

### Jesus: The "I am" Sermon notes.

John's Gospel records what is commonly known as the "I am" statements of Jesus. Here they are: I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the true vine.

<sup>35</sup> **Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. John 6:35.** One of the great stories of the Bible is how God provided bread, or manna, in the desert for the people to eat. People expected the Messiah, the Christ, when he came, to do the same. When the Messiah came it would be an age of abundance; that God's blessings would be poured out, once again, like manna in the desert. However, all they could think of was the Messiah bringing actual bread – actual material provision.

They didn't think about God providing spiritual food, much less the Messiah's body served up as death in our place, giving us the most important provision in all of human history. Or even the simpler spiritual idea - that bread was for the body; the Messiah would be for the soul. You've been waiting for the Messiah to come – here I am – but I am not bringing bread – I am the bread! More satisfying than any manna ever provided.

Then He said He was the **light of the world.** <sup>2</sup> **When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12.** There's some interesting background here. Jesus made that statement during the Feast of the Tabernacles, probably the greatest feast in the Jewish year. It celebrated the completion of harvest and was meant to remind the Israelites how God had provided for them during their wanderings in the desert. God had provided them with a huge pillar of fire at night to guide them. It lasted seven days, and during those days people would live in little make-shift tents or tabernacles made of large, leafy branches. That's why it was called the Feast of Tabernacles.

On the final day of the festival, Jesus is teaching in what was known as the court of women. This was so that men and women could give offerings. Imagine the scene! In the very court where the lighting ceremony takes place, Jesus stands and says that he is not only the true light of Jerusalem but of the whole World.

Jesus is referring to the countless times that God's saving work in the world is described as light. Right at the very beginning of his Gospel; <sup>5</sup> **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:5. God's first creation was light;** God's first creation was light; <sup>3</sup> **And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light Genesis 1:3.**

God led the Israelites with light; <sup>21</sup> **By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.** <sup>22</sup> **Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. Exodus 13:21-22** and <sup>14</sup> **He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. Psalm 78:14.**

And then Jesus said he was the gate. <sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. John 10:7. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. John 10:9.

Again, some background, when sheep were out on the hills in the warm season, they wouldn't be brought back to the villages at night. Instead, they would be collected into pens on the hillside. These were just open spaces enclosed by a low wall. There was a small opening that the sheep came in and out of, but it didn't have a door. It was just an opening, a gateway. Such a pen was entirely for safety so that the sheep would not become prey to wild animals.

What the shepherd would do was lie down across the opening at night so that no sheep could get in or out except over his body. Not only can the sheep identify rightful shepherds by their access through the gate but they also recognise the voice of the shepherd. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." John 10: 3-5.

The Middle Eastern shepherd is well known for having a personal devotion to their sheep. He talks to them and sings to them. Often shepherds will carry a short flute and use a repeated tune so that the flock has a consistent sound to follow. Just as these shepherds can separate larger flocks by using calls, so Jesus knows his own sheep. They recognise his voice and he leads them. In verse 4, <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. Note that the shepherd, Jesus goes out in the front leading the way. Jesus is the gate, and we are the sheep. He is the one through whom we must enter for Salvation.

Then in verse 11, <sup>11</sup>"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11. Then there is the statement that Jesus is not only the gate but is the good shepherd lying across the entrance. He is the rightful leader who goes through the gate. He and he alone has the authority to lead the sheep. The most important feature of Jesus' role as shepherd is that he lays his life down for the sheep. He cares for them so much that he is willing to come between them and danger, He is willing to die for them. As we have just celebrated Easter it is good yet again to be reminded that Jesus laid his life down for all of us.

Then, Jesus says that he is the resurrection and the life. <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup>and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11: 25-26.

There was a big debate going on during that time between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, two sets of religious leaders within Judaism. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees did. In other words, eternal life and rescue from the finality of death are not merely gifts obtained by appealing to God; they are what it means to live a life with Christ. If Jesus is life, then those who believe in him will enjoy the confidence and power of the resurrection.

Jesus goes even further. <sup>6</sup> **Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me John 14:6.** This verse in many ways is John's great expression of the theology of his entire Gospel. Access to the Father in heaven will only be through Jesus and no other. Here I am thinking of the ISIS attack, the act of terrorism in Moscow, where 130 people died. ISIS confessed to attacking a large number of Christians in Moscow. In New Zealand, we probably don't expect to die for our faith but this is a reality for many Christians around the world. It's a sobering thought.

In the Old Testament, to live in the ways of truth meant to live a life that followed God's law. The way, the truth, and the life were all interconnected. If you walked in the truth, it would have eternal consequences. It would bring life. Or as Thomas Kempis would write, **"Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living."**

Finally, Jesus called Himself the vine. **"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.**

<sup>5</sup> **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

Jesus paints an intricate picture of a vine trimmed by its gardener that produces generous fruit. He applies this image to his disciples charging them to remain vitally attached to him so they can produce the fruit of love and obedience. Jesus is pointing to the lives of believers who will live in the world following his departure. He is alluding to the first part of verse four, "Remain in me and I will remain in you". As believers, we must prioritise being attached to Christ.

Then this section takes a harsh turn. If we do not remain in Christ or fail to find life in Jesus, we risk separation from the vineyard and consequent destruction. We need to take care when we read this metaphor. Jesus is not saying that fruit-bearing is a test to be passed. We don't have to demonstrate a level of productivity to be safe from destruction. Rather, fruit-bearing is a byproduct of life in Christ. In verse five, Jesus makes a bold but true statement, "Apart from me you can do nothing". To be connected to the vine means that the life of Jesus is flowing through us and this is made possible through the Holy Spirit that Jesus sent that leads to fruitfulness.

So why does Jesus insist on using the phrase, "I am"? <sup>58</sup> **"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" John 8:58.** Jesus was in the midst of a heated debate with some religious leaders who were challenging his teaching and trying to get him to lay out just who he thought He was. So, he did. Let me read it for us – John 8, beginning with verse 48: **"I tell you the truth [Jesus said], if a man keeps my word, he will never see death."** **"At this, the Jews exclaimed, 'Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if a man keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?'"** **"Jesus replied, 'If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him...Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.'" "You are not yet fifty years old,' the Jews said to him, 'and you have seen Abraham!'" "I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'" At this, they picked up stones to stone him..." John 8:48-59.**

Jesus was quoting from the Old Testament, specifically the Old Testament book of Exodus. From the story of Moses before the burning bush. God Himself was speaking to Moses, telling him to go to the highest authority and power in the land and demand that he release all of his slaves. Moses understandably wanted to be able to have a little credibility, so he asked God to give him His name. The answer God gave to Moses is found in **Exodus 3:14: "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say...' 'I AM has sent me to you.'"**

The name of God was considered so holy that the Jews would not even write it completely out. They would only write the consonants: Y H W H. The closest we can make out in light of the missing vowels is that it was pronounced "Yahweh." God said my name is "Yahweh" -"I AM."