

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

OCTOBER 2017

THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

Over the next few months I intend to explore what Jesus said about himself and, in order to do this, we go to the Gospel of John, for nowhere in the Bible can we find a more insightful and personal account of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. This gospel was written by, or under the guidance of, the apostle John, between AD 70 -100, in his old age after a lifetime of reflection and service. It gives us the most intimate knowledge we have of who our Lord really is and how he thought. We might describe this Gospel as the "spiritual" Gospel. I am including the scripture references which we will examine in the course of these little studies at the outset, so that if you wish you can read them for yourselves. I use many translations, but most of the quotations will be from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise stated.

The "I Am" Statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John

<i>Absolute "I am" statements</i>	6:20; 8:23,24, 28, 58; 18:5
<i>Metaphorical "I am" statements</i>	
1. <i>I am the bread of life</i>	6:35, 48, 51
2. <i>I am the light of the world</i>	8:12; 9:5
3. <i>I am the door of the sheep</i>	10:7, 9
4. <i>I am the good shepherd</i>	10:11, 14
5. <i>I am the resurrection and the life</i>	11:25
6. <i>I am the way, the truth, and the life</i>	14:6
7. <i>I am the true vine</i>	15:1

We begin then with the statement recorded in John 8:23,24. He said to them (the Jews) "You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." ESV

Jesus is talking to the Jews who are constantly trying to trick and trap him into giving them an excuse to arrest him. In this statement Jesus makes it absolutely clear that he is from heaven. In so doing he asserts his divinity and, moreover, that believing on him is an absolute requirement for dealing with sin.

It is very important that we understand the import of what Jesus is saying here. He is saying that he is the Son of God! (See also Chapter 8 verse 19 and verse 58). Jesus is not simply a good man who invented a nice way for people to treat one another. He is not offering a set of ethical ideas or a benign morality to help humanity through their lives. Look what he says, "Unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." That is a very solemn statement and one that every human being has to deal with. It highlights this reality that there are only two types of human beings – those who believe and those who do not.

According to Jesus then, believing in and on him is the only way that sin can be dealt with. Believing means; to trust, rely on, to cast one's lot in with, to be utterly dependent on, to adhere to no matter what. That is faith which saves.

Unfortunately there are many in churches today who deny that Jesus is divine. They also deny that he came from heaven and, that having been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, became truly human. However, this fact that Jesus has two natures - divine and human - goes to the very heart of what makes Christianity what it is. Christianity is supernatural. In a way it is also illogical. What I mean by illogical is, why should a holy, utterly righteous, self sufficient, omniscient, omnipotent, loving God so love sinful fallen creatures that He would send his beloved son to take the punishment due to them and provide the means whereby they can escape the consequences of their sin?

The words of the so-called children's hymn "There is a Green Hill Far Away," conveys the idea well: "He died that we might be forgiven, He died to make us good, That we might go at last to heaven, saved by His precious blood. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in."

David Beveridge

NOVEMBER 2017 THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

Last month we saw that Jesus absolutely affirmed his divinity in the Gospel of John Chapter 8: 24,28,58.

Now we continue our studies by examining the first of His metaphorical statements in the gospel of John Chapter 6:35: **Jesus replied , I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.**

When we speak of bread we think of it as being a staple of nourishment. It is generally an essential requirement for keeping alive (even if we do not all eat bread). Proverbially we call it the "Staff of life". It is synonymous with "food".

If anyone alive in the world today, though they be the most powerful, the richest, the cleverest, the wisest the most able, said the words Jesus said, we would laugh them to scorn. And quite right too!

But when Jesus says them, we listen and the words are not outrageous. When the Jews (Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, clerics) heard them they were in no doubt that, by using the words I AM Jesus was again affirming His divinity. And they were outraged. (See Exodus 3:14)

When Jesus refers to Himself as the Bread of Life He means us to understand that He, Himself is the spiritual food for the soul of a believer. Christ is food which will not leave the soul hungry. Christ satisfies the soul-hunger of the believer to the uttermost. But how are we to understand this spiritual nourishment? Notice the text says "**whoever comes to me**". How does someone come to Christ?

Many, perhaps most people, think the initiative lies with them personally. We hear people say things like "I am interested in Jesus but I'm not ready I'll do something about it when I am ready".

The answer is to be found in verse 37 which says "**All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out**". Notice that the initiative is with God the Father. It is God the Father who **gives** to the Son those who are being saved. Notice also that they **will** come. There is nothing haphazard or dubious about this. Also take these wonderful words and wrap your soul in them if you are believing in Jesus – **and whoever comes to me I will never cast out**. Christ will never cast out anyone who comes to Him repenting of their sin and seeking forgiveness in order to be made right with Him. Moreover the second half of verse 35 says "**whoever believes in me shall never thirst**". Most of us never experience real thirst for any length of time. But the

agony of thirst is indescribable. Imagine being lost in the wilderness without water or being cast adrift in a boat on the ocean. Jesus uses this to describe the intense longing of the soul to be satisfied with real spiritual nourishment and to slake the burning thirst of yearning for soul satisfaction. (See Psalm 41)

In the gospel of Matthew chapter 5: 6 we read: **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.** So we see that this hunger and thirst is a yearning for being made right with God.

