

# The *I Am* Claims of Jesus in John's Gospel Account

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## Introduction

The study of figures of speech employed by the inspired writers is engrossing, fascinating, and rewarding to the serious student. Figurative language enriches the meaning of various concepts beyond that which literal terminology is sometimes able to do. One of the common figures of speech found in the Bible is the simile. It is also one of the most easily recognizable. It announces itself to the reader or hearer by means of the introductory words *like* or *as*. For example, the several "kingdom parables" in Matthew 13 all begin with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven **is like unto...**" (vv. 1-52; *emph. DM*).<sup>1</sup> In Matthew 25:14 we have another instance of simile: "For **it is as** when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods [*emph. DM*]."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps an even more common figure of speech in the Bible is the metaphor. This figure is more direct than the simile in that it omits the clue words *like* or *as* and simply states that the one or thing being compared to another **is** some other one or thing. Jesus employed metaphors when He instituted His supper, as seen in the following:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, take, eat; **this is my body**. And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for **this is my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins (Mat. 26:26-28; *emph. DM*).

Note that Jesus did not use the formula concerning the bread, "This **is like** my body" (a simile). He simply said, "This **is** my body." However, it is perfectly clear that the bread was not **literally** His body (i.e., He did not slice off some of His flesh and give to the apostles to eat). This being so, He was manifestly employing figurative language—a metaphor. He was thus indicating that the bread was to represent (symbolize, stand for, signify) His body when we eat it in the Lord's Supper as a memorial to His death (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The same is true of His statement concerning the fruit of the vine and His blood.<sup>3</sup>

The subject of this manuscript involves Jesus' employment of strong and vivid metaphors. John recorded seven metaphorical statements of the Lord in which He conveyed not only His Deity, but also His all-sufficiency to supply the direst needs of humanity. In each of these He declared, "I am the..." and then named an entity to convey some facet of His nature, function, or ability.<sup>4</sup> These seven statements provide rich and valuable insights into the nature

of the pre-existent Christ and the purpose of His assuming a fleshly body. While these seven *I am...* statements do not constitute miraculous signs, they complement the miracles of Jesus, which John records. They thereby complement John's clearly-stated purpose in writing his book: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). Let us now briefly study Jesus' "I am..." claims.

### **"I Am the Bread of Life"**

#### **John 6:35**

One of the signs that John recorded was the feeding of the five thousand men with only five barley loaves and two fish that a boy in the crowd had brought with him (6:5-14). The miracle so impressed the people that some concluded that He was "the prophet" that was to come into the world. From this conclusion a movement was even started to force Jesus to be their king. This attempt He utterly rejected by departing from them (v. 15).<sup>5</sup> The next day a multitude followed Him to Capernaum, where they found Him in the synagogue (vv. 24, 59). Jesus accused them of seeking Him merely for more loaves and fish when they really should be seeking for food that would provide them with eternal life. The Lord told them the Son of man was the source of this food and that believing on Him was the means of receiving it.

Incredibly, in spite of the banquet He amazingly provided the day before, they asked for a sign that they might believe His words. Their problem of unbelief lay not in the impotence of the sign they had seen, but in the perverseness of their hearts. And so it is with the theological modernist, the humanist, the atheist, and the agnostic of our day. He disbelieves, not because of the impotence of the evidence, but in spite of the power of it. He **chooses** to doubt, to disbelieve, to reject the manifold body of powerful evidence. He cannot bear the consequences and implications of belief in God, in the Bible, and in the Christ. The skeptic literally wills God and Christ out of existence (or so he thinks).

The Jews reminded Jesus that their fathers had been given manna in the wilderness. They seem to imply that Moses produced a great sign by giving their fathers the manna, and they wonder if Jesus can eclipse that sign in producing the food He had just mentioned. The Lord responded that the manna was not the true bread and that it was not Moses, but God, Who provided it. Jesus thereby introduced the fact that God is the source of the true life-giving bread which He had sent into the world. When they asked for that bread, Jesus declared, "I am

the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (v. 35). He repeats His "Bread of life" claim a few moments later (vv. 48, 51). Bread has for centuries been a primary part of man's diet. It is so central to his sustenance that it has become a symbol for the entire gamut of man's food. Jesus used *bread* figuratively in this all-embracing sense in this passage – essential sustenance and nourishment for the soul.

As in His temptations in the wilderness, so in this remarkable discourse, Jesus went all the way back to a principle first enunciated by Moses: "Man shall not live by bread alone..." (Mat. 4:4; Deu. 8:3). Physical food and drink satisfy physical hunger and thirst only briefly, and then we hunger and thirst again (John 6:27, 35b). Physical food and drink sustain us only for the brief span of our lives on this earth, and sooner or later we all die (vv. 49, 58a). Those who partake of the Bread of life will not die, but will live forever (vv. 50–51, 58b).

