

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Life in italics

Presented by John Edmondstone

Good morning. I want you to think about a statement I read recently. “Jesus lived his life in italics”. Why do we use italics? ***For emphasis!*** No one else like him has ever existed. He was mild and gentle, tough but tender. His life was a perfect blend of grace and gristle. Yes, he was mild and gentle, but, when necessary, forcefulness pushed through his humility.

Beginning with a handful of diverse disciples Jesus galvanized them into a Church that turned the world of the New Testament upside down. At the age of 33 he was crucified on a cross as a common criminal. On the third day he rose from the dead. The influence of Jesus is so prominent and dominant in history that we are compelled to ask “Who is Jesus, the man who lived his life in italics?”

This forces the question on us, “Who is Jesus?” I want to offer several answers to that question this morning.

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First, consider the name of Jesus study of names fascinates many of us because names often provide a clue to identity. The names of the Bible are rich in meaning. When the angel announced the birth of Jesus to Mary, he said, “You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21).

The name Jesus is the same as the Old Testament name Joshua, which means, “Jehovah is salvation”. So we cannot even speak the name of Jesus without indicating who he is. He is the Saviour of all people. That is the unanimous testimony of scripture, that in the name of Jesus the forgiveness of sins is offered to all people everywhere (Luke 24:47).

Peter declared that “there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12) and Paul added “that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13) What do we mean by that word “saved”? It means that Jesus through his death on a Cross opened the way to God; he took our place, took our punishment so that when we put our faith in Him, accepting what he did in our place, we begin to live the Christian life with the Bible as our guide.

Do not think it was an easy path for Jesus. The religious leaders of his day believed Jesus was possessed (Mark 3: 22,23) The High Priest accused him of blasphemy (Mark 14:64) even his own friends thought he had lost his senses (Mark 3:21). His family tried to take him back to the quietness of Nazareth (Mark 3:32-32).

And there were people like the Roman soldier who presided over the crucifixion of Jesus and recognized Him as the Son of God (Matt 27:54) and millions of people today gladly and joyfully join the soldier in the acclamation “Surely this is the Son of God.”

The unanimous testimony of scripture is that in the name of Jesus the forgiveness of sins is available to all people everywhere (Luke 24:47). We sometimes sing a hymn –

Jesus is the sweetest name I know
 And he's just the same as his lovely name.
 And that's the reason why I love him so,
 Oh, Jesus is the sweetest name I know.

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Next, let's consider the Aim of Jesus. Why did he come? What was his mission? He did not come to build a political or military empire. He taught His followers that the mark of greatness was not ruling others, but serving them. That is reflected in his words, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

He did not come to reign but to redeem. Of the many miracles he performed he did so out of compassion. So it is today organizations that have arisen do so to minister in his name to others, World Vision, Compassion, Anglicare, Wesley, Youth Off the Streets, Billy Graham and many others. In history, Albert Schweitzer, David Livingstone, Mother Theresa, to mention only a few. Jesus was man on a mission, that was his aim and those who follow him serve him. Both his name and his aim help us to know who Jesus is, the Son of God and Saviour of all who put their faith in Him.

In considering Living in Italics let's move to a third factor having looked at His Name and His Aim now let's look at His Claim. "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9) and "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30. And when he was on trial before Pilate, he was asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered, "It is as you say" (Mark 15:2).

Jesus made many other claims, for instance the power to forgive sins. He said to a crippled man who was brought to Him "Son, your sins are forgiven." The people said only God could forgive sins, they also knew that only God could heal a crippled man. So Jesus declared "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." He said to the man, "I say to you, pick up your mat and go home." (Mark 2:1-11) The man got up and walked. The man's healing verified the claim of Jesus that he was able to forgive sins.

Jesus claimed to have all authority in heaven and on earth. Did he have that kind of authority? Yes, he spoke to the winds and the waves and the wind ceased blowing. He spoke to the seas and the sea became calm. All things in heaven and on earth obeyed him (Matt 8:27) There's much more, he said, "I am the door" (John 10:7) Through Him we can find a ready access to God. He also said "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) Wherever he and his message have gone, the darkness of superstition and ignorance have been dispelled. He said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11) Those who have followed him have found guidance, care and leadership for their lives. Read the New Testament and study the 'I am's' of Jesus and you cannot fail to be impressed with His claims. All of these, His Name, His Aims and His Claims help us to know who Jesus is, the divine Son of God and our Saviour.

There is a fourth fact we should consider about Jesus.

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We are looking at Living Life in Italics. We use italics for emphasis. We've been looking at the life of Jesus and have noted the meaning of his name, then we looked at his aim, why did He come to this earth, then we looked at his claims. Finally let's look at his fame – for the want of a better word. It seems to be

popular today for writers to look for the weak points of prominent people exposing their flaws and inconsistencies. But the longer and more closely people look at the life of Jesus, the more brightly his life shines. He truly lived life in Italics, the emphasis is on his influence, his compassion, his loving actions, the meaning of his death and resurrection and the fact that He is with us always, in good times and in bad.

I came across a quote from historian Kenneth Scott Latourette, “As the centuries pass, the evidence is accumulating, that measured by the effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet.”

When you read the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament you read the record of what happened after his death and resurrection and the growth of the Church from a handful of people to thousands and beyond. Of particular interest is the life of men like Peter and Paul. Peter the big fisherman, outspoken and rough, a man who slipped into despair and who at the crucifixion of Jesus denied ever knowing him as Jesus had in fact predicted he would. But as you read on when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, and he met Peter by the lake side (John 21) with several other disciples. Peter, in despair over what had happened, said “I’m going fishing.” Jesus stood on the shore but they didn’t recognize him. He called out, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No” they answered. Jesus said “throw your net on the other side and you will find some.” They did and were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. They recognized Jesus. “It is the Lord,” they said. They then had breakfast by the side of lake. When they had finished, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” Three times Jesus asked the big fisherman did he love him. Three times Peter answered and with heart almost breaking, “Lord you know all things, you know that I love you. From that point he on lived his life for Jesus. (John 21:1-19)

We could also trace the life of Paul who spent so much time persecuting Christians until he had his Damascus road experience and his life was changed and he spent the rest of it spreading the gospel in the then known world. (Acts 9)

And that’s the question I want to put to you today, “Do you love Jesus? Have you accepted the truth that he died for your sins and now you live for him and he is the centre of life for you? From that faith you can live life in italics, that is with emphasis. Which means as a Christian with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Think again of his Name, his Aims, his Claims and his Fame. But most of all of his love for you and me.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I have lived my life, from the moment I became aware of all you did for me, seeking to make you central in every area of my existence. When I fail you, you lift me up and you help me move on. More than anything I want to love you and serve you and I continually need to learn to trust you. I too want to “live life in italics” – as a Christian. Amen