

# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

October 3, 2021 | *The Seven “I Am” Statements of Jesus*

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

- What is the most important thing in Christianity?
- Pray that this lesson will help you come face-to-face with Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.
- Read John 11:17–27; 14:1–14; 15:1–17.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus is the life-giving, hope-filled center of the Christian faith.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

There is nothing more important than understanding who Jesus is.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6).*

## GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to begin thinking of why Jesus’s identity is so important.

Q: *What are some common explanations for the identity of Jesus of Nazareth?*

Q: *Why do people feel the need to explain Jesus's identity?*

Who is Jesus? Our answer to this question is the most important decision of our lives. In Colossians 1:17, Paul said, "In [Christ] all things hold together." Paul placed Jesus at the very center of everything and attributed to Him the power to hold the very fabric of the universe together. Such a testimony is evidence of the radical difference Jesus had made in the life of the apostle Paul. According to John, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8; 22:13). Again, John understood that Jesus is the key individual in all of human history. He is the first and the last. Everything in between can be explained in terms of Him.

Most people today do not share the apostles' magnificent vision of Jesus. Many are willing to admit He was a good moral teacher. They think of Him in the same way they do Buddha or Gandhi. New Testament scholars have provided a plethora of ways to identify Jesus. Some believe He was part of a separatist movement, such as the Essenes. Others have thought He was a Jewish revolutionary. Some have suggested He was simply a rabbi who suddenly found Himself out of step with the norms of society. Ironically, the need of so many to explain Him illustrates the significance of who Jesus is.

When considering the identity of Jesus Christ, the most important place to start is with His own testimony. In his Gospel, John recorded seven of Jesus's statements in which He identified Himself, each beginning with the words "I am." If you want to understand who He is, there is no better place to begin than with the man Himself.

Q: *What do you think most non-believers would change about Jesus if they could?*

Q: *What is the most reliable witness concerning the nature and identity of Jesus Christ?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a movement among New Testament scholars known as the quest for the historical Jesus. They believed the portrayal of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels had become skewed by the theological commitments of the early church and, that by examining Jesus's culture and subjecting His words to the analysis of modern psychology, they would be able to describe

for the world what He was really like. They denied His miracles. They denied He ever claimed to be the Jewish Messiah or the Son of God. They claimed His only concern was teaching the love of God and the brotherhood of all human beings. The participants in this quest were quite proud of themselves until others began pointing out that their description of Jesus looked a lot like them! The quest of the historical Jesus turned out to be an attempt to remake Jesus into their own image.

When seeking to understand who Jesus is, it is crucial to begin in the right place. Despite the skepticism of the scholars participating in the quest for the historical Jesus, there is no better place to begin than with God's Word. Through the Bible, we become familiar with ideas like creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. We can begin to define concepts like sin and atonement. At the outset of this lesson, and any time you explore the identity of Christ, you must commit to starting with the truths provided in God's Word. This is the only way Jesus will ever make sense.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The first four "I am" statements were studied earlier in this series. This lesson will consider the final three "I am" statements.

1. I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.
2. I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.
3. I AM THE VINE.

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will investigate the "I am" statements in John 11:25, 14:6, and 15:1. These statements will be set within their surrounding context. We will also draw implications from them for us to apply today.*

## 1. I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

### ■ JOHN 11:17-27

Q: *Was Jesus speaking of physical death or spiritual death in this passage?*

Q: *Why did Jesus say everyone who believes in Him will never die?*

In John 11:17–27, Martha was mourning the death of her brother, Lazarus. She and her family were close friends with Jesus, and they believed He was the Messiah. Martha also believed if Jesus had been present, He could have saved her brother. His reputation as a miracle worker was well known. But Lazarus was dead, and she believed it was too late to do anything about it. But Jesus told her Lazarus would rise again. And Martha acknowledged that he would rise again on the last day. With remarkable clarity for her time, she spoke of a day in the future when God will intervene in human history and raise the dead to life. Jesus responded to her by both affirming her and alluding to the fact that resurrection on the last day was not all He meant. In so doing, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Q: *Why is the resurrection from the dead a great hope among Christians?*

Q: *How is the resurrection a symbol of the victory of Jesus?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Resurrection from the dead to eternal life is a remarkable gift for us in God’s plan for His creation. God’s glory is at the center of the Christian faith. He would deserve all the praise we can muster during our lives even if the resurrection of the dead were not part of His plan. But God has determined His people will be raised from the dead. The resurrection is a demonstration of His love for His people. It is a demonstration of His power over His creation. It demonstrates Christ’s ultimate victory over sin and death. Even believers can become completely wrapped up in our lives on earth. This is understandable. Throughout the course of this series on the life of Jesus, you have been challenged to make your life count for the gospel to the greatest extent possible, but in doing so to not completely take your eyes away from the great hope God has provided us for eternity. Take time to reflect on the day Jesus shall return, the dead shall rise, tears will be no more, and you will behold the wonderful face of your Savior in resurrection glory.

