

## Three things Jesus acquired. Cheltenham. 20 November 2011.

My Bible text this morning comes from John 16 – verse 28 – the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father’, John 16. 28.

I want to speak to you about *three things* which the Lord Jesus acquired during His 33-year stay in the world ... three things which He took back with Him to heaven ... three things which He still has this morning ... and which He will never lose.

First, He acquired a **nature**. Although it is still five weeks to Christmas, the shops have been selling Christmas cards and other Christmas goods for some time. Sadly, it is all very commercialised now, and, in any case, Christmas is by no means the only time when Christians celebrate that momentous event –

- when the Son of God became the Son of man
- when the One who was immeasurably rich became abjectly poor
- when He – the Lord Jesus – exchanged the glory of heaven for the obscurity of Bethlehem
- when He exchanged the worship of countless seraphim for the visit of some unnamed shepherds
- when He exchanged the royal robe of heaven for swaddling clothes, and
- when He exchanged sitting on the throne of the Lord of hosts for lying in an animals' feeding trough.

Just think of that for a moment ... He gave up the throne of heaven! As you may know, Edward VIII reigned as King of England for less than eleven months, abdicating on 10 December 1936 to marry divorcee Mrs Wallis Simpson. [Not interested today in rights or wrongs ... or possible sympathy with Nazi Germany] I was interested to find that his published autobiography, entitled ‘*A King's Story*’, more or less closes with the words, ‘And so it came to pass that at 2 o'clock on the morning of December 12 1936, HMS Fury slid silently and unescorted out of Portsmouth harbour. Watching the shore of England recede, I was swept by many emotions. It had been hard to give up the throne ... . Of one thing I was certain : so far as I was concerned love had triumphed’. I do not doubt that ‘it had been hard’ for him ‘to give up the throne’. But I know Someone who, out of a *far* greater love, gave up a *far* grander throne!

In the breath-taking words of John back in chapter 1, ‘The Word (a tile of the Lord Jesus) was made flesh, and dwelt (literally ‘pitched His tent ... tabernacled’) among us’ – or, as one modern paraphrase renders it, ‘and moved into our neighbourhood’.<sup>1</sup> What an incredible stoop for the Son of God to take!

Oh yes, as I said, He exchanged the glory of heaven for the obscurity of Bethlehem ... He exchanged the worship of seraphim for the visit of shepherds ... He exchanged the throne of the Lord of hosts for an animals' feeding trough – but I want to make it clear that He did *not* exchange His nature as God for the nature of man! He simply *acquired* a nature He didn't have before, adding sinless human nature to His existing divine nature. Ever remaining God, He became a very real man. And He experienced hunger, thirst, fatigue and pain. He slept, He wept, He bled and He died. ‘*Now you seek to kill me*’, He said to the Jews, ‘*a man who told you the truth*’, John 8. 40. Indeed, I note that the very first Christian gospel message began, ‘Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you’.

We read in Acts 14 of what happened at Lystra – when Paul, with healing power given to him by God, healed a ‘man without strength in his feet ... being a cripple from his mother's womb’. When the man leapt up and walked, the local people lifted up their voices in excitement, crying out in the speech of Lycaonia, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker’.

In an ancient myth, two of the imaginary gods, Zeus and Hermes, came down to the neighbouring district of Phrygia for a brief time disguised as men.<sup>2</sup>

According to the legend, Zeus and Hermes sought lodging, but no one showed them hospitality except one old couple who welcomed them into their home. After some time, Zeus and Hermes revealed their true identity. “We are gods,” they said, “and this neighbourhood will receive just punishment for its impiety”, but the old couple were spared – and, indeed, greatly blessed.

The apostle Paul was quick to assure the men of Lystra that he and his companion Barnabas were not gods, but ordinary men.<sup>3</sup>

In this story, these so-called ‘gods’, for a short time, assumed the *outward* form of men. But in contrast to this myth, and in sober history, the Lord Jesus didn't take on the *outward* form of a man. He became a *real* man.

