

WHO IS HE?

In a few weeks we'll celebrate again the birth of Jesus. The question we all must face is "Who is He?" This child born to Mary ... found by wise men, worshipped by angels ... *Who is he?* The answer is found in three key revelations in the Bible ... focussed on the greatest issues of his life. Who is he? He is the one ...

1. Rejected on the cross
2. Risen from the dead
3. Revealed in glory

1. Rejected on the cross

As soon as Isaiah predicted the Virgin Birth he quickly moves us from the crib to the cross. The years of Christ's childhood and youth are covered in a blur ... "*He grew up before him like a tender shoot*" (Isaiah 53:2). Then Isaiah focuses entirely on the achievements of Jesus at Calvary ...

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering ... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed ... the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v 3-6). Both the Old and the New Testaments give us many descriptions of the man on that cross. Here are a few reminders ...

In Isaiah's words "*He was led like a lamb to the slaughter ... he was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of God's people to whom the stroke was due*". This is a long way from Bethlehem ... yet Jesus said that is exactly why he was born ... "*For judgement I came into this world*" (John 9:39). He was born for judgement. Bethlehem was the gateway to Calvary. We can only understand Bethlehem from the cross.

Who is he? He is the one promised in Eden, the seed of the woman who crushes the serpent's head. He is the mighty King who conquers the 'god' of this world (Satan). One man saw this very clearly and was completely changed by it ... he was crucified next to Jesus: "*Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom!*" (Luke 23:42). He recognized Jesus as far more than an innocent suffering man ... he saw Jesus as the only hope for sinful

mankind. He saw the serpent's head being crushed right there and then! And the seed of the woman delivered him ... *"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise."*

Who is he? He is the stronger man who enters the strong man's house, removes the weapons he relied on, plunders his possessions and sets his slaves free! (Luke 11:21-22).

Who is he? He is the substitute for sinners, the innocent taking the place of the guilty! He is the scapegoat who carries all their sins away into the wilderness. He is the sacrificial lamb with no fault or blemish, shedding his blood for offenders. He is the great High Priest succeeding where all other priests failed, making atonement once and for all for the sins of his congregation. That is precisely why he was born ...

"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17). All these truths answer our question ... who is he?

2. Risen from the dead

One fact that can never be left out if you would truly honour Christ ... he has conquered death! *"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel!"* (2 Tim 2:8). They put him in a tomb but it could not hold him! *Up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o'er his foes!* Not only is Jesus resurrected to life ... he is the very essence and definition of life ... *"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me shall live even if he dies."* (John 11:25).

Remember how even the mere rumor that Jesus might come out of the tomb disturbed the Roman authorities so much that they stationed a hand-picked guard of elite centurions at the entrance ... to ensure no-one could steal the body and then claim Christ had risen from the dead? They were paid handsomely by the chief priests to spread that exact lie ...

"You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep'" (Matthew 28:13). What a monumental piece of human stupidity! *We were asleep ... so we disqualify ourselves as witnesses!*

We have no idea what happened ... but for the sake of money we'll tell you lies! We were afraid the disciples might tell lies, so we'll solve that with bigger lies!

And do you remember how, at first, none of Jesus' disciples believed his resurrection either? But one by one they all changed as he met with them ... he walked and talked and ate with them. Do you remember how it absolutely rocked Thomas? He demanded 'hands-on' proof ... and when Jesus graciously provided it, inviting him to touch his death wounds, it was no longer necessary. Thomas was already overwhelmed by seeing the empirical evidence. He fell at Jesus' feet convinced not only of his resurrection but also of his deity. He didn't merely acknowledge Jesus as 'my risen master'. He worshipped Jesus as "*my Lord and my God*" (John 20:28).

And remember how Saul of Tarsus was literally knocked off his high-horse on the Damascus road when the risen Jesus appeared to him in blinding light? As a result the persecutor became the apostle. So keep this picture in mind as we honor Christ.

3. Revealed in glory

We have just acknowledged two very major issues about Jesus ... rejected on the cross and risen from the dead. But the ultimate picture is grander still and is built upon them. The best witness of this big picture is the Apostle John. He was an eye witness to both the death and resurrection of Jesus. He stood at the foot of the cross and raced early in the morning to the empty tomb. His New Testament writings (gospel and three letters) major on these two great things ... Christ crucified and resurrected. But in his last book John reveals this third great Messianic truth.

He sees Jesus revealed in glory. It is no longer "*veiled in flesh the Godhead see*" but *magnified in flesh the Godhead see!* Gone are all the emblems of humiliation. Jesus has the name that is above every name. He is exalted far above every power and principality and dominion. He is the Lord of the universe. The sight is so intimidating that even Christ's closest disciple fell down terrified.

“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.” (Rev 1:14-16). We are not meant to strain each detail ... it is the aggregate ‘big-picture’ that communicates what God wants us to know.

You cannot avoid this awesome character. Here in Jesus is the Most High God, the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity. His thunderous voice leaves mortals speechless. The whole universe answers to him. He outshines the sun. This is certainly not someone to be falsely accused or hated and spat upon. This is not someone to mock and deny and crown with thorns. This is not someone you can safely ignore.

Who is he? I think Revelation 1:17-18 sums it up beautifully. *“I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”*

I urge you to see Jesus as he is. You’ll need to look beyond the nativity scene (though we are truly thankful for the incarnation of deity in the Virgin Birth).

Commit yourself to Emmanuel:

Rejected on the cross ... risen from the dead ... and revealed in glory.

To him be all praise!