

Introduction

About a month ago, a survey was taken in Wisconsin to determine who had the highest approval rating with those who live in that state. The three most popular were as follows: Abraham Lincoln (91% rating), Jesus (90% rating), and Aaron Rodgers, the quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, (89% rating).

One of the verses we just read, Matthew 1:21, makes two things perfectly clear. #1 - Jesus should have been first, not second, in the rankings. And #2 - His approval rating should have been 100%. Let's briefly examine this verse and you'll grasp why.

The Name

I begin with the word "**name**," which also appears in verses 23 and 25. In my view, one of the most constructive things parents can do for their children is to give them good names. Nothing is more personal to us than our names are and they stay with us for the rest of our lives. Parents, therefore, should make sure the names they select for their children are good ones.

Determining what are good ones of course is a highly subjective thing. What is a good name to one person might not be to another. But as subjective as they are, there are some that almost all of us would deem bad ones. I met a woman several years ago, for instance, whose last name is Byrd. Her first, and it's her legal one, is Sweetie. It's a play on words of the cartoon character Tweety Byrd.

Anyway, giving their Son a name wasn't a concern of Mary and Joseph. That's because they didn't name Him. According to verse 21, Father God did. He called Him "**Jesus**." There an old hymn that describes "**Jesus**" this way, "**Sweetest name I know**." It truly is just that. It's the sweetest and best of all possible names.

That's because of what it means. All of us have reasons for the names we give our children and so did Father God. He called His Son

Jesus because that name, more than any other, communicated why He came. The Greek word translated "**Jesus**" means "**the salvation of the Lord.**" And as the last line of verse 21 reveals, that's why He came. It was "**to save His people from their sins.**"

Sinners

The word "**sins**" refers to the things we think, feel, say, or do that are contrary to God's nature, and thus, destructive to others or us. Two weeks ago, I overheard a wife at the Target store angrily tell her husband to shut up when he suggested that they were buying too many Christmas gifts for their son. That's just one of the countless forms that sins take in our real lives.

Now, those sins of ours have a source. That source is what the Bible calls "**sin.**" Sin a condition or state of being into which all of us are born. It's often called our fallen nature. That nature is the prevailing disposition to think, feel, speak and act self-centeredly - to take ourselves, in practice as more important than anyone else is. That disposition is the root cause of all the sins that others and we commit.

Author Rebecca Pippert tells about attending her three year-old daughter's pre-school Christmas party. As the children stood there singing carols, their faces beamed innocently and they looked like angels. But when it came time for snacks and presents, pandemonium ensued. "**Where's my present?**" "**Her cookie is bigger than mine!**" "**He got more cakes than I did!**" "**She got to open her present first.**" Pippert points out that these children weren't deprived. They were well cared for, well fed, and loved. But we wouldn't know it by the way they behaved. How do we explain their attitudes and behaviors? "**Simple,**" she says, "**Those children, like all of us, are sinners who sin.**"

That's the Bible's analysis exactly. How do we explain all the bad attitudes and behaviors all around us every day? It's that people are sinners who sin. If you doubt that, I challenge you to do something. Carefully examine how people respond when their will is being opposed. You'll see it if you do, the inherent self-centeredness of human beings.

We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners.

Save Us

But don't despair because that's why Jesus came – to deal with our sins and sin. We hear so much talk about the real meaning of Christmas and verse 21 teaches us what that meaning is. It's that Jesus came to **“save His people from their sins.”** That means two things.

First, He saves us from our sins. His virgin birth led to His perfect life, which led to His substitutionary death. He took into Himself all of our sins on the cross and paid the penalty for them we should have paid. Because He did, it's as if we never even committed them. Or to use a computer metaphor, they've been deleted. I once counseled a young woman who had had an abortion and considered herself a murderer as a result. Jesus took into Himself that sin of hers on the cross and paid the penalty for it she should have paid. As far as Father God's concerned, therefore, it's as if she never had the abortion. That illustrates what the death of Jesus does. It deletes our sins. And Father God is able to give us eternal life in heaven because it does.

But Jesus didn't come just to save us from our sins. He came to save us from their source as well – sin. His virgin birth, you see, also led to His historical resurrection. He's alive and well today, not just in the world but also in us. He brings His resurrection life into our mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily processes and empowers us over the fallen nature that resides there. We are, as a result, able to routinely think, feel, speak, and act selflessly instead of self-centeredly. Jesus, in other words, not only gives us eternal life in heaven but transformed life on earth as well.

At Christmas time one year, a news reporter walked the streets of Tokyo and asked people a question, **“What is the meaning of Christmas?”** One young woman, according to the reporter, replied: **“I don't know. Is that the day that Jesus died?”** The answer is **“no”** and **“yes.”** It's **“no”** in that He was born, not died, on Christmas. It's **“yes”** in that the reason He was born was to die and rise from the dead.

The birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the basic components of Father God's plan to "save" us. They delete our sins and empower us over our sin. They give us transformed life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

Conclusion

That's the salvation Jesus came to give us, but it isn't ours until we receive it. We receive it in a definite way. We decide to follow Him. We firmly make the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says. We then arrange all of our affairs around carrying out that decision. In Wisconsin, Abraham Lincoln and Aaron Rodgers are as popular as Jesus is. But when we decide to follow Him and experience the salvation that Lincoln, Rodgers, or anyone else can't give, it's no contest. We recognize Jesus for whom He is by far – the greatest and best. It's supreme sanity, therefore, to follow Him.