

JESUS IDENTIFIED

John 1:29-36, 40-51

Most of us carry with us some form of identification that is “proof” of who we are. In many cases this ID is a driver’s license that has our picture and our name along with some physical descriptions and a unique number that references a data base on a computer. This “official” ID doesn’t really tell us a lot about the person other than his or her name and some sketchy physical attributes. In a less “official” sense we have numerous ways in which we are identified by others and, in many cases, these names and titles give some insight into who we are as individuals and such things as our interest, our character, our ability, and even our position in the culture or society in which we live. Sometimes these titles or identifiers are related to our jobs, our interests or hobbies, and positions of responsibility we might have. We use these descriptors to try to make sense of all the various aspects of what we know (or think we know) about a person. If I tell you that a particular person is a salesman who is a husband, a father, a grandfather, a Christian, a deacon, and a gardener, we form a preconceived idea about this person based on stereotypes. The labels we put on people can communicate a lot about them.

As we examine John’s Gospel we will find many names and descriptors applied to Jesus. Elmer Towns (Dean of the School of Religion at Liberty Baptist University) has written a book that identifies more than 700 names of Jesus found throughout the Scriptures. We find a few of these names or titles in the early part of John’s Gospel. Each one of these can give us some insight into the nature and character of Jesus. For example, in the prologue (first 18 verses) of John’s account we see Jesus identified as the Word which was related to His being the Agent of Creation or the Creator. We also saw that He is the Light of men and the Source of Life and these titles and descriptors tell us a lot of Who He is and opens up our understanding of God. In the latter part of this first chapter, additional titles were used by John the Baptist and some of the early disciples that give us additional insight as to what these various descriptor mean to us. These names or titles are the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Son of God, the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit, Rabbi, the King of Israel, and the Son of Man. What are some of the truths communicated in such identifiers?

I Can Be Forgiven – 1:29-36

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” ³⁰“This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’” ³¹“I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” ³²John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.” ³³“I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’” ³⁴“I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.” ³⁵Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” John 1:29-36 (NASB95)

John was led to know that the time for the earthly ministry of Jesus was to begin. John had seen Jesus before. They were cousins and about the same age. Now, at this particular time, John made an announcement that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Apparently, this particular situation occurred after Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness which happened immediately after Jesus had been baptized of John. During that baptism John saw the Spirit of God descending and resting upon Jesus. This was the “sign” that God had told John to watch for. The person to whom this happened would be the promised Messiah of Israel.

John the Baptist said “I did not recognize Him.” The interpretation of this is that though John and Jesus grew up together and their mothers knew each other, John did not know who

Jesus really was. He knew Him as the carpenter's son and as his cousin; however, now He knew him as the fulfillment of many significant Old Testament promises as the Lamb of God. John saw in Jesus the purpose of his own calling in life. He was to point people to Jesus as the solution to the most significant need of all humanity and that is how to be forgiven and restored to a right relationship to God.

This title "Lamb of God" was a link to several Old Testament references in which lambs were used as sacrificial animals in worship (God related) events. The first instance is possibly (not sure) the provision of a leather (animal skin) covering that God provided for Adam and Eve following their sin. The Genesis account does not specify that the animal was a lamb so this may be a stretch. The next instance is in the incident of Abraham and Isaac when God tested Abraham regarding sacrificing his son. On the way to the place of the sacrifice, Isaac asked the significant question, "where is the lamb?" Abraham's gave an amazing reply that "God will provide Himself a lamb." That may be the first subtle reference in Scriptures to the incarnation. As it turns out, the "lamb" that God provided to take Isaac's place was a fully grown ram. The Hebrew word for "ram" comes from a root word that means "mighty and strong." The implication, as applied to the sacrifice that Jesus made, was that He was mighty and strong but willing submitted to the will of the Father.

The most obvious connection of the title Lamb of God could be to the Passover and God's prescription for protecting the Israelites from the judgment of death to the "first born" that was going to come upon Egypt. In a spiritual sense, Egypt represents the world system that has people enslaved because of sin and these people are subject to the "law of sin and death." Notice that John did not say the "sins" of the world but used the singular term "the sin" of the world. How are we to interpret this distinction? The singular use of the word "sin" can refer to the general condition of mankind that resulted from "the fall" which all descendant of Adam and Eve inherited. Because Adam and Eve obeyed Satan, they became the servant or slave of the one they obeyed. All the descendants of slaves are born into slavery and have no way of delivering themselves from their condition because slaves have no rights. The plural term (sins) is related to the commission of prohibited behaviors.

The sacrifice of the Passover lamb was not a sacrifice for sins but was related to their deliverance from their slavery. This is obviously what Jesus' death on the Cross did for us in that His death provided the means by which we are redeemed and rescued from slavery since He paid the price or penalty for sin. We can also note that in the work of the Cross, Christ became our substitute in the same way that the "ram" became the substitute for Isaac. The connection of the "Lamb of God" to the annual Day of Atonement ritual is questionable since the sins (plural) were laid upon a goat in that observance. There is at least one other situation involving an ongoing sacrifice of lambs and that was in the twice daily (morning and evening) sacrificial offering of a yearling lamb. This occurred each day at 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. In the Gospel of Mark, we can see how this was fulfilled in Jesus. Mark 15:25 tells us that Jesus was crucified at 9:00 a.m. This was at the same moment that the morning lamb was being slaughtered. Mark continues in 15:34 and tells us that Jesus died at 3:00 p.m. This, of course, is the time of the evening sacrifice when the second lamb was being sacrificed.

