

■ LIFE OF JESUS

June 13, 2021 | The Seven “I Ams” of Jesus Part 1

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

- How would you identify Jesus Christ?
- Why is Jesus’s identity so important?
- Read John 6:25–40; 8:12–20; 10:1–18.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

John’s Gospel identifies Jesus as our Savior.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

We are in need of a Savior. There is nothing more important in this world than identifying our Savior.

■ MEDITATE

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to guide you through the interpretation of parables.

Q: *Why is identifying a person important?*

Q: *What are some of the most important things you would include in a description of someone?*

We may think describing someone would be as simple as stating basic facts, but it is hardly that simple. Descriptions can vary significantly from one context to another. For example, imagine you were trying to set up two acquaintances on a blind date. You would tailor the description of your friends to highlight their most attractive qualities. Now, if you were describing those same friends for a police report, your description would change significantly.

In his Gospel, John could have described Jesus in any number of ways. But all of humanity is in need of a Savior, and John knew Jesus to be that Savior. So, he highlighted Jesus's teachings that reveal Him to be just that.

Q: *Why is it appropriate to emphasize Jesus's role as our Savior?*

Q: *What are the implications of the Gospel writers' emphasis on Jesus's role as our Savior?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus traveled many places and taught many people during His ministry. He healed the sick and lame. He disputed with the religious elites. Each of the Gospel writers, however, took measures to emphasize Jesus's saving and sacrificial death on our behalf. All the Gospels emphasize the final week of Jesus's life. One thing they did not want readers to miss about Jesus was that He died for them, and they needed the salvation He provides. As you interact with others concerning Jesus this week, make sure you identify Him as the Savior all the world needs.

■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The "I am" statements, each in a unique way, identify Jesus as the Savior of the world.

- 
- 
1. JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.
 2. JESUS IS THE LIGHT.
 3. JESUS IS THE DOOR.
 4. JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

GOING DEEPER

+This section will investigate four of the “I am” statements to understand Jesus’s message.

1. JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.

■ JOHN 6:25–40

Q: *What Old Testament story is this passage related to?*

Q: *What were the crowds seeking from Jesus?*

After they left Egypt, the Israelites found themselves in a vast wasteland. With no food or water, they would soon perish (Exodus 16; Nehemiah 9:15). In response to their grumbling, God fed them bread called manna. Every morning, the manna appeared on the ground like dew. The Israelites gathered what they needed and the rest melted away. This happened for nearly forty years. God sustained His people with bread from heaven.

When Jesus called the crowds to belief in His person and work, they asked Him for a sign akin to Moses’s bringing down bread from heaven. In response, Jesus said He is the bread that has come down from heaven. Just as manna nourished the Israelites, Jesus provides the spiritual nourishment all of humanity needs.

Q: *Where do you turn for spiritual nourishment?*

Q: *How can you encourage yourself to go to Jesus for spiritual nourishment?*

APPLICATION POINT – In search of spiritual nourishment, our modern world has tried to replace Jesus with one substitute after another. Some people turn to romantic relationships. Others turn to their work. Others will turn to drugs. Some people even turn to physical nourishment, such as comfort food or chocolate. None of these works, at least not for long. We each have an unquenchable need for God that we cannot fill on our own. Only Jesus can fill it.

What do you look to as a substitute for Christ? Many things are not intrinsically sinful, but if you look to them as a substitute for Jesus, they become idols. Make a list of the idols you have. Ask God to help you do whatever it takes to lay aside your idols and look to Him to fill your greatest need.

Q: *Did the crowds understand Jesus's point about work and bread?*

Q: *What did Jesus say about the will of God in this passage?*

At several points in these verses, the crowd failed to see the metaphorical nature of Jesus's message. In verse 26, Jesus said the crowds were preoccupied with the bread He had fed them rather than the sign to which the bread pointed. In verse 28, the crowd has become focused on the work or physical labor Jesus seemed to be calling for and missed His point, that they must believe in Him. In verse 34, after He identified the bread of God with a person, they asked Jesus for actual bread. These misunderstandings show an unwillingness to be open to His teaching.

