

I Am Jesus of Nazareth

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Introduction.

- A. For the past two months, since the beginning of April, we've been studying the places in John where Jesus defines Himself through what we've been calling "I am" statements. We've looked at nine of these, stretching all the way from John 4 to John 18, and they are a complete set.
- B. However, there is one "I am" statement in John that we have not studied. It appears in John 18:3-6. Just as we look at it, we see that this is different from the other nine statements in John. Those were all statements of comparison, in which Jesus tells us who He is by means of some familiar concept. By contrast, John 18:5 is a statement of identification. Here, Jesus simply acknowledges His name just as we might if asked.
- C. Even though this is true, it's evident that this passage describes an event that is anything but mundane. After Jesus makes this seemingly ordinary statement, his enemies react by drawing back and falling to the ground. Now, I've read some commentators who say that this is because they're surprised by His ready admission of who He is, but that seems extremely unlikely. As you probably already know, my brother is a federal prosecutor in Virginia, and as a result, he likes to talk a lot about the weird things that happen in the world of criminal justice. Believe me, there is nothing a suspect can do that would astonish a number of policemen.
- D. Instead, we need to turn to the Bible for our answers. Even though Jesus is speaking Aramaic rather than Hebrew, the words He uses to identify Himself are the same words that the Father uses to identify Himself when He speaks to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3. It was an echo of that divine power that caused His enemies to retreat. It is no small thing for God to identify Himself. Contained within this incomprehensible divine identity is everything we've studied for the past two months. Let's look at these things through the lens of the statement, "I am Jesus of Nazareth."

I. Christ, Bread, Light, Shepherd, and Resurrection.

- A. In chronological order, the first self-revelatory statement that Jesus makes is "**I AM THE CHRIST.**" We see Him affirm that He is the Christ to the Samaritan woman in John 4:25-26. This is actually one of the most backward-looking of the I-am's. Often, we think of "Christ" as the last name of Jesus, but it is anything but. Instead, it is a title that means "Anointed One." When Jesus claims this title for Himself, He is actually claiming to be the fulfillment of thousands of years of Old Testament prophecy. He is claiming to be an anointed prophet, an anointed priest, and an anointed king, a man who not only holds all of these offices simultaneously, but is also God come to earth. This claim is still crucially important to us today. For one thing, the fact that all of these Old Testament prophecies existed in the first place makes the claims of Jesus more probable. He's not claiming to be anything that the word of God hadn't been predicting for centuries. Second, though, the way that the life of Jesus fulfills these prophecies so perfectly, in many cases in ways that man cannot arrange, shows that Jesus' claim to be the Christ is genuine, and that we can spiritually rely on Him.
- B. The next way that Jesus defines Himself is by saying "**I AM THE BREAD.**" This statement appears in John 6:32-35. In context, it's actually part of an appeal that Jesus is making to His Jewish audience to see the world through new eyes. The multitude that is listening to Him is extremely materialistic. They're following Jesus because He miraculously fed five thousand people a short time ago, and they're hoping for another handout. What Jesus wants them to understand is that they should be seeking food not for their bellies, but for their souls. The best meal on earth will leave the one who consumes it wanting more food in a day or less, but once their spirits have been satisfied by Christ and His word, they will never hunger again. In today's materialistic world, this is something that we need to understand too. It's not just food on earth that fails to satisfy the desires of the heart. Instead, all of the possessions that advertisers constantly parade before us will prove equally unfulfilling, even if we devote our lives to pursuing them. True satisfaction and true contentment are found in the same place today as two thousand years ago: in coming to know the Lord.
- C. The third way the Lord presents Himself in John is by saying "**I AM THE LIGHT.**" Jesus makes this statement in John 8:12, in the midst of an argument with some of His Jewish detractors. Here, He is drawing on one of the most common and instinctive human metaphors to describe Himself. Because we are such visual creatures, we love to compare things to light and darkness, and Jesus here takes these comparisons and applies them to Himself. Jesus gives us life, just as the light gives us life. Jesus gives us understanding, just as the light helps us to understand. He is the light that lights our way to heaven, a spiritual place that is nonetheless described as a kingdom of eternal light. This tells us how important it is to have Jesus in our lives. Without Him, we dwell in darkness, a spiritual darkness that makes the inside of a cave look like the noonday sun. Only through Jesus can any of us have hope and enlightenment.
- D. After this, Jesus further fleshes out our understanding of Him by telling us "**I AM THE SHEPHERD.**" This claim appears throughout John 10, but most especially in John 10:14-15. His point here would have been a

familiar one to His audience. He's telling them, and indeed us, that He stands in the same relation to His disciples that a shepherd does to his sheep. Just as the sheep know the voice of the shepherd, so too the true followers of Jesus hear and obey His voice. Just as a shepherd would act as a door between his sheep and danger, so Jesus interposes Himself between us and spiritual harm. Just as a shepherd would face large dangerous predators with only the flimsy weapons at his disposal, and even lay down his life to protect his sheep, so Jesus fought Satan for us and even died for us. We need to understand this in our lives because it underscores our helplessness without Jesus and His helpfulness to us when we have Him. If we have wandered from the Shepherd of our souls, we are easy spiritual prey. If we are with Him, we are safe.

