

The Message of Jesus Bible Study
Lent, 2025
Session 4 – Who Do YOU Say That I Am

Introduction:

I am

- How much, if at all, do your “I am” statements differ from what others would say about you if asked who you are?
- Would you rather tell people, “I am ...” or, “I am not”—and why?
- Does any single one of your “I am” statements communicate the whole truth about who you are?

“Among the most interesting cryptic, yet compelling ways in which Jesus answers the question of his identity and significance in John’s Gospel is with two small words, “I am.” (The Message of Jesus, p. 82)

Opening Prayer

God of light and life, in the beginning you spoke all things into being, and in the fullness of time, you spoke your Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. By your Spirit, guide us as we study the words he used to reveal himself to others, that our lives may become living words that reveal his glory and grace. Amen.

Video Session

- Which of Adam’s statements most interested, intrigued, surprised, or confused you? Why?
- What questions does this video segment raise for you?

Book Discussion Questions

I Am, the God of Israel

Exodus 3:1-15

- What does this story tell us about who God is?
- Why does Moses ask God for God’s name?
- With what words and in what special typeface (if any) does your Bible translate God’s name, “YHWH,” in verse 14?
- How do you understand the meaning of God’s name? How does this story help fill in its meaning?
- Ancient cultures often believed that knowing something or someone’s true name conveyed power over that thing or person how does God’s name reject this idea?
- Most English Bible translations substitute “the LORD” for YHWH, just as many observant Jews have, for centuries, substituted “Adonai” (“my Lord”) for “YHWH” when reading the Bible in Hebrew aloud. How well do you think the title “lord” conveys the meaning of God’s name, and why?

- Other devout Jews substitute *ha Shem* (the Name”) for “YHWH” when reading the Bible in Hebrew aloud, to show due reverence. Should Christians show similar special reverence for God’s name? if so, how? If not, why not?
- What does showing reverence for God’s name in everyday life, when not reading scripture aloud, look like?

When I Am Stands Alone

- Several times in John, as Hamilton notes, Jess says “I am” by itself, “as a nod to his identification with YHWH.” Read John 4:25-26;8:24-28; 13:18-20. What do these exchanges claim about the importance of knowing Jesus as “I am”?
- Read John 18:4-9. How does the physical response of those who’ve come to arrest Jesus underscore Jesus’ identity as “I am” how does Jesus’ control of the situation underscore it?
- Read John 6:16-21. How do the events of this story support Jesus’ self-identification as “I Am”?
- Hamilton says the story of Jesus calming the storm “is a picture of what Jesus still does in our lives as we trust in him.” When, if ever, have you experienced Jesus stilling some kind of “story” for you? For someone else? For your congregation?

The Classic Seven I Am Statements

- Bread of Life
 - Why do you think Jesus speaks of himself as bread and not some other food?
 - How do Deuteronomy 8.3 and Jesus’ quotation of it when tempted (Matthew 4.3-4; Luke 4.3-4) inform his use of bread as an image for himself?
 - Have you ever been “spiritually malnourished,” as Hamilton describes? What did you do, or what are you doing, about it? How can we avoid such malnourishment/
 - How important is the Eucharist (Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper) to your faith? Why? How important is it to your congregation’s worship?
- Light of the World
 - What is the deepest literal, physical darkness in which you have ever found yourself? How did you feel when you came into light—or when light came to you?
 - Jesus spoke of himself as light during the festival of Sukkoth (Booths), commemorating the Israelites’ wandering the wilderness. How was God light to the people during their wandering (Exodus 13.21)? according to Hamilton, how was the Temple illuminated during the festival as a reminder of this experience?

