

IN THE
BEGINNING
WAS THE...

WORD

A STUDY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

LESSON 6 – The Word is...THE "I AM"

FACILITATOR'S Note

MAIN POINT THIS WEEK: Jesus is the "I AM" from the Old Testament. He is Yahweh/Jehovah (4:26; 6:20, 35, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5–6 [cf. Exodus 3:14–15; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10–13, 25; 45:18; 51:12; 52:6]).

This week's lesson will focus on the "I AM" statements made by Jesus throughout the Gospel of John. While these statements in and of themselves might appear to have no meaning, John is very good at placing double-meaning on phrases in order to get his point across. What is his point? That Jesus is THE WORD, the Son of God, the Messiah, and God Himself. If that is the point you are trying to help others believe, then you will use multiple means of getting that across. When you put all the "I AM" statements together you realize that John is saying something. Jesus is the "I AM". Do you remember hearing that somewhere before? That's right, it's found in Exodus 3:14 when God describes Himself to Moses. This week you will help your class participants understand these statements and why they got the Jews in such a tizzy. This is a powerful message and an incredible testament to Jesus as THE WORD!

Remember, this semester we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS). Help them with that today.

HEAD → HEART → HANDS

As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for each lesson by digging into the Word and specifically the text for each of the weeks. **This week the texts are: 4:26; 6:20, 35, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5–6 [cf. Exodus 3:14–15; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10–13, 25; 45:18; 51:12; 52:6].** As you move through the Word, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.

PRAYER

Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

FOCUS

- Understand that Jesus is the “I AM”.
- Recognize why the Jews wanted to kill Jesus for the statements He made.
- Recognize that the “I AM” has been walking with and guiding us from the beginning and He continues to today. His goal: To lead us to the Promised Land!

DISCUSSION STARTERS (OPTIONAL)

- If you were describing yourself to someone, you would say, “I am _____” and would fill in the blank with words that describe who you are. What would you say?
- The words “I am” are meant to be descriptive. Today we will look at these two little words and how they played a significant role in describing God and more specifically, Jesus.

KNOWLEDGE HEAD

- This week (before we enter the text in the Gospel of John) it is important to examine some background in the Names of God in order to see the magnitude of statements made by Jesus about Himself. Studying this will help frame the rest of our discussion in John.
- Names of God
 - ***The three chief names of God***¹
 - **"Elohim"**—(Variations of this name are "El," "Eloah," and "Elyon") This name for God occurs around 2600 times in the Old Testament. It is translated "God" in our English translations. It has special reference to God as *creator* and *sustainer*. It emphasizes God's *power*, His *sovereignty*, and His *rule*. It is a plural word, which is always used with a singular verb, thus revealing God's *plurality* and His *unity*. It is used in reference to *false gods* as well as to *the true God*. Context determines which is being used at any given time.
 - **"Adonai"**—(This name was often used as a substitute for the name "Jehovah") This name is used around 450 times in the Old Testament. It is translated "**Lord**" (lower case) in our English translations. It emphasizes God's *lordship*. "Adonai" is used not only in reference to God as our Lord (Master) but also in reference to men who are lords (masters) over their servants.
 - **NOTE**—The New Testament uses the Greek name "Theos" as the equivalent of the Hebrew names "Elohim," "El," "Eloah," and "Elyon." It uses the Greek name "Kurios" as the equivalent of the Hebrew name "Adonai," the name the Jews used in substitution for the Hebrew name "Jehovah."
 - **"Jehovah"**—(A variation of this name is "Yahweh", YHWH) This name for God occurs around 6,000 times in the Old Testament. This is God's personal name. It is translated "**LORD**" (SMALL CAPS) in our translations. It has special reference to God as *Redeemer* and *Sanctifier*. It emphasizes *God's self-existence*, *His eternity*, and *His covenant faithfulness*. "Jehovah" is a name applied only to the true God. "Jehovah" was the most sacred of the names of God in Old Testament times. The Old Testament Jews believed that Leviticus 24:16 forbade them to even utter this sacred (and ineffable) name, so they substituted the name "Adonai" for the name "Jehovah" when they read their Hebrew Bibles. Down the road, even "Adonai" was held sacred and often not uttered.
 - **NOTE**—The name "I Am" in Exodus 3:14 is the verb form of the Hebrew noun translated "Jehovah".
 - **I AM WHO I AM**. God responds to Moses' question ("What is [your] name?" Exodus 3:13) by revealing His name as "Yahweh" (corresponding to the four Hebrew consonants YHWH). The three occurrences of YHWH in Exodus 3:14 are all verb forms of the Hebrew word that means "to be" (Hebrew: *hayah*). Each of these instances are a reference to the divine name Yahweh (i.e., "the LORD").

