

Conclusion

John and Ezekiel saw visions. In the spirit, they had a preview of the perfected body of Christ. They saw in a picture God's plan and blueprint for a glorious future reality. God, who sees the end from the beginning, sees it already complete. They were privileged to see through his eyes.

Jesus saw with eyes of faith what his disciples were going to become. He could say to them, 'You are the light of the world,' when they were just taking the first steps of their spiritual journey, and still full of the many failings we no doubt see in ourselves. Jesus believed in them and spoke in faith of what they were going to be, and already were in the sight of God.

We do not yet see the completed body of Christ. We see a building still under construction, largely hidden by scaffolding. We see mud, rubble and debris all over the building site. We can look at our own failures, sins and inadequacies and feel we can never be the light of the world, the bread of life, the way, the truth and the life. But that is not what God does. He sees the completed and perfected building. He looks at us, as Jesus looked at his disciples, and sees what we are going to be. In faith Jesus says to us, 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mat 5:48). And we press forward for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.

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the light of the world. If he is the way, the truth and the life, then we also are the way, the truth and the life.

May God make these things a glorious reality in us!

Before Abraham was I am

Lastly we will consider these words that so infuriated the Jews. Jesus existed before Abraham was on the earth, and no one who in any way believes in him doubts this.

Did we also exist before Abraham came to earth? More and more people these days believe that we did.

What say the scriptures?

The book of Ecclesiastes makes a clear pronouncement: ‘the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it’ (Ecc 12: 7). The word return cannot mean anything other than to go back to where you have come from.

Other familiar Bible passages have strong implications on this subject.

Paul describing the state of the unbeliever wrote, ‘God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions’ (Eph 2: 5). John uses similar language: ‘We know that we have passed from death to life’ (1 John 3: 14). Unbelievers, according to both Paul and John, are in a state of death. The word dead, according if you look in a dictionary, means no longer alive. In other words, you have to be alive first before you can be dead. You know whenever you see a dead animal or bird or plant that it was previously alive. The scriptural teaching that the natural man is in a state of death implies that he had previously been alive in some other state.

Paul also wrote, ‘He chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him’ (Eph 1: 4). Were we chosen before we existed? It’s possible, but it certainly makes better sense if we already existed before the foundation of the world at the time when we were chosen. This scripture also suggests an existence before we came into this world.

This life then is a brief stopover in time between two eternities.

I have written more on this subject in a separate article entitled *Pre-existence*.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated.

Death, likewise, can come at any time through factors completely outside our control. Both these great events are totally in the hands of God.

Physical life is a picture of spiritual life. Spiritual life is union with God. Spiritual death is separation from him. Jesus said, **‘This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’** (John 17: 3).

Spiritual birth is the beginning of spiritual life. From then all spiritual activity becomes possible. We can eat and drink and walk and talk in the spirit. We can pray and worship God.

Jesus gives us this spiritual life. He not only gives this life, but he himself **is** the life. When we receive him, we receive life .

He said to his disciples, **‘He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me’** (Mat 10: 40). We are in Him, and He is in us. That means that anyone who receives us is thereby receiving him. When they receive him, they receive life.

The spirit of Christ both in Jesus and in us is this spiritual life.

The True Vine

Jesus said, **‘I am the vine; you are the branches’** (John 15: 5). This was the last great **‘I am’** statement that he made. He spoke these words in the middle of his long discourse the night before he died. The central theme of that discourse was the great differences that would come to the disciples when they received the Holy Spirit.

Of all the trees in the land of Israel that Jesus could have chosen, he selected the vine. He could easily have said, “I am the palm tree; you are the branches.” The vine and the palm tree both bear fruit, but their appearances are very different. A palm tree has a long clearly defined trunk and branches that are almost leaves. Its branches are completely different from its trunk. A vine is made up entirely of branches and has no clearly defined trunk at all. In other words, the vine **is** its branches.

We could easily think that the palm tree would have been a better picture of Jesus and his followers. The long, strong trunk would represent him, and the cluster of large leaves at the top would be his followers.

That however is not the picture he chose to represent himself and us. He chose the vine, the one plant that is made up entirely of branches. We are totally identified with him. He is the vine, and we are also the vine. We are in him, and a part of him.

