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Psalm 8:3–4, ESV

³ *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

Matthew 8:18–20, ESV

¹⁸ *Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. ¹⁹And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” ²⁰And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”*

Isaiah 7:10–17, ESV

¹⁰ *Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”*

Matthew 1:18–23, ESV

¹⁸ *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. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to*

put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

My name is Jesus.

I’ve told you stories before about my Catholic school upbringing. I’m going to tell you another one. One day, on the first day of class, I think in fourth grade, there were a couple new students in the class, kids who had not been at Santa Clara Grammar school the year before. One of them was a boy who happened to be sitting right next to me. The sister who was teaching us asked the new kids to introduce themselves. When she pointed at the boy sitting to my right, and said, tell us your name, he said “My name is Jesús. It means Jesus.” At that moment, the girl who was sitting several students to my left gasped quite loudly. “That’s wrong,” said the girl. “You can’t name a child after Jesus!” I’ll get back to this story. But first, let’s talk about our Bible quotes for the day.

We all know that there are many names for Jesus in the Bible. Jesus referred to himself as “the bread of Life” in John 6:35: *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger.”* Obviously, Jesus is being poetic, using

the need for physical food as a metaphor for the need for spiritual food. Jesus calls himself a bridegroom in Matthew 9:15, when he says: *“Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”* This is another metaphor: in Jesus’ day, as long as the bridegroom is there, the wedding feast and celebration cannot stop. But someday, Jesus is warning, he will be taken away and the party will be over. In the Gospel of John, 8:12, Jesus uses yet another metaphor, saying that his ability to illuminate the proper path to God makes him a light: ¹² *Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* In John 13:14, Jesus calls himself Lord and Teacher, while pointing out that just as he is modest, we need to be humble in our lives: ¹⁴ *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.* And we see another metaphor in John 15:5, when Jesus talks about himself as the vine on which our spiritual lives grow: ⁵ *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

We’ve talked in the past about the Gospel of Matthew, which was written primarily for Jews who were followers of Jesus; it draws multiple parallels about prophecies made in the Old Testament being fulfilled in the New Testament.

Matthew worked hard to make the New Covenant understandable to Jews by showing that events in the New Testament were directly related to predictions made in the Old Testament. Our first two passages today illustrate this. Psalm 8 talks in breathtaking terms about the beauty of the world created for humans to live in and underscores our responsibility to care for it. And likewise, God will care for us: ³ *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,* ⁴ *what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?* To remind us that the New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old, Matthew uses this name, the son of man, when he tells us that Jesus is poor and essentially homeless: *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”* The point is that rather than the Messiah coming out of the clouds of Heaven as a powerful entity, he is actually arriving as an empathetic, forgiving human.

In our third quote, the great prophet Isaiah tells us of God speaking to a king of Judah, part of Israel. This king is named Ahaz, and he ruled in the 700s B.C. He acted against the counsel of the prophet Isaiah and appealed to the enemy of the Israelites, the King of Assyria to help repel invaders from Judah. God wants Ahaz to ask for a sign, so that Ahaz will know to trust God. Ahaz refuses, but God decides to give Ahaz a blessed sign anyway: *Therefore the Lord*

himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Matthew refers directly to this famous biblical quote that all Jews would be intimately familiar with when he writes: ²⁰ *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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).* Matthew makes it clear to Jews that Immanuel, the God who is with us, is none other than Jesus, and thus the New Testament serves as the fulfillment of a prophecy made in the Hebrew Bible.