Jesus says "Blessed (or happy) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness". Why does He say that? Because the fact is that most people are not hungering or thirsting after righteousness. Most people are convinced they possess a righteousness of their own or are setting about establishing their own righteousness by their good works. They do not acknowledge their sinfulness or the fact that they are lost and in need of a Saviour. Those who yearn to be made right with God by faith in Christ Jesus are truly blessed for there is a promise that they will be satisfied.

It may be that as you read this you are aware that there is a deep longing and hunger in your soul which nothing will satisfy. It may be that you are struggling with sin which you cannot defeat or that everything in your life is falling apart. If that is you then this is for you. Come to Jesus and believe in Him who can fulfil all your longings, hunger and thirst, wash away your guilt and give you nourishment to your soul.

May I invite you to meditate on the wonderful words of one of our favourite Communion hymns by Horatius Bonar:

Here O my Lord, I see thee face to face; Here would I touch and handle things unseen, Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace, And all my weariness upon thee lean

Mine is the sin but thine the righteousness; Mine is the guilt, but thine the cleansing blood; Here is my robe my refuge and my peace- Thy blood, thy righteousness, O Lord my God.

Here would I feed upon the bread of God, Here drink with thee the royal wine of heaven; Here would I lay aside each earthly load, Here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.

David Beveridge

DECEMBER 2017 THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

In the providence of God, I have no doubt, we come to the second metaphorical statement of Jesus wherein He states in John 8:12 and 9:5; **I am the light of the world.** It is entirely appropriate that we consider this statement of our Lord at this time of year, for it is perhaps supremely at Christmas that the full import of His words bears upon our minds. Again we note that no other person in the history of the world could make this statement. Only Jesus Christ can say this and be taken seriously. So let us examine His words and consider their meaning.

I recall once visiting a cave complex in County Clare, in Ireland, called Ailwee Cave. The tour involves walking for about half a kilometre underground along a path which is lit. At the end of the walk they turn out the lights. The darkness is almost palpable – there is no light whatsoever. It is very disturbing. When a light was produced there was a tangible sense of relief amongst the visitors.

The Bible begins by stating in Genesis 1:2,3 **"The earth was without form and an empty waste and darkness was upon the very great deep. The spirit of God was moving (hovering, brooding) over the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light"** (Amplified Version). God called light into being in the midst of utter darkness by His mighty power or as theologians would say by Divine Fiat – which is to say by His word of command alone.

When the inspired Apostle John records the creation event some thousands of years later, he does so like this in the Gospel of John 1:1-5. **In the beginning {before all time} was the Word {Christ} and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. He was present originally with God. All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him was not even one thing made that has come into being. In Him was Life and the Life was the Light of men. And the Light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness has never overpowered it {put it out, or has not absorbed it, has not appropriated it, and is unreceptive to it.}** (Amplified Version)

From John's Gospel we can see that Christ co-existed with God the Father always. The Son of God was not created. For this reason we say in the Nicene Creed:

We believe ONE GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible: and in ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST, the only begotten Son of God,

begotten of his Father before all worlds, GOD OF GOD, LIGHT OF LIGHT, VERY GOD OF VERY GOD, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.(That is by Christ all things were made).

These words take us to the very heart of the Trinity, and they speak to us of things of staggering complexity; if we find ourselves confused, it is only to be expected because we are considering the very Being of God insofar as HE has revealed it to us in Scripture.

So how are we to consider this Jesus who is the Light of the world? If we go to the Book of the prophet Isaiah 9:6 it reads thus: **The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of intense darkness and the shadow of death, upon them the light has shined.**(Amplified Version)

What is this darkness wherein we walk? It is the darkness of sin and unbelief. From the time of Adam's fall it has been like this. It is the darkness which refuses to acknowledge God as God. It is the darkness which places EGO at the centre of one's existence usurping the place rightfully to be occupied by God. It is the darkness which places idols of whatever kind before God in the hearts of men and women. People erect all manner of idols as they live their lives. The home, the job, the new furniture, the new car, the new kitchen, the boat, the holidays, even the family and the church, can all become idols. In the Ten Commandments God says in Exodus 20:3 **"You shall have no other gods before (or besides) Me."** And we are all guilty of it.