The vine perfectly illustrates what Jesus said, **‘Remain in me, and I in you’** (John 15: 4). We have no separate identity from him. If we are in him, and he is in us, then whatever he is we are. If he is the Son of God, we also are sons of God. If he is the bread of life, then we also are the bread of life. If he is the light of the world, then we also are

Introduction

The prophet Ezekiel and John in the book of Revelation both saw visions of four living beings. Each saw a lion, an ox, a man and a flying eagle. By the amazing supernatural design of God, these four beings corresponded in order to the four gospels of the New Testament. Matthew’s biography of Jesus views him as a king, which corresponds to the lion. Mark sees him as a servant, which is the nature of the ox. Luke views Jesus as a man. John sees him as Son of God, represented by the eagle flying in the heavens.

Jesus has the two extreme opposite roles of king and servant. He also combines the irreconcilably different natures of man and Son of God. Irreconcilably different, that is, to the minds of all who came before him, and the great majority of those who have lived since his time, and even of those who have claimed to be his followers.

That Jesus should be both king and servant, as well as both man and Son of God is a staggering revelation to the natural mind. Amazingly, however, there is a further, yet more surprising revelation hidden in the visions of the four living beings. Not only is Jesus king and servant, man and God; his followers also are called to these same privileges. They too are to become kings and servants, men and partakers of his divine nature.

I have written in more detail on this subject in a separate article entitled *The Four Living Beings*. This writing is a sequel to *The Four Living Beings* and will be clearer to those who have already read what I wrote there. This article focuses and expands on the fourth living being, the flying eagle. The flying eagle depicts Jesus the head, together with the members of his body, as God.

The Divine Name

Moses stood before the burning bush and asked God the question, **“What is your name?”** In answer God spoke the words, **‘I am who I am’**. From the Hebrew word for I am (אֶהְיֶה - ehyeh) came the name Yahweh. Basically then, Yahweh means I am.

To the Jewish people, past and present, I am is part of the divine name and was and is utterly sacred. The third commandment says, ‘Do not take the name of Yahweh, your God empty, for Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes his name empty.’ Jewish people will not even pronounce the name for fear of breaking this commandment. When reading the scriptures aloud, they replace it with *Adonai* meaning *Lord* or *h-shem* meaning *the name*.

Did Jesus follow this tradition? The answer is emphatically, “No.” In John’s gospel, which is the basis of this study, we find the words I am coming from the lips of

Jesus no less than 21 times. Interestingly, 21 is the gematria (numeric value) of **יהוה**, (ehyeh), and is a multiple of 3 and 7, both of which numbers are associated with God.

Of course we use the words *I am* in normal speech all the time. Anyone can say “I am hungry” or “I am David” without implying that he is God! We must look more closely at the way Jesus used the words.

Sometimes he used the words *I am* to make incredible statements about himself, such as ‘**I am the light of the world**’ or ‘**I am the way, the truth and the life.**’ We will look at these claims individually later. Sometimes he used the words *I am* on their own. In John 8: 24 he said to the Jews, ‘**if you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins.**’ Later in the discussion in verse 58 he said, ‘**before Abraham was born, I am!**’ What was their reaction? ‘**They picked up stones to throw at Him.**’ To them he was claiming to be God. He was in clear breach of the third commandment, and the penalty for this in the Law of Moses was death by stoning.

Soon after this event the Jews again attempted to stone Jesus. The reason was the same as before. He had just said, ‘**I and the Father are one**’. The Jews made their reasoning very clear. “**We are not stoning you for any of these (good works),” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a man, are making yourself God.”**”

We can see how Jesus regarded himself. He knew his own identity. He knew he was one with the Father. We must now ask how he regarded his followers.

As we read what he said to and about his disciples, we find that he continually placed them on the same level as himself. He said, ‘**I and the Father are one**’ (John 10: 30). Soon after he prayed for his disciples that, ‘**they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me**’ (John 17: 21).

The Divine Family

Jesus regarded God as his father. What about his followers? Was God also their father? He taught them to pray, “**Our Father**”. He said: ‘**Go to my brothers (and sisters) and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’** (John 20: 17).

Jesus was the Son of God. At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on him, in the form of a dove, and God spoke the words, ‘**This is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased**’ (Mat 3: 17). We are probably too familiar with these words to have considered their implications. Never throughout Old Testament history had any human being described himself, or been described as a Son of God. This was something totally new and revolutionary.

When Jesus said, “**I am the way (road)**”, this is the imagery that would have come to the mind of his hearers. He was of course not speaking of the way to his Father’s earthly house, but to his heavenly house.

That journey also starts in the low familiar plains of our natural experiences. It also is long and arduous. It too ascends through unfamiliar hills and valleys and finally reaches our Father’s house.

Jesus himself is the way for us; and we in him and he in us become the way for others.

