

Jesus said
"I am....."

Small group exploration and discussion

"Who do the people say the Son of Man is?"... "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Matthew 16:13,15. Here we see Jesus posing the question of his identity to others, but does Jesus say anything about himself? For sure. Over the next few weeks we will be exploring some of the most astounding things Jesus said about himself - the *I am* statements of Jesus. There are nine to choose from, and you can take them at whatever pace suits your group. There are some questions included, but they are by no means exhaustive. Be prayerful, don't rush it, take time to think and reflect.

I am the bread of life
John 6:35

Cultural Background:

Bread was the all important commodity of the ancient Near East, and the price of grain was an infallible index to economic conditions at any given time. In early Babylonia the grain of corn provided the basic unit for the system of weights, and cereal took the place of

money in commerce. From earliest times the word "bread" was used for food in general (Genesis 3:19, Proverbs 6:8).

The metaphor of *eating and drinking* was quite common among the Jews. It points to taking something within one's innermost being (*New Bible Dict*).

Getting it in Context: Read John 6

For extra thought: Galatians 2:20; Psalm 63

- What do you think it means when Jesus refers to himself as the bread of life? In what ways is Jesus like bread?
- What do you think it means to "eat my flesh and drink my blood" v53?
- What type of 'believing in Jesus' is emphasised from this passage?

I am the light of the world
John 8:12

Cultural Background:

The word *light* is used in connection with joy, blessing and life in contrast to sorrow, adversity and death (Genesis 1:3f; Job 10:22, 18:5f). At an early time it came to signify God's presence and favour (Psalm 27:1; Isaiah 9:2; 2 Corinthians 4:6) in contrast to God's judgement (Amos 5:18). From this and other sources arises the contrast between *light and darkness* as metaphors for the contrast between *good and evil*.

Jesus made this statement during the festival of Tabernacles, which celebrated the end of harvest and reminded the Jews about Moses and the desert wanderings. The Israelites

had been guided across the desert by a pillar of light in the sky, which was symbolised during this festival by the lighting of golden candelabra.

Getting it in Context: Read Jn 8:12-30

For extra thought: Jn 1:1-18; 1Jn 1:5-10.

- What do you think it means when Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world? In what ways is Jesus like light?
- In what ways do followers of Jesus not 'walk in darkness'? What does it look like to *have* the 'light of life'?
- How has Jesus' light made a difference to my life?...and to what I see?
- The word to *follow* in John 8:12 in the Greek language is in the continuous tense ie. "to continually follow". Jesus is speaking of whole-hearted discipleship, not casual adherence. (L Morris *Gospel of John*, 1971) In what ways might 'the light' help us 'follow continually'?

Before Abraham was, I am!
John 8:58

Background:

I AM was the term God used to describe himself when he talked to Moses. (Exodus 3:4). I AM is an equivalent to *Yahweh*, the Hebrew name for God, which in the Old Testament we translate as LORD. Jews considered *Yahweh* a name too sacred to pronounce. God also described himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 3:15).

Note too that *I AM* is present tense, not past or future. To each successive generation, God, the *I AM*, is in the present.

The *Pharisees* were a minority group of Jews who sought to interpret and keep the Torah (The Mosaic Law) in every detail. They determined that there were 613 commandments, 248 positive, 365 negative. Their next step was to “make a hedge” around these commandments, ie. to interpret and supplement them so that there was no possibility of breaking them by accident or ignorance. There were 1521 of these.

Blasphemy is an act of shameless insolence in which God is insulted by man. In Jewish culture blasphemy was a sin punishable by death, the normal means being stoning (Leviticus 24:16) (*New Bible Dict*)

in Context: Read John 8:31-59

For extra thought: Exodus 3:1-15; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1

- Why did the Jews get so upset about what Jesus said in v58?
Notice Jesus’ response to the Jews in v44.
- What do you think it means when Jesus refers to himself as the I AM? How does this fill out the picture for us of what Jesus is like?
- Reflect on the political correctness of calling a Jew (esp. a Pharisee) a child of Satan. How does the “meek and mild, baby in a manger Jesus” stack up against the one you encounter in John 8?
- What principles of relating can we draw from Jesus here?
- From where did he draw his conviction and security to relate like this?

