

Series: What's In a Name?

December 25, 2016

Title: Jesus

[Slide 1]

Text: Matthew 1:21-25

Jesus

Bestsellers:

[Slide 2]

It's Christmas Day, and I'll bet a whole bunch of people will get an NFL jersey with the name and number of their favorite player. So which player is the most popular? Well, it depends on where you live, for one thing.

If you live in New England, the most popular jersey has a big #12 on it with the name "Brady." No surprise there. But if you look at the whole United States, the most popular jersey has a 21 on it, with the name Elliott – for Ezekiel Elliott, the rookie sensation who plays for the Cowboys.

The top 5 sellers are:

- Ezekiel Elliott – Cowboys
- Dak Prescott – Cowboys
- Carlson Wentz – Eagles
- Tom Brady – Patriots
- Rob Gronkowski – Patriots

But that only tells part of the story. If you look at which player's jersey is most popular *state by state*, and assign Electoral College votes to those states, then top prize goes – hands down – to Ezekiel Elliot.

[Slide 3]

- Elliott wins 12 states with 129 Electoral College votes.
- Brady wins 7, with 61 votes.
- Prescott wins 5 with 39 votes.

Looks like Ezekiel Elliott is the man of the hour when it comes to popularity in the NFL.

Only the best:

So what is it that makes for an NFL best-selling jersey? Winning, pure and simple. Guys who fumble the ball all the time or who can't kick field goals don't come up on top of the jersey sales stats.

If you want to identify with the best, all you need is to where their name. The name says it all, whether it's Brady or Elliott, Dak or Gronk.

The same was true 2000 years ago when Jesus was born. Then as now, people picked names for their kids that connected with winning, with victory, with being the best. The top two names for girls in Jesus' time were Mariam and Salome – names connected with famous members of the Jewish dynasty that won a war of independence and ruled a free Judea for a hundred years.

[Slide 4]

The sixth most popular name in Palestine in Jesus' time was the name "Joshua." Why Joshua? He was the ancient hero of the Exodus who conquered the Promised Land. His name meant: "The LORD saves."

Think of what that meant to a people who had recently conquered their enemies only to be re-conquered by the Romans. What they wanted more than anything was another Joshua to come along and drive the enemy out of their homeland once and for all. Every time a dad or mom named their little boy Joshua, they were expressing the hope that perhaps this child would be used by God to bring victory.

Jesus:

And that brings us to the most important name in the Christmas Story: Jesus.

The name "Jesus" is based on the Greek pronunciation of the Hebrew name "Joshua." Jesus=Joshua. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, Joshua is translated as "Jesus." When the Book of Hebrews speaks of Joshua, it calls him Jesus.

So, think of what a person from Jesus' time would have thought when he or she heard these words:

[Slide 5]

Matthew 1:21 NIV

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

They would have heard that God was sending a *new Joshua to set them free*. This little baby would be wearing the Joshua jersey. He would, like his namesake, be the champion.

Savior

A better Joshua?

So what would it take to be a *better Joshua*? Joshua had a record of victories and accomplishments that was greater than any of the leaders and kings who came after him. For example:

- He was born in Egypt as a descendant of Joseph.
- He crossed the Red Sea with Moses.
- He won a great battle against a tribe of bandits – fighting the enemy in hand to hand combat.
- He climbed Mt. Sinai with Moses to meet God.
- He served as Moses' right hand man for 40 years in the desert.
- He spied out the Promised Land.
- He was hand-picked by Moses to take his place.
- He led Israel across the Jordan River.
- He conquered Jericho and a long list of other cities, so that Israel could at long last dwell in the Promised Land of Canaan.
- And all along the way, he was faithful to God.

His motto?

[Slide 6]

Joshua 24:15b NIV

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

What would it take to be a *better Joshua*?

A better Savior:

The only way to be a *better Joshua* would be to take a greater journey and win an even greater battle. For the people of Jesus' time, that meant fighting the Romans who ruled over them and winning a war of independence. Then God would finally establish *His Kingdom*.

But there was a much bigger battle to be won – one far greater than defeating the Romans or any human foe. *This Joshua* – Jesus of Nazareth – came to take on the enemy that had enslaved the entire human race, Jew and Roman alike. That enemy was the evil force that turned humans away from God and His gift of Life. This new Joshua would be the Champion who finally conquer Sin and open the way for people to become God's children. As the angel said:

[Slide 7]

Matthew 1:21 NIV

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

This would be a victory not just for Israel, but for the entire human family. It is a family that reaches back not just to David, the Jewish king, but all the way back to Abraham, the Gentile who became the father of God's people.

God with Us:

Matthew goes on to explain just how much better *this Joshua* is by saying:

[Slide 8]

Matthew 1:22-23 NIV

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us.")

God's true Champion would need to do more than win battles. He would need to bring God back to His people. Moses and Joshua did just that in their time. Moses brought the Israelites to their meeting with God at Mt. Sinai. Joshua conquered the land where God chose to dwell with His people.

So what would make a *better Joshua*? Jesus, the new Joshua, came as God in human form. And He came to live with His people forever. The baby who was called "God with us" at His birth would one day say to us:

[Slide 9]

Matthew 28:20b NIV

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What's in a name?

Your jersey:

So, this Christmas Day, whose name is on your jersey? Who is your Champion? Who is your Joshua?

There's only One Name worthy of being the best. And that name is "Jesus." In fact, one day the whole world will recognize that His is the Champion. Paul tells us:

[Slide 10]

Philippians 2:9-11 NIV

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

One day all Creation will sing the praises of His Name. Until then, you and I have the honor of wearing His Name on our jerseys.

He's the Champion.

LIFE Group Lesson for "Jesus"

Ice Breaker:

- Who was your hero when you were a kid?
- What made that person so special to you?

A New Champion:

- The Jewish people of Jesus' day were desperately longing for a new Champion.
- Just 60 years or so before Jesus was born they had been a free country. The Maccabees had led a war of independence against their Greek oppressors, and had ruled as a dynasty over the Jewish people for 100 years. Then the Romans had come and conquered the Jewish homeland. It was time for a new Champion!
- Joshua, the commander and leader who had conquered the Promised Land after the Exodus, was the ideal model of that Champion. No wonder, then that the name Joshua was the 6th most common boy's name in Jesus' time. (Many of the other popular names recalled the glory days of the Maccabees.)
- The name "Jesus" is simply the Greek version of Joshua. Joshua/Jesus means "The Lord saves."
- So, when the angel told Joseph to name Mary's baby "Jesus," he was announcing the arrival of that long-awaited Champion.

A better Savior:

- How easy it is to focus on the symptom instead of the root cause of our suffering. For example: If my tooth hurts, it's easier to take an Advil than to schedule an appointment with the dentist. But Advil won't fill a cavity!
- People in Jesus' day wanted someone to come along and defeat their earthly enemies and bring them prosperity and power. Not much different from today!
- But the New Joshua didn't come to fix the symptoms; He came to destroy the root cause of all of our troubles: Sin.

"God with us":

- The other great task for the Champion was to bring God to his people.

- Jesus did much more than that! He came as God to live with His people: "God with us."
- No wonder, then, that He alone is the Champion!

Your Champion:

- Think of some ways in which *you* need a Champion in 2017.
- Share at least one of those areas of your life.
- Take time to pray with each other for the coming year – a year in which you will discover all over again, that Jesus is Lord.