

Knowing Jesus: The “I Am” Sayings of Christ – part 2

Last week we began looking at the eight major “I AM” sayings of Christ as we seek to know Him more. We saw how Jesus revealed to us that He is “the bread of life” that was come down from heaven as God’s provision for eternal life and that He himself is the only one who satisfies our souls.

We also saw that Jesus is “the light of the world,” revealing both our sin as well as Himself as the remedy. We saw how His light dispels the darkness in our soul and transforms us from the inside.

We also saw how Jesus was the door for the sheep, the only entrance given by God into eternal life.

Likewise we saw that Jesus said of Himself that He is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” and by trusting in Him and His work, we can be assured that He will bring us to the Father.

We turn now to look at the last four of the “I AM” sayings of Christ, and as we do, let us remind ourselves that as He reveals Himself to us, the goal is to know Him more so that we may cherish Him, and love Him, and so that we may worship Him more perfectly, both in our corporate worship on Sunday, and also with our lives each and every day.

- I. The fifth “I AM” saying that we will be looking at this morning is “I AM the good shepherd.” Please turn with me back to the Gospel of John chapter 10. You will find that on page 896 in the pew Bibles.

Follow along with me as I read John chapter 10 verses 11-16.

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

It’s imperative for us to see this passage within its overall context here in John. There isn’t any break in the narrative from John 9 to John 10, so knowing what happened in John 9 helps us understand what Jesus is saying and why He calls Himself the good shepherd.

Back in chapter 9, the religious leaders criticize Jesus because He healed a man born blind on the Sabbath. But in their effort to scold Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, they completely ignore the miracle. And that’s the problem – for two reasons:

- First, that Jesus performed this miracle was a sign pointing to His divine nature, and the fact that God the Father was with Him. Thus the religious leaders shouldn't have set themselves against Him.
- And second, the nature of Jesus's act in healing the man born blind and the subsequent bringing the man to faith was an act of caring for His sheep. Which was something that was completely absent in the religious leaders.

And THIS is why Jesus reveals Himself as the good shepherd. The religious leaders were the hired hands. They really could have cared less about the people they ministered to. They did what they did for their own gain and recognition. Which is seen very well when Jesus uses the analogy of a wolf coming and the hired hands fleeing because they care nothing for the sheep. So then they have two problems. They refuse to believe in Jesus and to recognize who He truly is, AND they are leading people astray—away from their Messiah and into rebellion.

There are three points to consider in this passage:

1. First, it is important to know some background on Jesus calling Himself the good shepherd. Centuries before Christ came, the Old Testament prophets had prophesied that a Shepherd would come to shepherd His people.
 - Ezekiel 34:23 says, *“And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.”*
 - Micah prophesied in Micah 5:4 and said of the Messiah, *“And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.”*
 - This of course has divine connotations attached to Jesus, as the people of Israel would have also remembered Psalm 23:
 - “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
 - ² *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*
 - He leads me beside still waters.*
 - ³ *He restores my soul.*
 - He leads me in paths of righteousness*
 - for his name's sake.”*
 - Jesus, then is saying that He is the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophesies. This is further amplified by Jesus saying of Himself that he is “the” Good Shepherd, not “a” good shepherd.
2. Second, this passage magnifies the love of God through Jesus Christ. Note the loving and caring language in verses 14 and 15: *“I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* The word “know” is used here to describe a love relationship that is characterized by the love between the Father and the Son, and extended to His precious sheep. So great is His love

toward us, His sheep, that it says He lays down His life for the sheep. This reflects what Jesus would say later in chapter 15: *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”*

Brothers and sisters, how great is God’s love for you! It is beyond fathoming. I love the words to that great old hymn that says, “Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made, and were each stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky. O love of God, how rich how pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure the saints’ and angels’ song.”

3. Third, we see that the good shepherd brings in all His sheep. Verse 16 says, *“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”* The other sheep Jesus is talking about here are the Gentiles who will also hear His voice and come to Him.

What Jesus reveals about Himself: Jesus Christ is the prophesied Shepherd that God has sent to show His great love for His sheep and to bring them in from all over the world.

Now this whole idea of God sending Christ into the world to bring in His sheep leads us to the next “I AM” saying that we will consider this morning...

- II. The sixth “I AM” saying is found in chapter 15 of the Gospel of John, just a few chapters over. Here we see that Jesus says of Himself, “I AM the true vine.”

