

Jesus said, "I AM..."

The Greek saying, "Know thyself," is not incompatible with biblical teaching. In the First Corinthians' instructions for personal preparation before receiving communion, we are urged to "examine ourselves" spiritually to be sure we are ready and "qualified" to participate. In the Old Testament, King David asked God to search him to see if there was "any wicked way" in him (Ps. 139:23-24). And in Ps. 4:4, David speaks for God and says:

...when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

So, God expects each person on earth to "know themselves." In fact, He assumes that we DO know ourselves and that if we are honest, we'll admit our real motives.

Now, with that in mind, have you heard about the "Am I Ugly?" videos being posted on YouTube? Teenage girls by the hundreds of thousands are posting videos of themselves asking the question, "Do you think I'm pretty or ugly?" At last count, there were over 500,000 of these postings. They all seem to end the same way with one of these vulnerable young women begging the viewer to "be honest."

Some have chalked this up to teenage immaturity but I think it's something more. These girls are doing one of two things: either they are shamelessly fishing for compliments or they are pathetically allowing others to define them. One is the result of a greatly inflated ego and the other the result of a greatly deflated ego. In either case, they are looking in exactly the wrong place for their identity. Our real identity can be found only in a relationship with our Creator. King David had it right when he said to God:

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

...you are familiar with all my ways.

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made...

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! (Ps. 139:1, 3, 13-14, 17)

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, found His identity in God and therefore, He knew Himself very, very well. In the gospel of John there are eight quotations of Jesus in which He reveals a part of His character, purpose or plan through an "I Am" statement. Today, we're going to study four of those statements because, like His names, each of these tells us something critically important about who He is. First, in John 8:58 Jesus said...

I. "Before Abraham Was Born, I AM"

Now, at first glance, this may seem like poor grammar, but it is not. What Jesus is doing here is connecting Himself with God the eternal Father. When God was sending Moses to tell the Israelites in Egypt that He was about to rescue them, Moses asked God:

...“Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Ex. 3:13-14)

In Greek, this moniker for Jehovah, I AM, is *ego eimi*. In John 8:58 Jesus uses those exact words to announce that He is God, linked forever with God the Father who spoke to Moses. Some liberal Bible commentators have said, “Jesus never claimed to be God!” That is absolutely untrue! He does it right here in John 8:58. And everyone who heard Him say it, knew that was precisely what He was claiming, proved by their reaction. The punishment for blasphemy was stoning. In verse 59 it says: (John 8:59)

At this (when He said, I AM), they picked up stones to stone him...

And this isn't the only time Jesus made this claim. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus was about to be arrested by the Roman guards, Jesus asked them:

“Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

“I am he,” (literally in the Greek, He said, *ego eimi*, “I AM”) Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am he” they drew back and fell to the ground. (John 18:4-6)

The power of Jesus just speaking His divine name knocked the soldiers off their feet! Jesus then, asks them again whom they wanted and they said, “Jesus of Nazareth,” and He voluntarily surrendered to them. So don't let anyone tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God. He did it every time that He said that He was the “I AM,” which He said at least ten times in the gospel of John.

The second context we want to look at in which Jesus used the “I AM” name is when He said...

II. I AM the Bread of Life.

Jesus said this in John 6, which comes one day after Jesus fed the 5,000 men or 10 to 12 thousand people on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. At the end of this miracle, it says in John 6:14 and 15:

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world (meaning the Messiah).” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

What's this all about? Well, the Jews of that day believed that they would recognize the Messiah because He would find the lost Ark of the Covenant and produce the manna hidden in it. So, the Messiah would be identified with manna or bread. This wasn't predicted anywhere in the Old Testament, but rather by some of the Jewish commentators. One of them wrote, “As was the first redeemer [Moses], so was the final redeemer; as the first redeemer caused the manna to fall from heaven, even so shall the second redeemer cause the manna to fall.” In the Jewish mind, then, producing manna would be proof of who the Messiah was and Jesus had produced “bread” at the feeding of the 5,000. ⁱ

So, this is why the Jews brought up manna as another sign they wanted to see. The next day they asked Jesus:

...“What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:30-35)

Now, the obvious point Jesus is making here is that He isn't coming to give the people manna but that He IS the manna. In the rest of this chapter Jesus then challenges the people to “eat his flesh,” and the people say:

“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52)

And Jesus replies:

“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6:53)

Now, even today some think this means that when we take communion the elements must actually, physically turn into the body and blood of Christ or else we can't be saved. But in this same chapter, Jesus clarified what He said. When some followers said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Jesus said:

...“Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” (Jn. 6:61-63)

How can it be necessary for the bread of communion to magically turn into Christ's flesh if “...*the flesh counts for nothing*”? No, Jesus is not teaching transubstantiation, the bread and cup becoming real, physical flesh and blood. Nor is communion in any way attached to salvation! It's “*The Spirit that gives life, the flesh counts for nothing.*” So the right question to ask is, “How can I eat and drink Jesus' flesh and blood spiritually?”

In John 6, there are two different verbs used for eating. The first verb is *phagein*. We find it in verses 50-53. This “eating” verb is talking about the spiritual devouring of the truth of who Jesus is so that you are spiritually transformed; we might say, “saved.” This eating Jesus equates with “believing” in verse 40:

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Receiving communion is spiritually beneficial to us to remind us of Christ's work completed to save us, but it has no part to play in our salvation. None.

