

Matt Henry  
Advent #2: "Who Was"  
05 Dec 2018

### "Who Was"

We're continuing the series based on the verse of Revelation 1:4: "Grace and peace be unto you from him who is, who was and who is to come." Tonight, we take a look at the meaning of that middle phrase "who was". Or as Jeff Foxworthy likes to call it "used to could"!

As to the first meaning, "was" refers to the past which Jesus entered into time itself for our sake. He entered time in order to redeem it. So we can say, yes at a specific moment in time, Jesus *was* born. He *was* a carpenter. He *was* baptized. He *was* crucified. He *was* raised to life. Paul says in Timothy, Jesus "was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). These are all past, completed events.

As to the second meaning, where "was" means something has always been. John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word was with God. He was with God in the beginning." We believe in eternal life. It's hard to wrap our minds around a future that has no end. But equally mind-boggling is comprehending a past that has no beginning. He has always been. There's never been a time with God was not. "Who is, who was, who is to come" is a way of comprehending an eternal God in both directions. Jesus, as a human,

has a beginning...and that's what Christmas is all about. God became man at this point in time, more than 2,000 years ago. It actually happened. Christianity is a historical faith.

It's almost amusing when the secular world catches a whiff of the historical veracity of the Scriptures. As if, wow, the Bible might actually be true. This last week, did anyone catch this? They found the ring with the name of Pontius Pilate! Now it doesn't mean it was Pilate's ring but more than likely it was someone in his administration, an official of sorts. The copper alloy was a little on the cheap for a Roman prefect. But still, this ring was found at Herodium, which was a Roman palace south of Bethlehem. And they found this ring in the 1960s, but didn't have the technology to read deeply into the ring itself the inscription the find the name of the one who presided over the crucifixion of Jesus. The point is archaeology and history back up the narrative of the Bible. Pilate existed. Jesus existed. The "was-ness" of them is undeniable.

So it's simply thrilling to go back and look. Go back and study what was—even your own life! And if you do, for better or for worse, you might find why you are the way you are.

My dad gave me a CD that said it's two minutes long. It's called Matthew's earliest conversations and it's dated 1979. I've had it for months, but I just listened to it. You'll be relieved to know there were no swear words, so that's a big relief.

But it wasn't just two minutes long. There's a whole other recording from my 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, June 27, 1985. I listened to 40 minutes of opening presents and family interaction. It was hilarious and but entirely sentimental. The recording caught the sibling banter, the ding of the microwave, the ring of the phone and how we answered, "Hello Henrys". We had this tradition on birthdays of the spanking machine and that involved crawling through a tunnel of sorts of people's legs and they would spank you as you went through. And if that wasn't enough, my dad was trying to time it so that I would make it through the spanking machine right when the timer on the camera went off. To hear the voice of your family growing up—young parents, young siblings, young me. This historical footage was incredibly sentimental to listen to. This is who I was. And it wasn't all good either. Because when my parents were trying to get me to go to bed, since it was after 10 pm, I yelled to my mom, "But Mom, it's my birthday. I can do what I want to!"

That's when there could have been one of those Nixonian gaps of silence on the tape. But no. They prevailed. The point is, I learned something about myself by listening to who I was. To what extent are we defined by our past? If you're well along in life you may well define who you are by what you did—your career, what you retired from, your family role, your life experiences. Because what you

did in the past makes you who you are today. Being defined by our past can be a good thing and a healthy part of life.

But I gotta say, the other thing I run into is people defining themselves not by what they are proud of in the past, but by their mistakes or by their failures. Since none of us is perfect, *we all have a past*. We all have said words that we can only be glad no one recorded them because we never want to hear them again.

It's pretty well known that the devil wants to define you by your past, and only by the bad parts of our past. He keeps reminding you of where you've gone astray or missed the mark. His job is to make our sin seem so large that it really becomes our focus. He defines people by past mistakes by labeling us. And a lot of the time we buy into it.

But God does not define us by our past. He defines us by Jesus' past actually. And his forgiveness is a complete forgiveness. God does not remind us of the sins of our past, but by the grace of our past. That makes all the difference so we can say, "I was." But it's not who I am today. I am someone different today. He is making me into something new!

**Only Jesus has a perfect past. And this same Jesus gives us a perfect future.**

2 Cor. 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!" This speaks to the power and promise of the change

God brings. “I was that person. But I’m not who I was.” By understanding the past and what Jesus has done for us, we gain a present and a future. Grace is a past event that is still going on today. That’s why we can say, “I was because He is. I am because He was. I will be because He is to come.”

In Jesus’ name, Amen.