Follow along with me as I read verses 1-5:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Jesus begins by saying, “I AM the true vine.” What is the significance of this vine that He was referring to, and why would He say that He is the *true* vine?

Well, again we have to return to the Old Testament to understand what Jesus was referring to and what His listeners would have surely understood.

Several times in the Old Testament, God used the symbol of a vine to refer to Israel.

Psalm 80:8-9 - ⁸ *You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹ You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.*

Isaiah 5:1-4 - *Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine*

vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

Ezekiel 15 - And the word of the Lord came to me: ² “Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? ³ Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? ⁴ Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? ⁵ Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! ⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ⁷ And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the Lord, when I set my face against them. ⁸ And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord God.”

This goes all the way back to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 when He promised Abraham, “² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

You see, Israel was chosen by God from out of the world to be His special people. A people that would live in God’s blessing in front of the watching world so that all would know the one true God because of Israel. God’s main command to Israel was that they obey Him and have no other gods before Him. That they would love Him with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and that they would love one another.

But Israel failed, because they were sinners just like the rest of the world, which is basically Paul’s message in the letter to the Romans.

But it’s important for us to realize that this was all part of God’s sovereign plan all along. For out of the nation of Israel would come the *true* Vine, Jesus the Messiah, who would be the ultimate fulfillment not only of God’s law, but most of all, of Israel’s vocation and mission in the world.

Through Jesus’ perfect obedience, doing what Israel could not do, and through His death and resurrection, He “bore much fruit” and fulfilled the God’s promise to Abraham, and brought salvation to the whole world, to all who would come to Him by faith. In other words, He was both the true vine and the perfect fruit-bearer.

This passage goes on to say that all who abide in Him, those who are, as Paul says, “in Christ,” who continue to trust Him in all things, are the branches of the vine. These branches bear fruit, WE bear fruit, not by our own power, for no branch can bear fruit on their own, but we do so by being connected to the perfect fruit-bearer, the true vine, Jesus Christ.

What Jesus reveals about Himself: Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Israel's calling to bring God's salvation to the world, accomplishing it through His perfect obedience and ultimate sacrifice.

III. The seventh "I AM" saying comes to us back in John chapter 11 where we see Jesus reveal Himself by saying, "I AM the resurrection and the life."

Follow along with me as I read verses 17-27 of John chapter 11:

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.

¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Many of us here know what it's like to have a friend or loved one die. It's a life event you never forget. It brings grief. And sometimes, depending on the circumstances, it brings loneliness and emptiness. It's difficult to watch that friend or loved one, who was once so full of life, fall ill, degenerate, and finally pass on.

Statistics show that 10 out of 10 people die. And while death is common to all, yet, according to Scripture, it is not a normal part of creation. It is an enemy.

1 Corinthians 15:25-27 tells us, *²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet."*

In this passage in John chapter 11, Jesus had three friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, with whom Jesus and His disciples were very close. So you can imagine their sadness when they learned that Lazarus became sick and died.

Jesus actually waited to go to them until Lazarus had been dead for four days. He did so, He said, "so that you may believe," which is the central theme in John's Gospel.

As Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Martha went out to meet Jesus, complaining that if He would have been there sooner, Lazarus wouldn't have died. After Jesus told her that her brother would rise again, Martha continued her good theology by stating, *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."*

Now obviously the idea of resurrection was indeed a held belief in Jesus' day. That was one of the things that separated the Pharisees from the Sadducees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, while the Sadducees didn't. That's why they were "sad, you see."

But what Martha didn't comprehend is just HOW the resurrection of the just was going to be made possible. God would not, indeed *could not*, according to His own holiness, simply raise people from the dead to be with Him, because of their sin. Paul tells us in Romans 6 that "the wages of sin is death." And this is much more than just physical death. It involved eternal separation from God. In other words, for there to be a resurrection, God would have to provide a WAY for people to be ABLE to be resurrected on the last day.

Martha said to Jesus, "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*" It's then that Jesus said to her the words that made all the difference in the world. *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*

This is so because the life that Jesus had after His resurrection was what 1 Corinthians 15 calls the firstfruits of the new heavens and the new earth. He didn't just come back to life, only to die again like Lazarus. He rose with a resurrected body, which means we all, who believe, will have as well.

