

Titles that We Bear

Giving titles to people is important. A title will indicate what a person does and their status within society. Some titles are complimentary while others can be something less than flattering. Some titles have a certain amount of respect attached to them regardless of who holds that title. In sports, titles or nicknames can identify the athlete. "Mr. October," "The Sultan of Swat," "The Comeback Kid," "the Greatest," and "the Homerun King" are all titles given to sports figures. These titles indicate the main accomplishments of that athlete. If the title is known well enough, the person's name doesn't even have to be said, people will know who the person is. Titles of movies can sometimes evoke the whole storyline without saying anything else. "Gone With the Wind," "The Wizard of Oz," and "Jaws" are just a few examples where just hearing the title we recall the whole movie. Titles of books and movies can create a certain expectation of what is to be expected. Sometimes, a person may have more than one title, wear more than one hat. Titles such as spouse, parent, child can be used for an individual at the same time and each title will say something about the person. Another example would be a person could be a supervisor in the company where they work, they can also be a neighbor to those who live next-door to them and they could be a part-time handyman who fixes things for others. It's not that one of those titles cancels all the other titles but adds a little more to who the person is.

At other times, the title can be confusing especially if it is contrary to other titles or descriptions. Titles can also be confusing if they evoke different images for different people. This is how it is with the titles of Jesus. Not only does Jesus have several titles but these titles had different meanings attached to them. The title "Lamb of God" is one such title. For different groups of people in the first century, this title meant different things. How people imagined the Lamb of God depended

upon how they thought the Messiah would come to them. Most of these images involved a victorious lamb who defeats God's enemies and drives away sin. The Book of Revelation uses this image of Jesus as the Lamb as well as the image of the slain lamb. Another image that would come to mind is that of the sacrificial lamb similar to the Passover lamb which John uses often in his Gospel account. This image of Jesus being the lamb of God would evoke images of a deliverer. While it would be natural for the Jewish people to connect the lamb of God with the delivery out of slavery in Egypt, the deliverance from slavery that Jesus gives is much different. The slavery that He was delivering the people from was the bondage to sin, not delivery from a physical slavery to another group of people. Also, the delivery of Jesus was for all people, not just a certain group of people. Other images in terms of sacrifice would come to mind for the Jewish people. This would include the image of Isaac, the beloved son of Abraham. This signifies that with Jesus, a new "nation" is being brought forth similar to the promise made to Abraham of many descendants.

Another image that would come to mind for the people of the first century, that would be consistent with their view of Biblical history, is related to astrology. Many of the cultures at that time looked to the stars as signs from God. We do see signs of that in the Bible where it talks of the heavens and the stars. The people would have known the significance of the constellation Aries, the ram, the male lamb being the divine lamb who was the ruler of the other constellations and the starting point from which all other constellations were mapped. Therefore, John's followers who had a knowledge of astrology and heard John the Baptist say "Here is the Lamb of God," could have made the connection between Jesus and the constellation Aries and would be willing to follow a person who is declared to be a strong leader of the world.

Knowing this background is interesting in understanding why Andrew and the others would follow Jesus so willingly and, later in the Gospels, why John the Baptist would seem so disappointed when Jesus did not fulfill the expectations of the powerful warrior type Messiah. But what does this title "Lamb of God" mean for us in the 21st century? Being more of an urban based society rather than an agrarian society, many of the historical, Biblically-based images do not hold the same meaning as they originally did. However, we still can find this title meaningful for us. When we look at this title "Lamb of God," the first thing we notice is the possessive phrase "of God." This tells us whose Lamb we are talking about. The Lamb is sent by God and belongs to God. Instead of thinking of a Lamb as being meek, we could see the Lamb as being obedient to its owner. Looking at it this way, we see that Jesus is someone who is sent by God and is obedient to God.

Having this updated, more urban understanding of the title "Lamb of God" gives us instruction of how we should live today. We should be obedient as Jesus was obedient to God's Will. To do that we should try to live as Jesus taught us to live, in service to others. But living a Christian life is more than just serving others. It is also working to change the world so that there is no one subjected to any kind of oppression or injustice. We can work to change business philosophies that exploit cheap labor in poorer parts of the world or merely sees labor as part of the cost of manufacturing that they can reduce rather than as people working to make a living. We could stop participating in the stock market trying to make as much as we can as quickly as possible. Instead of protesting against abortion, we could help develop viable alternatives. We can teach our young people that there are consequences to our actions and to take responsibility for their own actions. Instead of showing how we disagree with someone by shouting how ignorant they are or calling them other derogatory names, we could listen to what they have to say and work toward a solution

that addresses all areas of concern. We can change the world by first admitting that we are not the center of the universe and are right about everything and that someone else may have a good idea, no matter how different they are from us. As we change ourselves and our immediate world around us, in small ways, there will be a ripple effect and large changes will be able to be seen. If we doubt this, we can look at the early church and see where it was when Jesus died and the influence it had on the world just thirty years later. It had spread to Rome by then and was well established in the world. With God on our side, can our efforts have any less significant results?

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: https://youtu.be/jW78Vln_8Rg

Service: <https://youtu.be/JfKH6R-Y1Ac>