Jesus did not set Himself forth as "a Bread" or "one Bread" among many, but "**the** Bread" – the only, exclusive, without exception, indispensable Bread of life sent from the Father. In so doing He clearly set Himself forth as the only source of spiritual and eternal life. How are we to partake of Him as the Bread of life so as to receive eternal life? He explains in various ways:

1. One must "work...for the food which abideth unto eternal life" and this "work of God" is to "believe on him whom he hath sent" (vv. 27, 29)
2. "He that cometh to me shall not hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (v. 35b)
3. "Every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life" (v. 40)
4. "And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the father, and hath learned, cometh unto me" (v. 45)
5. "He that believeth hath eternal life" (v. 47)
6. "If any man eat of this bread [Himself, His flesh], he shall live forever" (v. 51)
7. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life" (v. 54)<sup>6</sup>.
8. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him" (v.56)

The compilation of the statements above leads to the following conclusion: Jesus says that eternal life is procured by eating His flesh and drinking His blood, but also by believing on Him and coming to Him. Therefore, to eat of the Bread of life (i.e., eat His flesh and drink His blood) is a figure of speech for believing in and coming to Christ as the Son of God. One believes in and comes to Christ by hearing and learning the Word of God. That which Jesus taught figuratively in this chapter, He taught in literal terminology a bit later: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall never see death" (John 8:51). Thus, to eat of the

Bread of life means to believe and obey the Word of Christ. Christ is “...unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9). To “eat” His flesh and “drink” His blood is simply to appropriate and apply the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, which is accomplished when the penitent believer confesses Christ and is baptized into Christ and into His death (Acts 2:37–38; Rom. 6:3–4). When one thus obeys Christ, He indeed partakes of the Bread of life.

The strangest of all ironies is that the world is starving spiritually, but not because the Bread of Life is not available, but because it refuses to eat!

### **“I Am the Light of the World”**

#### **John 8:12**

The subject of *light* and the identity of Christ as the “Light” are presented to us in the very beginning of John’s book (1:5–9). The apostle states that John the Baptizer was sent to “bear witness of the light” (v. 7). *The Light* is immediately identified by the apostle as the One through Whom the world was made (v. 10). The context clearly points us to the eternal pre-existent Logos Who “became flesh and dwelt among us” – Jesus Christ, “the only begotten Son” of God (vv. 1–3, 14, 18). In John 8:12 the Lord confirms the claim that John the Baptizer and the apostle John made of Him: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.” He repeats this self-identity in John 9:5 and 12:35–36, 46.

Possibly the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2–14) prompted Jesus’ declaration that He is the Light of the world. This great feast was in large part a commemoration of Jehovah’s guidance and protection of Israel in the wilderness. The people kept this annual seven-day feast by building and dwelling in freshly-made booths or tabernacles and by offering various sacrifices (Lev. 23:39–43). A major element of Jehovah’s care for Israel in the wilderness was the means by which He guided and led them on their trek: “And Jehovah went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might go by day and by night” (Exo. 13:21). Hendriksen describes part of the celebration at this feast: “There was the illumination of the inner court of the temple, where the light of the grand candelabra reminded one of the pillar of fire by night which had served as a guide through the desert (Num. 14:14).”<sup>7</sup> Whatever, if anything, may have provoked Jesus’ claim to be the Light, it was a bold claim that sparked immediate challenge and response from the Pharisees.

*Light* and *darkness* are frequently used figures of contrast in the Bible. Darkness is a symbol for at least the following:

1. **Sinful behavior:** Solomon wrote of those “Who forsake the paths of uprightness, To walk in the ways of darkness” (Pro. 2:13).
2. **Death:** Job thus depicted death as “the land of darkness and of the shadow of death” (Job 10:21).
3. **Ignorance:** The Lord likened darkness unto ignorance: “Jesus therefore said unto them, Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth” (John 12:35).
4. **Error:** Paul equated the Truth with light and error with darkness: “For ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: ...(for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth) ...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them” (Eph. 5:8-11).
5. **Secrecy:** Jesus used the term thus in giving the apostles their first commission: “What I tell you in the darkness, speak ye in the light; and what ye hear in the ear, proclaim upon the house-tops” (Mat. 10:27).
6. **God’s Final Judgment of sin:** God’s wrath in the Final Judgment (Hell) is described as “the outer darkness [where] there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:30).
7. **Satan’s power:** Jesus labels the composite evil power of Satan with this term: “When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched not forth your hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53; cf. Eph. 2:2; 6:12).

*Darkness* obviously symbolizes or is associated with ignorance and with that which is malevolent, harmful, evil, undesirable, erroneous, and dreadful. The world was filled with all of these elements of darkness when Christ came “a light into the world” to dispel man’s hopeless darkness (John 12:46). When the Lord came it was as the rising of a sun that had never risen before. It was as if someone had at last flipped on the light switch in a pitch-dark cavern. Just as obviously, *Light* represents the opposite of all of the foregoing concepts—knowledge and that which is good, helpful, righteous, desirable, hope-inspiring, and even the Truth itself. Jesus’ claim that He is the Light means that He is the source of all of these wholesome, lovely, and beneficial qualities. The claim itself implies either the Deity or the insanity of the claimant. However, only one himself insane could read the testimony of John and the other Gospel penmen and label Jesus “insane”! No, this claim is one of Deity, pure and simple.

The announcement of the arrival of the Great Light in the world is the greatest and most wonderful announcement ever to be made. In this fact lies the significance of the term *Gospel*, for it is indeed the ultimate good news ever to break upon humanity! As bright as the Light is, our world remains in darkness, not because there is no light, but because “men loved the

darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil” (John 3:19). The brightest light in the darkest night is of no value unless one turns it on, appropriates it to his needs, and accesses its brilliance. Jesus tells us the only way we may take advantage of the spiritual light He provides: “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12b). “Following” Jesus involves two elements:

1. **We must follow His example of life.** He is the only One Who has ever lived or will live without a sinful thought, word, or deed, and we must carefully study His behavior and emulate it as closely as possible. One is a hypocrite who claims to abide in Christ and partake of the Light, but who does not walk in His steps: “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). Since there is no source of information about the life of Christ outside of the Bible, we must diligently search its pages.
2. **We must follow His teachings.** True discipleship does not exist apart from abiding in His Word: “Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). To reject the Word of Christ is to reject the Light Himself: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day” (12:48).

