

June 26, 2022

“I Am”  
John 8:48-59

FCF: Our failure to reckon with Jesus’ identity/deity  
**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Jesus has made clear His divine nature.  
 (magnet) We need to heed what He is saying.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Summer is here. Not that I had to tell you, given the lack of AC. Again, our apologies. How do you choose a summer sermon series? Folks are in-and-out so it can be good to think in terms of something that wraps up in August but does not depend on weekly attendance. So with that, we’re going to study the “I Am” statements in John’s Gospel. Some of these are metaphors. But others are more direct. That’s where we’re going this morning - to a more direct statement.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [John 8:48-59](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Many of you know that Sarah and I were out for a few weeks on a much delayed visit to the United Kingdom. International travel is a bit more complicated than just another road trip. You need more than an itinerary and luggage. To cross another country’s border, your tickets cannot have any discrepancy. Your identification and passport must be up to date. Customs officials rightfully want to know why you are there, where you are from, and who you are. And that needs to be communicated without any ambiguity or confusion. They are not interested in being left to wonder, guess, or having to figure out any of those things. It needs to be clear.

Jesus provides such clarity repeatedly in the Gospels. We are not left wonder, guess, or figure things out as to who He says He is. We may differ with Him as to whether He is who He says He is - that’s a whole other matter. But who He says He is is not stated with any ambiguity or confusion. What do we do with that? How should we respond to this? That’s the point of the text. Jesus has made clear His identity, His divine nature. We need to heed what He is saying.

Now Jesus’ claim has impact on three areas. There are three major implications to what Jesus is saying. First, for apologetics. Second, for our daily struggles. Third, for social ethics.

**I. FOR APOLOGETICS**

First, for apologetics. That is, what we can say to folks who are skeptical towards or wrestling with the claims of Christianity. Let’s look again at this dialogue we see in John 8.

*A) What Jesus Said*

Resistance to Jesus and His teaching is growing. In the face of that, what does He say?

1. He is not merely ancient

([READ John 8:58](#)) This is more than just a claim of being ancient, of being 2,000 years old.

2. He is truly divine

Jesus is saying He is divine, that He is God. To any Jewish person, “I am” would immediately take them back to Exodus 3 and God’s appearance to Moses at the burning bush ([READ Exodus](#)

3:14). What does this mean? Certainly, there is the idea of God as the self-existent, immutable, eternal creator and sustainer of all there is. But we have to note the context. He is saying, “I am the God who will be with you in this trial, to save you.” And that’s who Jesus is claiming to be.

### *B) How They Responded*

Now let that land on you. How did His hearers respond? (READ John 8:58-59)

1. Not just a strong disagreement

This is not just a point of contention, of strong disagreement. This is worse than being cancelled.

2. But worthy of execution

They see this as blasphemy. And, as blasphemy, it is worthy of execution, of being put to death.

And note Jesus doesn’t say they misheard. Because they did hear Him. He simply withdraws.

All of this has serious implications for apologetics, for explaining the Christian faith.

### *Illustration:*

What do we make of Jesus? C. S. Lewis speaks to this in *Mere Christianity* (READ):

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 patronising 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.

The people heard Jesus. They didn’t agree with Him. But they did hear Him. Do we?

### *Application:*

Let me come at this from another angle. The Jewish perspective was that to make such a claim was blasphemous. They had no categories for a mortal human being standing before them and saying such things. Now the apostles were Jewish. At some point, they would have shared that perspective. How do we explain the shift, the change? It’s indisputable what they came to believe and proclaim. How do we explain it? Well, this takes you to the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. That’s what clinched it for them. They saw Him dead and buried. And then raised.

Jesus’ divine nature has been made clear. We need to let that speak in our apologetics.

## **II. FOR OUR DAILY STRUGGLES**

But this also has implications for our daily struggles - not just what we can say to others but what we can hold to for ourselves. At this point, we need to go back in time to Exodus 3.

### *A) Who Jesus Is*

Jesus is saying that He is the “I am.” Who then is this God Jesus is claiming to be?

1. The holy One

(READ Exodus 3:4-5) Jesus is the holy One - distinct, unique and utterly unlike any other.

2. The faithful One

(READ Exodus 3:6) He is the faithful One - making and keeping promises, playing a long game.

### *Illustration:*

We Americans don't really have much appreciation for long periods of time. On our trip, Sarah and I ate in a 12th century tavern, stayed in 17th century inn, visited a cathedral founded in the 7th century. At Magdalen College in Oxford, there is a building finished in 1733, about 250 years after most of the main part of the college. Yet still today it is called "The New Building".

Such things have an air of permanence to them. It's all but a flicker compared to God.

#### *B) What He Does*

And this is who Jesus is saying He is. And what of what He does? Again, Exodus 3.

##### 1. He is attentive

(**READ Exodus 3:7-8a**) He is attentive to us - hearing and seeing the affliction of His people.

##### 2. He delivers us

And He delivers us. He redeems us - bringing freedom and flourishing to us in the very deepest sense, something that was dramatically pictured in the flow of these historical events in Egypt.

