

IDENTITY IS MORE THAN A NAME

Today's Text: 1 Cor. 10:1-13

Extracts:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the extent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted ... nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents [1 Cor. 10: 1-6, 9]

Jaleesa Martin recently had a new baby-boy.¹ She and the father of the boy, Jawaan McCullough, were unmarried and they had the practice of including both parents' last names in their children's names. Jaleesa had given the name, "Messiah," as the baby's first name but disagreed with his father on the last name. So she went to court. In her ruling, a Tennessee (USA) Child Support Magistrate, Lu Ann Ballew, changed the baby's first name to Martin, adding, "'Messiah' is a title that is held only by Jesus Christ [and naming the baby thus] places an undue burden on him that as a human being, he cannot fulfill." The county where the child was born has a large Christian population. Jaleesa has appealed the ruling and the Tennessee American Civil Liberties Union is following the case.

She may yet win the court case on appeal but that is not the issue we are looking at here. The judge is making the point that a person's identity goes beyond the name s(he) bears. That baby could well be called Martin (according to the judge's ruling) or Messiah (as his mother desired). However, he will NEVER be the Messiah because that title applies only to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. We know that Jesus died on the cross a little over two thousand years ago. So, who is the Messiah of those from Adam to the time of Jesus on earth? In this week's Bible verses, Paul gives us the staggering revelation that the rock that Moses struck in the wilderness when the children of Israel were on their way from Egypt was Christ! Let us find out more on it from this week's exciting study.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: Marlena Baldacci, "Tennessee judge rejects the name 'Messiah,'" CNN, Aug. 13 2013, <http://www.ktxs.com/news/national/Tennessee-judge-rejects-the-name-Messiah/-/14769504/21455972/-/15qajmx/-/index.html> and "Judge rejects 'Messiah' as boy's name," *The Associated Press*, Aug. 13 2013, http://www.yorkdispatch.com/breaking/ci_23843648/judge-rejects-messiah-boys-name

1. Background: The true identity of Jesus Christ

In the game of baseball², which is most popular in the United States of America, a run (equivalent to a goal in soccer) is counted only when an offense (attacking) player reaches the home base. To do so, you have to have touched and passed four bases without being run out by the defense (opposing) team. In that case, the score is not counted until the run is completed. However, there is one play called the home run.³ It occurs when a batter plays the ball over the outfield fence within the allowed space without the ball first hitting the ground. It is counted as a run even before the player leaves the first base. It becomes immaterial whether he walks or runs to reach the home plate.

That illustration underlines the fact that there can be *a time lag between the occurrence of an event and when it is recognised*. The recognition of Jesus as the Christ is like that. John began his gospel story by saying, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” [Jn 1: 1-3]. Compare that with the opening verses in the book of Genesis, where it is written, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” [Gen. 1: 1-3]. It was through the word that God spoke that all things were created. John adds in the gospel, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” [Jn 1:14]. There is thus a direct link between Jesus of John’s gospel and the Word of God at creation, that is, the Christ. That is why John concluded his gospel by asserting authoritatively, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” [Jn 20: 31].

The average believer finds that too difficult to understand and pushes it into the realm of mysteries that should be believed without probing. But Paul is not an average believer! Remember, he was given the privilege to be “caught up into Paradise [where he] heard inexpressible words, which is not lawful for a man to utter” [2 Cor. 12: 1-4]. Is it, therefore, a coincidence that his theological exposés in his epistles have helped believers to understand more clearly their faith in Christ? This week’s Bible verses are a point in view.

Most of us have read of the story of Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. As a result of disobedience, the journey that was to last for forty days took forty years [Num. 14: 34]. During their wanderings, God showed them mercy by feeding them with manna from heaven and giving them water to drink from a rock. We are familiar

² http://www.ehow.com/list_6730808_baseball-rules-beginners.html

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_run

with the story which we shall discuss in more detail presently. But, in this week's study, Paul has given us a spiritual perspective that he said we should not be ignorant of [1 Cor. 10: 1-4]. Let us pay attention to the following:

a) *There was a water and Holy Spirit baptism!*

Paul wrote, "Brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that ***all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea***" [vv. 1-2].

When the children of Israel came to the shores of the Red Sea, they could not cross it, especially as Egyptian troops pressed hard on them. God commanded Moses to stretch his rod over the waters of the Red Sea. But before Moses did that, we are told, "The Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them." Then Moses stretched his rod; the Red Sea parted and "the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" [Ex. 12; 13-22].

Each time the Scriptures refer to "Angel of God" with a capital 'A,' they are talking of God in visible form [cf: Gen. 16: 7; Ex. 23: 20; Judg. 13: 17; Is. 63: 9; Zech. 3: 3]. We know that the Father and the Spirit are invisible. At creation, God said, "Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness. . . . So God created man in *His* image; in the image of God *He* created him" [Gen. 1: 26-27]. Here, we see a demonstration of God's triune nature. So, who spoke on behalf of the Trinity? Only the Word of God who came in human form (Jesus) looks like man because we do not know what the Father and the Holy Spirit look like. Therefore, we can conclude that ***the Angel of God that was with the children of Israel by the Red Sea was the Pre-Incarnate Christ!***