One who follows the Christ does not walk in darkness (8:12b), that is, he walks in the light. As seen above, following Christ cannot be separated from heeding His Word. Therefore, to “walk in the light” means to follow – to obey – the Word of Christ. One is not only a hypocrite, but a liar, who claims to be in fellowship with God while living in disobedience to Him:

If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:6–7).

Paul makes clear the means by which Christ sheds His light upon the world. He “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10).

### **“I Am the Door”**

#### **John 10:7, 9**

Jesus’ claim to be the Door was preceded by the “parable” (actually an allegory – *paroimia*; [an allegory, an extended and elaborate metaphor]).<sup>8</sup> He told a story concerning sheep, a sheepfold with its door, a porter (doorkeeper), a shepherd, and a thief or robber who would seek to steal the sheep (John 10:1–5). Here we have another instance of a figure of speech (a metaphor) within a figure of speech (an allegory). As with a parable, so with an allegory: some of the details are mere “drapery” (i.e., elements to make the allegory more realistic). The teller

usually intends to emphasize only one or two points, and one should not attempt minute application of every detail. Hendriksen is right: “Over-analysis leads to misinterpretation.”<sup>9</sup>

The sheepfold referred to by the Lord is a crude enclosure for sheep, having walls of stone and a secure door. After the shepherd had led his flock into the security of the fold, he would secure the door and leave a porter (a doorkeeper, a guard) to watch it through the night. Thieves and robbers would not attempt to enter by the guarded door to steal sheep but would stealthily seek some low or weak place in the wall to gain access to them.

The Jews failed to understand the application of the allegory (v. 6), which precipitated Jesus’ words of explanation to them. When Jesus said, “I am the door,” the Jews must have begun to understand the allegory and just where they fit into it. The sheep represented the people of God (at that time, fleshly Israel in general). The Pharisees to whom Jesus primarily addressed and applied this allegory (9:40–10:1, 7, 19–21) were the thieves and robbers. They were doing all they could to “steal” the sheep away to their traditions, which they revered above the law of God (Mat. 15:6). Their method was intimidation (John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42; 19:38; 20:19). The sheepfold represented the safety and security of fellowship with God. There was but one means of access to that place of safety and thus to God – through the Door. The Lord’s claim here is that He is the one avenue of access to the Father, which He later stated in very literal terms: “No one cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6b). All who seek or claim to be another means of access are thieves and robbers.

The “thieves and robbers” among the Jews would not dare honor the true Door by acknowledging Him and seeking access through Him. On the contrary, they were doing all they could to discredit and destroy Him and to steal the people away from God. They had only perverse, selfish, and destructive motives concerning the sheep. Their mission was to use the people for their own vainglorious ends, which would mean not only stealing, but killing and destroying the sheep. Jesus’ later preached a powerful sermon to the scribes and Pharisees in which He very specifically and explicitly explained their roles as destroyers of God’s people (Mat. 23:13–36, esp. vv. 13–15).

However, Jesus, the exact opposite of the thieving Pharisees, would provide life, as opposed to killing and destroying. Those who would hear and follow Jesus and enter through the Door (vv. 4, 9) would find not only life, but also **abundant** life. All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). These will eventuate at last in the fulfillment of a living hope “...unto an

inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). “Abundant life” indeed!

All men have the opportunity to enter the fold of Christ and be saved (Mat. 11:28–30; John 10:9). However, one must choose to do what is necessary to enter. One can accomplish this only by following Him, by hearing His voice (vv. 4, 16; 8:31–32). To follow and hear means to obey (Mat. 7:21; John 3:36; 14:15; Heb. 5:9; 1 John 5:3; et al.). Specifically, Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

It is possible that the action of the Jews against the blind man Jesus had healed (John 9) may have prompted this allegory. The Pharisees had made a rule that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be cast out of the synagogue (v. 22). They took this action against the healed blind man who shamed them for their unbelief (v. 34). In making this law and taking this action the Pharisees took to themselves the role of the door to God’s favor, which the synagogue symbolized. It is almost as if the Lord is saying, “Although you Pharisees presume to admit to or exclude from God’s favor, I alone can do so—I am the door!” If this assumption of authority and access by the Pharisees did not prompt the Lord to tell the allegory, it at least served to reveal Who the real Controller of access to the Father was and is. Christ alone can say of Himself: “These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth” (Rev. 3:7).

### **“I Am the Good Shepherd”**

**(John 10:11)**

Jesus now emphasizes and applies the figure of the shepherd in the allegory. He contrasts the shepherd who owns and is known by the sheep with hireling shepherds. The hireling does not own the sheep, and they do not recognize his voice. Not all hired men are hirelings. Some have genuine concern for others and for doing their work well. However, the hireling’s motive is wholly selfish and mercenary. Having no genuine care for the sheep, when the enemy comes, rather than fighting him off to protect the sheep, he runs, leaving them to be slaughtered.