Q: *Was Jesus thinking about the resurrection on the last day or something else when He spoke to Martha?*

Q: *Why was Martha unable to see what Jesus meant when He said Lazarus would rise from the dead?*

When Jesus told Martha her brother would rise from the dead, she assumed He was referring to his resurrection on the last day, but Jesus meant Lazarus would be raised to a new life right then. In responding to Martha, He said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Martha had an incomplete understanding of what He meant. She did not fully understand who Jesus was because she had limited the extent of His ministry to resurrection after death, but Jesus came so that His followers might truly live now. There is new life available in Jesus for those who will believe in Him now. In Ephesians 2:1–10 Paul affirmed Jesus’s words, saying we were once dead in our trespasses and sins, but Jesus has made us alive. Since Christ has “made us alive,” we are now able to accomplish the good works for which God created us. The blessings of the resurrection are not completely reserved for the eternal state. There is new life in Christ available now.

Q: *What does Lazarus’s resurrection teach us about our lives now?*

Q: *How are you limiting the benefits of new life in Christ?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Limiting the joys of new life in Christ to the eternal state will severely inhibit the church’s witness to the lost. If we cannot show the benefits of living for Jesus now, the best we can say to non-believers is, “Take my word for it.” Jesus had far more in mind when He said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” This week, spend some time reflecting on passages that cover attributes associated with the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23; Colossians 3:12–17). Ask God to make the new life you have in Christ evident through the emergence of these attributes in your life.

## 2. I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

### ❏ JOHN 14:1-14

Q: *What was the occasion for Jesus's address in John 14?*

Q: *What prompted Him to say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life"?*

John 14:1–14 is part of Jesus's address to the disciples on the evening before His arrest. It is known as the "Farewell Discourse." He was preparing the disciples for the events that would shortly transpire. The thought of being without Him weighed heavily on the disciples. But Jesus affirmed that He would return in the future to receive His followers. One day, they would find themselves again in His presence and in the presence of the Father. In this passage, as in others in John's Gospel, Jesus's message to them blends two realities. In one sense, it seems as if He was just shuttling off to some other location in Israel, but readers on this side of the resurrection generally recognize that He was departing this earthly reality to join God in heaven. His going would somehow prepare His followers for a place in heaven with the Father. Perhaps sensing their confusion, Jesus also told them they knew the way to where He was going. But the disciples were not tracking with Him. Thomas questioned whether they could know the way to the Father since they did not know where Jesus was going. Thomas could not unhook himself from thinking only in terms of physical time and space. He was asking for a roadmap. Jesus replied to him in the clearest way possible. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Forget roadmaps and compasses. If you want to find God, focus on Jesus. He is the way. If you want to know the truth that is needed to go before God's presence for eternity, forget your traditions, pop psychology, and horoscopes. Study Jesus. He is the only truth you need. If you want to live your life to the fullest, do not seek adventures, drugs, money, or sex. Search for the life Jesus offers. Jesus's response shows there is one way to know and enjoy God forever, and that one way is through Him.

Q: *How do modern secularists respond to claims of absolute religious truth?*

Q: *Why are claims of absolute truth vital for Christianity?*

**APPLICATION** – Many non-religious people shudder at claims of absolute truth, especially within the realm of religious truth. Religious inclusivism is the dominating paradigm. They have stories they like to tell. Religions are like people taking different paths up the same mountain or like blind men unable to identify an elephant because they think the part they are touching is all there is. Unfortunately, they fail to recognize the pretentious superiority underlying such tales. In their minds, every religious person is deceiving themselves. They are the only ones enlightened enough to see the truth, but doesn't this make them just like the people they are chastising? If you confront them with this inconsistency, some will sheepishly admit they had not thought through the implications of their position. Others will be offended at your refusal to get with the picture. The real problem, of course, is that in the minds of secular people religion does not matter all that much. Most will not begrudge you holding to some private religious principles, but they view as bigotry any suggestions that those claims are absolute. But John 14:6 leaves Christians with no other option. We cannot abandon the absolute exclusivity of Jesus Christ. To do so is to deny the gospel and endanger souls. As you read through this lesson, reaffirm your commitment to Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father.

