

The I Am Statements in John - Before Abraham Was, I Am

I Am's series, who Jesus reveals himself to be in John – how we should live as a result.

- *Jesus in the Present Tense* by Warren Wiersbe
- *I Am changes who I Am* by Gregg Matte – I liked that and want to title our series.

Tonight - introductory, look at background of I Am, overview the I am statements of Jesus

PASSAGE: John 8:48–59 (ESV)

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.

- Jews accusing Jesus of having a demon, insult – Samaritan.
- Claims – who keeps word will bring eternal life, Father (God) glorifies him (approves).
- Abraham in OT, respected figure, father of the nation—looked forward to my day—Messiah OT pointed toward.
- **Jesus said**, “you do not know the Father of Abraham” Called them Liars, said that they do not know God – this caused great anger in them.

In this passage,

- May have been, shouting, anger, hush—raises his hand, “I AM!!”
- **Reaction**—wanted to stone him, kill him, **why so strong?**
 - Claiming to be God! Called blasphemy, penalty in the OT was capital punishment by stoning (Lv 24:16; Deut 13:6-11). Not by mob violence, but by a just judgment, witnesses/leaders (Deut 17:2-7)

Another part of the reason their reaction... so strong OT background:

Background is important to understand their strong reaction. Important phrase in Greek (I am)...same phrase was used in the Septuagint—Greek translation of the OT that many used then. They knew the phrase he was using in Greek was a clear reference to the burning bush scene with Moses where God calls himself the I AM. (Exodus 3:14)

Background, burning bush Exodus 3:1–17 (ESV)

¹ Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵ Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” ¹² He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

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. ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, ¹⁷ and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

- Moses asks for God's name – so he can tell the people who has sent, promise.
- God identifies himself – God of your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.
- God shares his name, three ways:
 1. "I Am who I am"
 2. Tell the them "I Am" has sent you.
 3. Tell them "Yahweh...has sent me to you...this is my name forever."
- God reveals himself to be "Yahweh" , Hebrew consonants YHWH, and this phrase "I Am who I am," both are built on the same Hebrew word (hyayh)
- What does "I am who I am" mean? Implications of the name/phrase.

1. **God is Self-existent**—independent, not dependent on anyone for his existence. His being is grounded in only himself. Necessary vs Contingent beings

No reality exists behind God—His personality and power is owing solely to himself.

Acts 17:24–25 (ESV)

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

2. **God is Creator and Sustainer** of all that exists.

Acts 17:28 – In him we live and move and have our being

All power and energy in the universe flows from God

We must conform to God, not He to us, there is objective reality, He defines it

3. **God is Unchanging**—immutable, being and character have always remained consistent.

Four aspects of God unchanging: character, nature, purposes, promises.

Ps 33:11 – The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

4. **God is Eternal**—God is not a created being and is not subject to the limitations of time. God has always existed and will always exist, **not** "I was" "I will be"

I AM – "I was, I am now, and I will always be" God exists.

Isaiah 40:28 – The Lord (Yahweh) is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary.

5. **God is the LORD**—rules, reigns, king/master of universe.

- See this in verse 15, 16 – Say to the people Yahweh has sent you, This becomes the proper name for God.
- Yahweh then becomes translated as LORD.

- Yahweh sounds in Hebrew like a form of the verb “to be” or here “I am”
- English translations put YHWH as the LORD in all capitals in the OT. Used 6,828 times in the OT.
- Also “Lord” in Greek becomes a title for Jesus—The Lord Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 6:4–5

⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

- This is a confession of Lordship: Yahweh, the Lord, is the one and only true God and therefore deserves all of our love and our allegiance.
- But most importantly, **God is Present** with his people!

Main focus of this passage... a nuance of I AM is “I will be” meaning I will be with you! God tells Moses he will be with him, his people, to be their God – save, provide, protect, guide...bring them out of Egypt/captivity and into the promised land.

God is saying, “I have promised this and I will see it through! I will be with you!”