But here is the wonderful thing. God became incarnate; He took on flesh as a baby in a stable in Bethlehem, so that He, having lived a sinless life might take upon Himself all your sin and mine and suffer and die instead of us on the cross at Calvary. When we grasp this, and give ourselves; heart, soul and mind and strength to Christ, LIGHT - God's Light, shines into the heart of the believer and completely chases away all that which would separate the believer from God. All things become clear because the believer is able to see all things in the brilliant light of Jesus Christ. If you do not know Jesus as Saviour come to Him now, repent of your sin and be washed by His shed blood and dwell forever in His Light. May you have a truly blessed Christmas.

David Beveridge

JANUARY 2018 THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

PLEASE READ GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTER 10:1-10

Those of you who have been following up to now, will recall that we are looking at what the Lord Jesus Christ said about himself. In order to do this we are studying the so called I AM statements of our Lord. We come now to the statement "I am the door for the sheep" John 10: 7.

To understand this metaphor which Jesus applies to himself, it is important to remember that Palestine at this time, was a largely pastoral and agrarian culture, so that people listening to Jesus would be able, very quickly, to understand and appreciate what he was conveying by his word pictures.

For instance, when he refers to a sheepfold we need to remember that there were in general two types of sheepfold. On the one hand a village or municipal sheepfold where several flocks might be assembled for protection. This fold was guarded by a hired gatekeeper who, when a shepherd came to reclaim his sheep, gave access to the shepherd who would call to his sheep, and they, recognizing his voice would follow him. This is still true today and can be easily seen in Palestine. The sheep will not follow anyone but their own shepherd.

The other type of fold is what we in Scotland sometimes call a "fank". These can be seen all over our country and consist of a circular wall of stones with only one access point and are similar to those in the Holy land at the time of Christ. These would be used by the shepherd out on the plain to corral the sheep and protect them overnight from wild animals and robbers. In this case the shepherd would sleep across the opening to the fold and literally be the door to the fold.

When Jesus therefore refers to himself as the door for the sheep we can begin to understand more of the nuances of meaning which the metaphor conveys. Notice first the fact that there is only one access to the fold, and Jesus himself is that access point. There are not several ways or doors into the security of the sheepfold. This unique position of Jesus as the only means to gain access to the fold (heaven and eternal life) must be robustly maintained in a world which increasingly promulgates the lie that there are many ways to God. Not so. The first letter of the apostle Paul to Timothy says in 1Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ".

Notice also the selfless dedication of the shepherd. Since there is only one access point to the sheep, any would be predators must pass by Him. He protects his flock by his strength and power. This is a fact which all believers may lay hold of. Jesus Christ will protect his sheep for all time. No one or nothing can separate them from him. See **Romans 8:38,39**. Some people are afraid that, if they trust on Christ for salvation and give their hearts to him they may not stay the course, or they will somehow lose out on life.

But look what Jesus says “ I am the Door, anyone who enters in through me will be saved – will live; he will come in and he will go out (freely), and will find pasture. The thief comes only that he may steal and may kill and destroy. I came that they have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance- to the full, till it overflows. **John 10:9-10** Amplified Bible.

There are several points to note in the above verses.

1. Christ is the only means whereby anyone will be saved. Notice that there is no doubt about the state of those who enter by the Door of Jesus Christ – they will be saved.
2. Being saved means to be delivered from sin which we are all guilty of, to be forgiven our sin, and to be given new life. Indeed the Lord himself describes this as being born again. **See John 3:3**
3. To the Jewish mind the idea of coming in and going out freely, expressed a state of security and blessing. In an uncertain world, as it was then and is now, this is of great importance. But it also refers to the final condition of the believer when he finally comes home to God.
4. The idea of pasture speaks to the nourishment of the soul which the believer enjoys through the means of grace. These are, the Word God, Prayer and the Sacraments. It is strange how many who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ never read the Word of God, never pray and never attend Church.
5. Christ warns of thieves who come to steal and kill and destroy. Who are these? Well they are those who would rob men and women of their faith, peddle untruths and error and seek to destroy the Gospel. We are warned of this in the Apostle Paul’s second letter to Timothy Chapter 3:1-6 which should be read in this context. This is so important that I will write it out here to save you looking it up:

“Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self control, brutal, not loving good,

treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having an appearance of godliness but denying its power. Avoid such people".

Again in 2Timothy 4:3:

"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions".

The importance of sound teaching or doctrine cannot be over-emphasized. See Paul's letter to Titus 2:1.

For this reason we study the Word of God – to allow the Word to speak for itself, without editing those parts which are supposed to be difficult, or do not accord with the received "wisdom" of this modern world. Jesus himself said "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God". Matthew 4:4 If we would please God, and know His will for us individually and as a church, we need to study His Word.

David Beveridge

FEBRUARY 2018 THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

PLEASE READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTER 10:11-30

The "I AM" saying of our Lord which we study this month continues the shepherd theme which we looked at last month, and is to be found in the gospel of John Chapter 10 in verses 11 - 15:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

As with last month it is important that we consider how shepherding was carried out in Palestine over 2000 years ago, in order to see more clearly the image which the Lord Jesus is conveying.