We know other names for Jesus, like the Word, or Logos, the Christ, which means the anointed one, and the Rabbi or teacher. But let’s look at his common, his given name: Jesus. We’ve talked before about the fact that his real name was Yeshua, which is a Hebrew name, and is the same as the name Joshua, but that the New Testament is written in Greek, and so the name was turned into a Greek word Lesous (Lee-Soos), or Jesus. It was actually a very ancient and commonly used name among Jews during the time of Jesus. Let’s get back to my new

schoolmate who had just told the sister teaching us that his name was Jesús; when he did this, a girl shouted out that this was extremely disrespectful. This is of course entirely a cultural thing and naming your child after Jesus is in no way improper. We call boys Christopher and girls Christina, and those names come from the word Christ. We also use the name Joshua, which is actually the very same name as Jesus. And nobody actually called Jesus “Jesus”: this name is entirely a product of the fact that the New Testament is a Greek document; our Lord’s name was translated somewhat sloppily when the Gospels were written. We also have the name Salvatore, which means Savior. In Italy people use the name Renato, which means Reborn or Born Again. As for the actual name Jesus, it is very commonly used in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal. The name is used in Ethiopia and in other parts of the world. The parents of my new classmate Jesús were simply honoring the Son of Man, the Light of the World, the Messiah, the Good Shepherd by naming their son after him.

We want to honor Jesus, the person who brought us the good news that being a child of God, being a believer, does *not* mean that we must live by a system of intricate rules and worry about doing something wrong simply for the sake of staying out of trouble, of not raising the wrath of God. Being a Christian is an uplifting thing, not a burden or a duty. We honor the person who taught us

that simply having faith and illustrating that faith by being empathetic and forgiving is what it means to be a believer. There are many ways we can honor Jesus every day of our lives. We can honor Jesus with our time, by coming to church, by helping at the food bank, by dismissing our selfish needs in order to serve God's people. We can honor Jesus by praying, by communicating with God and letting God know that we deeply appreciate the gift God gave us by sending his son, with the New Covenant in hand, to walk this planet for a brief period and thereby giving us a joyous, anxiety-free way of life. We can honor Jesus by remembering that when Jesus took human form, he took on the same body that we have – and therefore it is very important that we honor our bodies by staying away from drugs and excessive alcohol. We can honor Jesus by donating money if we can afford it. Perhaps most of all, we can honor Jesus by giving him the topmost place in our hearts and by putting our total trust in God. Psalm 3 tells us:

⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

It is important that as we proceed through life, we remember that we do need to make sure our lives honor our Savior, that they honor the person who came into our lives to do us a great favor. The reason that I love the Gospels so much is that they aren't just the story of the Son of God and how he came to this planet and died for us. The Gospels tell us, through the words and actions of Jesus, how to

live simple, calm, gentle lives that lift us up, make us feel good about who we are, and make it so easy to go to sleep each night and rest peacefully. Of course, we want to honor the person who did this for us.

I'd like to finish up the story of the kid named Jesús. After that little girl blurted out her horror at a boy being named after Jesus, the sister teaching us did a beautiful job of rescuing him from the incredible embarrassment that suddenly flashed across his face. She pointed at that little girl and said that it wasn't wrong to name your child after the child of Mary and Joseph, after the child of God. She said that some people worked a lot harder than others to live lives that honor God, that honor Jesus. They care so much about making sure that they do what Jesus taught us to do - that we are kind, forgiving, and caring - that they name their children after Jesus. That way, they say the name of our Lord over and over every day of their lives, and therefore never forget just who Jesus is to us. After she said this, Jesús grinned proudly. Please pray with me.

God, let us always honor your son. He has many names. He is the Redeemer, the Lamb of God, the King of Kings, the Nazarene, the Galilean. Most of all, to us, he is simply Jesus, a boy born on the other side of the world two thousand years ago. Thank you for sending him to us. Help us find new and creative ways to honor your son during an age when so many dishonor him.

Let us always be sensitive to the fact that you are the God of the world. We have our way of expressing our faith. There are churches where people talk in tongues. There are churches where people believe that the bread literally becomes the body of Christ when it is blessed. There are churches where people dance and sing during their services. There are churches whose services are filled with high solemn ritual. Let us treat all believers as our true, full brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us be one.

Amen.