What Jesus reveals about Himself: Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life, and all who believe and trust in His name will also share in His resurrection.

Well, you can imagine the stir it caused when Jesus confirmed this I AM saying by raising Lazarus from the dead. I mean it's one thing to heal someone or turn water into wine. It's quite another for someone to come along and bring someone who has been dead for four days back to life. This was by far Jesus' greatest miracle to that day, and one that let people know that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. He wasn't even an ordinary prophet. The things that He had said about Himself and the miracles that He had done, well, those who were paying attention and who believed knew that this meant only one thing.

- IV. And so as we come to the final "I AM" saying of Christ today, we will be going back to chapter 8 in John's Gospel and look at the biggie! This is the biggest "I AM" bomb that Jesus drops which stirs no small ruckus among his listeners. But as we will see very soon, this "I AM" leaves no room for doubt as to what Jesus is claiming about Himself.

Up until now, we have looked at times when Jesus has revealed Himself by saying "I AM" with a predicate added. "I AM the bread of life," "I AM the door," and so on. But this time Jesus leaves off the predicate altogether. And by leaving off that predicate, Jesus actually says more about Himself than ever! And it ruffles not a few feathers!

So turn with me to John chapter 8 and follow along as I read verses 48-59:

⁴⁸ *The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"* ⁴⁹ *Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me."* ⁵⁰ *Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.* ⁵¹ *Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."* ⁵² *The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'* ⁵³ *Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?"* ⁵⁴ *Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'* ⁵⁵ *But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.* ⁵⁶ *Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."* ⁵⁷ *So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"* ⁵⁸ *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."* ⁵⁹ *So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."*

Now let's just cut to the chase here. Let's not minimize what Jesus is saying about Himself. He has said, in no uncertain terms, without mincing any words, that He is none other than Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, the same God who created the heavens and the earth, the same God that spoke to Abraham and Moses.

And we know this is exactly what He meant because of the reaction of the crowd who went ballistic. And if this wasn't clear enough, we also see over in John chapter 10 verses 27-33 Jesus saying this:

²⁷ *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* ²⁸ *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* ²⁹ *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* ³⁰ *I and the Father are one."*

³¹ *The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.* ³² *Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?"* ³³ *The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."*

What Jesus was alluding to, and this was not at all lost on the crowd who heard Him, was the account in Exodus 3 when Moses spoke with God at the burning bush. God revealed Himself to Moses and commissioned him to go to Egypt to prophesy to Pharaoh, telling him to let God's people go. Moses argued with God and asked Him what he should say if the people didn't believe him.

Verses 13-15 of Exodus 3 say, ¹³ *Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"* ¹⁴ *God said to Moses, "I am who I am."* *And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'"* ¹⁵ *God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God*

of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

Now here we have the crux of the situation. The crowd saw Jesus as just a man. And many today see Him as just a man. A man that did good works and even great miracles, maybe, but they still saw him as just a man. And if Jesus was just a man and made the claims that He did, He would most certainly be guilty of blasphemy. No mere human should ever make the claims Jesus made.

The ONLY thing that would make what Jesus said NOT blasphemy...is if He was, really and truly...God. And the Father has left no room for doubt because He has vindicated everything Jesus has said and done by raising Him from the dead. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ the Father placed His divine stamp of approval on the words and work of His Son. By raising Jesus from the dead, God was saying, I want the whole world to know that what my Son said and did is completely true.

This means one thing for us. Jesus cannot be just a good teacher in history. He cannot be just a prophet, one among many, even a great prophet, as the Muslims say.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the sort of thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn’t be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he’s a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell; you must make your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut Him up for a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But don’t come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. He hasn’t left that alternative open to us. He did not intend to.”

At the end of John’s Gospel, after Jesus had risen from the dead, in chapter 20 we see that Jesus appeared to His disciples again. On this specific occasion, Jesus went to Thomas who doubted, and said, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas, who then had absolutely no doubt whatsoever, answered Him the only way that he could in light of what he had witnessed. He cried out to Jesus and said, “My Lord and my God!”

What Jesus reveals about Himself: Jesus Christ is God.

John says to his readers, *“³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*

And so we find ourselves right back to where we started last week with the question every person who has ever lived has to answer. It’s a question *you* have to answer. When it comes to Jesus Christ, He asks each of us, “Who do you say that I am?”

Your answer to that question means the difference between life and death.

Let’s pray.