In this application the Savior is no longer just the Door through which the Shepherd and sheep enter to find safety with God. He is now the Good Shepherd Who leads and protects the sheep. We should not be concerned about nor confused by the fact that in the same allegory Jesus depicts Himself by two different symbols. Such sudden changes of metaphors are found



elsewhere (e.g., Christ is both Lamb and Lion [Rev. 5:5–6]). “So great is Jesus that His significance can never be fully expressed. No symbol, taken by itself, can do justice to His fulness. He is indeed, both door and shepherd.”<sup>10</sup>

The Lord also changes the figure for the leaders of Judaism. Even as the Lord is both the Door and the Good Shepherd, so the Pharisees are depicted not only as strangers (John 10:5) and thieves and robbers (v. 8). Now they are hirelings to whom the sheep do not really belong (v. 12). They had no genuine care for the sheep, but only used the sheep for their personal profit or pride, as demonstrated by their utter lack of concern toward the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1–16), the adulterous woman (8:1–11), or the healed blind man (9:24–34). At the first sign of any personal danger or loss, in their selfishness they would abandon the sheep to their attackers. Leaderless Israel was as “sheep not having a shepherd” (Mat. 9:36).

By contrast, the true and good shepherd truly cared for the sheep and would risk his own safety to protect them. In fact, Jesus prophesies His crucifixion in the application by stating that as the Good Shepherd He would even lay down His life for the sheep. He emphasizes that He will lay down His life **by His own** choice for the sake of the sheep, rather than having it taken from Him by force. All of the forces on earth and in Hell combined would have been powerless to take Him against His will (Mat. 26:53; John 19:11). To their amazement, He openly identified Himself to those who came to arrest Him and meekly submitted to them (John 18:4–8). There is astonishing irony in seeing the One before Whose Judgment Seat all shall eventually stand (Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10) yielding Himself to the unjust judgments of evil men! He did all this because He is the Good Shepherd.

Another significant prophecy the Lord uttered in connection with His Good Shepherd claim was the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s flock. Whereas there had been (and still were) the two separate “flocks” of Jews and Gentiles, which the Law of Moses had created and maintained for fifteen centuries, now there would be only one. This unification was accomplished when Jesus laid down His life for the sheep, as described by Paul:

For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Eph. 2:14–16).

The apostle to the Gentiles makes it clear that the “one fold” under the “one shepherd” is the “one body” which he elsewhere identified as the “one church” (Eph. 1:22–23; Mat. 16:18).

We cannot fail to remember the David's beautiful Psalm that describes God's loving care for Israel, but more so the Good Shepherd's care for the flock for which He laid down His life:

Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul: He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, thou I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever (Psa. 23:1-6).

These words have brought great comfort and solace to millions of grief-stricken hearts through the centuries. However, they should also serve to bring great encouragement and confidence to the Lord's people as we live from day to day. We must remember that the Lord fulfills the role of the Good Shepherd only for those who have entered His fold and have become a part of His flock by hearing and following His voice.

### **"I Am the Resurrection, and the Life"**

#### **John 11:25**

After delivering the allegory of the shepherd and the sheep and debating the Pharisees in Jerusalem, Jesus, with the disciples, proceeded eastward across the Jordan where He stayed some time (10:40; 11:7). His beloved friends (v. 5) from Bethany in Judea, Mary and Martha, sent word that their brother, Lazarus, was ill (v. 3). That they would seek Jesus out and send a special messenger to Him implies that they perceived the illness to be grave. They knew His power to heal and were anxious for Him to come to their aid. The Lord purposely did not go immediately "that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (vv. 4, 6). After delaying two days, He announced to the disciples that they would return to Judea because Lazarus had died (vv. 7, 13-14).

As Jesus and His company approached Bethany, Martha went out to meet Him. She expressed regret that He had not come in time to heal Lazarus and prevent His death. Jesus informed her that Lazarus would rise again, which Martha understood as a reference to the final universal resurrection. In response, the Lord made the claim of incomparable power: "I am the resurrection, and the life." He would shortly prove that His promise concerning Lazarus was to be fulfilled eminently. After Mary had also come out to see Jesus and they had both wept over Lazarus' death, Jesus asked to be led to his tomb.

John leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that Lazarus was dead (v. 14). Twice he remarks that he had been in the tomb four days (vv. 17, 39). Lazarus had not merely fainted or

swooned — he was most definitely dead! Jesus called him back from the Hadean realm with the simple command, “Lazarus, come forth” (v. 43). One can scarcely imagine the drama of the moment. The effect on the witnesses was almost electrical. It caused many who had been doubters to believe. However, others were only hardened in their unbelief and went running to the Pharisees as informers. The raising of Lazarus was the “last straw” for the Sanhedrin. They met and at the urging of Caiaphas “...from that day forth they took counsel that they might put him to death” (vv. 47–53).

Jesus never made a claim He could not certify and prove. He first said, “I am the resurrection, and the life” and then promptly called a man, four days dead, from his tomb! However, the miracle wrought on Lazarus, as powerful as it was, was not an end within itself. He would have to die physically again and will be called forth again at the Last Day. Jesus had earlier promised His own resurrection when the Jews would kill Him (John 2:19–21; 10:17–18). He had earlier taught that He would raise men up at the last day unto eternal life (6:39–40, 44, 54). He had even raised the young man of Nain and the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Luke 7:11–15; 8:40–42, 49–56). However, in both cases they were very recently dead and doubters might have claimed that they only slept or were comatose. In the latter case, Jesus ordered that the miracle not be told.

In the case of Lazarus, it was time for His resurrection-power and life-power to be publicly demonstrated. There is no record of any — not even among Jesus’ most hardened enemies — who ever or even attempted to deny this sign (John 11:47). To Martha He iterated a claim that He presently demonstrated at Lazarus’ tomb in the presence of many (v. 40). In raising Lazarus, He “makes a statement” which He doubtless knows will incite the wrath of His enemies so as to precipitate His cruel death.