Q: *Why was the crowd closed off to Jesus's meaning?*

Q: *What does their misunderstanding reveal about their worldview?*

APPLICATION POINT – The crowds were operating on the basis of materialism. They were not open to the spiritual dynamic of Jesus’s teaching. Materialism is alive and well in our time as well, even within our churches. Materialism is the belief that nothing exists beyond the material world, which is an inherently atheistic worldview. While many churchgoers would deny a naturalistic worldview, they nevertheless frequently operate under this basic principle. It is impossible for faith in Christ to flourish under materialism, as seen in the repeated failure of the crowds to understand Jesus’s teaching.

How can a professing believer who faithfully attends church and would never consider denying the existence of God come to operate under materialistic principles? It is easy to pick up materialism from living in a materialistic society. We are confronted by it at every turn, and if we are unprepared, we can easily find ourselves under its control. The best way to combat the influence of materialism is to challenge it with the claims of Jesus Christ. When you encounter materialism in your workplace, ask yourself what that mindset makes of Jesus’s claim to be the bread of life. Can materialism offer what Jesus can?

2. JESUS IS THE LIGHT.

■ JOHN 8:12–20

Q: *How does Jesus help the world see?*

Q: *What does Jesus help the world see?*

Jesus’s claim to be the light of the world must be understood within the larger light-darkness theme in John’s Gospel. In the book of John, darkness represents sin and its power in the world. Those who walk in darkness are under the dominion of sin. They oppose God and are opposed by God. Thus, for Jesus to claim He is the light of the world says much more than that He helps us see as we move about and keeps us from bumping into things. The Light of the World, Jesus, overcomes the power of sin, frees us of the dominion of sin, and places us under His own dominion. To walk in the light is to live under the rule of God through the work of Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus is the light that brings life.

Q: *What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ?*

Q: *In what ways are you failing to follow Christ?*

APPLICATION POINT – You cannot “sort of” or “halfway” follow someone. You either follow them to the destination or you do not. The same can be said for following Jesus. You cannot follow Him with half a heart. To do so is to remain in darkness. Many people want to hedge their bets. They want to hold back from following Him in some areas of their life in case He turns out not to be all they expected. Or they want to follow Jesus and follow the world too. But we either follow Jesus and allow His light to shine on us, or we continue to grope around in darkness. If you are guilty of holding back from following Jesus, write down the areas of your life where you are particularly susceptible to withholding. Give the list to a pastor or close friend in church and ask them to walk with you as you struggle to follow Jesus with a whole heart.

Q: *What was the Pharisees’ main concern in this passage?*

Q: *What was Jesus’s response to their concern?*

In saying He was the light of the world, Jesus made a major assertion about Himself, God, and the world. The Pharisees challenged the validity of this claim by accusing Him of offering uncorroborated testimony. Their concern was legitimate, but there was a problem. Jesus was claiming an authority higher than any human can affirm in their own experience. If someone could affirm Jesus’s testimony, they would also share His supreme authority, which would call Jesus’s authority into question.

Jesus appeared to be in an inescapable quandary, but He did the only thing possible to verify His claim. He appealed to God the Father. God is the only one who could affirm Jesus’s authority and claim. Jesus said the Father affirmed His testimony, and the Pharisees did not accept His claim because they did not accept the testimony of God about Him.

Q: *Why do you believe in the testimony of Jesus?*

Q: *How would you defend your faith in Jesus to others?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus acknowledged that Jewish law required two people to affirm someone’s testimony for it to be considered true. He met this requirement with His own testimony and the testimony of the Father on His behalf. We have two witnesses as well that verify the truth we believe about Jesus Christ. The first is the testimony of Scripture. The Bible claims Jesus to be the Light of the World, the Son of God the Father, and our only Savior. The second witness is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit affirms the witness of the Scriptures in our lives. Is your faith in either of these testimonies weak? If so, work to increase your knowledge and faith in them. For example, take some time and write down how you have felt the Holy Spirit testifying to you about the truth of Jesus Christ. This is a standard Christian practice otherwise known as “your testimony.”