Scholars inform us that, unlike our shepherding methods which are practiced in this country, where the sheep are driven in front of the shepherd, often with the help of a sheep-dog, the practice in the Middle East is for the shepherd to lead the sheep. He goes in front of them seeking out the best areas for them to traverse and graze, to find water and provide security. We can do no better than look briefly at the 23 Psalm the so-called Shepherd Psalm to see how this worked, and I believe that we may be sure that the Lord had this Psalm in mind when he described himself as the Good Shepherd.

The first thing to notice in Psalm 23 is that the Psalmist says "The Lord is my shepherd". This is so important because it takes us to the very heart of Gospel truth. The relationship one has with God must be a personal one. Notice that Jesus says "I know my own and my own know me". It begs the question is this your experience? Do you know God in this personal way, or is your knowledge of God something academic and impersonal? I would encourage you to consider this very seriously, for it determines the status in which you stand with God, and determines your eternal security. One cannot be right with God except by repenting of one's sin and believing in and on the Lord Jesus Christ and on what he achieved at Calvary. You see he says, "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep". That is exactly what

Jesus did; he came to die for sinners like us on a cross, to take upon himself the punishment that was justly ours.

Returning to the 23rd Psalm, it goes on "I shall not want" and the inference is I shall not want any good thing for I shall be led in ways of good safe pasture in pleasant places where I will find refreshment to my soul and be filled by God's own presence and fed by God's own hand. This does not mean that from the moment I come to faith in Jesus Christ that my troubles are over and I will go through the rest of my without trials, and possess everything that my heart desires. Not at all, but what it does mean is that I will, from the moment I believe on and trust in Jesus, my life will be radically transformed, and will continue to be transformed; I am given a new relationship with God whereby, having been rebellious, I am now welcomed as a son or daughter, able to call Him Father. And since God is my Father – I shall not want. As one of His sheep, I am now trusting the Good Shepherd to manage the rest of my life.

In John 10:12,13 the Lord contrasts his selfless care of the sheep with that of unfaithful shepherds or hirelings. They have no love or care for the sheep and they not only desert the sheep when danger approaches but also cause the sheep to scatter and be consumed. Jesus may well have had the religious leaders of Israel in mind when he said this but his warning is still as apt today, when believers in Christ are beset on all sides by bitter and implacable secularism and at the same time, false shepherds within the church who undermine and obscure the clear teaching of Scripture.

Speaking as he was to Jewish people, it must have come as a staggering blow to their sense of being the chosen people of God when the Lord stated: And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. We belong to that fold if we hear His voice and follow Him.

From our perspective our status appears conditional upon our will but if we read on in the 10th Chapter of John at verses 27 - 30 it says this: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them from out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Jesus says "They are my sheep". They are a gift from the Father to the Son! How thrilling these words are! Jesus holds his believing people as His own possession; with an ardour and strong protection we cannot begin to understand. The sheep are a gift

from the Father to the Son from everlasting to everlasting. What a comfort that is to us who are so like sheep; unable to keep ourselves from our own waywardness, unable to take the right path, or to supply our need. So often we stumble and doubt. We give less of ourselves,, and do less than we ought. We do what we should not, and fail to do what we should. But here is the thing, we belong to Jesus and He is God the Son, who goes out after us when we stray, and finds us and brings us home, for He has redeemed His people and purchased them, by shedding His precious blood so that they can be with Him forever. Perhaps you have been astray for a while; perhaps you are lost, feeling unfulfilled and empty; perhaps you cannot find peace; perhaps you are concerned about your relationship to God. If this is you, you need to come to the Good Shepherd and ask Him to lift you up in His mighty arms and give yourself to Him. He is willing to aid you and take your burdens upon His blessed shoulders, and He will comfort you and lead you beside still waters.

David Beveridge

MARCH 2018 THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

PLEASE READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTER 11:1-46

This month we examine these words: Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

Of all the "I am" statements of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, this must surely be the most arresting and thrilling. Were one to say these words to oneself, or apply them to any other human being on the face of the earth they would sound absurd. But coming from the lips of Jesus they are not only credible; they are magnificent, full of power and hope. Why is this so?

In this world people in politics and leading roles in society make statements all the time, in the media. Often, and quite correctly, these statements are received with a significant degree of skepticism. One simply cannot trust the statements, perhaps because the person making them lacks credibility, and often because the statements are inherently flawed. Examples of this are legion and need not be dwelt upon here.

