

Bible Studies in the “I Am” sayings of Jesus in John’s Gospel

Study 1: The great “I Am”

For discussion and reflection: If you had to sum up who you are in three “I am ...” statements, what would they be?

READ John 8:31-59

1. In verse 31 we find one of Jesus’ most often quoted sayings: “The truth will set you free.”
 - a. How do you think most people understand this? What do they take it to mean?
 - b. What did Jesus mean by it?
 - c. What do you make of the Jews’ response?
2. In verse 33, and again in verse 39, the Jews point to their status as offspring of Abraham.
 - a. What is Jesus’ response to this? Who does he say their real father is?
 - b. Can you think of examples of someone’s “father” not being their biological father, but someone else? How does this shed light on what Jesus is saying here?
 - c. What does it take to be a child of God, according to Jesus (see verse 47, in particular)?
3. In verses 38, 49, and 54, Jesus claims that his father is God.
 - a. As the Son of God, what does he offer in verse 51?
 - b. What question does this prompt them to ask, in verses 52-53?
 - c. In verse 56, Jesus says that Abraham rejoiced to see his day. What do you think he means by that?
4. Jesus then responds in verse 58 by saying “Before Abraham was, I am.”
 - a. What does that tell us about who he claiming to be? Especially in the light of Exodus 3:14 (see also Hebrews 13:8)?
 - b. What does the Jews’ response in verse 59 tell us about what they understood him to be claiming about himself?
5. The argument that has been called “Lewis’ trilemma” was not in fact original to C. S. Lewis. Several other scholars had put it forward before him. For example, the Scottish preacher John Duncan, in around 1860, said:

“Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable.”

The most famous formulation of this, though, belongs to C.S. Lewis, who wrote in *Mere Christianity*:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

- a. What do you make of this argument?
- b. What would you say to someone who wanted to respect Jesus as a man, and saw his teachings as valuable, but refused to accept his as God, and refused to follow him?
- c. Which of the three options do you accept? And what difference does that make to your life?