

## **The Search for Jesus' Real Identity**

In a church like ours, where children's security is a high priority, a 4-year-old boy somehow showed up with no identification sticker. The teacher got a first name out of him, but not a last. So, she asked, "Brian, what's your daddy's name?" He said, "Daddy." She tried again, "Brian, what's your mommy's name?" "Mommy." Suddenly, she had a bright idea about how to get what she needed. She asked, "Brian, what does your daddy call your mommy?" With a deep 4-year-old voice he said, "Hey, Babe." <sup>i</sup>

The second half of the first chapter of the gospel of John begins with the story of John the Baptist being interrogated about his identity. In verse 19 it says:

**...the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.**

John dodges the issue, denying that he is the Christ, Elijah or Moses even though later, Jesus Himself will reveal that this John is a "type" of Elijah who fulfilled the prophecy that before the Messiah would come, Elijah would come first (Matt. 17:11-13). So, why would John the Baptist make this big denial?

John never, ever wanted to upstage Jesus. He knew that his purpose in life was to point people to Jesus. He made this plain when he said:

**"The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less."** (John 3:29, 30)

Whom do you know who has the humility of John the Baptist?

In today's Scripture, John the Apostle shows us John the Baptist and three others who know who Jesus is and each one uses a unique name or title to introduce Jesus to a friend. As we study these four names, we need to notice as well the key role that listening plays in each person's choosing of that name to introduce Jesus. So, let's begin. The first name is...

### **I. Lamb of God, Name of Sacrifice**

In verse 29, John the Baptist sees Jesus coming and says:

**..."Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** (Jn. 1:29)

At this point, who's listening to John? Well, according to verse 28, it appears that this is in Bethany on the east side of the Jordan River where he had been baptizing people. So, that means that it wasn't only disciples of John but also the priests and Levites who came to question him from Jerusalem.

Now, to us, the term "Lamb of God" is not shocking. We hear it all the time as a reference to Jesus. But to this audience it was completely strange. They fully understood lambs being connected to sacrifice. Every Passover, every Jewish family sacrificed a lamb. At the temple, two lambs a day were sacrificed as part of worship. But for a lamb to be connected to a person? That's crazy talk! They'd never heard that done before. And John doesn't say it once, but twice!

So, what exactly is John doing? First, he's using a common form to help his audience understand an uncommon concept. They understood that a lamb was used by Abraham as a substitute offering for his son Isaac. They understood that the Law required that, for unintentional sin to be forgiven, a lamb needed to be sacrificed. But a lamb as a person?

Warren Wiersbe writes:

In one sense, the message of the Bible can be summed up in this title. The question of the Old Testament is, "Where is the lamb?" (Gen. 22:7). In the [New Testament] the emphasis is "Behold the Lamb of God!" Those lambs [in the Old Testament] were brought by people to people, but here is God's lamb, given by God to humankind! <sup>ii</sup>

John knew his audience. He knew their beliefs. He fashioned a new concept from an old one. How could he be so clever? He wasn't. Listen:

**"I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."** (John 1:33, 34)

Listening is our second step in BLESSING people. As you listen to people, God will reveal ways in which you can help them understand who He is, using concepts with which they are already familiar. We need to listen first and speak later. The second name of Jesus used here is...

## **II. Messiah, Name of Hope**

At this point in history, if anyone needed hope it was the people of Israel. They had been under the rule of Rome for almost one hundred years and under Greek rule for about a hundred years before that. The concept of a politically and militarily strong Messiah seemed really good to most Israelites, from priests all the way down to fishermen.

Now, two of John the Baptist's disciples were John (the writer of this gospel) and Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. After John the Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God," John and Andrew started following Jesus. They spent a whole day with Him and then they both went off, found their brothers, and told them about Jesus. Andrew said to Peter: (John 1:41b, 42a)

**... "We have found the Messiah." ... And he brought him to Jesus.**

Peter gets a lot of print in the New Testament, doesn't he? We feel like we know Peter. He's often the first to speak, the first to act, the first to try something new. Remember in grade school, when the teacher would ask a question and one kid was always the first to raise his hand, even if he didn't know the answer? Remember that kid? That's Peter!

But we know next to nothing about Andrew. Andrew is one of the first two disciples to follow Jesus. The other, John, becomes part of Jesus' inner circle; Peter, James and John. What about Andrew? But we never hear Andrew complain. I don't believe in the concept of patron saints, but if I did, I'd name Andrew the Patron Saint of all those who play second fiddle, the hardest instrument in the orchestra to play.

And when we do see Andrew, what is he doing? There are only three incidents, three views of Andrew in the New Testament. This is one, where he's bringing his brother to Jesus. The second is in John 6 where it is Andrew who brings

a boy with five loaves and two fish to Jesus. The third is in John 12, where he brings a group of Greeks to Jesus. Do you see the pattern? Andrew was a bringer.

We have no record of a single sermon preached by Andrew. But if Andrew hadn't brought his brother to Jesus, who would have preached like Peter at Pentecost where 3,000 became Christians in one day? We have no record of a single miracle performed by Andrew. But if Andrew hadn't brought the boy with the fish to Jesus, how would 10,000 people have been fed that day? We have no record of Andrew going on a single missionary journey, but before Jesus even sent Paul to the Gentiles, Andrew was bringing Greeks to Jesus who, while they were there, heard God the Father speak from heaven. Do you think when they got home, they might have told a few friends about that?

Some of you listening to my voice today are "Peters." You're gifted, natural leaders. Some of you are that. But many of you are "Andrews." You don't preach or do miracles or go on mission trips. But you do pray and you listen and you serve and you bring people to Jesus. The Church of Christ needs thousands of Andrews because Andrew brought hopeless people to the only one who could give them hope! The third name for Jesus we find here is...