¹ Roy E. Gingrich, *Introduction to Theology (Volume I)* (Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 2001), 14-15.

- The following is some of the suggested meanings for the divine name Yahweh:²
 1. God is self-existent and therefore not dependent on anything else for his own existence
 2. God is the creator and sustainer of all that exists
 3. God is immutable in his being and character and thus is not in the process of becoming something different from what he is (e.g., "the same yesterday and today and forever," Hebrews 13:8)
 4. God is eternal in his existence.
 - While each of these points is true of God, the main focus in this passage is on the Lord's promise to be with Moses and his people. The word translated "I am" (Hebrew 'ehyeh) can also be understood and translated as "I will be" ("I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.").
 - Given the context of Exodus 3:12 ("I will be with you"), the name of Yahweh ("the LORD") is also a clear reminder of God's promises to his people and of his help for them to fulfill their calling. In each of these cases, the personal name of God as revealed to Moses expresses something essential about the attributes and character of God.
- READ Exodus 6:1-8
 - Pay careful attention to how many times "I am the LORD" is said and consider why. Why does God repeat this over and over?

From the Gospel of John

- **Absolute "I AM" Statements – 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-6**
 - 4:26 – Key Points
 - Jesus' is speaking with the Samaritan woman. Samaritans were a racially mixed people (partially Jewish and partially Gentile) who were disliked by both Jews and Gentiles.
 - They are believed to have descended from the Jews in the Old Testament northern kingdom and then intermarried with Mesopotamian colonist and strongly integrated themselves into the non-Jewish culture.
 - The Samaritans had their own Pentateuch, Temple (Mount Gerizim), and telling of Israelite history. Therefore, the Jews considered them unclean and they tried to avoid them at all costs (remember the story of the Good Samaritan). The disciples are even surprised that He is talking with her (see v. 27).
 - The Samaritans, therefore, had an understanding of the Messiah and were all waiting in expectation of His coming. When the Samaritan woman mentions His coming, Jesus makes a very bold statement and claims, "I...am he."
 - Jesus does not often identify Himself as the Messiah. Why?

² ESV Study Bible Notes.

- Because most would think that the Messiah would come to restore political power and that is NOT why Jesus came. Jesus did indeed come to deliver His people and restore His kingdom, but in a very different way than was expected.
- So, why does He reveal Himself as the "I AM" to a Samaritan woman?
 - Because He wants the Samaritans to know they are a part of His salvation AND because He is away from the center of Judaism (the very ones who would try to make Him king).
- Contemporary Application
 - What would you do if someone told you they are the Messiah, the "I AM"?
 - How is your reaction any different than what the Samaritan woman might of thought?
 - Then why is it hard for us to consider that others in the world might struggle with the truth that Jesus is God's Son? This emphasizes our need to be patient with those we are proclaiming the good news to.
- 6:20 – Key Points
 - The very fact that Jesus has the ability to walk on water, calm a storm, and transport the boat to land would be an indication of His divinity. However, Jesus reiterates His divinity not only by His miracles (By the way, this is a fulfillment of Psalm 107:23-32. Read it if you have time.), but also by what He says, "It is I..." (Greek: *egō eimi*). Or also translated, "I AM."
 - As it says in Psalm 118:6, "The LORD is on my side, I will not fear."
 - Only the true "I AM" could walk on water, calm the storm, transport a boat to land, and vanquish all fear simply by saying "I AM."
 - Contemporary Application
 - Does believing that Jesus is the "I AM" vanquish all our fears? Explain why or why not.
- 8:24, 28 – Key Points
 - In both these verses, Jesus says "I am he" (Greek: *egō eimi*) and both times He is pointing to His divinity and connection to His Father. In v. 23 He speaks of being from above with His Father and therefore in v. 24 claims that only by believing that He is the "I AM", the promised Messiah, would they find life and freedom from sin.
 - Further evidence that He is the "I AM" is through His ability to foresee His death/resurrection ("lifted up the Son of Man") and knowing the very Words of God.
 - Contemporary Application
 - One can only be saved from their sin by believing that Jesus is the "I AM", the Messiah. He does not leave room for any other belief. How can we teach this exclusive claim to people today?