When we look at Jesus, however, we see that He carries out what He says. If we read on to verses 43 and 44 we hear the Lord Jesus calling in a loud voice for Lazarus to "Come forth". What happened in that stifling tomb which should have reeked with the stench of decaying flesh? We cannot begin to guess or imagine; but we know this, that the power of death over Lazarus was overwhelmed by the greater power of the Son of God, who by His word alone called life into the body of a dead man and recalled his soul to its erstwhile home. As we think on this we might remember how Adam was created from dust, and given life by the very breath of God. It is the same God who creates life and has the power to command life over death. Why? Because He himself is Life. That is what our text says: I am the Resurrection and I am the Life.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians 1:15-20 says this of Christ:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (see Note below) 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. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together, and he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

{Note: This does not mean that Christ is part of creation. Careful exegesis of both the Old and the New Testament demonstrates that the meaning here is rather that Christ has pre-eminence above all creation. And this is borne out by the rest of our text. As the Nicene Creed states He was begotten, not made; of one being with the Father}

But why did Jesus carry out this miracle? You will notice as you read the whole of this story that when Jesus was informed of the sickness of his friend Lazarus, he actually delayed setting out! We can see that this deliberate slow progress to Bethany was for a purpose, for we read in verse 4, Jesus says: **This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.** So this is part of the answer – that the Son of God might be glorified.

Is this the only reason? No, this miracle, wherein a man who has been dead for 4 days, lying in the tomb, is resurrected – brought back to vibrant life, is clear proof of the divinity of our Lord. Who can bring back life to a corpse save God almighty? Would such a miracle not persuade the most ardent skeptic that Jesus was who He claimed to be? You would think so and indeed many believed we are told, in verse 45, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. There is always a “But”. And nothing has changed to this day. In our efforts to persuade people of their need of a Saviour; of their need to repent and be delivered from sin; of their need to lay hold of Christ by faith and experience the joy of sin forgiven and a new life and purpose in Christ, we often lead folk to the very point of believing – then there is a “But”. That is when we realise that no one can bring life to a dead heart but God Himself. Only the power of God the Holy Spirit can change the heart. Only He can bring a soul to see its need and persuade it that Jesus is the only answer to their sickness of soul.

How can we know that Jesus is the only answer? Because Jesus himself, went to the cross of Calvary. There He gave His life to die for his people, as a substitute for them, so that their sin might be laid on Him., and the righteous judgment of God might be carried out on Him instead of us.

But here is the thing. Though He died on the cross, and they placed Jesus in a tomb, and sealed it with a great stone, death could not hold Him. On the third day He rose from the dead proving His sacrifice was sufficient to atone for our sin. Remember the words we read last month when we considered the Good Shepherd:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father. John 10:17,18.

Dear reader, Jesus Christ laid down his life for poor helpless sinners like you and me; he did it willingly, yielding himself utterly into the hands of evil men to pay the price of sin. They took Him and abused Him and crucified him. The Jews and the Romans did that but it was for you and me He died. BUT the glorious truth is that He rose from the grave and is alive today. Our text for this month posed a question- "Do you believe this". I pray that all might be enabled to answer "I do – with my whole heart".

David Beveridge

APRIL 2018
THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

PLEASE READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTER 14

The verse which we will be focusing on particularly this month is John 14:6

I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.

It will be immediately obvious even on a cursory reading, that the Lord Jesus is not revealing one facet of his nature but rather three, and so, in order to do justice to this statement we will need study them over three months. So we begin with **I am the Way**.

During this series of short studies we have heard Jesus describe Himself as the Door to the sheepfold. As such He tells us that He uniquely, is the way into heaven and eternal life. Now He explains that He is also the Way in which His people should walk in their life's journey. We do not enter into a saving relationship with God in order to carry on as though we were unchanged.

The fact is that when we enter through the door of faith, and trust on; and in; and into Him for salvation we instantly become new creatures with a new heart and a new set of priorities and orientations. Things which were once a bore and uninteresting, like prayer, the Word of God, and attendance at church, become thrilling. Things, which took up our time and were perhaps sinful, are seen for what they are, and we no longer wish to have anything to do with them. This does not happen over night in all cases but there should be a steady progress of the soul toward the things of God. This work is carried out in the soul of the believer by the Holy Spirit. He begins to dwell in the believer's heart the moment they trust in Jesus and they begin to journey on the Way. It cannot be stressed too much that we must set out on the right way – the way of Christ. He himself warns in Matthew 7:13 **"Enter in by the narrow gate (that is by Christ). For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter are many. For the gate is narrow and the way hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.**

This passage warns us of the great danger of attempting to live our lives outside of Christ and without Him to guide us. The temptation to try to earn our way into heaven by our own effort is very strong, and one often hears "I try to be a Christian" " I try to do the best I can" " I think I'm as good as the next one " etc. The

fact is that only those who hear and answer the call of the Good Shepherd will enter onto the right way for they will be following Jesus.

It is interesting to note that the early disciples were called followers of "The Way" You will find this in the book of Acts 9:2,19:9,23, 22:4, 24:14,22.

But what is "THE WAY"?

Lets imagine we were interviewing the Apostle Paul and we were trying to find out what THE WAY was. It might go something like this.