Verses 35 and 36 should remind us that we can be witnesses of what God has done in our lives and we can relate those things to the Biblical teachings of Jesus and be someone who points others to Jesus even as John the Baptist did. We can find opportunities to share with others what living for Jesus is all about and the requirements that God has for every person. The Good News is that through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and by the debt that Jesus paid at

Calvary, we can be forgiven and measure up to God's expectations.

I Can Trust God's Promises – 1:40-42

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John *speak* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which translated means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). John 1:40-42 (NASB95)

The two young men who were with John the Baptist took a step of faith and started to follow Jesus. All of us who follow Jesus start out following Him somewhat far away. When He sees us following, He asks us the same question he asked these two in verse 37: "What are you looking for?" In other words, why are we following Jesus? Is it because it is the socially correct thing to do where we live? Is it because we are trying to impress someone we know who is a serious Christian? Is it because we think this is the ultimate fire insurance? Is it because we realize that He is the Creator and that He has a claim on our lives?

The two young men didn't have a ready "pat" answer to the question, but responded with a question of their own: "Where are you staying?" In other words, they wanted to sit down and have a serious talk with Jesus.

Andrew was one of the two men who met with Jesus that day. The other one was probably John the author of the Gospel of John. Sometimes Christians are referred to as Christ followers. Andrew and John literally did follow Jesus and that resulted in them spending meaningful time with Him. The natural outcome of such an encounter is to want to share the Good News with those whom we care about. Andrew was convinced Jesus was the promised Messiah and he could not wait to share the news with his brother Simon. He then brought his brother to meet Jesus. The lesson that we should not miss is that as we tell others about Jesus, we should follow through and bring them to Jesus. We are not told whether Simon was introduced to Jesus or if Jesus told him his name without an introduction. That would have been impressive to Simon. Jesus then pointed out a characteristic of Simon by nicknaming him Peter (a stone). The renaming of Simon by Jesus has meaning for us in that when a person comes to Jesus he is given a new nature – old things are past away, behold all things are new.

I Can Rely on God's Word – 1:43-46

⁴³ The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." John 1:43-46 (NASB95)

In addition to the promise of the Messiah coming to His people, Moses and the other prophets recorded in the Old Testament many references to a person who would come into the world and be the fulfillment of what the rituals and ceremonies pointed to. From the very beginning of God's dealing with man, He has been in the process of revealing Himself to us so that we can know Him. The people in Israel who were students of prophecy knew the time was right for the coming of the Messiah. From Daniel's prophecy they would know that after 69 "weeks" from the time of the order to rebuild the temple that the Messiah would appear. The weeks were understood to be seven year periods. So 69 times 7 was 483 years. Artaxerxes gave the order to rebuild the temple in 457 BC and 483 years later would put the time around AD 27 - the time of the baptism and start of the public ministry of Jesus. So people were looking for the Messiah because it was time for Him to come.

Philip did not use the term Messiah as Andrew did but used the more general reference

(the one written about). Not everyone agreed that all such references (such as the suffering servant) pointed to the Messiah but were references to the nation of Israel. In our 20-20 hindsight we can clearly see that these reference pointed to Jesus. The fact that Philip had such insight shows a familiarity to the Old Testament and that God was already working in his life so that he was ready to respond to the call that Jesus issue to “follow Me.”

Nathanael was probably familiar with the scriptures regarding the Messiah and that familiarity may account for his remark regarding Nazareth. The prophecies did not indicate that the Messiah would come out of Nazareth but Bethlehem. But Nathanael had no way to know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and had later moved to Nazareth. This apparent discrepancy in the town from which the Messiah was to come did not stop Nathanael from checking into the matter.

I Can See God Working – 1:47-51

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.” ⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹ And He said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” John 1:47-51 (NASB95)

As Nathanael walked up to Jesus, he heard Jesus describing the kind of person Nathanael saw himself to be. He was an open and honest person who said what he meant. His response to Jesus was “How do know about me?” I guess this is a lesson that all of us need to realize: Jesus knows all about us and we cannot fool Him. We may have everyone else fooled but Jesus knows the kind of person we really are. Not only did Jesus know the kind of person that Nathanael was, He knew about the things Nathanael had been doing. “I saw you under the fig tree,” Jesus told him. How could an ordinary person know such things about him? Nathanael was convinced and made his declaration of belief in Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel.

Jesus promised Nathanael that he would see far greater things. He would see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon Jesus Himself. Jesus did open the way into Heaven. He Himself is the Way to the Father. By His death He became the opening for us to enter eternal life and to enter into the presence of God. The reference to angels ascending and descending goes back to the vision of the ladder between heaven and earth that Jacob had at Bethel. Jesus is that ladder that links heaven and earth and the messages of God to man and the prayers of man to God are made possible because of that link.

We need to be as Andrew and Philip and bring others to Jesus when we discover the satisfaction He brings to our lives. There is a whole world of people who need to know that they can be forgiven, and someone needs to help them see that forgiveness is found in trusting in and relying upon the promises of God found in His word regarding Jesus. When we place our faith in Him, then we begin to see how God is at work in all the world to bring about His plan of salvation.