



02. THE WORD

EXERPT FROM 'DIFFERENT' - CHAPTER 2

THE JESUS WHO IS AND EVER SHALL BE

You see, we cannot just think about Jesus in the past tense because he is not dead. We have to be different in seeing not just all of who he was, but who he currently is and who he has promised he will be.

This kind of Christology will produce a new kind of disciple, making up revolutionary churches. In his prologue to his revelation, John describes the Jesus he encounters as "Him who is, who was, and who is to come... the firstborn from among the dead."

We tend to think of people in history a certain way. We refer to them in the past tense because that is where they lived and where they belong in any sane retelling of the events that included them. We hold them there, as we should, in the past, in the time and space where they lived. Jesus in that sense is not a historical figure.

John is saying that Jesus was, yes, a person in history. But he is saying he is also a contemporary and futuristic figure as well. We simply have no corresponding category that can help us to comprehend him except of course for our notion of God. The first thing John does in his expansive Christology is establish Jesus as Lord over not just us, his churches and the kings of the earth, but over time itself. He is from the past, he is here now in our present, and he is coming to reign over the future.

The Jesus we know from the gospels; the Nazarene, who comes as a child, who fasts in the desert, who heals, whose identity was a secret, who lived among the poor, who had virtually no

earthly power showed us how to be strong when we are weak and how to be great when we are small. His story ends when he lets us kill him to show us the meaning and strength of real love.

That Jesus was mocked and said nothing. That Jesus fulfilled the promise of Isaiah that "like a sheep before its shearers he did not say a word." He was beaten, tortured, falsely accused, and he endured it all for love.

But that same Jesus did not just die, he also rose. He was dead, but he came back from that death different. And like a caterpillar changes in its chrysalis, he changed in the tomb. The Lamb of God, the Prince of Peace, became violent. He took death and the devil by the throat, and he demanded his life back. And not just his own life. But mine and yours, too.

He said, "Give me Brian's life. Give me Mike's life.
I am the maker of heaven and earth.
I am the first and the last.
I am the one who was and is and is to come.
I am the Lord of heaven and earth.
I am life itself, and the Lord of both space and time.
Give me that life back."

And hell screamed as its grip was broken, and as it gave up the dead. And he rescued those whom he had chosen since before the foundations of the world were laid.

And the angels sang, and the earth shook from the sheer force of it. But what no human being saw that day was the world splitting open and the grave giving up its contraband, as the author of life burst forth with a book of names in his hands.

And the gospel record says that he appeared to his followers. But he was different. He was glorified, and so they worshiped him. And he let them until his ascension to the Father's side. All of that is just describing the Jesus who was. We are right to worship him. But to see Jesus for who he really is we must also learn to know and love and worship

the Jesus who is now (the glorified savior) and the Jesus who will be (the conquering king).

THE HEIGHTS OF WORSHIP

A full Christology should take the breath away and keep the heart full. It will fill our heads with wonder and give our hands work to do. It is this kind of wide-eyed theology that will keep our heads in the clouds and our feet on the ground, making us a different kind of church for a watching world.

My (Brian) youngest daughter, Eve, has a Quaker

Parrot. She calls him Charlie. He's a beautiful green bird that talks, loves no one so much as Eve, and who unfortunately cannot fly. This bird had its wings clipped; a procedure that I understand is common and possibly even necessary in order to keep a bird like Charlie. But there are few things sadder than watching a bird with clipped wings try to fly.

On the rare occasion that Charlie gets out of his cage, he always tries to fly away. I find this odd. Since he was a baby he has not been able to successfully fly. Charlie has never known any reality other than a flightless one. Yet still he stubbornly, perhaps instinctively, tries to fly. In his experience, birds are lousy at flying, and you would think he would give up on it. I find him to be a sad but resilient reflection of modern Christianity.

God made us to fly. Somewhere deep inside us, when we reflect on God, read his word, find him in the secret place of prayer, we know it. But somehow our wings have been cut. We listen to lifeless sermons, watch unimpressive lives, and we have never really experienced what it is like to soar on the wind, light but powerful. But still we try to know him, to seek him, as we squint at the inadequate portraits of

Jesus we see painted. We were made to worship. But we have never felt the virtue of a full wingspan, of a whole Christology, we have never known anything but the cage of our cultural Jesus, locked in time.

To see him for all that he is releases us to worship him. In a way we instinctively know we should. To behold the fullness of Jesus is to fly. And to fly with him is to experience the greatest wholeness and life a person can know.

Christians that are awestruck by the mystery and wonder of Jesus are tangibly holy, different in the way that matters most.

(if you enjoyed this excerpt, consider purchasing the book and read the entire chapter)