

Jesus the I AM, Part 2

In John 8, Jesus has a discourse with the Jewish leaders of His time. This is a discussion going back and forth with them claiming all sorts of evil things about Jesus, even going so far as to call Him demon possessed (v. 48). Near the end of the discussion, Jesus makes an off-handed comment about Abraham rejoicing about Jesus' coming (v. 56). The Jews mock him for such an assertion, because Abraham had died centuries ago (v. 57).

Jesus comes back and tells them, "before Abraham was, I AM" (v. 58). This simple statement is powerful in its implications. Jesus is saying that He not only knew Abraham, but also that He existed even before Abraham did. Furthermore, Jesus identifies Himself as God Almighty. He is directly referencing the Exodus 3:14 passage we studied last week. He is equating Himself to the God of the burning bush. The Jews immediately recognize the importance of His statement. Were it not true, it would be blasphemy for any man to name Himself God in this manner. That is why they get ready to stone Him (v. 59).

Jesus was the Eternal God

It was bad enough for the Jews when they thought Jesus was a prophet. His miracles meant that He obviously had some sort of power. Yet Jesus is now claiming to be Yahweh. Even though He had been born, and as John 8:58 pointed out was not even 50 years old physically, we understand that He transcended time itself. He was the God of Abraham. The transfiguration, where Jesus' true nature shines through and His face shines as the sun, was not Jesus meeting Elijah and Moses for the first time. Instead it was a joyful reunion (Matthew 17:1-3).

John takes great pains for us to understand this about Jesus. As we discussed last week, Genesis 1:1 told us that before the beginning of all things, God was there. God does not have a beginning, but instead has always existed and will always exist. John 1:1 echoes those same thoughts. It tells us that the Word was there before the beginning even happened. The Word itself had no beginning. In verse 14, we are told the word became flesh in the form of Jesus Christ. John 8:58 should not really be surprising to the reader then. Jesus saying that He was there before Abraham fits when we already know that Jesus was there before time itself started.

Jesus the Mighty God

Jesus is also claiming to be the Mighty God that had power over all the nations. He is the fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. Jesus establishes His kingdom and that kingdom will never be able to be destroyed by the kings of this earth. Jesus establishes this claim through all of His miracles. The amount and type of miracles that Jesus performs is astonishing. In the very next chapter (John 9), Jesus heals a blind man, which no one else has done before or since. Furthermore, Jesus conquered the greatest enemy for man in all the earth: Death. It is fitting that Paul mocks death, asking where its sting has gone (1 Corinthians

15:54-57). We no longer have to fear death, because Jesus the mighty God has been able to defeat it.

Jesus, the God of Promise

It is fitting that Jesus' statement about being I AM is an argument that starts with Him making a promise. In John 8:12 Jesus tells the Pharisees "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Jesus' ministry on earth was one full of promises for what He would do for people if they would just follow Him. Here He is telling people they are able to move away from the darkness and have life in Him.

We see it elsewhere in the Gospels as well. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus promises to give rest to those who come to Him for release from His burdens. In Luke 9:23-25, we see that Jesus promises that if people will deny themselves and follow Him, they will find eternal life. In the book of John, we see that Jesus is promising Himself in various forms, whether it be the bread of life or to give people the living water. In all these various forms, Jesus is promising to bring life and deliverance to His people.

Jesus' spiritual application of God's deliverance in the Old Testament matches what we read in the book of Hebrews 11:8-22. We see the people's faith in God's promises that we looked at last week. Yet verse 16 tells us that while they believed in the physical fulfillment of what God said, they also knew that there was more than that to it. They were searching for God's spiritual promises as well, for God's forgiveness for their sins and that they may dwell in His eternal abode. No wonder Abraham was rejoicing at seeing Christ coming into the world and fulfilling all those promises (John 8:56).