So, when we get to Jesus in **John 8** and other places he uses this phrase, all this background is loaded in this phrase—self-existence, creator, sustainer, unchanging, eternal, rules/reigns, present with his people—all things that are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

New Testament picks up on these themes:

Colossians 1:16–17

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

- Creator, self-existent, Sustains the universe, eternal

Hebrews 13:8

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

- Unchanging, immutable, completely consistent

Matthew 28:18–20

- End of great commission—emphasizes his continual presence in their lives—“behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”

In John, Apostle John uses phrase, “I Am” 23x in the Greek is (ego eimi, Εγώ είμι), it is used for emphasis, a repetition, literally means “I, yes I, Am”

This phrase is used in three ways in John:

1. **When people are uncertain** (uncertain predicate) – 6:20, walks on water, disciples were scared and uncertain, to comfort them, Jesus said, “It is I.” ...Do not be afraid.
2. **Absolute statements**—like in our passage today Jn 8, points to his self-existence and eternal nature (6:20, 8:24, 18:5) “Before Abraham was, I AM” (8:58)
3. **Metaphorical statements** (explicit predicate)—the absolute I am added to seven powerful metaphors to describe who Jesus is.

These are known as the seven I am sayings in John:

The I AM Sayings in John
1. I AM the Bread of Life (John 6:35,48,51)
2. I AM the Light of the World (John 8:12)
3. I AM the Door/Gate (John 10:7)
4. I AM the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-14)
5. I AM the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)
6. I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)
7. I AM the True Vine (John 15:1)

This is how The I Am Changes who I am

Jesus Is	Jesus Provides
Bread of Life (John 6:35,48,51)	Spiritual life and nourishment
Light of the World (John 8:12)	Truth, purity, eternal life
Door/Gate (John 10:7)	The way to eternal life, abundant life now
Good Shepherd (John 10:11-14)	Protection, provision, guidance
Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25)	Power to overcome death, spiritual forces, vibrancy
Way, Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)	Path to eternal life, objective truth in Word, eternity
True Vine (John 15:1)	Spiritual strength, companionship, power to bear fruit

1. **John 6:35** *I am the Bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*
 - a. Jesus gives spiritual life—he satisfies the hunger in our spirit to be filled/belong.
 - b. When we hunger to belong, when we are dry spiritually, Jesus fills us with his presence and satisfies our deepest need for relationship.
2. **John 8:12** *I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*

- a. Jesus gives the light of life—he provides truth, enlightens our minds, eternal
- b. When we feel we are in the dark (confused, discouraged b/c of sin), Jesus provides truth, understanding, promises to lean on.

3. **John 10:9** *I am the door of the sheep; if anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.*

- a. Jesus gives entry into salvation—he provides the way to eternal life.
- b. When uncertain about destiny, Jesus provides salvation and life abundant/its full

4. **John 10:11** *I am the good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

- a. Jesus gives eternal life and protection, provision, and direction.
- b. When we are scared, anxious, in need of direction, Jesus shepherds us—protects, provides, guides.

5. **John 11:25** *I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*

- a. Jesus gives life to the dead—provides spiritual life.
- b. When we feel lifeless, stagnant, stuck, spiritually dead, Jesus provides resurrection power to overcome death, devil, and give life and abundance.

6. **John 14:6** *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

- a. Jesus gives the only path to eternal life—he provides the way to a relationship to God, he defines what is true, he is eternal life.
- b. When we feel lost, feel confused, need truth and direction, Jesus provides direction for us, truth/Word for our confusion and ultimately a life—the path to relationship—true peace and companionship.

7. **John 15:1** *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*

- a. Jesus gives true, genuine nourishment—he provides spiritual sustenance, power.
- b. When we feel dry, weary, unconnected, Jesus provides the strength to thrive and the power to be fruitful Christians, cannot bear fruit apart from him.

Summary from Warren Wiersbe:

“In his I AM statements, Jesus not only tells us who he is, but He also tells us what He can do for us and what we can become through Him. If we are spiritually hungry, He offers us the bread of life. To those walking in darkness, He gives the light of life; and we need not fear death, because he is the resurrection and the life. Can we be sure of going to heaven? Yes, because He is “the way, the truth,

and the life" (14:6). Can our lives be fruitful for His glory? Yes, if we abide in Him and draw upon His life. In Jesus Christ, the great I AM, we have all that we need!"

(Wiersbe)

DISCUSSION AND PRAYER

1. Share a verse, thought, or idea from the material this evening that you think is important or meaningful.
2. Review the six implications of God being the I AM and the seven sayings of Jesus and what he provides. Think about the things going on in your life right now. Are there any I Am implications or provisions of Jesus that you can apply to your situation? How do they relate?
3. If time, reflect together on this quote from John Piper, "Could Jesus have taken any more exalted words upon his lips? When Jesus said, 'Before Abraham was, I AM.' He took up all the majestic truth of the name of God, wrapped it in humility and servanthood, offered himself to atone for all our rebellion, and made a way for us to see the glory of God without fear."