And the Lord Jesus still has the nature He acquired. For He didn't relinquish – didn't give up – His human nature when He ascended back to heaven and the Father any more than He relinquished – gave up – His nature as God when He came out from the Father and came into the world. Just before Stephen (the first Christian martyr of whom we know) was stoned to death several years after our Lord's ascension, he (Stephen) reported that he saw the heavens opened, and '*the Son of man standing at the right hand of God*', Acts 7. 56. And the Lord Jesus is *still* a man today. '*There is*', Paul wrote many years later, '*one God, and one mediator between God and men; the man Christ Jesus*', 1 Tim. 2. 5.<sup>4</sup>

But, along with His nature, He also acquired a **name** – to us Christians, the lovely name – of 'Jesus'. It is clear from Isaiah's vision of the heavenly temple/palace in chapter 6 of his book that – before the Lord Jesus *ever* entered the world as a man – He was known, for example, to the seraphim (their name indicating 'fiery/burning' heavenly beings) as the Lord of hosts. That title – as many others – had *always* been His, but 'Jesus' was a new name He acquired. Not that He was the first to carry the name 'Jesus' – not by a long way. We can trace it back at least as far as the successor of Moses, whose name was changed – by Moses himself – from Hoshe/ua (meaning 'salvation') to Joshua – the Hebrew form of Jesus – in Numbers 13. It was also the name of the *last* High Priest mentioned in the Old Testament. And it was a very common and popular name in New Testament days – scholars refer to over 100 other men of roughly that period with the name 'Jesus'.<sup>5</sup>

But He was called Jesus, not because of *the past associations* of the name, nor because of *its present popularity*, but because of *its special significance* for Him. According to the Bible, the angel Gabriel brought His name for Him from heaven. Some time before our Lord's birth, Gabriel informed Joseph about Mary, '*She shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins*'. So this name – meaning 'the Lord is salvation' or 'the Lord our salvation' – was His in an altogether unique sense.

And He was known to all as 'Jesus'.

The demons knew Him as such – for example, the unclean spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum in Mark 1 addressed Him, '*What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are – the holy One of God*', and the spirit known as 'legion', living among in the tombs of Gadara in Mark 5, addressed Him, '*What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God*'.

Angels also knew Him by the name; one angel, for example, saying to the women at our Lord's empty tomb, '*Fear not, for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified*', Matt. 28. 5.

But not only demons and angels knew Him by this name. So too, of course, did **men**. For example, as our Lord journeyed towards Jerusalem for the last time, blind Bartimaeus cried out, '*Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me*'. In his account of this event, Mark paints the background very graphically. As 'they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem', he records, 'Jesus went before them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid'.

'As He (the Lord Jesus) was leaving Jericho', Mark continues, 'Bartimaeus, a blind beggar ... began to cry out ..., "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ... many rebuked him, telling him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ... Jesus stood still,' Mark notes, 'and said, "Call him"'.<sup>6</sup>

Truly it was a remarkable moment when, according to the Old Testament book of Joshua, 'the sun stood still' over Gibeon in response to the prayer of Joshua.

You've probably heard of the young Sunday School scholar who, when asked to name one of the great miracles in the Bible, answered, 'When Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him'.<sup>6</sup>

But, yes, it was indeed a remarkable moment when the 'sun stood still' the cry of Joshua. Yet how much more wonderful when 'Jesus stood still' at the cry of a poor blind beggar! And this was the name on the placard above His head on the cross – '*Pilate wrote a title (a superscription), and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews*', John 19. 19.

I said that the angel Gabriel brought His name for Him from heaven; and he did – but the Lord Jesus took it back there Himself. And it is still His name today. At His ascension, angels spoke to His disciples of His return, '*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven*', Acts 1. 11. And when He met Saul of Tarsus, the risen, glorified Lord immediately identified Himself, '*I am Jesus*', Acts 9. 5. And some bombshell that was! And we cannot help noticing that the New Testament closes with the heart-felt prayer of the apostle John, '*Amen, come, Lord Jesus*', Rev. 22. 20.

We noted that His name 'the Lord is salvation' was given to Him because He came to save His people from their sins. And, in one sense, it was because of the very meaning of His name that He also acquired a **nail-print**. For He was crucified.

Just over 40 years ago, archaeologists discovered an ossuary (a box containing the bones of the dead) in a tomb on the north east of Jerusalem. The ossuary carried the name JE-HO-HANAN, and contained the bones of a young man in his twenties.<sup>7</sup> The ossuary and its contents have been dated by scholars to early in the first century.