Q: *What additional "I am" statements did Jesus make in John 14:1-14?*

Q: *What instigated these "I am" statements?*

The seven "I am" statements in John's Gospel refer to seven metaphors that begin with "I am." These statements create unique images by which we gain additional insight into the identity and ministry of Jesus. There are other significant occurrences of "I am" within John's Gospel that are not included with the seven "I am" statements because they are non-metaphorical. For example, in John 8:58, Jesus responded to those claiming He could not have seen Abraham by saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." This is an allusion to "Yahweh," the proper name used for God in the Old Testament. The allusion was not missed by the Jews. They picked up rocks in order to stone Him. Another "I am" occurs within John 14:1-14. In John 14:10-11, Jesus twice said, "I am in the Father." While not metaphorical, this "I am" statement has enormous implications for understanding Jesus's identity. In saying "I am in the Father," Jesus affirmed both His unity with the Father and their uniqueness. This is one of the verses underlying the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. There is one God. He has existed for eternity in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God. There is real unity between all three members of the Godhead and also real distinction. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

Q: *Why would you refuse to worship another person?*

Q: *How does the Trinity model mutual love and harmony between people?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The doctrine of the Trinity is not just something fussy theologians argued about hundreds of years ago or something stiff-necked academics use to feed their superiority. The doctrine of the Trinity has significant implications for our lives. Sometimes, we are so used to the implications we simply fail to trace them back to the Trinity. For example, do you pray to Jesus? Worship Him? Confess Him as Lord? Would you do this for any other person in the history of humankind? Of course not! The reason you worship the man Jesus of Nazareth is because you recognize that He is also fully God. This is part of the doctrine of the Trinity. Other times, we should perhaps be chastised for failing to recognize the implications of the Trinity. If God has existed forever as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then He obviously values unity and harmony. We should expect nothing less from our families and our churches, but dysfunction has become so common in these spheres it is almost surprising when they are absent. This week, praise God for the doctrine of the Trinity. Think deeply about the doctrine of the Trinity and its implications for your life.

### 3. I AM THE VINE.

#### ■ JOHN 15:1-17

Q: *What is the role of the Father in this metaphor?*

Q: *What do the branches represent in this metaphor?*

This passage is a continuation of the Farewell Discourse. In John 15:1, Jesus compared Himself to a vine from which many branches grow. The branches in this metaphor are His disciples. When attached to the vine, the branches are able to bear fruit and thrive. Apart from the vine, they are worthless. They cannot bear fruit on



their own or even sustain themselves. They dry up and are thrown away. In comparing Himself with a vine, Jesus shows Himself to be the source of life for all believers. There is no life apart from Him. Furthermore, He shows Himself to be the true source of good fruit within our lives. The branches receive life from the vine and then naturally produce fruit. The branches do not produce fruit on their own. In order for His disciples to bear fruit, they must abide in Christ.

Q: *In what ways do you depend on Jesus?*

Q: *What are some ways even Christians attempt to live apart from Him?*

**APPLICATION** – Most Christians want to grow in their faith. They want to adopt habits that will lead to righteousness and glorify God and jettison the sinful practices that characterized their lives before Christ. A common misconception of the Christian faith is that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but somehow, we grow through our own efforts. When Jesus says, “I am the vine,” He reveals that nothing could be further from the truth. We do not grow through trying really hard to be good and avoid sin. We grow by drawing nourishment from the vine. We dwell on who Jesus is and what He came to do. In your Christian walk, be wary of seeking growth from your own efforts apart from the live-giving power of Jesus.

Q: *How do we abide in Jesus?*

Q: *What are the signs that Jesus loves us?*

Jesus calls His disciples to abide in His love. This is the only way for them to bear fruit. They can be assured of His love because of His willingness to die for them and because He considers them friends. By abiding in His love, Jesus’s disciples will keep His commandments. The dynamic of the gospel is clearly seen in this. They do not keep Jesus’s commandments to gain His love. They keep Jesus’s commandments because of His love.

Q: *How does Jesus's love motivate you to obey His commandments?*

Q: *How can you extend "gospel love" to those around you?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Our world lives by the principle “you do for me and I’ll do for you.” This is an exhausting way to live. There is no grace or love in this lifestyle. Seek to serve others this week. You may be ridiculed or taken advantage of. If that happens, use it as an opportunity to consider the scorn of Jesus on the cross. Sometimes, however, you may draw the attention of someone in need of the gospel.

## NEXT STEPS

What other metaphors can you think of to illustrate Jesus's identity and mission? Spend some time reflecting on the gospel and the world around you this week. How can we see the love of Christ in the ordinary things in life? Write your reflections down and share them with your group. Encourage one another in the gospel.

## PRAY

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

-Lord Jesus, help me to come to a greater understanding of who you are day by day.

-Father, thank you for the life you have given me now and the life you have promised me in the resurrection.

-Jesus, give me the courage to proclaim that you are the only way, the only truth, and the only life.

-Jesus, help me to abide in your love.