Question: How did you get started on this Way Paul?

Answer: Acts 22:3 tells us he would begin with a précis of his up bringing and training. He would say that he was outstandingly zealous for the Jewish religion to the point that he persecuted and imprisoned Christians and willingly participated in their execution. Then he would say that while he was going about persecuting these people, he was confronted by the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. He was blinded by the radiance of the risen Lord, overwhelmed by the power of His Life and the purity of His Being. From that moment on he was a changed man. Acts 22:1-22.

Question: What is it like to walk in this Way?

Answer: It is the most exciting, rewarding, challenging, life affirming journey you could imagine, for I am serving my Master and there is nothing I will not do for Him, because He has first loved me, while I was still a sinner, from before the foundation of the world. Romans 5:8

Question: What is the Way?

Answer: In a nutshell I will use my Master's words in the Gospel of John 6:38 He said: **For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me"**. KJV

Question: How has it been for you, Paul, following this Jesus?

Answer: It has been hard. I have been imprisoned more than once. I have been beaten, scourged, had my life threatened; I have been put on trial, mocked, shipwrecked, abused, run out of town and scorned by my own people and the intelligencia, and yet in all this I have been content, **for I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I might gain Christ.** (Philippians 3:8)

Question: Have you ever thought of giving up Paul?

Answer: Not for an instant! I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Philippians 3:14 NLT

Now few of us will experience a conversion like the Apostle Paul, or live his magnificent life, yet in some respects all believers will experience some kind of personal engagement with Jesus. That is the point! A personal moment of decision for Christ, issuing in a life lived in His service.

Scholarly historians inform us that the Apostle Paul went on to be tried at Rome and was, after some time in the Mamertime Prison in Rome, beheaded around 64/68 AD.

David Beveridge

MAY 2018
THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

PLEASE READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTER 14. YOU MAY ALSO FIND IT HELPFUL TO LOOK UP THE SCRIPTURE REFERENCES WHICH ARE GIVEN TO ASSIST WITH CROSS REFERENCING.

The verse on which we will continue to focus particularly this month is John 14:6

I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.

As we noted last month, it would be a mistake to try to consider the words of Jesus contained in this short statement as a block rather than trying to give proper weight to each element in His words, and so this month we come to "The Truth".

What does He mean by He is the Truth? I would suggest that the first thing we notice is that He is THE TRUTH. Christ is not A TRUTH or a means to The Truth, or a form of Truth. He is THE TRUTH. How are we to grasp the enormity of this statement? If we could think philosophically for a moment we might try some ideas which may help us to understand the meaning of TRUTH.

Let us suggest that Truth is the essence of reality, which cannot be changed or altered into something other than what it is. Truth is both robust and defiant. Though attempts may be made to alter it, Truth resists these attempts and remains pure and unaltered. Truth is faithful and trustworthy. It does not yield its essential verity and remains what it always was and will continue to be; it is therefore eternal by nature. Truth can be relied upon. Truth coexists alongside its companions Knowledge and Wisdom. TRUTH is able to produce absolutes.

By contrast we could say that untruth contributes to unreality, it is changeable and alterable. Untruth is impure, unfaithful, untrustworthy and unreliable. Untruth yields to caprice and whimsy, it is not eternal nor can it be because it changes its nature to suit the situation. Untruth coexists with Ignorance and Folly. Untruth cannot exist with absolutes and produces relativism and confusion.

As we consider these contrasts they illuminate for us something of the very being of God. His unchangeableness. Some verses of Scripture may help to make this clearer. Exodus 3:14; Psalm

102:26-28; Isaiah 41:4; 48:12; Malachi 3:6; Romans 1:23; Hebrews 1:11,12; James 1:17.

We can apply all of the aspects of Truth we have mentioned to God, and all of these aspects are personified in the Person of Jesus. So Truth, absolute Truth, is intrinsic in the being of God, and so Christ Jesus, God Incarnate, is able to say I AM THE TRUTH. For this reason God is righteous in all His judgments, for He judges in Truth.

But there is so much more to learn from this idea of Truth.

Let us look at other areas of Scripture which can further clarify this. In the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John, at the 17th verse we read:

Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth. A more contemporary translation of this text would be: Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.(NLT)

You will notice that truth is to be understood and learned from God's Word, and that the purpose of this is to make believers holy. It is very easy in our day-to-day lives as Christians to lose sight of what the purpose of becoming a Christian, a believer in Jesus Christ, is. It is to be saved from sin, given a new heart, be made progressively more holy by the Holy Spirit who dwells in the heart of believers, so that the believer becomes part of the family of God. Why? To share an eternity with Him, Father, Son and Holy Spirit This is very clear if we read the whole of the 17th chapter of John which is Jesus' prayer for his people, sometimes called His High Priestly Prayer.