What of His two-fold claim here? Note the following significant statements and some of their astounding implications:

1. The **Person** of His claim — He does not merely provide and **produce** bodily resurrection and life eternal, although these claims are true concerning Him. He **embodies, is, in His Person**, resurrection and life. These two great promise-blessings proceed from Him because they reside in Him as their very source. He empowers them. Homer Hailey comments incisively on this claim: “Any hope of resurrection and life beyond this life is in Him, and apart from Him there is naught but death and despair.”<sup>11</sup> How empty and impotent are the claims of Mohammed, Confucius, Buddha, and all of the other “prophets” men have followed and

gods men have fashioned with their own hands and worshiped! If the Lord's enemies had not grasped His claims to Deity before, they could not miss His claim here.

2. The **progression** of His claim – first the resurrection and then the life. The resurrection is that which will open the door to life eternal. *Life* here obviously refers to eternal life. After His *I am* claim, Jesus continues: “He that believeth on me, though he die [physically], yet shall he live [eternally]; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me [in the present physical world] shall never die [in the eternal realm to come] ” (vv. 25b–26).
3. The **period** of His claim – It is not “I **shall be** the resurrection, and the life.” He spoke plainly in the present tense. The fair sense of the words is that “I am now and will always be the resurrection, and the life.” Martha understood His claim in relation to the future resurrection only. Jesus emphasized that the resurrection He would effect at last would occur because He even now possessed that power. Then He demonstrated it!
4. The **people** of His claim – It contains a promise of resurrection to never-dying (eternal) life conditioned on their living in and believing on Him (v. 26). While the good and evil alike shall be raised at the same hour, only the good will be raised “to life,” while the evil will be raised “to judgment” (“damnation,” KJV) (5:28–29). Thus eternal life is conditional rather than universal or based upon Calvinistic “unconditional election.”
5. The **purposes** of His claim – It was to glorify Him and His Father (11:4, 40). It was to strengthen the often-weak faith of the apostles (v. 15). It was to produce faith in the witnesses (v. 42), which effect it had on many of the Jews (v. 45; 12:10). Both the purpose of the miracle and of John's record of it form a happy convergence: that men “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and believing [they] may have life in his name” (20:30– 31).

The claim of Jesus is a powerful introduction to the miracle itself. Jesus knew what He was about to do. He builds anticipation in Mary and Martha and in all who were privy to their conversations, although they were not aware of His plans. The miracle thus becomes more than the resurrection of a man dead four days, as spectacular as that was and is. Hendriksen correctly analyzed the relationship between this event and Jesus' two-fold claim preceding it: “Thus, the miracle will be seen in its true character, namely, as a **sign**, pointing away from itself, to Christ, and making Him manifest in all His glory.”<sup>12</sup>

### **“I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”** **John 14:6**

After the Lord had eaten His last Passover with the twelve and had instituted His memorial supper, Judas departed for His awful deed (Mat. 26:17–29; Luke 22:14–23; John 13:1, 21–30). Jesus immediately began a long discourse to the remaining eleven (John 13:31– 16:33). It was designed both to comfort them and to prepare them for the cataclysmic events that would soon descend upon them. What Divine irony we see just here in the Christ. He is the

One Who will soon be unjustly arrested, tried, mocked, scourged, and made to suffer the indescribable agony of crucifixion, but He thinks of their needs and seeks to comfort them! Near the beginning of His speech to them He uttered the following words that have been used at gravesides innumerable times through the centuries and that are still used daily to bring comfort and solace:

Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go, ye know the way (John 14:1-4).

The Lord had just prior to the statement above told them He was soon to depart for a place where they could not presently follow Him (13:33; cf. 8:21-24), prompting Peter to ask where He was going and why he could not accompany Him (13:36-37). Now, upon Jesus' reiteration of His eminent departure for another place, Thomas, likely speaking for them all, explains that they neither know where He is going nor the way to get there (14:5). The Lord responds with one of the most familiar statements ever to fall from any mortal tongue: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (v. 6). In this famous declaration, the Son of God tells Thomas (and all of them) both where He will soon be going ("unto the Father") and the way to get there ("I am the way"). These words are practically inexhaustible in their meaning. Entire books have been written in an attempt to plumb their depths. Our limited space will permit consideration of only a few of its numerous implications.

When Jesus said, "I am the way," He employed the ordinary word for a literal road or a traveled way.<sup>13</sup> He amplified this thought when He said, "No one cometh unto the Father, but by me." It seems quite possible that in declaring Himself "the way," He was tying Himself to the hope-filled prophecy of Isaiah 35:8: "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for the redeemed: the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein" (Isa. 35:8).

Before, men had only indirect access to God. Sinners could only offer the impotent blood of bulls and goats through equally sinful priests who stood between men and Jehovah (Heb. 7:27; 9:6-7, 25; 10:1-4, 11). Now we have not a fallible high priest of the Aaronic order, offering the inferior blood of brute beasts in an earthly sanctuary, but a sinless High Priest of the higher order of Melchizedek Who offered in the most holy place of Heaven His own pure blood for our sins (Heb. 7:11-17, 26-27; 8:1-2; 9:11-14, 24). Men hereby have "boldness to enter into the holy

place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20).