And this particular set of bones was distinguished by the fact that the right heel bone was pierced by an iron nail some four to five inches in length. Jehohanan had been crucified. I have no way of knowing whether my Lord's feet were nailed separately to His cross with four to five inch nails – as Jehohanan's had been – or whether they were nailed together with a single eight or nine inch nail. But I do know that He said prophetically some 1,000 years before the event, 'They pierced my hands and my feet', Psa. 22. 16.<sup>8</sup>

And He still has the marks He acquired at the cross. When Luke and John record how, following His resurrection, He appeared to His disciples – both tell us – in the very same words – that He '*showed them his hands*'. According to John, the disciples told Thomas – who was absent at time, '*We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe. And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came and said, Peace to you! Then He said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands*'.<sup>9</sup>

According to the closing section of 1 Samuel 17, when young David emerged from the valley of Elah having slain Goliath of Gath, the Philistine champion, 'Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand'.<sup>10</sup> In his hands, David carried – and displayed – the proof that the battle was well and truly over – and would never need to be re-fought. And there, in the upper room, our Lord showed in His hands the evidence that His work on earth was finished – that salvation was complete.<sup>11</sup>

At home, we often sing the words of Horatius Bonar ...

We thank Thee for the blood, the blood of Christ, Thy Son:  
The blood by which our peace is made,  
Our victory is won:  
Great victory o'er hell, and sin, and woe,  
That needs no second fight, and leaves no second foe.<sup>12</sup>

And the nail-prints in His hands demonstrated to His disciples – and to us – that the work of salvation was completed ... that it truly 'needs no second fight, and leaves no second foe'.

The marks our Lord carries in His glorified body this morning are the only man-made things to be found anywhere in heaven.

And the Lord Jesus has acquired the nail-print for ever.

In the Old Testament book of Zechariah – chapter 13 – God predicts the day coming when He will cut off idols out of the land of Israel and false prophets will be executed by their own parents. God speaks of one, who, ashamed of his earlier message, and fearing punishment, will attempt to cover up his past. 'I am no prophet', he will protest, 'I am a farmer; a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth'. And if, the passage records, some sharp-eyed and suspicious person says, 'What are these wounds in your hands?', he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends', Zech. 13. 2-6 – possibly in a fight or when cutting some meat. To protect himself, he will strenuously deny that his wounds are self-inflicted scars – similar to those of the prophets of Ba'al in 1 Kings 18, who cut selves with knives in their frenzy when crying aloud to their non-existent god, 1 Kings 18. 28.

I am not interested this morning in Zechariah 13 or that young prophet. I am interested in the question he is asked, 'What are these wounds in your hands?'

The Bible speaks of the Lord Jesus as 'the Lamb' in the midst of the throne of God – standing (in vigour and life) though slain – bearing still the evidences of His sacrificial death. And if, in heaven, I should venture to ask Him, 'What are these wounds in your hands?', He might well reply, 'These are wounds I acquired during My 33-year visit to planet earth'. And if I should follow up with a second question, 'But why did you acquire them there?', He might well respond, 'I acquired my nail-print for the same reason I acquired my nature and my name – because I loved you – that much'.

And it is because He loved *that much* that today He is *acquiring something else* – a company of people for His very own – a company made up of sinful people, who, through faith in Him, have been saved – and who will – just as the nature, the name, and the nailprint – be *His* for ever. Do *you* have the assurance that you are included in that company?

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> John 1. 14.

<sup>2</sup> This legend is preserved in a Latin story-poem by Ovid (Metamorphoses, "The Story of Baucis and Philemon"). See <http://etext.virginia.edu/latin/ovid/trans/Metamorph8.htm#482327671> ... Bk VIII: lines 611-678. Paul's healing of the crippled man make the Lystrans think that he and Barnabas were the gods Zeus and Hermes once again come down in human form. And, if the people of ancient times failed to pay homage to the gods on their previous visit, the Lystrans are determined not to make the same mistake and incur their wrath again. Thus, the priest at the local temple arranges for a sacrifice to honour the presence of Paul and Barnabas. Luke says he "brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them".

<sup>3</sup> Acts 14. 11-13.

<sup>4</sup> For this reason, He is supremely qualified to be our great High Priest. 'We don't have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but has been tempted in every way/respect like us, apart from sin', Heb. 4.15. The One who has passed through the heavens to represent us in the presence of God is the very same One who first passed through experiences of severe temptation, testing and trial here on earth. And so it is that this evening He retains His ability to understand us and to sympathise with us in our trials and temptations – 'for in that he himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour (help) those who are being tempted', Heb. 2. 18.