3. JESUS IS THE DOOR.

■ JOHN 10:1–18

Q: *Who are the thieves and nobles in Jesus’s extended metaphor about the sheepfold?*

Q: *How many roles does Jesus fill in this metaphor?*

In John 10:1–8, Jesus gave an extended metaphor comparing His followers and a sheepfold. This metaphor can be challenging to understand because the characters can fill different roles. Take, for example, those who are entering the sheepfold. If they enter by any other way than the door, they are thieves and robbers. Jesus likely had false prophets and illegitimate officials in mind. These clandestine figures appear to be counterparts to Jesus, because they are an attempt to hold sway over the sheep. They are unsuccessful at misleading true sheep. In John 10:9, however, the ones entering the sheepfold through the door become part of the flock. Thus, the ones entering the sheepfold can be both thieves and robbers, in contrast to Jesus, as well as sheep who become part of the flock.

Jesus also serves multiple roles within this extended metaphor. He is the gate who determines who enters the sheepfold (10:9). He is also the shepherd who enters the fold by the door and the one the sheep listen to.

Q: *How can you identify false teachers within the church?*

Q: *How can you keep yourself from teaching falsely within a church setting?*

APPLICATION – Compromise can be a wonderful concept. It can keep marriages together and businesses afloat. I recently heard a business analyst remark that the reason people fail in the workplace is seldom due strictly to incompetence but rather the inability to work well with others. Compromise is widely regarded as a virtue that keeps the world going.

Compromise is not always a positive thing in the church, however. Today, many voices from within churches claim we must compromise on our foundational teachings for the sake of relevance and growth. They want to abandon long held doctrines and views they think the world will find unacceptable in exchange for a continued hearing. The problem is twofold. First, the world has made no guarantee of a continued voice if doctrine is abandoned. What the compromisers are promoting is not a true compromise. The church would give with no guarantee of getting. Second, and more importantly, the church would be compromising its foundation. If the doctrines that identify the church are abandoned, the church has ceased to be the church.

Church members must always be aware of thieves and robbers who have entered illegitimately. Church members must know also what they believe and stand firm on those beliefs, whatever the cost.

4. JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Q: *How did Jesus distinguish Himself from the false shepherds?*

Q: *What was Jesus's goal after securing the sheep from His own fold?*

Jesus continued the sheepfold metaphor by proclaiming Himself to be the good shepherd. The good shepherd is characterized by his willingness to protect the flock at all costs, even his own life. The disciples would not have known this, but Jesus was not discussing a hypothetical in this instance. He died to secure our salvation. He is the Good Shepherd, the true owner of the flock.

Q: *Have you ever felt pressured to abandon your Christian convictions?*

Q: *How can Jesus's words sustain us through persecution?*

Jesus said the hired hand would flee rather than risk his life to protect the flock. Our role in protecting the flock is different from Jesus's, but we still have a responsibility to preserve the flock. You cannot behave like a hired hand when pressured to give up or compromise your faith. Doing so not only shows the lack of your own faith but will also endanger the faith of others. Take some time to count the cost of remaining faithful to Christ. Also, take time to count the cost of unfaithfulness.

NEXT STEPS

John's identification of who Jesus is and what He came to do is essential for a commitment to Jesus Christ. After reading this lesson, take some time to reflect upon the four "I Am" statements covered in this lesson. What do they say about who you are? Write out four corresponding "I Am" statements describing who you are in Jesus.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Lord Jesus, thank you for being the Good Shepherd.

God, help me oppose those who would sacrifice the flock by compromising our convictions.

Holy Spirit, confirm in my heart the validity of Jesus's testimony.