- 8:58 – Key Points
 - This is a crux verse in the Gospel of John. Why? Because it is here that Jesus makes His most bold claim yet. If there had been any doubt about His “I AM” statements prior to this, there would be none now. There is no confusion or veiled statements here. Jesus clearly states, “Truly, truly [*the use of “truly, truly” is always an indication of a statement of truth and certainty in Scripture*] I say to you, before Abraham [*before God’s covenant with His people*], I am.”
 - Here He speaks of His existence before Abraham (some 2,000 years earlier) and of His identity (using the exact wording of God to Moses in Exodus 3:14).
 - There is now NO doubt in the Pharisees’ minds who He is claiming to be. They are fully ready to stone Him for claiming identity with God Himself, and this is blasphemy.
 - Contemporary Application
 - How would we respond to someone today who claimed to be Jesus?
 - Would we respond any differently than the Pharisees did?
- 13:19; 18:5-6 – Key Points
 - These verses are in the context of Judas’ betrayal. In 13:19, Jesus is predicting Judas’ betrayal and 18:5-6 is the fulfillment of that. In both instances, Jesus is claiming that His prediction and its subsequent fulfillment are further evidence that He truly is the “I AM”.
 - 18:6 demonstrates even the power of speaking it. At the very words that Jesus says, “I AM”, they all drew back and fell to the ground. Falling to the ground was not uncommon in divine revelation (see Ezek. 1:28; 44:4; Dan. 2:46; 8:18; 10:9; Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14; Rev. 1:17; 19:10; 22:8).
 - Contemporary Application
 - Does knowing/believing that Jesus is the “I AM” “blow you away,” or is it just another belief you have tied with Christianity? In other words, does knowing and believing that Jesus is God bring you to your knees? Why or why not?
- **Metaphorical “I AM” Statements**
 - Key Points
 - Each of the following statements made by Jesus are metaphorical representations of the fact that Jesus is the “I AM”. They demonstrate the different ways in which Jesus fulfills this role and identity.
 - Take some time to read through each statement and consider what they tell us about the character and identity of Jesus and therefore the character and identity of GOD.
 - The Statements:
 - **8:12; 9:5 – “I AM” the LIGHT OF THE WORLD**
 - **10:7, 9 – “I AM” the DOOR OF THE SHEEP**
 - **10:11, 14 – “I AM” the GOOD SHEPHERD**
 - **11:25 – “I AM” the RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE**
 - **14:6 – “I AM” the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE**
 - **15:1 – “I AM” the TRUE VINE**

- Contemporary Application
 - How do these statements make you feel?
 - Which statement(s) stands out and impacts you most right now? Why?

UNDERSTANDING HEART

- How does understanding that Jesus is the “I AM” change your thinking (or does it)?
- Why is this important at all?
- Does it make you look at the Old Testament any differently? Why or why not?

WISDOM HANDS

- In your conversations with those who do not know the Lord, how can you communicate this very important message with them?
- Who this week will you take time to share this message with? Name someone in order to find accountability among your brothers and sisters and be prepared to share how it went (both positive and negative responses).

PRAYER



End your time together with a prayer. Ask God to help you to boldly share the message that JESUS IS THE “I AM”.