The second Greek verb is *trogon*. It is found in verses 54 and 56-58. It is a present, active participle which could almost be translated, “munching or feeding on.” In fact, it IS translated that way in verses 57 and 58:

...so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

Jesus isn't saying, "You need to receive communion every day! In fact, how about multiple times a day so that you can maintain your spiritual health!" No, no. *"The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing."* He's talking about spiritually feeding on Him through reading and meditating on His Word, through praying daily, having a running conversation with Him throughout your day, memorizing God's Word, *"hiding His Word in your heart."* That's what Jesus means by "feeding" on Him.

So, how are you doing in these two areas? Do you have assurance of eternal life because you have "devoured" the truth that Jesus is the bread of heaven, the only food that will bring your soul to life? And having done that, are you now "feeding" on His Word, "munching," "snacking" on the "Word become flesh" through listening to teaching on the radio or Internet or drinking in worship music as you drive to and from work? Are you feeding on the bread of heaven? If your spiritual diet is less than it should be, what a great time of year to make a change!

Thirdly, Jesus said...

III. I AM the Good Shepherd

Since Jehovah God told Moses that His name is "I AM," then, when Jesus makes these "I AM" statements about Himself, we could summarize them this way:

- The "I AM" God of the Bible is an eternal God
- The "I AM" God of the Bible is a life-giving God

And now, by calling Himself the 'Good Shepherd,' He is saying:

- The "I AM" God of the Bible is a caring God

In John 10, Jesus makes this next "I AM" claim and in doing so He draws a distinction between Himself as the "good" or legitimate Shepherd and other religious leaders as illegitimate or false shepherds. He says that He comes to provide protection from all the things that threaten the helpless sheep. He says in fact, that He is "the gate," the entrance into this protected area.

He goes on to say that the basic difference between Himself as the legitimate Shepherd and all the other "wannabe" shepherds is that they don't really care about the sheep, except to steal their wool, butcher them for their meat and destroy them. But He wants to do the opposite. He wants to preserve and enhance their lives, "lead them into green pastures." And why is His attitude so different? Because He "knows" the sheep. The Greek word is *gnosko*, which means much more than mere statistical facts. It means a sincere and committed relationship - someone who takes a deep interest in each individual sheep. In fact, Jesus says that He "knows" His sheep in the same way, to the same level of intimacy, as He and His Father "know" each other: (John 10:14-15)

...I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep.

This Christmas, has this reality sunk in for you yet? Is there anyone here feeling left out, misunderstood, even abandoned? David felt that way at times in his life. In Ps. 22, David cries out to God:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Yes, it was David who first said those words. And the rest of the psalm is filled with similar phrases... *All who see me mock me... I am poured out like water... My strength is dried up... Dogs have surrounded me... Rescue me... save me...* He's crying out to God! But then, what does David, the former shepherd boy, remember? Ps. 23:

**The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down...
he leads me... he restores my soul. He guides me...
I will fear no evil for you are with me...
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

Where are you living today, in Ps. 22 or in Ps. 23? Your Shepherd has not lost track of you. He knows you inside and out. He will lead you, guide you, restore your soul. If need be, He will make you lie down and because you are “His”, you will wake up and live in the “house of the Lord” forever. Which psalm are you living in today? Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He has not lost track of you.

Which brings us to our last “I AM” statement for today. Jesus also said:

IV. I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life.

Liberal theologians and humanitarians have asserted for decades that, if there is a heaven and if there is a God, surely all religions are just different paths up the same mountain. Jesus’ “I AM” statement in John 14:6 puts an end to any such speculation. In responding to Thomas’ question, “*Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*” Jesus said:

I AM (ego eimi) the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

Is there any reason to believe that’s not still true? No. In fact, there’s some remarkable evidence that shows it’s absolutely still true.

Have you ever heard of Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri? He was a famous and highly respected ultra-orthodox rabbi in Israel until his death in 2006. Other chief rabbis looked up to him as a *Tsadik*, a righteous man or saint. When he died, 200,000 people marched in the funeral procession in Jerusalem.

Just before his death at the age of 108, Rabbi Kaduri told his followers that he had “met” the Messiah in a vision. He told close associates that he had written Messiah’s name in a note that was not to be opened until one year after his death. So, in 2007, one year after Kaduri’s death, the note was opened. It read in part, “*Concerning the letter abbreviation of the Messiah’s name...*” and then there was a sentence. The sentence was a code from which it was understood that you would take the first letter from each word to discover the name. In Hebrew, the name revealed was YEHOShUA, which we learned several weeks ago in English is JESUS. ⁱⁱ This set off a firestorm of controversy in the ultra-orthodox community in Israel but it isn’t that surprising to me. The ONLY WAY to the Father is reportedly revealing Himself also to Muslims and others by the score in dreams and visions. And He’s revealing Himself right here today to you through His Word. He is The Way, the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life and the eternal I AM. He came once and He’s coming again very soon. Do you know Him? Let’s pray...

ⁱ Elmer L. Towns, *The Names of Jesus* (Internet download)

ⁱⁱ Israeltoday.com, "The Rabbi, the Note and the Messiah," May 30, 2013