PLEASE READ THE 17TH CHAPTER OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

So the Word of God is Truth, and Jesus calls Himself THE TRUTH. Of course this is entirely consistent with what Jesus says about Himself in Matthew 5:17

"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose".(NLT) What was the purpose of the Old Testament? To prepare the world and specifically those who would believe on Him for the coming of Jesus Christ. Here is what the apostle John says about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, at the beginning of his gospel: John 1:1-5 In the beginning the Word already existed. The word was with God and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will never extinguish it. (NLT)

We might conclude this little study with the following verses from the Book of Revelation:19:11-13 Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns. A name was written on him which no one understood except himself. He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his title was the Word of God(NLT).

THE WORD IS TRUTH- CHRIST IS THE WORD – CHRIST IS TRUTH

David Beveridge

JUNE 2018 THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

IF YOU HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO, PLEASE READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTER 14. YOU MAY ALSO FIND IT HELPFUL TO LOOK UP THE SCRIPTURE REFERENCES WHICH ARE GIVEN TO ASSIST WITH CROSS REFERENCING.

The verse on which we will continue to focus particularly this month and for the last time in this series is John 14:6

I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.

We have already noted Jesus referring to Himself as "LIFE" in the statements "I am the Bread of Life" and "I am the Resurrection and the Life", which we have briefly considered. Throughout the bible we note that God is referred to as "The Living God". {God is called by this term 28 times in the bible from Deuteronomy to Hebrews and some of the references will be given in notes at the end of this study.} This title immediately emphasizes the unique nature of God. He is the Living God, as opposed to all false gods. No one made God, He possesses what theologians term "ASIETY" that is to say God exists IN and OF and FOR and FROM and UNTO Himself. We do not possess the words to describe God because He is indescribable.

God is the Creator of the universe. He is the Creator of Life. He is the Creator and Guarantor of Reality. The universe did not spontaneously burst into existence by some random, accidental and uncontrolled cataclysm, but existed in the mind of God and CAME INTO BEING by the POWER of HIS WORD.

These are difficult concepts for us to grasp, nevertheless we are assisted in our understanding of this by the Word of God, as we shall see.

We turn first to the Gospel of John chapter 1 verse 1 onwards and I am using the Amplified Bible in order to reveal the nuances of the words:

In the beginning [before all time] was the Word [Christ], and the Word was with God and the Word was God Himself. He was present originally with God. All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him was not even one thing made that has come into being. In Him was Life and the Life was the Light of men.

Again, we have already seen the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians 1:15-20. Again I will use the Amplified Bible to express the fuller meaning of the words:

[Now} He [Christ] is the exact likeness of the unseen God:- the visible representation of the invisible; He is the Firstborn- of all creation. For it was in Him that all things were created, in heaven and on earth, things seen and unseen, whether thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities; all things were created and exist through Him and in Him and for Him. And He Himself existed before all things and in Him all things consist – cohere, are held together. {Please read Proverbs 8:22-31}

It is clear that the apostles were in no doubt about the eternal power of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In fact we can see this amply demonstrated in Acts 3 where Peter and John, going to afternoon prayer, heal a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. The ensuing uproar gives Peter the opportunity to preach to them. In the course of that sermon, he reminds them of the outrageous trial and execution of Jesus. He says in verse 14 and 15 “ But you denied and rejected and disowned the Pure and Holy, the Just and Blameless One, and demanded [the pardon of] a murderer to be granted to you. But you killed the very Source – the Author – of life, Whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.” AMP

When we looked at the Gospel of John Chapter 10, we focused on the Good Shepherd but in verse 10 of that chapter Jesus says “I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance – to the full, till it overflows.” AMP

The life we have as human individuals, and the lives we participate in by procreation, we have on loan from God. He gives us life and allows us by His gracious arrangements, the honour and gift of enjoying and nurturing life. All life, but especially human life is precious because it belongs to God. This is why the destruction and abuse of life is sin. And yet destruction and abuse is what we find in the human condition, because, from the Fall, and by the Fall of Adam, Man has been rendered utterly incapable of living the life he was intended to live. What the Bible does is to chart the way God has set about remedying humankind’s situation and the climax of that process is the coming of God Incarnate; His faultless Life; His atoning Death; and His Resurrection - the guarantee of His successfully finished work.

As we come to an end of this particular part of our study we note that Jesus’ statement ended with the words “No one can come to the Father except through me” NLT. We have spent some time examining the words Way, Truth and Life in Jesus statement, in order to comprehend more clearly the meaning of His words. Now we come to the crux of the matter. This is why He said it. If a

soul would be justified in God's sight, would enter into a familial relationship with God and dwell with Him in eternity, then it is only by believing on and trusting the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is NO OTHER WAY.