The Truth

Pilate asked the question, ‘**What is truth?**’ Jesus gave him no answer. Some ancients believed this was because the answer was hidden in the question. They searched and found that if you re-arranged the letters of the question ‘**Quid est veritas?**’ (in Latin, the language in which Pilate would have asked the question), you got the answer, ‘**Est vir qui adest**’ meaning ‘It is the man who is present.’ The story may be questionable, but its conclusion is spot on. Truth personified stood before Pilate. If he could not recognise truth standing in person before him, what words could Jesus speak that would enlighten him? Every word that Jesus spoke was true. However, truth is more than words. Everything that Jesus did was truth. Every action, every gesture, and every look upon his face expressed the truth. He *spoke* the truth, he *lived* the truth and he *was* the truth – just as he *spoke* the word of God, he *lived* the word of God and he *was* the word of God. The spirit that was in Jesus was the spirit of truth.

The same spirit that was in Jesus is also in his body. Its members also will speak the truth, act the truth and be the truth. They will be a walking gospel and visible demonstration of God to the remainder of mankind. Just as Jesus is the truth, we also are becoming the truth.

The Life

Twice Jesus said he was / is the Life. ‘**I am the resurrection, and the life**’ (John 11: 25) and ‘**I am the way, the truth, and the life**’ (John 14: 6). How can we understand this spiritual mystery? What is life?

Physical life is a state of union between the spirit, soul and body. At death this union ends. Living people can engage in every kind of activity of body and of mind. They can eat, drink, sleep, walk and run. They can speak, think, laugh and cry. At death, all such activity ceases. The soul and spirit leave the body, which soon begins to disintegrate, until in due course all its identity is lost. We can control neither its beginning nor its end .

Strangely we have little or no control over the two most important events of our lives. Birth can result from an impulsive, unpremeditated act between two young people.

Jesus spoke these words to Martha when her brother Lazarus lay dead in the tomb. They could have only one meaning for her – the physical resurrection of her dead brother. As of course we know, that was about to happen. Lazarus came back from physical death into physical life. Not many days after, Jesus himself appeared to do the same thing. However, there were two big differences. Unlike Lazarus, Jesus did not remain physically on this earth after his resurrection. Neither did he die again.

The resurrection of Lazarus fulfilled the words that Jesus spoke, but only in a natural way. It was a visible demonstration and manifestation in the natural of the greater and more important spiritual resurrection.

Death means separation. Physical death is separation from the body. Spiritual death is separation from God. In Adam, all die the spiritual death of separation from God. In Christ, all will be made alive in spiritual union with God. Jesus does not offer immortality in a physical body. Rather he gives restored and unending union with God. This is resurrection and life.

Jesus is our resurrection and our life, and the spirit of resurrection and life lives in us.

The Way, the Truth and the Life

Jesus said: **‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’** (John 14: 6). How could anyone say so much in one short sentence? Behind each of these three words lies a wealth of imagery that points to and illustrates great spiritual reality.

The Way (or the Road)

These days, most countries have hundreds and thousands of roads connecting every town and village to all its neighbours, and even connecting each individual house to the road network. In ancient times, things were different. For the people of Galilee there was just one important road. It went south to Jerusalem. Every active male that was able trod that road three times a year. According to the scriptures: **‘Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose’** (Deut 16: 16). God later chose Jerusalem to be that place. The disciples must have walked that road many times in their lives, and they had recently just walked it for the final time with Jesus himself. For the people of Israel, it was the road that led to the holy city and the house of God. This journey meant leaving the familiar surroundings of one’s home town or village; temporarily leaving one’s normal occupation, and spending up to one week on the road before reaching the all-important destination. For the disciples, this journey began in the low-lying plains of Galilee, and ascended up through the Judean hills to Jerusalem.

Was this sonship reserved for Jesus, or was it also for his followers? At the beginning of John’s gospel we find the words: **‘to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’** (John 1: 12). Paul was even more explicit: **‘Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father” ’** (Gal 4: 6).

So the words of Jesus are plain. God is our father. We are his children. Jesus is our elder brother. We are all one family.

According to scripture and to common observation, every creature and every plant produces offspring after its own kind. Genesis chapter 1 states this rather obvious truth no less than 5 times! The great sea monsters and every living creature that moves after their kind ... every winged bird after its kind ... let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds. When God proclaimed that Jesus was his son, he was saying that he had produced offspring after his own kind. Jesus had the same nature and attributes as God himself. Jesus was and is the Son of God.

God was not content with just one son! He wants many offspring after his own kind. He wants more sons and daughters who will inherit his nature and attributes. His original purpose, stated at the beginning of Genesis was to have a family. **‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,’** He said (Gen 1: 26).