Jesus never presents Himself as "a" Son of God, "a" Savior, or "a" Redeemer, as if there were more than one. Accordingly, He is not "a" way to the Father, but "**the**" way. He thereby claimed for Himself unique, exclusive means of access to the Father. Neither Mohammed nor any other self-proclaimed "savior" offered himself for sinful mankind; and any such sacrifice would have been useless and powerless had it been made. By means of His sinless life and the offering of His pure blood for our sins, Jesus thereby became the One, the Only, Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). Roman Catholic dogma, not the Bible, has blasphemously elevated Mary to the role of "mediatrix." Jesus is "**the** lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, emph. DM). Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, is the only One Who can point us in the right way, teach us the way, and, as "the Door," admit us to the way that will finally lead us to the very presence of God, because He Himself **is** The Way! As surely as there is only **one** Lord, **one** God, and **one** Spirit, just as surely this **one** Lord has (and authorizes) only **one** body (His church [Mat. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23-27]), **one** faith (Acts 6:7; Jude 3), **one** baptism (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:20-21), and provides our **one** hope (Eph. 4:4-6).

Jesus came into a world that was filled with error and falsehood. False philosophies and religions were rife then even as now. There was agnosticism, which, at least in part, consists of doubting that there is any such thing as "truth" in the absolute sense (perhaps the background of Pilate's question, "What is truth?" [John 18:38]). Our present age is burdened with the cursed and irrational philosophy of relativism that subjectively defines *truth* as whatever one thinks or wants it to be. Contrary to all such wicked and destructive views, Jesus came boldly speaking of "Truth." According to the Lord, "the Truth" pertaining to religion and morals is that corpus of objective principles and teachings revealed by God – the Bible: "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). "The Truth" can, yea must, be ascertained or known: "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall **know the truth**, and **the truth** shall make you free" (John 8:31-32, emph. DM). (Note that the Lord equated *my word* and *the truth*.)

With the coming of the Lord into our world came "grace and truth" (John 1:14, 17). We are not to understand John to be saying that God's grace and Truth were either unknown or non-existent before Jesus appeared, but that with His coming He brought the ultimate

expression—the fullness—of them. He could not deliver all of the Truth to the apostles while He was among them in the flesh, but such was not due to His inability to deliver it, but to theirs to receive it at the time (16:12). He promised clearly and repeatedly that when He had returned to the Father He would send “the Spirit of truth” Who would guide them into “all the truth” (14:16–17; 15:26; 16:13). This promise explains the means by which we have the fullness of the revelation—the Truth—of God’s Word. Paul described the “all Truth” of Jesus’ promise as “that which is perfect” which was to (and now has) come (1 Cor. 13:9–10) and “the unity of the faith” to which men could one day (and we now) can attain (Eph. 4:13).

It is true that Jesus is the source of Truth (both in the doctrine He taught while on earth and in the doctrine the Holy Spirit taught the apostles after He returned to Heaven). He is Truth’s infallible source because **He is the actual embodiment** of Truth itself: “I am... the truth”! Jesus here answered Pilate’s question before He asked it: Pilate: “What is truth?” Jesus: “I am the truth!” Peter understood and honored Jesus as ultimate Truth and its source when He rhetorically asked, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus repeats here that which He earlier stated to Martha: “I am... the life” (John 11:25). As in the earlier context, so here—Jesus spoke not of mere animal life or breath, but of eternal life, the immortal state. As the Father has this life within Himself, so does the Son (5:26). It is this life that God sent His son into the world to provide for sinful men (3:16). For further comments I refer the reader to the earlier discussion in this manuscript of Jesus’ claim to be “the life.”

While Jesus, the Only Begotten of the Father, is fully “the way, and the truth, and the life,” the predominant idea in this metaphor is that He is “the way.” I agree with Hendriksen: “The meaning appears to be: ‘I am the way because I am the truth and the life.’”<sup>14</sup> This concept is borne out by the closing phrase of the Lord’s claim: “No one cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Gaining access to, coming to, communion in eternity with, the Father is the major point. Christ alone is that way, paved with the stones of Truth and leading to the destination of life, which is life indeed!

Jim Waldron astutely observed on this majestic, all-embracing claim of our Lord: “Were Jesus a mere man, such would be a pious presumptuous platitude. But He is Immanuel, God with us.”<sup>15</sup>

## **“I Am the True Vine”**

### **John 15:1, 5**

The Lord is still in the upper room with the eleven when He makes this claim. He has been comforting His disciples in anticipation of His impending death and departure (John 14). Now He turns to instruction, admonition, and exhortation that will be helpful to them when He is no longer among them in the flesh. Various commentators have suggested several possibilities as the background of this allegory.<sup>16</sup> Was it the fruit of the vine of which they had just drunk (some of which likely remained on the table before them) as He instituted His memorial supper?

Was it the fact that Israel had been depicted in the Old Testament as God’s Vine (Psa. 80:8–16; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:21; Hos. 10:1)? Whether one of the above elements or some other factor caused the Lord to adopt this metaphor for Himself we can never know certainly. However, His meaning and application are not left in doubt.

Israel, as God’s chosen fleshly “vine,” had long since proved itself unworthy of the designation (Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:20–25; Hos. 10:1–3). Other “prophets” or “messiahs” might arise, claiming to be “the vine.” By contrast, Christ proclaims Himself to be **the** (not merely “a”) vine that is true (*alethinos* – real, genuine).<sup>17</sup> His claim here is very similar in its effect to one He had already made twice – “I am the life.” As the True Vine He is the source of spiritual life to the branches attached to Him – their sustenance and nourishment.

