

WHO WAS, WHO IS, WHO IS TO COME

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Why do we worship Jesus the way we do? What is it that makes Him so special?

Is it His teachings? They are arguably the most articulate, succinct expressions of godly wisdom and knowledge, but there have been many eloquent teachers of spiritualities.

Perhaps it is His miracles. He did many more than were recorded, yet those alone are remarkable for their compassion and power. But other miracles have been recorded in various parts of the world.

We respect Jesus Christ for His teachings and His miracles and we thank Him for all that He has done for us, but we worship Him because He is more than a man — He is God, come to us in human form. Some do not believe that He is God; they draw the line at “godly” or “godlike.” But the Bible is clear on this point: Jesus is God. Even those who knew Him best worshiped Him as God.

Let’s see if we will be inspired again by the Word of the Living God today, and find our worship voice increasing, with confidence and joy.

Is, Was, Is to Come

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come (Revelation 1:4; ESV).

So begins the final book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. A few verses later (1:8), Jesus Himself appears to speak with John and identifies Himself in this way: *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

Then, a door is opened in Heaven and John is carried through by the Spirit, where he is given a view of the breathtaking throne of God. Around the throne, on each side, are four living creatures. *“And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”* (Revelation 4:8; ESV).

This unique description of the Son of God reveals a great mystery: He was, He still is, and He is yet to come. Using human, time-bound language, the Holy Spirit is describing the fact that the Son of God is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting.

This means more than “He once lived, He lives again, and He shall return,” although that alone would be amazing. It is more like “He always was, He always is, and He shall always be.” He is eternal!

Terms of Time

We can only think of eternity in temporal terms of past, present, and future, for that is all we know. But God has *“set eternity in the hearts of men”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11; ESV). Therefore, though we cannot adequately describe it, we can recognize eternity and we can possess eternal life.

And eternal life is not simply life-as-we-know-it in unending quantity. If you stop and think about it, that might not be such a thrilling prospect, for the life we know is full of heartache and trouble.

No, eternal life is life of another quality. Part of that quality is timelessness — not the mere stretching of time to immeasurable dimensions, but altogether outside of time — unbound and unlimited. Eternity has neither past nor future, but is unceasingly present tense. God has said, *“I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done”* (Isaiah 46:9-10; ESV).

Our future is present with God, as is our past. That is how Jesus could offer one sacrifice for all time, both past and future, effectively delivering faithful David, king of ancient Israel, and also your great-grandson, who has not yet been conceived. Though His was the offering *“slain from the foundation of the world”* (Revelation 13:8; NKJV), that offering was not actually made until the *“fullness of time”* arrived (Galatians 4:4). God is outside of time, yet He created time for us and His works appear within the framework of time.

Another part of the quality of eternal life is that it is life as God has it. That is a life of wholeness, of fullness, a life without limits — the heavenly life. It is the life that Jesus exhibited when He was here on earth.

John wrote: *“We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us.”* (1 John 1:1-2; NLT)

Therefore, Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10). He, who is Life, brought eternal life to us!

Life Eternal

John 3 (NLT)

¹⁴ *So the Son of Man must be lifted up,* ¹⁵ *so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

¹⁶ *For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

John 3:36 (JNT)

Whoever trusts in the Son has eternal life. But whoever disobeys the Son will not see that life but remains subject to God’s wrath.

John 6:47 (NLT)

I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life.

John 17:3 (NLT)

And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.

When does eternal life begin? To be eternal, by definition, it must have already “begun,” for eternity has no beginning. That is to say that the eternal life already exists. Though we sometimes speak of “receiving” eternal life, it is perhaps more like entering into it, like stepping into a stream.

But do we step into the life eternal only after we die? The use of the present tense (*has* and *have*) indicates that it is something we must gain during our lifetime. When Jesus spoke of being *“born from above,”* He was referring to that moment when we step into the life eternal.

When you wholeheartedly repented of your sins and turned to Christ for forgiveness and salvation, in that moment a new life began in you — a new quality of life, the life eternal. God's life came into you and began to swallow your mortal, godless life.

Does Jesus Christ live in you? Does the Holy Spirit dwell in you? Then you *now* have eternal life. The God-life you have begun to experience will never cease. But the mortal life you have known before has not yet ended. One overlays the other. One, by its very nature, is declining, while the other — the life eternal — is becoming more vigorous as you walk in faith.

Worlds in Collision

As a result, you and I are living in two worlds at once! The one we see and feel, and the other we cannot see, yet we believe and receive. *"For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:18). These two worlds co-exist, yet their structures and their arrangements are very different. How do we manage both? Initially, with confusion and uncertainty and conflict; in other words, not very well.

Matthew 26:41 (ESV)

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Romans 8 (ESV)

⁵ *Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* ⁶ *For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

Galatians 5 (ESV)

¹⁶ *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* ¹⁷ *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

There is a battle going on inside of you, because the two worlds are colliding. You want to follow Christ and trust Him to order your steps, but you are in the habit of following your flesh and ordering your own steps, according to your feelings and reason.

Understand this: you cannot reason yourself into the life eternal (the Kingdom-of-God-life). You can only walk in it by faith; that is, by actively trusting Christ to lead you. *"Without faith, it is impossible to please God"* (Hebrews 11:6). This is not about denying reason or checking your brain at the door. However, trusting Jesus will require you to reason from God's eternal perspective, not from a temporal, human perspective.