CLASS OUTLINE

"...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31) The Gospel of John was written so that those who read its message may believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, THE CHRIST. The following outline holds the major themes expounded on in the Gospel of John in order that its readers may believe in Jesus and have eternal life. (Adapted from the "Key Themes" outline in the ESV Study Bible):

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (January 4)
2. THE WORD IS...
GOD (January 11)
 - a. Jesus is GOD
 - b. 1:1–2, 18; 5:17–18; 8:58–59; 10:30–33; 20:28
3. THE WORD IS...
BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD (January 18)
 - a. Jesus existed before the creation of all there is.
 - b. 1:1–2; 8:58; 17:5, 24
4. THE WORD IS...
OMNISCIENT (ALL KNOWING) (January 25)
 - a. Jesus has supernatural knowledge that only God can possess.
 - b. 1:48; 2:4, 19, 23–25; 3:14; 4:17–18; 6:51, 70; 8:28; 9:3; 10:15, 17–18; 11:4, 14; 12:24, 32; 13:10–11, 38; 21:18–19
5. THE WORD IS...
THE MESSIAH AND SON OF GOD (February 1)
 - a. Jesus is the promised Messiah and Son of God prophesied in Old Testament.
 - b. 1:36, 41, 49; 3:18; 4:25, 29; 5:25; 7:26, 27, 31, 41, 42; 9:22; 10:24, 36; 11:4, 27; 12:34; 19:7; 20:30–31
6. THE WORD IS...
THE "I AM" (February 8)
 - a. Jesus is the "I AM" from the Old Testament. He is Yahweh/Jehovah.
 - b. 4:26; 6:20, 35, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1; 18:5–6 (cf. Ex. 3:14–15; Isa. 41:4; 43:10–13, 25; 45:18; 51:12; 52:6)
7. THE WORD IS...
THE SON WHO WAS SENT BY AND REFLECTS THE FATHER (February 15)
 - a. Jesus was sent by God and reflects the very essence of the Father.
 - b. 3:17, 35–36; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:35–36; 14:13; 17:1
8. THE WORD IS...
THE FULFILLMENT OF JEWISH FESTIVALS/INSTITUTIONS (February 22)
 - a. Jesus fulfills the Jewish festivals and institutions found in the Law (even the temple itself).
 - b. 1:29, 36; 2:14–22, esp. v. 21; 4:23–24; 8:12; 9:5; 19:14
9. THE WORD IS...
THE GIVER OF ETERNAL LIFE (March 1)
 - a. Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in Him.
 - b. 1:4; 3:15–16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 26, 39–40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47–48, 51, 53–54, 68; 8:12; 10:10, 25, 28; 11:25; 12:25, 50; 14:6; 17:2–3; 20:31

10. THE WORD IS...

A MIRACLE WORKER (March 8)

- a. Jesus performs signs and wonders that demonstrate that He is the promised Messiah.
- b. 2:1–11, 13–22; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–15; 9:1–41; 11:1–44

11. THE WORD IS...

TESTIFIED BY OTHERS TO BE THE MESSIAH (March 15)

- a. Witnesses testify that Jesus is the Messiah.
- b. 1:7–8, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:11, 32–33; 4:39; 5:31–39; 8:14, 18; 10:25; 15:26–27; 18:37; 19:35; 21:24

12. THE WORD IS...

UNIFIED WITH FATHER AND SPIRIT IN THEIR WORK OF REVELATION AND REDEMPTION (March 22)

- a. Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their work.
- b. 14:17–18, 23, 26; 15:26; 20:21–22

13. THE WORD IS...

THE BASIS OF SALVATION (March 29)

- a. It is by Jesus' death that God brings His people salvation.
 - i. 1:29; 3:14–15; 6:51–58; 10:15; 11:50–52; 12:24; 15:13
- b. God is sovereign in salvation.
 - i. 3:21; 5:21; 6:37–45, 64–65; 10:16, 26–30; 15:16; 17:2, 6, 9

14. BELIEVERS MUST...

CONFESS AND BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH (April 12)

- a. Salvation is obtained by believing in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God.
 - i. 1:12; 3:15, 16; 5:24; 6:29, 35; 8:24; 11:25–27, 42; 12:44; 17:8, 21; 20:31
- b. The benefits of salvation can be experienced here and now (in this evil age), but will be fully known when He returns.
 - i. 3:18, 36; 4:23; 5:24; 6:39–40; 10:10, 26–29; 11:25–26

15. BELIEVERS MUST...

CONTINUE JESUS' WORK AND MISSION (April 19)

- a. Believers are called upon to continue the work of the Savior in order that all men may know and be saved.
- b. 4:38; 15:16; 17:18; 20:21–22

16. CONCLUSION TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (April 26)