I Am

As we have seen, John’s gospel records the incredible **‘I am’** statements that Jesus made about himself.

I am the bread of life (6:35), I am the light of the world (8:12), I am the good shepherd (10:11), I am the door (10:7), I am the resurrection (11:25), I am the way, the truth and the life (14:6), I am the true vine (15:1).

As we are transformed to be like him, can we also make those same statements? Can we say that we are the bread of life, the light of the world, good shepherds, doors, resurrection, the way, the truth and the life?

Jesus emphasised that he **‘did nothing of himself’**. The Father who lived in him did everything. **‘Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work’** (John 14: 10). He went on to make the astonishing promise to his disciples that he and the Father would live in them also. **‘If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him’** (John 14:23).

The same spirit that was in Jesus is in us, his people. That spirit, living in Jesus, was the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the door, the resurrection,

the way, the truth and the life. That same spirit, living in us, is also the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the door, the resurrection, the way, the truth and the life.

The Bread of Life

Jesus made the first great I am statement at Capernaum (which means the village of the Comforter). He said, **'I am the Bread of Life'** (John 6: 48). Jesus is the Bread of Life. Are we also, or can we also be the Bread of Life?

Jesus spoke of bread again at the last supper. **'He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me"'** (Luke 22: 19). He said that the bread was his body. What did he mean by his body? His physical body was given for us throughout his life on earth and most specifically when he laid down his life on the cross of Calvary. The spiritual body of Christ is his people. Paul said this to the Corinthians, **'you are the body of Christ'** (1 Cor 12: 27); and to the Colossians **'his body, which is the church'** (1: 24); and in similar words to the Romans and the Ephesians. He also associated the bread with the body when he wrote: **'Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body'** (1 Cor 10: 17).

So Jesus is the bread; the bread is his body; his body is his people. He is given for his people, and his people are given for the world. His people are the bread of life for the starved and hungry multitudes of the human race. They, with Jesus their head, are the food for which the world is hungry. Only the whole body of Christ, the head and the members, can satisfy its needs.

Bread is made of many grains of wheat, which have been fused together by baking. Jesus spoke of himself as a grain of wheat. **'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies'** he said, **'it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit'** (John 12:24). Those many grains of wheat are his body.

Jesus is the bread of life to us; and we - that is to say he in us - become the bread of life for others.

The Light of the World

Jesus said, **'I am the light of the world'** (John 8: 12), but he also said plainly to his disciples **'You are the light of the world'** (Mat 5: 14). He did not say this to them after he had risen from the dead and imparted the Holy Spirit to them, or even when he had finished teaching them on earth. Right at the beginning of his time with them he told them they were the light of the world. His eye of faith could look past their many weaknesses and failings, and see the perfect, finished product.

He also looks at us in faith and says, **'You are the light of the world.'**

Without Jesus the state of this world, and everyone in it, is darkness. He and his body together are the light that shines, enlightens, and will enlighten the whole creation.

We receive and follow Jesus, the light of the world; and we ourselves become the light of the world.

The Door

At the beginning of John chapter 10 Jesus says, **'he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.'** He himself of course is that shepherd who enters through the door. Later (in verse 9) he says: **'I am the door (or gate); whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.'** He is both the shepherd and the door.

At night, the sheepfold is the best place for the sheep. In it they have protection, warmth, and safety. Jesus is the door into the fold. When the day breaks and the sun rises, everything changes. The fold is no longer where the sheep should be. They must go out. They must find pasture and water and take exercise. Again, Jesus is the door. Without him, there is no way in to the shelter and safety of the fold for those outside. There is no way out to the green pastures that are essential for life and growth for those that are in the fold.

First, we enter the fold through Jesus the door. Then we go out through him as the door, and with him as our shepherd. Then he in us becomes the door through which others may enter the fold, and go in and out and find pasture.

The Good Shepherd

Jesus said: **'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep'** (John 10: 11). In his last conversation with Peter, Jesus spoke the words, **'Feed my sheep'** (John 21: 16). If we take the Greek words more literally, he said, **'Shepherd my sheep'**. Shortly after he indicated that Peter would also lay down his life.

Two of the greatest men of ancient times were shepherds. Both Moses and David were feeding sheep when God called them to be shepherds of his people.

Today we have true shepherds and false shepherds. The true shepherds are those who are willing to lay down their lives for the sheep. For a few, this may be the final act of a consecrated life. For all true shepherds this will be an ongoing, daily experience.

First, we know the Good Shepherd; then we become good shepherds.

The Resurrection

'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11: 25,26).