To develop this kind of reasoning, you must admit the eternal things that God's word declares and describes, even though you cannot see them by natural means. His word is truth; you can trust it. Let it fill in the blanks — the gaps of natural understanding — for you. Let it reveal the unseen world in which you also live and move — the world of angels and demons, principalities and powers. Let it reveal the life eternal that is seeking to break into our dying world — the life of freedom and wholeness. Let it teach you God's ways of overcoming evil and multiplying good.

In Between

We walk in the great "in between." We walk in between this world and the next. We walk in between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of Light. We are God's emissaries in this world, representing His

kingdom-life. We are also God's conduits, bringing His Kingdom to bear upon this crumbling world. This is the power of intercessory prayer. We call God's Kingdom and Life into this world, applying it like salve to the wounds and brokenness of this faltering world. This world is broken; God's Kingdom is whole. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "*Your Kingdom come! As in heaven, so on earth*" (Matthew 6:10; WUEST). We are to invite divine transaction.

This "in-betweenness" also impacts our own lives. While we believe in wholeness, we experience various kinds of brokenness. While we hope for justice, we experience injustices. While we pray for love to prevail, we must endure much meanness and indifference.

We even falter over our own spiritual condition. Who has not lamented their own spiritual sluggishness? Who has not pined for greater closeness to Jesus? Greater sensitivity to the Holy Spirit? A keener ear for God's voice? Who has not longed for more implicit trust and instant obedience?

King Jesus was, and is, and is to come. Our situation is similar: we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. We once were solely in the flesh (apart from Christ); we now are in the Spirit, yet also in the flesh; we shall be eventually in His likeness, spirit, soul, and body.

Have Been

⁸ *For it is by grace you **have been saved**, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9; NIV).

Plainly, this describes a past-tense event. This was your new birth, your first salvation experience, when you first transferred your trust from yourself to Jesus Christ. It had some very positive effects, which are also part of your past: God forgave your sins and made your spirit alive, reconnecting you with Himself.

Your sins, though they were many, have been forgiven. You are no longer counted guilty for your misdeeds. Your record has been expunged, because Jesus took the blame for you. He paid the debt for your guilt. He Himself chose to take your punishment, so that you could go free. Because of Him, your sentence for sin has been cancelled.

Your spirit was dead, but God brought it to life. A resurrection took place in your heart! God began a good work in you, which He has promised to complete.

However, in that very promise is the indication that it is not yet complete. God is not finished with you yet!

Will Be

We look forward to the return of Jesus Christ, not simply to rule the nations of the earth for a thousand years, but to transform our mortal bodies!

1 Corinthians 15 (NLT)

⁵⁰ *What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.*

⁵¹ *But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!* ⁵² *It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.* ⁵³ *For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.*

On that day, an instantaneous miracle will take place, and each of us will experience it! We will be changed. Our bodies will become like Jesus' glorious body, full of life, health, strength, and vigor. Even if you've lost a limb or borne a chronic illness — all that will be ended in a split-second.

On top of that, we will be fully and finally delivered from the presence of sin. Our guilt has already been removed, but in that day the source of our temptations will also be removed. We will enter God's Kingdom in its fullness, where righteousness and peace will reign forever. Oh, what a day that will be! Faith will be turned to sight, as all God's promises are fulfilled.

Matthew 10:22 (NLT)

*Everyone who endures to the end **will be saved**.* (See also Matthew 24:13.) We will be saved. This is the future-tense application of our salvation.

Are Being

In between these two events stretches the course of our lives — between *have been saved* and *will be saved*. But this is neither an intermission nor a vacation. The planting is done and the harvest is yet to come; this is the time of tending the garden — watering, feeding, fertilizing, pest-removal, thinning, and weeding.

Theologically, this period is called sanctification, which means being *set apart for or devoted to* God. It is the very necessary process of learning to live with and for Jesus. We also call it discipleship, for it includes instruction and discipline. This is the time when Jesus' likeness is being formed in you.

If you think you've got your ticket to ride and your certificate of fire insurance and you can just coast on God's favor for the entire trip, you are headed for a rude awakening. Jesus intends to be thoroughly involved in your life now, just as He was at your new birth, and as He will be when you meet Him in the air. If you're not thoroughly involved with Him, you won't make it to the end, no matter how self-assured you feel right now. Life can change drastically in a flash. Are you prepared?

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NLT)

*The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who **are being saved** know it is the very power of God.*

It is the message (and application) of the cross that sanctifies us, day by day. Jesus told us to take up our cross every day and follow Him. Without this, our flesh is sure to rise up again and trouble us. We are learning to surrender to His will and obey His voice — this is our discipleship. This is what will get us to the end of the road.

God has prepared opportunities for you to do good (Ephesians 2:10 — bringing the Kingdom of God into your world). The devil has prepared challenges and roadblocks to threaten your passage. This is an uphill climb; you cannot coast into the Kingdom. Jesus said, "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation*" (Mark 14:38). He also promised, "*Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it*" (John 14:13).

He promised to never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5), and to be with you always (Matthew 28:20). He is a closer friend than a brother; He is intent on seeing you through. The plan is His and the power is His; all He needs from you is your trusting obedience. Can you give that to the One who gave His all for you? The One who was, who is, and who is to come?