

We're smack in the heart of a series on marketing, and, in this episode, we're talking about *brand*. According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers." Oh, so a *name* is the first signifier on the branding list? How about the *name of Jesus* for the most powerful brand ever?

Hey, in business, working your brand is essential! And I tell university students and business executives alike that they have a *personal* brand, for better or for worse. Brand is important, it's key. That's because people make important decisions in their lives based on brands. And they make everyday decisions that way, too. What brand of watch to wear, a sparkling Rolex or a connected Apple watch? What car to drive, a weathered Prius or a glittering Mercedes? Even those people who sincerely detest all that kind of image-calibration have their own carefully cultivated brand—*indeed, as a sign of their independence from a status-seeking culture, they refuse to wear or display logos!* That's right, non-identification is *itself* a brand!

In your mind's eye, picture numerous high-level meetings taking place over the past several decades, meetings chock full of decision-makers looking at the challenging branding issues they are facing currently and also looking at an unsettling future marketing landscape for their organization. (Hey, think cassette tape-makers in a streaming world.) Now here's the question. In these types of meetings, how many times do you think the words *Jesus* and *brand* have been used in the same sentence? Are you kidding, you might say, why would the words *Jesus* and *brand* be in the same sentence in a strategy session for marketing?

Well, I can assure you, exactly that has happened countless times! Unfortunately, a huge number of times that it's happened is when our Lord's name is taken in vain—used as a swear word—when talking about an organization's difficulties in achieving a strong and durable brand. But the *other* reality is that the name of Jesus and His sacrifice on the Cross *has been positioned as a more effective brand than any other marketing enterprise in world history!* Oh, you think the Coca-Cola name has effective market penetration worldwide? Or you think McDonald's yellow arches are instantly recognizable everywhere? Those are strong choices! But the truth is, the most powerful name in the world is Jesus! And the most powerful symbol is the Cross, instantly recognizable by billions worldwide—a symbol bought by the blood of Jesus!

But what does the name of Jesus *actually* mean when it comes to branding? Even during the time of Jesus, people were confused, often contradicting one another, about who Jesus was, what His unique service offering was—you know, what Jesus's "brand" was! Confusion? Yeah. Here's Matthew 16:13-17 (ESV).

"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"

Very powerful and very clear, right? Here Jesus Himself informs us that His Father in heaven revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. That's the Christ...the Messiah...the Savior! You can't get any higher brand, any better brand than that, right off the bat! Then the sweat and sacrifice of countless serious Christians the past couple thousand years—not to mention the blood of martyrs—helped spread the brand of Jesus Christ worldwide. But, wait a minute, just what specific brand is that?

The very name "Jesus" means *Yahweh saves*...of course, that's "God saves"...and that's the reality undergirding the *true* brand of Jesus. A previous Whitestone episode about marketing spoke of "Capital D Differentiation." There we asserted that nothing less than Christ and Him crucified can satisfy the Father's demand for justice as well as justify the salvation of sinners worldwide at the same time. Luke recorded this powerful sentence in the book of Acts, and it's applicable to Jews and Gentiles alike...

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) And John wrote this in his gospel (3:16-17), "For God so loved the world,

that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” So, God’s overriding purpose of the incarnation of His Son is really foundational—*yes, that the world might be saved through Jesus.*

Now that’s a mighty brand, an exclusive brand, an eternal brand...and it’s every person’s privilege to respond with a simple faith response to God’s grace through Christ’s sacrifice. *But something’s apparently gone wrong over many centuries.* You see, Jesus’s name is *not* copyrighted, His name is *not* trademarked, His name is *not* reserved for the use of just those who read and apply the Word of God accurately. So...

Given the power of Jesus’s name, it’s not surprising that many cults claim the name of Jesus—just like consumer counterfeiters make fake Nike shoes or fake Rolex watches that lack the quality and ability to perform. Here’s the game plan for religious cultists: they take the approach of putting *their* rules, *their* processes and especially *themselves* right between their victims and the real Jesus. Some of these cults are extremely well-known and entrenched worldwide...and in fact claim more accuracy than the Word of God itself—by their *adding to* the Word, *subtracting from* the Word, and *distorting* the Word. But they claim the name of Jesus because of the power of the name above all names, that name of Jesus.

Likewise, over the centuries, some individual churches and even entire denominations have taken much the same path—they deliberately place *their* rules, *their* processes, *their* interpretations, and especially *themselves* in firm control between their congregants and the real Jesus, becoming false mediators between each individual and Jesus. But Christ alone is the only mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2). And the careful Christian’s “great High Priest” is Jesus! (Hebrews 4:14). The false mediators’ tactics include mixing Jesus and tradition—and, like cults, often adding to and subtracting from the Word of God.

But it’s even broader than that. For centuries, the religious posture of millions has been to craft a *plainly limited brand*: like Jesus the Good Teacher, Jesus the Great Example, or Jesus the Wise Ethicist—true but lacking the power of the Risen Christ. Indeed, God’s eternal salvation is *not* built on such limited realities.

And even trusted Christian elites often don’t really agree on “who Jesus is.” In 1906, the famous Christian medical doctor and theologian Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote a famous book titled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. In it, Dr. Sweitzer essentially built a case that dozens of very well-known Christian thinkers and theologians preceding him crafted their own *limited* culturally-based interpretations of “who Jesus is.” But was Sweitzer correct in his own beliefs? Not so sure! But the real question is this: *are you and I?*

We just heard from Scripture that Jesus Himself asks that very core question of His disciples. And as we just heard, He got these answers: “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” And Jesus then said to his disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Then Peter, as revealed by the Father to him, said Jesus was the Christ, that confirmed by Paul and John in very direct fashion: *Jesus saves, and He came to do so for the whole world!* That’s the essence of His very name, and that’s core to His eternal purpose. That’s a totally unique brand that we can represent with confidence!

So, are we faithful marketers of the true brand of Jesus? Here’s a sort of last word about *Jesus and brand* (Romans 10:9-16a ESV): “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?...” So. We believers have both privilege and purpose: proclaiming the salvific power of Christ and Him crucified! That’s the very most powerful, reliable brand in history and it’s an awesome brand to advocate simply and clearly to all! *Jesus. Our brand to represent. Humbling.*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Are you highly spiritually aware of the somewhat bewildering buffet of cults and churches and denominations and theologians that are deficient in the area of representing the fullest, most accurate brand of Jesus? Without sarcastic rancor or spiritual condemnation, list a couple from each category with your supportable evidence. Be specific. If you are unable to do that for an inquiring family member or coworker or fellow believer, why not?
  
2. Think about your local neighborhood and city. Are you a highly effective steward of Jesus's brand? Do you believe Jesus for who He said He was? If so, do you proclaim Him as He commands? When was the last time you were an identifiable "brand ambassador" to someone who wasn't aware of the Gospel? Be specific.
  
3. Think back on the global nature of the Great Commission. Does your prayer life, thought life, and bank account align with proclaiming Jesus's brand outside of your local community? How proactive are you in being a part of God's global branding campaign? Give examples.