

**R**eadings: Luke 1v1-3v20, John 1v19-51, John chapter 3, Matthew chapters 5-7, John chapter 11 & 15-17, Matthew 27v11-28v20, Colossians 1v15-20.

In his commentary on the book of John, Don Carson describes Jesus as God's ultimate self-expression and revelation, and explains that Jesus "narrates" God – He shows us who God is and explains God to us. If we look at Jesus we have seen God. If we know Jesus we know God.

The gospel story begins with the birth of John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets. John is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord', and is the fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah must come before the Day of the Lord.

Jesus' birth is announced to the shepherds by a host of angels, and wise men come from the East to worship Him. John the Baptist points the crowds to Jesus and says "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1v34)

Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus gave the people of His day every possible opportunity to realise who He was and is.

Firstly, He told them quite clearly that He is God. He called Himself the Son of Man, referring back to the Messianic prophecy in Daniel

## Jesus, the promised Messiah

*"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1v15)*

chapter 7. In John chapter 8 Jesus says to the Jews who were questioning Him, "If I glorify Myself, My glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the One who glorifies Me" (v54). "I tell you the truth', Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I AM!'" (v58). After Jesus had said this they picked up rocks to stone Him with because they understood perfectly well that He was claiming to be God – Yahweh, the great I AM who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush – and they saw it as blasphemy. They understood fully what His claims were, but they would not believe Him.

Jesus backed up His claims with His miracles. When John the Baptist sent people to ask if Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus answered "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and good news is preached to the poor" (Matthew 11v4-6). Jesus was here referring to two Messianic prophecies, that the Jews themselves understood to be prophecies of the coming Saviour.

Jesus created wine from water (John 2v1-11), and bread from nothing (John 6v1-14) – just as He had done at the beginning of

time when together with His Father He created the universe. He defied the laws of nature by walking on water (John 6v16-21), and demonstrated His control of those laws by stilling the storm (Mark 4v35-41). He proved He had authority to forgive sins by healing a paralytic (Matthew 9v1-8) and He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11v38-44).

When the Jews came to Jesus and demanded "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly", Jesus responded: "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in My Father's Name speak for Me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep"(John 10v24-26). But the response of the Jews after Jesus had raised Lazarus was to want to kill Him.

Jesus taught the Scriptures with a unique authority. "When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7v28-29).

In the well-known Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7, Jesus explained that He had come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. In Jesus, everything the Law and the Prophets had pointed forward to was fulfilled. In

the same sermon Jesus described the lifestyle that should characterise a child of God, and expanded on the Law given to Moses so that people would understand that outward obedience alone was not sufficient.

This was one of the main reasons the Scribes, Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, often just described as the Jews, hated Him so much. He exposed them as the hypocrites they were. In Matthew chapter 23 is recorded Jesus' damning indictment of these men.

We often talk of how the Jews did not recognise who Jesus was because they were waiting for a political Messiah. There may be truth in this for the masses, but those who instigated His crucifixion were in no doubt as to who He was. When Jesus told the parable of the tenants in the vineyard (Matthew 21v33-44) He was drawing on Old Testament imagery. In Isaiah the nation of Israel was pictured as God's vineyard, which He had taken great care in planting, and yet which only produced 'stink-fruit' (Isaiah 5v1-7). Those who heard Jesus' parable recognised that the landowner represented God, that the vineyard represented Israel, that the tenants in the vineyard represented Israel's leaders, that the servants represented the prophets, and that the son represented Jesus. We know they understood this because it is recorded in Matthew 21v45: "When the chief priests and

the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew He was talking about them".

The Jews also hated Him because they were afraid of the Romans. Israel was no longer a free nation, but was ruled by the Romans who had conquered the land. In the society that existed under the Romans, the Jews were allowed to practise their religion with little interference, and the religious leaders held positions of power and influence. We have a glimpse of their motivation in John 11v47-48: "Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. 'What are we accomplishing?' they asked. 'Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation'".

This did not come as any surprise to God, or to Jesus His Son. He had been foretelling the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin in Genesis chapter 3. The death and resurrection of Jesus was the whole reason God had chosen the people of Israel as His own people, and the whole reason He moulded the history of the nation as He had. All of history had been working up to this point.

Jesus warned His disciples frequently that He had to die on the cross and rise again,

and return to the glory He had with the Father before the world began (John 12v20-36, John chapters 13-17). It was really they, rather than the religious leaders, who were blinded to His true identity by their expectations of a political Messiah. Right up to the moment of His death they did not understand what was happening.

And so Jesus died. Betrayed by one of His disciples, handed over to the Romans by the people He had chosen to be His own (Matthew 23v37-39). Flogged to within an inch of death, and then hung on a cross to die, His real agony was not the nails in His hands and feet but the weight of the sins of the world as they were laid on the perfect, holy Son of God and He died in the place of sinners. Matthew 27v51 tells us how at the moment of Jesus' death the curtain in the temple was torn in two as the barrier that separated sinful man from Almighty God was finally broken down forever.

The Pharisees did their very best to make sure that Jesus stayed dead, but they could not succeed, and so they just did their best to cover up His resurrection (Matthew 27v62-66, 28v11-15). The disciples saw the risen Lord and finally believed, and finally began to understand (Luke 24v1-49), and Jesus gave them their commission to carry the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28v16-20).