This is Jesus - who He is and what He does. And this can transform our daily struggles.

#### *Application:*

How? I was sitting with someone just this past week, someone truly struggling, who said, "I know Jesus loves me. But I don't understand how that helps me." Put another way, "So what if He's the God of Exodus 3. What difference does it make when things are disappointing or difficult - which they often are?" Isn't that what we're all thinking? We can't know why such times come. But we can know this. Jesus has come and is coming again. And that is grounds for assurance. A change is coming to all things. Which is a counterweight to our hopelessness.

He is coming so change is coming. And, through His Spirit, He is with us. Which is our encouragement. He is with us right here and now. Which is a counterweight to our loneliness.

Jesus has made clear His divine nature. We need to let that speak to our daily struggles.

### **III. FOR SOCIAL ETHICS**

And to one more thing, our social ethics. Jesus is who we must trust in and who we must submit to. Again, we need to think in terms of what Jesus means when He says He is the "I am."

#### *A) He Brings the Change*

First, looking to Exodus 3, we see that He is the One who brings change even now.

##### 1. The reality of our involvement

(**READ Exodus 3:10**) Moses was called to do something. We are truly involved in serving God.

##### 2. The preeminence of His engagement

So we see the reality of our involvement. But also the preeminence of His engagement (**READ Exodus 3:16b-17a, 19-21**). He would do all this. We are but instruments in His great hands. Which is so humbling. And so encouraging as well. For it is His work, not dependent upon us.

#### *B) He Sets the Agenda*

The "I am" accomplishes His purposes. But the "I am" also sets the agenda. How so?

### 1. For our relationship with Him

First, in our relationship with Him. He establishes that relationship and then tells us how it is to work. Think back to the book of Exodus - the first four of the Ten Commandments, the many rules for the priests and feasts, the tabernacle and the sacrifices. The Lord sets the agenda here.

### 2. For our relationship with each other

Not just in our relationship with Him but also in our relationship with each another. Think of the next six of the Ten Commandments and the laws regarding justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Such laws touch every area of life. You see this throughout the Bible. There is no dichotomy between sacred and secular. It is all His ([READ Psalm 24:1; Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:15-21](#)). Jesus is the great King and we, as His subjects, are to be utterly marked by His kingdom interests.

This is why social ethics must be shaped by Jesus, the great “I am,” leaving nothing out.

#### *Application:*

The PCA General Assembly met last week. A report was presented on domestic abuse and sexual assault. This was the fruit of three years hard work. Other such reports in recent years have been on same-sex attraction and racial reconciliation. Years before that, pornography, mercy ministry, church and state, marriage and divorce. There is also one on abortion. No doubt that would be worth rereading. All of those are online and I would gladly commend them to you.

Sadly, some hear of such good efforts, push back, and say, “Why are we getting into these matters? Aren’t these political issues? Should we not focus on the gospel?” To which it has to be said, “That is absolutely correct. We should focus on the gospel.” But what is the gospel?

Time and again, Jesus refers to “the gospel of the kingdom.” This what He proclaimed. By that, He means the coming of His rule upon this earth as far as the curse is found. Read His parables. That is what makes this such good news. And He has called us to be kingdom agents.

#### *Illustration:*

There is a new Star Wars TV series, *Obi-Wan Kenobi*. It’s set 10 years after Episode Three - after the rise of the Empire, after Anakin Skywalker turned to the dark side and became Darth Vader. Obi-Wan is now living in the deserts of Tatooine as a distant protector of a 10-year-old Luke Skywalker. He and the other Jedi are being hunted down by Inquisitors, deadly agents of Darth Vader. There’s a line in an early episode ([READ](#)), “Do you know the key to hunting a Jedi, friend? It is patience. Jedi cannot help what they are. Their compassion leaves a trail.”

The same should be true of us as Jesus’ disciples. We are to be kingdom agents, leaving a trail. Jesus has made clear His divine nature. We need to let that speak to our social ethics.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

There is no ambiguity as to His claim. We have no need to wonder what He means. You may have heard the news report last week that China is claiming that its enormous “Sky Eye” telescope (the largest radio telescope in the world) may have picked up trace signals from a

distant alien civilization. That said, the scientists say their findings are preliminary and should be taken with caution until the analysis is complete. Those in the field say the possibility is very high that this suspicious signal is some kind of radio interference. In fact, there have been other cases in which such signals were proven to originate from someone microwaving their lunch.

A lot of folks have spent a lot of time, effort, and money trying to determine if there's life out there. What would settle it? Well, if a ship came down and landed on the White House lawn, at Disney World, or the 50-yard-line during the Super Bowl, that would get our attention. And then, if the someone walked out and held a press conference, that would pretty well nail it.

We have so much more here - not the appearance of another creature from an alien world but the Creator of the universe Himself, in the flesh, come into this world. That's what the New Testament records for us. That's who Jesus is. How do we respond? What do we make of it?

Jesus has made clear His divine nature. We need to heed what He is saying.

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