The pillar of cloud that moved over the children of Israel was a form of spiritual baptism. Their passing through the waters of the Red Sea was a form of water baptism. Their faith was in God that commanded Moses and they obeyed. Jesus told Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" [Jn 3: 5]. The kingdom of God has been defined as "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" [Rom. 14: 17]. It does not matter that they first received Spirit baptism before water baptism because that was what happened when Peter went to the home of Cornelius when the Holy Spirit descended on his listeners while he was still speaking. He asked, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" [Acts 10: 44-48]. ***Therefore, the crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel is analogous to baptism by water and the Holy Spirit.***

b) *There was a “communion”!*

Paul added, “All ate the same spiritual food” [1 Cor. 10: 3]. For forty years, the people of Israel in the wilderness were fed on manna from heaven. God said to Moses, “I will rain bread from heaven for you” [Ex. 16: 4]. Speaking thousands of years later on the subject, Jesus said, “Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For ***the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life***” [Jn 6: 32-35]. When He instituted the Holy Communion the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me” [Lk 22: 19]. Therefore, ***the manna in the wilderness is analogous to the Holy Communion that the today’s faithfuls take during church services.***

c) *And there was a spiritual drink from that spiritual Rock!*

Paul also wrote as follows, “All drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock ***that followed them***, and that Rock was Christ” [1 Cor. 10: 4]. The first time that we came across the rock was in Horeb. Israel in the wilderness complained of thirst. God commanded Moses to strike the rock and water gushed out for the people to drink [Ex. 17: 1-6]. The next time was in the Wilderness of Zin by Kadesh, after years of wandering. Again, there was no water and the people contended with Moses and Aaron. God commanded Moses to speak to the rock in the presence of the congregation. Instead, out of anger, he struck the rock twice. For his disobedience, God prevented Moses from entering the Promised Land [Num. 20: 1-12].

From Paul’s account, we now know that ***the rock that Moses struck was the same rock that he was commanded to speak to; the rock followed them from place to place! That Rock was Christ.*** It follows that you cannot crucify the Christ twice! When Moses struck the Rock the first time, it symbolized the crucifixion of Jesus. The word of God states, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things... from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with ***the precious blood of Christ***, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was ***foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you***” [1 Pet. 1: 18-20].

Having opened their eyes to the reality of Christ from the foundation of the world, Paul warned believers to eschew disobedience through idolatry (unfaithfulness to God) and sexual immorality (unfaithfulness to their neighbours) because unrepentant offenders all through history have not been spared [1 Cor. 10: 5-11]. ***Jesus is indeed the Christ of God.***

2. Implications for the modern believer

Believers are popularly called Christians. But from the foregoing analysis, we now know that there have been believers in Christ from the foundation of the world. The saints listed in the Hall of Faith include from Abel to Moses, Joshua and Rahab to Samson, Samuel, David and the prophets [**Heb. 11: 1-40**]. Add to that list believers from the days of Jesus on earth to date. What do they share in common concerning the Christ? Here are a few interesting points to note:

a) *You may only know your date of birth but not your age!*

You count your birthday from the day you were born. Yet, at birth, you were already almost a year old, having spent nine months in your mother's womb! God said to the prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" [**Jer. 1: 5**]. It follows that we are older than before our conception! Adam was said to have lived for 930 years [**Gen. 5: 5**]. He was married to Eve at "birth," that is, just after God had created him [**Gen. 2: 20-25**]. Today, most of us marry after 20 years of age! Therefore, you may know your date of birth but not your age!

That Jesus was manifested as the Christ only about two thousand years ago does not mean that that was when He became the Messiah. The risen Christ Himself told His disciples when He appeared to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that ***all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.***" Then "He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures" [**Lk 24: 44-45**]. Jesus has also been called "***the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world***" [**Rev. 13: 8**]. On one occasion, Jesus told the Jews that their father Abraham rejoiced to see His day; he saw it and was glad. Perplexed, they asked Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" He replied them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" [**Jn 8: 57-58**]. Indeed, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" [**Heb. 13: 8**].

b) *Your name is enabled by your identity*

When John the Baptist was confronted by the Jews to confirm who he was- the Christ? Elijah? The Prophet? - he answered that he was the mere voice and precursor of the Christ (whom he had baptized by the Jordan River). The following day, he saw Jesus coming toward him and he said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me'" [**Jn 1: 15-29**]. Speaking of John some years later, Jesus confirmed to His disciples, "Among those born of women there has

not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” [Matt. 11: 11].

John identified himself with Jesus and his name took on a bigger meaning. In like manner, *you are not known by the name you bear or the church you attend but the extent to which Christ has enabled you*. God Himself highly exalted His Son and gave Him a name above every name because He was obedient to His Father’s will [Phil. 2: 5-11]. When the sons of Sceva in Ephesus tried to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, the evil spirit in the victim said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” [Acts 19: 11-22]. Paul’s name was enabled by his identity with Jesus.

In sum, we should understand that the word of God is one- from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus the Christ is not mentioned by name in all the pages but they are all about Him. He was there when Satan fell from heaven like lightning [Lk 10: 18]. When the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us [Jn 1: 14], He fulfilled the Law and the Prophets [Matt. 5: 17], that is, the Christ as revealed in the Old Testament. *The Jews are still waiting for their Messiah but He has already come in the person of Jesus who will soon return to judge the world. That is Paul’s message to us in this week’s study.*

3. Conclusion: Jesus is the Rock of your salvation!

Jesus has said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” He was referring to the Holy Spirit that would be given after His glorious resurrection and ascension [Jn 7; 37-39]. We are the beneficiaries of the new dispensation but what does our identity card read?

That Rock was Christ. *Jesus is that Rock, the Rock of our salvation*. Do you know Him or merely mouth His name to impress the gullible? *Accept Him as your Lord and Saviour. Obey Him in all ways. Then you will be a true believer. That will be your ID card to salvation.*