### **III. King, Name of Authority**

Beginning in verse 43, there is an extended story about Jesus, Philip and Nathanael. Jesus decides to go up north, back home, to Galilee. He meets Philip and says, "Follow me." Philip is from the north, like Peter, Andrew, James and John. Philip pulls an "Andrew" and finds a friend named Nathanael and tells him:

**..."We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth..."** (John 1:45)

Nathanael replies:

**"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" ...** (John 1:46)

Does anyone have a Nathanael as one of your Focus on Five? They're not really searching for Jesus and if truth be told, they're actually rather anti-Jesus. You've talked with them about Jesus and argued and offered them books to read or websites to visit and they just aren't interested. In fact, they offer you books and websites that criticize Jesus! What do you about a person like Nathanael?

You do what Philip did. Invite them to Jesus. Philip said to Nathanael, "*Come and see.*" (v. 46c) You turn them over in prayer to Jesus and let Jesus deal with them.

Richard Burr, whom you've heard me talk about as a mentor to me personally and to this church corporately in the area of prayer, had two sons. They were young when he became a Christian and both confessed to follow Christ as children. But as Jeffrey got into high school, he began to turn away. After college he announced that he was gay and he wanted nothing to do with his father's religion. Richard said his first inclination was to go after his son, pursue him relentlessly to rescue him from this deception. But in talking with a friend who also had a prodigal son, he received other advice.

It seems that this other father did exactly that; he drove across the country to try to persuade his son how much he loved him, believing that love would win over sin. But the opposite happened. His forced presence only drove his son further away.

This friend then told Richard that he studied the biblical story of the prodigal and he said, "I noticed that the father never went out after the son. He went to the edge of the property, looked out to the horizon and presumably prayed; but he never went into the pigsty!" He told Richard to follow that father's example.

Philip introduced Nathanael to Jesus and then backed away. The conversation quickly moved from Philip and Nathanael to Nathanael and Jesus. Eventually, after Nathanael saw the supernatural reality of Jesus, he confessed:

**..."Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." (John 1:49)**

Richard Burr saw Jesus do the same with his son. One day, he received a call from Jeffrey after many years of refusing to even speak with his dad. He was in a hospital in Denver, dying of AIDS. He asked his father to come. They had not seen each other in over fifteen years, but Richard had been praying daily prayers like this:

*Father... as you have been magnanimous in extending Your mercy and grace to me, I now ask, Oh gracious Redeemer, that through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, You would extend Your mercy and grace to my son, Jeffrey. Forgive him for what he has done. Create in him a spirit of repentance with a cleansed heart. Lord Jesus, could that day be today? It is in your most powerful name that I pray. Amen.*

When Richard walked into Jeffrey's hospital room at 11:50 p.m., Jeff greeted his dad by saying, "Dad, I'm so sorry... I love you, I love you." Can you imagine the joy in Richard's heart? After a brief conversation about his condition, it was revealed that death was imminent, within a few weeks. Richard asked his son if he was ready to meet his Creator face to face. Jeffrey said, "No, I'm not. Will you help me, Dad?"

After 15 years of silence, father and son had the most blessed three-way conversation any father and son can have as Richard helped Jeffrey repent of his sins and receive the forgiveness of His heavenly Father. Richard says, at that moment, his thoughts rushed to Ps. 126:5:

**Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.** <sup>iii</sup>

This was most certainly true.

Jesus is not just the King of Israel but of all mankind. Release your skeptical friends in prayer to His authority and watch what your loving King will do.

The fourth and final name in this chapter is spoken by Jesus Himself...

#### **IV. Son of Man, Name of the Future**

In response to Nathanael's expression of faith in Jesus by calling Him both the Son of God and the King of Israel, Jesus says:

**..."You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that. ...I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:50, 51)**

This thing about the angels ascending and descending is a reference to Jacob's dream where he saw angels doing exactly that. But what Jesus is saying is that Nathanael will see the angels ascending and descending on Him – the Son of Man! In other words, he will see that Jesus is the bridge between heaven and earth.

Do you remember where we first came across this title "Son of Man"? It was in our study of Daniel. In Daniel 7:13 and 14, Daniel says:

**“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”**

Daniel is seeing a vision of the Messiah and Jesus is claiming that He is the “Son of Man” of this vision. This is Jesus’ favorite name for Himself, using it 83 times in the Gospels. Why would He choose this title as His favorite? Because this title accurately describes who He really is, what His powers really are and what role He will play in the future world which will never end. He has “authority, glory and sovereign power” that He will use for the good of all people of every nation and language. Though His Kingdom in this world may seem weak or limited or even heading for disintegration and defeat, it is not!

- Though ISIS is beheading Syrian Christians and burning churches, they will NEVER destroy the Kingdom of Jesus.
- Though European parliaments may pass laws making it illegal to try to convert others to Christianity, they will NEVER stop the growth of the Kingdom of Jesus.
- Though our own Supreme Court may pass more and more laws that directly contradict the Law of God, they will NEVER overpower the Spirit’s ability to lead people to the truth.

How do I know this? I know this because John has reminded us today that the name of Jesus is a name of Sacrifice, Hope, Authority AND a name that guarantees our future - a future that will outlive ISIS, the European Union and the United States Supreme Court. *“His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”* Are you a citizen of the kingdom of the Son of Man? Your answer to that question is the most important answer you will ever give in your life. Let’s pray...

---

<sup>i</sup> Today’s Christian Woman, “Heart to Heart” 7/01/1996

<sup>ii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Alive (John 1-12)* (eBook, page 9 of part 9)

<sup>iii</sup> This story of Richard and Jeffrey Burr is from the book, *Praying Your Prodigal Home* (Camp Hill: Wing Spread Publishers, 2003)