I am the Good Shepherd

John 10:11

Background:

Shepherd imagery was common in many parts of the ancient world. Kings and gods alike were described as shepherds. Jesus uses an allegory in John 10 based on the main facts of herding sheep in Palestine. Sheep were herded into a walled enclosure, mostly open to the sky, but providing shelter from bad weather and predators. Large pens contained several flocks and the door into the pen was guarded by a doorkeeper. The Shepherd had the right to enter and this was recognised when the doorkeeper opened to him. When the Shepherd came in he would call his sheep, who knew his voice. In this way mixed flocks could be separated. When going out to pasture the shepherd would *lead* them rather than driving them. The sheep would follow because they knew the shepherd’s voice (*L Morris Gospel of John, 1971*).

Getting it in Context: Read John 10:1-21

For extra thought: Psalm 23; Isaiah 53:6; Matthew 9:36,37

- What do you think it means when Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd? In what ways is Jesus like a shepherd?
- How is the good shepherd distinguished from a hired hand?
- What are you thinking and feeling as you reflect on:
 - Jesus as your Shepherd?
 - The sort of sheep that you are?

I am the way and the truth and the life

John 14:6

Getting it in Context: Read John 14:1-14

For extra thought: Acts 4:12; Romans 5:1-11; Hebrews 10:19-23; 1 Peter 1:3-9

- What do you think it means when Jesus refers to himself as the way? How is Jesus ‘the way’?
- What do you think it means when Jesus refers to himself as the truth? In what ways is Jesus like ‘truth’?
- What do you think it means when Jesus refers to himself as the life? In what ways is Jesus ‘life’?
- These claims seem so absolutist. How would these extreme claims look in the everyday if we took them seriously and lived them out?
- Can you identify with Philip’s struggle?

I am the resurrection and the life

John 11:25

Background:

The Christian idea of *resurrection* was different from Greek and Jewish ideas. The Greeks thought of the body as a hindrance to true life and they looked forward to the time when the soul would be free from its shackles. They firmly rejected the idea of resurrection (Acts 17:32). Jews believed in

resurrection, that the body would be raised from the dead at the end of time, but without transformation.

Mary and Martha were grieving for their dead brother, and at times of bereavement like this, thoughts would often turn to the 'resurrection' – to the time when God would put everything right and vindicate the 'faithful'. But Jesus took this *future* hope and everything being put right and he brought it into the *present* and into the *personal* - Jesus identified himself personally as the present hope of Israel.

Getting it in Context: Read John 11:17-44

For extra thought: 1 Corinthians 15; Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 3:1-4

- What do you think Jesus meant when he said "I am the resurrection and the life"?
- What do you think it means "whoever lives and believes in me will never die"?
- What difference would it make to the present for us to be believing in Jesus as the resurrection and the life?

I am the true vine

John 15:5

Background:

The preparation of a *vineyard* usually involved terracing the hillsides and clearing stones. A hedge of boxthorn was grown around the vineyard to deter animals and thieves. The ground was dug over carefully and when the soil was friable, young vines were planted. Vines were *pruned* each spring. Left to itself a vine would produce a

lot of unproductive growth in the form of canes or shoots. For maximum fruitfulness extensive pruning was necessary². A covered wooden structure, the watchtower, was erected on high ground overlooking the vineyard, where the owners kept a watch as the *grapes* matured. Apart from their use in wine, grapes were an important part of the diet in Palestine, dried into raisin cakes they provided iron and other essential minerals¹.

Getting it in Context: Read John 15:1-16

For extra thought: Colossians 2:6-10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Galatians 5:13-26

- What does it mean to remain in Christ?
- How has God pruned you? How did you feel? What was the effect of the pruning on you?
- What sort of fruit do you think Jesus is wanting?

I am the Living One; I was
dead, and behold I am alive
for ever and ever!

Revelation 1:18

Getting it in Context: Revelation 1

Check this out: John 20:24-31

Read Revelation chapters 2 & 3.

- What do you learn about the Jesus who talks to the seven churches?
- What is he saying to you?

I am the Alpha and Omega,
the First and the Last, the
Beginning and the End

Revelation 22:13

Getting it in Context: Read Revelation 22

- what does it mean when Jesus says he is the Alpha and Omega?

Read Revelation 19:11-21:27.

- What do you learn about Jesus from these passages?

Summary

We've spent a bit of time looking at some of the things that Jesus says he is. And as you've gone through this, you've probably had some insights into the images Jesus has used to describe himself. So now would be a good time to bring them all together!

On a sheet of paper write out the I AM statements Jesus makes about himself and include any adjectives, metaphors, general insights that you've had to help 'flesh out' your picture of who Jesus is.

Then consider these questions...

- Who does Jesus say he is?
- How are you responding to this?
- What is he asking you to do?

the end.