

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 314

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 18:3-6

Topic: The Great I AM

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John 18:3-6 MKJV Then Judas, having received a band and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. (4) Then Jesus, knowing all things that were coming upon Him, went out and said to them, Whom do you seek? (5) They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I AM! And Judas who betrayed Him also stood with them. (6) Then as soon as He had said to them, I AM, they went backward and fell to the ground.

The “I AM” sayings of Jesus in the gospel of John have received much attention from biblical scholars. They seem to fall into three main groups:

The first group is when Jesus describes Himself, His mission and His identity e.g. “I am the Light of the World” “I am the Bread of Life, “I am the Good Shepherd”, “I am the Door of the Sheep”. “I am the Son of God”, I am the Resurrection and the Life”, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”, and “I am the True Vine”.

The second group is when He is (apparently) speaking in Aramaic and using I AM as a parallel to the Jewish name of God “YHWH” (which means I AM). In these verses Jesus is identifying with the eternal realm and specifically with God Himself. See John 4:26, 6:20, 8:24,28,58; 13:13, 13:19, 18:5,6,8

There is also a third group where Jesus defines some characteristic of Himself, often in contrast to the something else e.g. “I am not of this world”, “I am from above”, “I am from Him, and He has sent Me”, “I am not alone”, “I am one who bears witness of Myself”, “I am coming to you”, “I am in the world no longer”. etc. These sayings define the identity of Jesus relative to other things such as the Father, the world and the heavenly realms.

Today's verses fall into the second category when Jesus is identifying directly with the sacred name of God the Father. Some other examples of this can be found in John chapter 8:

John 8:23-28 MKJV And He said to them, You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. (24) Therefore I said to you that you shall die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I AM, you shall die in your sins.(28) Then Jesus said to them, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you shall know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things.....

John 8:57-58 MKJV Then the Jews said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? (58) Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I AM!

When Jesus used this phrase in the Garden, the soldiers “went backward and fell to the ground”. The massive personal authority of Jesus Christ and the sacred name of God simply stunned them into submission even though they possessed “lanterns and torches and weapons”. Jesus claimed not just earthly authority – but heavenly authority which is why He says in Matthew 28:18 “all authority is given to Me in heaven and on earth”. This is a preposterous claim for any human being to make – unless they are God. Even Moses did not claim such authority.

To say that you existed prior to Abraham, that you were the Light of the World, the Son of God, and had all authority in heaven and on earth, and that anyone who did not believe in you would perish...is very unusual to say the least. If these extraordinary statements are true - then you must be God, or at least utterly different from normal humans. If they are false then you are either a lunatic or a liar – and Jesus' wisdom and miracles show that he was neither of those.

These self-referential claims of Christ cannot be dodged. Who can say such things about themselves? Who would have anyone believe such things? The fact that Jesus said them is shocking. And you either agree with them, or you are lost. And where did Judas stand? On the wrong side! “And Judas who betrayed Him also stood with them (the soldiers).”

Lets just take one such statement: “[John 14:6 MKJV](#) Jesus said to him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me.” No normal sane mortal can say this – not Plato or Einstein or Moses or Elijah. At most a normal sane mortal can claim that their doctrines or ideas are essential – but not they themselves. But here Jesus claims that He personally is essential to the salvation of all mankind. Is He deluded? Is He a con-man? Or Is He God? The proof is in the eating – or in this case in the believing. Those who believe are changed and transformed. Believing these statements about Jesus works – at the deepest levels of the human spirit. They give life and salvation – because they are true!

In the Garden the I AM statements of Jesus caused shock, and they immediately divided everyone there into two groups. The saved and the damned, the sons of light and the Son of Perdition, the believers and the unbelievers. Reason stumbles and falls at statements like these. They can only truly be apprehended by faith. Each such statement calls out the true believers from the crowd – and offends the unbelievers.

Thus the I AM statements of Jesus are powerful tools for evangelism, which is why they are in the most evangelistic of all the gospels “so that you may believe”. Those that the Holy Spirit has prepared to receive Christ will latch on to them, while those who will not believe will be offended and walk away.

When Jesus says “I AM”, He is saying “I am the eternal God-Man, before Abraham was I AM, all authority in heaven and on earth is mine, I am from above, from the Father, the Son of God. I am the Way, the light of the World, the Living Bread that has come down from Heaven. I am the Resurrection and the Life and he who believes on Me will never die”. No prophet ever claimed such things! Jesus is not an angel or a prophet – He is God!

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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