That which I infer concerning the identity of the branches from verse 1 Jesus states plainly in verse 5: “Ye are the branches.” The Lord surely meant for this part of the allegory to apply primarily and immediately to the apostles: “I am the vine, ye [the eleven] are the branches” (John 15:5). Burton Coffman notes this fact: “That very evening had revealed Judas as a branch which the Father took away and Peter as a branch that would be pruned.”<sup>18</sup> Most certainly Jesus wanted this small band of His intimate associates to remember that their spiritual life and productivity – their ability to execute the work He would leave with them – depended upon their abiding connection to Him.

Coffman continues by appropriately calling attention to the fact that the application also reaches down to us: “But there is a sense in which, by extension, the teachings apply to all who are in the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> Note first that it is individual disciples, not bodies of people, who are characterized as “branches.” The denominational world has long abused and misused these



words of Christ – making the “branches” the denominations – in a vain attempt to connect themselves to Him. The late Guy N. Woods stated correctly:

This [v. 5] forevermore refutes the view that such bodies [the denominations] are branches of the vine – Christ. In truth, they sustain no connection with the true vine at all; all of them came into existence hundreds of years after the end of the apostolic age. The Lord is not talking about branch churches but about individual disciples who are His faithful followers.<sup>20</sup>

As with the apostles and their work, so with us and ours. We must abide in Christ to be the fruitful branches He requires us to be if we would have the spiritual (and eternal) life He alone provides:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me.... He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing (John 15:4-5).

Note several implications of these statements and the surrounding context:

1. Before one can “abide in” Christ he must first come into, become attached to, Him (note: “Every branch **in me**...” [v. 2, emph. DM]). At what point does the alienated sinner “enter in” to Christ and become united with Him? The New Testament clearly answers: “Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3). “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). “Nor is any other means of entry into Christ disclosed in the sacred Scriptures.”<sup>21</sup> Denominational bodies almost universally deny the necessity of baptism in water as a condition of salvation from sin, but these passages just as unequivocally affirm its requirement.
2. Upon entering into Christ, one must abide (continue, remain) in Him to partake of His spiritual sustenance. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* amplifies the meaning of *abiding in Christ* as follows: “Maintain your belief in me, your attachment to me, your derivation of hope, aim, and motive from me.”<sup>22</sup> It is not enough to be good starters in the Christian race – those who will win the crown of life are the good finishers (1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Heb. 12:1-3).
3. One cannot earn spiritual life or eternal salvation by His own righteousness or goodness: “As the branch cannot bear fruit **of itself**, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me...for **apart from me** ye can do nothing” (John 15:4-5; cf. Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5; et al.; emph. DM). Coffman wrote well on this passage: “As regards procurement of righteousness in the sight of God, no human being can ever achieve any semblance of it.”<sup>23</sup>
4. One cannot bear the good fruit in this life that will ultimately glorify God so that he may save his soul without abiding in Christ; abiding in Him one will bear much good fruit (John 15:4-5). The branch (a person) must be attached to and must continue in the Vine (Christ) to produce the good fruit that leads to life eternal; apart from Him we can do nothing.<sup>24</sup> We must maintain a fast and vital connection with the Lord to be the productive citizens in His kingdom He desires us to be. What is the fruit a disciple is to bear? “Fruit, for the Christian, is specified in Galatians 5:22-23, and involves all the good works expected of those who are

wholly dedicated to the Lord.”<sup>25</sup> Only faithfulness in producing such fruit will lead one to eternal life at last.

5. As a branch once attached to the vine can and will be severed by a good husbandman if it is fruitless, so a person once in Christ can and will be cut off by God if he is unfaithful and unfruitful. One who is once saved can most assuredly be lost eternally. The figure is strong concerning such: they are taken away, cast forth, gathered up, and cast into the fire and burned (vv. 2, 6). There could hardly be a stronger case against the absurd and heinous Calvinistic tenet of perseverance of the saints (impossibility of apostasy) than the Lord sets forth in this allegory.
6. Entering into Christ—becoming attached to Him as a branch is to a vine—is dependent upon our response to the words of Christ. The apostles had already been made clean (“purged”) by the Word (doctrine) of Christ (v. 3); their adherence to the teaching of Christ is the means by which they became attached to Him. In this same setting Christ would soon indicate that the apostles were also to be sanctified through God’s Word (17:17). Those saints to whom Peter wrote had been purified through their obedience to the Truth (1 Pet. 1:22). Those who are in the church (those in Christ) have been “cleansed by the washing of water with the word” (Eph. 5:26). Thus, one enters into Christ—becomes attached to the Vine—by obeying His Word.
7. Abiding in Him (and He in us) is directly related to our response to His Word. Note the comparative phrases Jesus used in this regard:
  - a. “Abide in me” (v. 4a)—“And I [abide] in you” (4b)
  - b. “Abideth in me” (v. 5b)—“And I [abideth] in him” (5b)
  - c. “Abide in me” (v. 7a)—“My words abide in you” (7b)

The Lord had already told a group of believing Jews: “If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples” (John 8:31). In John 15:7–8 He said, “If...my words abide in you...herein is my Father glorified... and so shall ye be my disciples.” It is strikingly evident that the means by which the Word of Christ abides in one is by that one’s abiding in (i.e., obeying) the Word of Christ. Things that are equal to the same thing are equal to each other. Therefore, since (1) abiding in Christ, and His Word abiding in us are the same, and (2) abiding in (obeying) His Word, and His Word abiding in us are the same, then it follows that (3) abiding in Christ, and abiding in (obeying) His Word are equal to each other. Jesus’ statements immediately following the vine-branches allegory are further confirmation of the truth of this principle: “Abide ye in my love. **If ye keep my commandments**, ye shall abide in my love” (vv. 9b–10a; emph. DM). It is impossible for us to abide in Christ and for Him to abide in us apart from our obedience to His Word that not only begins, but that remains constant to the end.