<sup>5</sup> 'All of the names on these ossuaries were extremely common names among Jews in Palestine at this period. We have a great deal evidence about this (the data is collected in the enormously useful reference book: Tal Ilan, Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity, part 1 [Mohr-Siebeck, 2002], and also analysed in chapter 4 of my recent book Jesus and the Eyewitnesses [Eerdmans, 2006]). We have a data base of about 3000 named persons (2625 men, 328 women, excluding fictional characters). Of the 2625 men, the name Joseph (including Yose, the abbreviated form) was borne by 218 or 8.3%. (It is the second most popular Jewish male name, after Simon/Simeon.) The name Judah was borne by 164 or 6.2%. *The name Jesus was borne by 99 or 3.4%*. The name Matthew (in several forms) was borne by 62 or 2.4 %. Of the 328 named women (women's names were much less often recorded than men's), a staggering 70 or 21.4% were called Mary (Mariam, Maria, Mariame, Mariamme)', Joe Ziasjezias - [http://benwitherington.blogspot.com:80/2007/03/smoking-gun-tenth-talpiot-ossuary\\_9874.html](http://benwitherington.blogspot.com:80/2007/03/smoking-gun-tenth-talpiot-ossuary_9874.html).

'Kloner goes on to discuss the name Yeshua, or Jesus. He states that this name is "a derivative of Yehoshua (Joshua)...Yehoshua/Yeshua is the sixth most common name used during the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Eretz Israel, borne by 71 of the individuals studied by Ilan" (1996: 18a). Ilan later came up with a total of **104** names (2002: 126-133, 449)', Gordon Franz - <http://abr.christiananswers.net:80/articles/article.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.midrash.net/humor.html> - item 'o'.

<sup>7</sup> The discovery of a crucified man was made in the summer of 1968 by a team of archaeologists led by Vassilios Tzaferis in cave-tombs at Giv'at ha-Mivtar, north of Jerusalem. Scholars reckon that Jehohanan had died around AD 7. Olive wood fragments were found between the large nail head and the bone, which show that a wooden plaque of wood was added to make it harder for him to pull his leg free from the cross.

Despite the earlier assertion that both legs were affixed by one nail, the nail is only 11.5 centimeters in length; thus making it anatomically impossible to affix two feet with one nail. In the case of Jehohanan, it is clear that his hands had been tied – and not nailed – to his cross. But we know that it was often the practice of the Romans to nail those crucified. For example, during the revolt of the Jews against the Romans in 66-73 AD Josephus mentions that in the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD) 'the soldiers out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses', Wars of the Jews, Book 5, Chapter 11, Paragraph 1.

That no other example of actual nails have been found can easily be explained. For nails of a victim crucified were among some of the most powerful medical amulets in antiquity and thus removed from the victim following their death. This is attested to by the Mishnaic passage (Shabbath 6.10) which states that both Jews and Amorites (colloquium for non-Jews) may carry a nail from a crucifixion, a tooth from a jackal and an egg from a locust as a means of healing. For the Jews, this was even, according to some Rabbis, permitted on Shabbath when Jews were normally forbidden to carry objects. As this Mishnaic passage mentions both Jews and non-Jews carrying these objects one can infer the power of these amulets and their scarcity in the archaeological record. Not only do Jewish sources attest to the power of these objects but Plinius in *Natural History* (28:4) wrote that a nail from a crucifixion wrapped in wool and hung from the neck cures fever while a wood chip from the cross is a talisman for the modern intelligent woman.

[<http://www.joezias.com/CrucifixionAntiquity.html> ... see too <http://www.centuryone.org/crucifixion2.html>]

<sup>8</sup> As the carpenter of Nazareth, Jesus had been no stranger to driving nails. Many times He had swung the mallet and pounded nails hard into wood. And I cannot help wondering – when He took the mallet in His hands – if He thought of the day when Roman soldiers would take a mallet to smash 7-8 inch nails into some splintered wooden beam – through His own hands.

<sup>9</sup> David emerged from the valley of Elah – 'As David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand', 1 Sam 17. In his hands was the proof that the battle was all over.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Sam 17. 57.

<sup>11</sup> 'His own wounds in heaven declare His work on earth is done', J. G. Deck – from 'The veil is rent—lo, Jesus stands'.

<sup>12</sup> From the hymn, 'No blood, no altar now'.