Jesus the God of Deliverance

As mentioned above, from the very first verse in the book of John, we see that John is trying to impress upon His readers that Jesus is God, that He is the I am. It is evident throughout the book. Obviously, the introduction flat out claims that Jesus is God. John 8:58 leaves no doubt that Jesus was teaching these same things during His life. We see that in the book of John there is particular power in the idea of Jesus as the "I AM".

There are 7 I AM statements: bread of life (6:35), light of the world (8:12;9:5), gate of the sheep (10:7), good shepherd (10:11), the resurrection (11:25), the way, the truth and the life (14:6), and the true vine (15:1). Consider also that when Jesus was in the garden and the Jews came to arrest Him, Jesus asked them who they sought (John 18:4-6). When they say that they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus tells them "I am". We see at this proclamation they all draw back and fall to the ground. While we do not know what it was that made them draw away in this particular instance, the scene reminds us of the burning bush and Moses in Exodus 3:6. Another example would be the people of Israel at Mount Sinai in Exodus 20:18-20.

John clearly wants his audience to understand that Jesus is the same God that promised deliverance for the people of Israel in Exodus. For the sake of this study we will look at only a few of those comparisons. We will be able to see that Jesus is able to fulfill the same promises to His people today that the "I AM" made to Moses in Exodus 3. He will be able to free His people from their slavery, provide all that they need and bring them to the promised land.

Jesus, the Light of the World

In John 8:12, Jesus says "I am the light of the world". John tells us this about Jesus in the very beginning of the book (John 1:4-5). We see that Jesus provides deliverance to His people by guiding them down their path. This happened for the Israelites when they were fleeing Egypt. God led them by a fiery pillar at night, so that they could see well enough to travel at night (Exodus 13:21). The light of the pillar was enough to overcome the darkness. Jesus does this for us spiritually today. He leads us by His light away from our enemies and toward the promised land so that we may arrive safely to the promised land.

Jesus the Bread of Life

When the people were wandering through the wilderness, they started to run out of food. They worried that they would die. God provided bread from above (Exodus 16:4). Jesus, after providing physical bread for people Himself, told them "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). By partaking of the bread that Jesus offers one will not die (John 6:50). Jesus provides for His people what they need to have eternal life.

Jesus the Giver of Water

In the same way, Jesus tells the woman at the well that He has water that provides eternal life (John 4:13-14). This harkens back to God providing water for people out of the rock (Exodus 17:1-6). Again, Jesus provides spiritually for His people what was provided physically for the Israelites. The water given by Jesus does not just provide physical life, but spiritual life as well.

Jesus the Shepherd

In John 10:11-14 Jesus claims, "I am the good shepherd." When we look back at the Exodus journey, we see that God led the Israelites in the same way He led David in the 23rd Psalm. God led them only where he thought they would be safe to go (Exodus 13:17). He made sure that they were fed and that they had the water they needed. He protected them from all of their surrounding enemies, and He led them to the promised land. This is why the Psalmist says God led the people out of Egypt like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock (Psalm 78:52).

Jesus leads His sheep the same way. As always, we see that Jesus fulfills this in the spiritual realm rather than the physical. All three of the things mentioned above are how Jesus makes

provision for us. He is the food and drink that gives us eternal life. He is the light that allows us to make our way in this world of darkness. And he will lead us into His promised land. He is indeed the great deliverer, for those who follow His voice will receive an eternal life that cannot be taken away (John 10:27-29).

Questions:

1. How does Jesus say that He knew Abraham?
2. What about the Jews' actions indicate that they understood that Jesus was calling Himself God?
3. What does John 1:1 tell us about the nature of Jesus?
4. What enemies does Jesus overcome?
5. What are some of the promises that Jesus makes?
6. What was Abraham searching for, according to the Hebrew Author?
7. What are some of the ways John shows that Jesus is the "I AM" in his gospel?
8. How is Jesus the light of the world?
9. How is Jesus the bread of life?
10. How is Jesus the good shepherd?