Jesus’ major thrust in this powerful allegory is the necessity of His disciples’ remaining vitally connected to Him through persistent obedience to His Word, so as to be saved in the end.

## Conclusion

Jesus has thus proclaimed and described Himself in these seven statements under no fewer than nine metaphors. Hendriksen well wrote: "So rich and glorious is he that not a single name can describe him and not a single metaphor can do justice to his greatness." <sup>26</sup> He is the Bread, the Light, the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection, the Way, the Truth, the Life, and the True Vine. He is the "One and the only One" of each of these. To be apart from Him is to starve, to grope in utter darkness, to have no access to God, to be bereft of care and provision, to face death without hope, to wander aimlessly, to be enslaved to error, to be among the living dead, and to be a fruitless branch destined for fire.

## Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Since a parable is itself a figure of speech, these "kingdom parables" are actually double figures, figures within figures—similes within parables.
3. Had Roman Catholic theologians recognized Jesus' obvious employment of metaphors in the institution of His supper (as they doubtless recognize them in His *I am...* statements), they would never have invented the equally absurd and blasphemous doctrine of transubstantiation. Nor would Luther have invented consubstantiation, his transubstantiation twin.
4. John also recorded two other instances in which the Lord said, "I am" (John 8:24, 58), but in these statements He did not employ a figure. He rather asserted His possession of the nature of eternal Godhood, identifying Himself with Jehovah's identity of Himself to Moses and Israel—"I AM that I AM" (Exo. 3:14).
5. Premillennial theologians ignore this passage because of its devastating implications. This theological system asserts that Jesus came to establish an earthly political kingdom and that He failed to do so because the Jews rejected Him as their earthly king—quite the contrary on both counts. **First**, Jesus did not come to establish an earthly political kingdom. The kingdom He came to and did establish "is not of this world," but is the everlasting spiritual empire Daniel prophesied (2:44; cf. Heb. 12:23, 28). Premillennial dogma demotes the kingdom of Christ to a mere material domain lasting for only one thousand years! **Second**, the Jews mistakenly expected the Messiah to be an earthly monarch, reviving the glory years of the reigns of David and Solomon. It was this very sort of crown they sought to force upon Jesus' head on this occasion. Obviously, they did not reject Him from being such a king. Rather, they would have accepted Him as such by acclamation! Just as obviously, Jesus' refusal of their crown demonstrates conclusively that He did not come to reign over such a kingdom as they sought. The Jews actually rejected Jesus because He **refused** to become their earthly king, not because He **desired** to!
6. The Roman Catholic Church forces a literal application upon these words of Jesus in an effort to justify its doctrine of transubstantiation. Likewise, some brethren see in these words a reference to the Lord's Supper. Both are grievous misapplications of the Lord's words. For a fuller discussion of the meaning of this section of John 6, see Tyler Young's chapter earlier in this book.
7. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1954), 2:4.
8. Strong's, *Online Bible Concordance on parable* (John 10:6).

9. Hendriksen, 2:100.
10. Ibid., 2:102.
11. Homer Hailey, *That You May Believe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 7.
12. Hendriksen, 2:151.
13. Strong's, *ibid.*, on *way* (John 14:6).
14. Hendriksen, 2:268.
15. Jim Waldron, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Fred Davis (Indianapolis, IN: Garfield Heights Church of Christ, 1984), pp. 283–4.
16. For a listing of five such suggestions, see Burton Coffman, *Commentary on John* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Pub. House, 1974), p. 343.
17. Strong's, *ibid.*, on *true* (John 15:1).
18. Coffman, p. 344.
19. Ibid.
20. Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1981), p. 324.
21. Coffman, p. 345.
22. Marcus Dods, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980 reprint), 1:829.
23. Coffman, p. 346.
24. We are not to understand the phrase, *Apart from me ye can do nothing*, as unqualified or absolute. Such an application is a grievous **mis**application that attributes to Jesus the Calvinistic heresy of total hereditary depravity (i.e., a sinner is unable to entertain any good thought, do any good deed, make any overture toward God that pleases Him), which neither He nor any other inspired man ever taught. Unregenerate men (i.e., alien sinners) are able to read the "golden rule" (Mat. 7:12) and practice it just as a Christian can. Sinners can read the New Testament and learn of and practice any and all of the ethical traits taught therein. Furthermore, they **must** bear **some** good fruit (e.g., faith, repentance, confession, love of God and Christ) before they can enter into Christ! They can in this way bear some "good fruit" from the same Spirit-given seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) that produces spiritual fruit in the Christian (Gal. 5:22–23). Moreover, such fruit is not rendered counterfeit by its being produced by sinners. However, sinners, not being in Christ, will never be able to acceptably glorify God by their good behavior (John 15:8; Eph. 3:21), nor will reproduction of those Biblical ethical traits bring them into Christ where salvation is found exclusively. They must still obey the Gospel plan of salvation which brings them into Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), or they will be lost. We must thus understand the Lord's statement to be elliptical: "Apart from me ye can do nothing [that will glorify my Father unto your salvation, that will enable you to be saved]."
25. Woods, p. 322.
26. Hendriksen, 2:41.

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