- E. In order, Jesus makes His next point by declaring **"I AM THE RESURRECTION."** We see Him make this claim in John 11:23-25. This is part of the story that culminates in Jesus raising His disciple Lazarus from the dead, one of the greatest miracles of His ministry. Through His claim and its subsequent proof, Jesus establishes that He is the answer to mankind's biggest problem, the problem of death. If the natural order continues, all of us will die sooner or later. Worse still, as we sin, we die spiritually, which means that when life is over, we will find ourselves in the eternal death of hell. Jesus is the answer on both counts. Because Jesus offers us forgiveness of sins through the blood that He shed on the cross, we can be raised from spiritual death when we rise from the waters of the baptism that He commands. Even if we do die physically, as so many of the disciples of Jesus already have, He assures us that when He returns to earth, He will raise us from the dead to eternal life with Him in heaven. We are alive with Jesus, but without Him, we are dead.

II. Teacher, Way, Vine, and King.

- A. To this point, Jesus has been uttering these "I am" statements infrequently throughout His ministry, at the rate of about one every six months or so. In the couple of days before His crucifixion, though, the pace picks up dramatically, so that He makes almost as many statements in that time frame as He did in the years before.
- B. The first of these final I-am's is **"I AM THE TEACHER."** It appears in John 13:12-14. In context, Jesus' disciples have been squabbling about which among them is the greatest. Jesus stills their argument by rising from the dinner table and washing their feet, something that only the lowliest slaves of the time would have done. This is something that Jesus is able to do only because of His security in the Father and His love for the disciples. He then tells them that if He is indeed their teacher, they should serve one another just as humbly as He has just served them. This is a lesson for us in two different ways. In the first place, it tells us that we need to be willing to let other Christians serve us sometimes, because that's a way that they can imitate their Lord. Second, though, it tells us that we should also have the heart of a servant, that we should be primarily interested not in looking out for ourselves and what's best for us, but for others and what's best for them.
- C. Just a little bit later in the conversation on the night of His betrayal, Jesus reveals Himself to His apostles by saying **"I AM THE WAY."** He makes this particular statement in John 14:5-6. Here's what's been going on: Jesus has just told the apostles that He is going to be leaving them. Peter, in particular, expresses his desire to remain with Jesus no matter what. Jesus tells Peter that no matter how Peter may feel, the facts are different. Indeed, Peter is going to deny Jesus three times before the next sunrise. Jesus, however, softens the blow by telling Peter and the others that they can still come to Jesus and the Father in heaven through belief in their Lord. They can't earn their way to where Jesus is, but they can come to Him by faith. This should be extremely reassuring to us too. We may never have denied Jesus ourselves, but just like Peter, we all fall short in some way of what we would need to be to come to the Father on our own. We need Jesus to be our way to heaven too, and as long as we trust in Him, He will be the way that we need.
- D. As Jesus continues in this final discourse, He next tells His apostles, **"I AM THE VINE."** This appears in John 15:1-4. With this comparison, He is once again returning to a familiar phenomenon in Judea: vineyards and the growing of grapes. The point that Jesus is making is that just like branches on a vine are expected to bear fruit, His disciples are expected to bear the spiritual fruit of good works for God. We can make ourselves into fruitful followers only by developing and constantly improving our connection with Jesus. If we do that, His fruit in our lives will be obvious. If we do not, like non-producing branches on a grapevine, we will be cut off and burned. This self-description is at once a promise and a warning for all of us. It tells us that we can accomplish wonderful things for God if only we rely on Jesus, but it also tells us that we don't get to be non-performing Christians. The fruit that we bear is not just a bonus; it is an expectation. If we do not, if we spend our lives on our work instead of on God's work, that won't be enough to get us to heaven.
- E. The last "I am" that we see in John comes during the trial of Jesus, when He tells Pontius Pilate **"I AM THE KING."** This is recorded for us in John 18:37-38. This is the "I am" statement that leads to the death of Jesus. His enemies among the Jewish leadership use this claim of spiritual kingship to accuse Him of treason against the Roman government. Pilate recognizes that Jesus is in fact no threat to Rome, but the Jews threaten to report to the Emperor that Pilate himself is a traitor, and Pilate isn't willing to sacrifice his own life to save the life of Jesus. He gives the order for Jesus' crucifixion. Although Jesus here is accused as a false king, His reception in Revelation proves Him to be a true King to whom we owe allegiance.

Conclusion. If you want Jesus to be these things for you, come to Him today.