
- (b) Tverberg is right to point out that there is no "magic" associated with any name, even that of Jesus. However, Christians often associate Jesus' name with authority and power. Where on this spectrum do your prayers lie? Do you believe there is any reason to use the name of Jesus in prayers such as Dr. Ascabano's or Grandfather Tverberg's? How about in less urgent prayers?

4. In Matt 18:18-20, Jesus says,

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. 1, p. 576.

about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

In this second-century rabbinic commentary on the law, the Mishnah, we read,

Rabbi Halafta the son of Dosa of the village of Hananha said: “When ten people sit together and occupy themselves with the Torah, the Shekinah abides among them... And whence can it be shown that the same applies to three? Because it is said *He judges among the judges* [the minimum number of judges being three], hence can it be shown that the same applies to two? Because it is said, *Then they that feared the Lord*, etc. (m. Abot 3:7)

This reflects the belief among some Jews that the Spirit of the Lord was present when two or three studied the Torah together. “Here Jesus himself fills the role of the Shekinah, God's presence, in the traditional Jewish saying (which probably predates this saying, since the rabbis would not likely borrow it from Christian sources).”<sup>2</sup>

What light does this shed on Jesus' statement? Does the context of this statement within Matthew—within a passage on church discipline—limit its applicability only to deliberation on the law?

5. An understanding of God's name as representing God himself (Tverberg, 85) can be applied to prayer. In the Psalms David occasionally petitions God not merely as God, but as the God whose very character is consistent with David's petition. For instance, Ps 25:5, “Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.” (See also Ps 59:5.)

A similar grounding of petitions in God's goals and character can be found in the prayer form called the “collect.” A collect is a brief prayer generally with a three-fold structure: a preamble (address, invocation), a petition, and a conclusion. Generally collects ground the petition in the preamble. For example, the collect for the second Sunday in Advent is:

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

There are many other excellent examples:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires know, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your holy name, through Christ the Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, who has given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto You and does promise that when two or three are gathered together in Your name You will grant their requests; fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of

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<sup>2</sup> Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 455-56.

<sup>3</sup> See Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (Harper, 1995), 164.

Your servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of Your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen. (by Chrysostom)

Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Take five minutes and write a sample collect to share with the group. How might use of collects enhance your petitions?

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*Fun fact:* Craig Keener also points out in his Matthew commentary, “Jewish teachers often called God 'the Place,' that is, 'the Omnipresent One'; Jesus is 'God with us.'” (456)