A selection of scripture references for the term "Living God":
Deuteronomy 5:26, Joshua 3:10, 1 Samuel 17:26, 2 Kings 19:4,
Psalm 42:2, Psalm 84:2, Isaiah 37:4, Isaiah 37:17, Jeremiah 10:10,
Jeremiah 23:36, Daniel 6:20, Daniel 6:26, Hosea 1:10, Matthew
16:16, John 6:69, Romans 9:26, 2 Corinthians 3:3, 2 Corinthians 6:16,
1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Timothy 4:10, Hebrews 3:12.

David Beveridge

JULY 2018 THE "I AM" STATEMENTS OF JESUS

PLEASE READ JOHN CHAPTER 15.

This is the last in this series of studies. Our text is to be found in John 15: 1-17.

For the purpose of this study we focus on the first two verses:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit.

The Bible is replete with examples of botanical species being used to convey ideas which assist in understanding a particular piece of scripture. The mustard seed for example, as a metaphor for the growth of the kingdom of God, Matthew 13:31-32; a fig tree which is cursed for not producing fruit Mark 11:12-25; the grafting in of the Gentiles (wild olives) into the spiritual Israel Romans 11:11-31.

Of all the many examples, however, none is more descriptive than the imagery of the vine and the vineyard which appear in many places in Scripture, in both the Old and the New Testament. A few examples will demonstrate this. Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1-8, 17:5-10,19:10-14, Hosea 10:1. No fewer than five of Our Lord's parables refer to vines, the fruit of the vine or vineyards. Luke 13:6-9, Matthew 20:1-16, Matthew 9:17, Matthew 21:28-32, Mark 12:1-11.

Supremely, however, is our text this month wherein Jesus describes Himself as the True Vine.

Why does He call Himself the True Vine? With what is He comparing Himself?

A careful reading of the examples given above will reveal the recurring theme of God's establishment of a holy Israel (the vines and vineyard), which is given every opportunity to bring forth good fruit, but which consistently fails to produce as expected. On the contrary Israel consistently degenerates religiously and morally. Israel consistently fails to fulfill the requirements of the law. Jesus by contrast came to, and actually did, fulfill the law. Matthew 5:17, **"Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them".**

What can we deduce from the metaphor of the vine? Vines naturally grow both along the ground and entwine themselves around vertical surfaces. In order to become useful they need to be trained. Moreover if the branches are to bear fruit they must remain in living connection with the vine, receiving nutrients and water via the body of the vine. If the branches are permitted to run

wild, they produce less fruit or none at all. The vinedresser therefore removes branches which are non-productive, and prunes those which have potential to fruit in order to stimulate growth. The Lord's metaphor therefore, precisely conveys His meaning, which we are to understand. Branches which are utterly non-productive we may think of as non-believers or those who pretend to be believers but are not, whilst those which are fruitful are believers who will continually, throughout their lives, experience providences which tend to increase their fruitfulness as believers "In Christ".

This is a salutary word to all of us to examine whether we are truly "in Christ". Have we truly received Christ's gracious offer of salvation by faith in Him and His finished work at Calvary? Or is our Christianity a false thing, something we just do every week. This is very important and cannot be glossed over, and needs to be resolved for each one of us. If we are not abiding in Christ we can do nothing, according to the text at verse 5, and like the dead branch of a vine are fit for nothing but to be burned. It is one of the facts about the wood of the vine - it is fit for nothing but to be burned. Verse 6.

On the other hand if we abide in Christ and His words abide in us whatever we ask of God which accords with His will be done for us. Verse 7.

What does it mean to "abide in Christ"? Abide is a lovely word which in Scotland has the meaning to "dwell". In the North East of Scotland they would say in the Doric "Far div ye bide?" It means, "Where do you stay?" It also means to "remain in". So we have the idea of dwelling and remaining in Christ Jesus. The good that issues from this is that God the Father is glorified and we bring forth abundant fruit, which is a mark or sign or proof of our discipleship. Let us allow Scripture to convey this wonderful relationship which the believer has with Jesus and the Father.

John 15:12-17 : This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you so that you will love one another.

The great imperative here is to love one another with same selfless love that Christ has proved by laying down His life for His sheep.

Believers are invited into friendship with God through His Son Jesus. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (See Ephesians 1:4). Why? To bear much fruit. What is that fruit? To love as Christ loved, to serve as Christ has served, to preach the gospel of redemption, by faith in Christ, to obey His commandments, to BE the friend of God, above all to bring God glory and to dwell in Him and enjoy Him forever.

Is it not a bewildering concept to be a friend of God Almighty? And yet this is what we are offered in Christ. The moment we trust in Him we enter into a new relationship with God. Our sin is washed away and Jesus righteousness is accounted to us so that God sees us through His Son, and we are regarded by God as though we were spotless and blameless.

Listen to this wonderful old hymn *“To God be the glory great things he hath done, so loved he the world that he gave us his Son, Who yielded his life an atonement for sin, and opened the life-gate that all may go in. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood! To every believer the promise of God; The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives”*.

David Beveridge