- How does Jesus' self-identification as light echo John 1.1-5? What does it mean to you to call Jesus light that darkness has not and cannot overcome?
- How, if ever, have you experienced Jesus as light in your emotional, mental, or spiritual darkness?
- Gate for the Sheep
 - When has a gate been important for your safety and security?
 - Why do sheep need protection from wild animals and thieves?
 - How does the Bedouin practice Hamilton describes of shepherds using their bodies to act as gates for their sheep illuminate what Jesus may mean by using this image for himself?
 - Have you experienced Jesus keeping you or those you know safe? If so, how?
 - What does abundant life Jesus says he came to give mean to you?
- The Good Shepherd
 - What qualities and characteristics distinguish a good shepherd from other shepherds?
 - What charges does God, through the prophet, make against the leaders or "shepherds" of ancient Israel (Ezekiel 34.1-10)? How does God promise to respond (Ez. 34.11-16)? What does God promise to do among the sheep themselves and why (Ez. 34.17-22)? Who does God promise to establish as the new shepherd (Ez. 34.23-24)? How will the rest of the world reflect God's relationship with God's sheep (Ez. 34.25-31)?
 - When and how do leaders in positions of authority today—in congregations, in communities, in the nations—act as "good shepherds"? Who are the "fat sheep" in today's world from whom "the lean sheep" need protection (Ez. 34.20)? How are you and your congregation offering, or how would you offer, such protection?
- The Resurrection and the Life
 - Why did Jesus wait several days before going to Bethany when he heard Lazarus was ill (John 11.1-6)?
 - How does John emphasize Jesus' love for Lazarus, Mary, and Martha?
 - How much, if at all, can you relate to the sisters' disappointment in Jesus (Jn 11.21, 32), and why? How does Martha model faith in the midst of disappointment? How would you respond to someone feeling disappointed in or angry with Jesus or God?
 - How does Martha initially misunderstand Jesus' promise about Lazarus rising again why does she profess faith in Jesus after he identifies himself as "the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11.25-27)?

- Why does Jesus, who knows he will bring Lazarus back to life, weep (Jn. 11.35)? What, if anything, do his tears tell us about grieving, in Hamilton's words, "as people who have hope" (1 Thessalonians 4.13-14)?
- When, if ever, have you found comfort and hope in Jesus' self-identification as the resurrection and the life?
- The Way, the Truth, and the Life
 - How is Jesus "the way" to God? What makes "the way" synonymous with "the truth" and "the life"?
 - How does Jesus' self-identification here serve to reassure and encourage troubled hearts (Jn. 14.1)?
 - As Hamilton notes, some Christians take Jesus' words to mean "all non-Christians will go to hell." What do you think about Hamilton's interpretation, that any who experience God are experiencing God through Christ, "whether they are conscious of this or not"?
 - Should Christians distinguish between Jesus' claims about himself and claims about the Bible, the church, and Christianity? If so, why and how? If not, why not?
- The Vine
 - What firsthand experiences, if any, do you have handling vines, pruning branches, or growing fruit? What insights do these experiences give you into Jesus' image of himself as the vine?
 - Read Isaiah 5.1-7. How does this song about Israel as God's vineyard help you understand and appreciate Jesus' image?
 - How do you think God "prunes" those who are the branches to Jesus' vine?
 - What is the "fruit" Jesus the vine expects his branches to bear?
 - How, practically, do Jesus' followers "abide" in him?

Closing

- What meaning can you find in the fact that Jesus so often reveals who he is during conversation with other people?
- When, if ever, has a conversation with someone else led you to a new or deeper understanding of who Jesus is and what he means for you?
- How does your congregation encourage conversations, within and beyond its membership, about Jesus' identity and significance?
- With whom would you like to have a conversation about Jesus? How might you start such a conversation?

Closing Prayer

Jesus our vine, our sheep gate and good shepherd, bread of life and light of the world: we praise you for all you are and all you give, to us and to the world. Strengthen us, by your Spirit, to follow you, who are the Way; to embrace you, who are the Truth; and to abide in you, who are the Life; that we may love as you love, serve as you serve, and share in your resurrection life, now and forever. Amen.