

THY KINGDOM COME

3. The Seven Miracles and the Seven “I Am’s” of John

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**A Teaching Commentary
of the New Testament**

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1. The Seven Miracles and Seven "I Am's" of John

Jesus brought two things that would change the world – his teachings and his miracles. His teachings straightened out men's thinking and showed them the way back into a right relationship with the Father. His miracles authenticated his teachings. Since the time of Elisha, nobody had ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit like Jesus did. The miracles also present different facets of his Lordship. Jesus had power over the forces of nature, over creation, and even over spiritual realms such as the Sabbath and Jewish traditions.

When John wrote about the life of Jesus, he chose to include seven miracles, although he tells us that Jesus did much more than this. Seven is a number of completeness, which is why John chose to include seven miracles. John also includes seven "I Am's." In the teaching of Jesus, seven times he said "I am the bread of life," "I am the good shepherd," etc.

In some places, the seven miracles in John are intertwined with the seven "I Am's." We shall now consider both.

2. The Seven Miracles of John

2.1 *Changing Water into Wine in Cana*

John 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

A wedding was a religious ceremony. Much of Jesus' ministry took place in such contexts. A wedding was also a major social event, much more elaborate than what we typically do today.

Jesus was a people-person and he was out celebrating this marriage along with friends and family.

A feast accompanied the wedding ceremony. The feast typically lasted for seven days. The comfort and well-being of the guests was the responsibility of the host during this time. It was a major social faux pas to run out of wine. The significance of this may be lost upon us, but running out of wine would have caused this ceremony to conclude early. It would be an embarrassment to the newlywed couple and to their families. It could have branded the couple as being unfit hosts for the rest of their lives. It was not a good way to begin a new marriage.

Mary, the mother of Jesus was there and she was aware of the situation. She had sympathy for this couple and wished to spare them the embarrassment. She asked Jesus to help. Mary's request may have been totally natural – relying on Jesus' wisdom, common sense, or resourcefulness to find a solution to the problem. This may not have been a request for anything supernatural. Jesus' reply indicated that he knew that it was not yet the time for any public display of miracles, but his actions showed that he had the Father's permission to help this couple and to privately demonstrate to his disciples who he was.

It is interesting that Jesus used the jars intended for ceremonial cleansing. Jesus came to show us that the ceremonies which arose out of Jewish law and tradition could never make us clean. He came to turn all of that into new wine – the best wine.

Thus we see Jesus, the Lord over the physical, work his first miracle. There was no show. Few people seemed to know what actually happened. According to verse 2:9, Even the wine steward had no idea from whence it came. The significant audience for the miracle was the disciples. Verse 11 says that as a result of the miracle they put their faith in him.

The majority of Jesus' ministry was directed at the twelve rather than at the masses. He came to build a kingdom, but he took great care in laying the foundation. A public show of miracles would have brought him a mass of followers that he was not yet ready to handle. Thus his disciples began to see his ministry unfold and they began to understand and believe who he was.

2.2 Healing an Official's Son in Capernaum

John 4:46-54

Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.”

The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

Jesus replied, “You may go. Your son will live.”

The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.”

Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed.

This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

By the time this happened, Jesus had a reputation, as evidenced by verse 3:2 ("He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.'") and also in verse 4:45 ("When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there."). As John says at the end of the book, he made no effort to record everything Jesus did. Jesus had been about, performing a ministry that was accompanied by signs and wonders. We do not have a record of everything that he did. We do know that people were aware of who he was and they knew that God ministered mightily through this man.

A royal official heard that Jesus was back in Cana. His son in Capernaum was very sick and he felt that Jesus may be the only hope. He came to Jesus. The distance from Capernaum to Cana is around 25-30 miles, which would have been at least a day's journey.

The man asked Jesus to come with him to Capernaum to heal his son. Jesus told the man to return home and that his son would live. Note that Jesus met the man at his point of need but not necessarily his point of expectation. Who knows what would have happened if the man had kept insisting that Jesus return with him to Capernaum. We must take Jesus at his word and proceed in faith based on his promise. The key seems to be in verse 50, "The man took Jesus at his word and departed."

John shows us Jesus as Lord over Time and Space and also Jesus as the Lord of healing.

2.3 Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

John 5:1-18

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie – the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

There is a textual problem with verses 3 and 4. Note that KJV says "In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." The text "waiting for ... disease he had" is not included in many later versions. Best textual evidence indicates that it was probably not part of the original text but was inserted by a later scribe, probably as an explanation of why the people waited around the pool. It was like a footnote in a study Bible that later was copied into the body of the text. It does provide a glimpse into a superstition of the time – that people could get healed by following the proper formula, doing the right thing, being the first to jump into the pool. What a cruel image they must have had of God – that his grace and mercy is available only to the one who could jump in the pool the quickest.

Jesus approached the man and asked him, "Do you want to get well." This may seem like a bit of strange question. Why else would the man be waiting here, and who in his condition would not want to be healed? The fact is that the man was somewhat of a whiner. His response was basically "it is everybody else's fault that I cannot get into the pool first." Sitting by this pool and begging had become a lifestyle to him and he may well have grown comfortable with it. Jesus was not going to violate his wishes. If he liked his condition he could remain in it. Nobody gets saved against his or her will.

Jesus told the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." The healing required a response of faith. The man had to get up even though he had no reason to believe he could.

After the healing, Jesus found the man again and dealt with his spiritual condition. He told him to stop sinning or something worse would happen to him (v. 14). Jesus came to bring physical healing, but the more important healing that he brought was that of the soul. He cared about this man's spiritual condition.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of this story is the reaction of the Jewish leaders. A great miracle had been performed in their midst. Their response was to get upset because Jesus had violated their concept of keeping the Sabbath. This seems to be the pivotal point where the Jews began organizing to kill Jesus. In the dialogue that follows, Jesus clearly claims a unique relationship to the Father, calling Him "My Father" and not "Our Father". This incites the Jews even further because they understood that he was claiming divinity in this. The Jews never seemed interested in the credentials he had just displayed by healing the lame man.

John shows us Jesus as Lord over the Sabbath and over Jewish tradition. Again, he is also the Lord of healing. He is the Lord who sweeps away our conception of religious formulas for getting God to act.

2.4 Feeding the 5000

John 6:5-15

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

This is the only miracle mentioned in all 4 gospels.

The Jews had a precedent for miraculous feeding – the giving of manna in the wilderness. The Jews were looking for a prophet who would be the next Moses, who would fulfill Deuteronomy 18:18, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him." The significance of the miraculous supply of bread would not be lost upon them.

Again, this miracle required an act of faith and obedience on the part of the disciples. They had to obey Jesus' command to take these morsels out to the masses before they could see the multiplying take place. It was obvious that they still did not really understand what was going on as indicated in verses 5-7 ("When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!'") Jesus involved the disciples in the multiplying to increase their faith. Perhaps the reason that this is the miracle that is recorded in all 4 gospels is because it is the one that impressed the disciples the most – because they were allowed to participate in it.

This miracle also had a big impact on the crowds, who now saw this man as one who could provide them with material benefit (i.e. a meal ticket) but Jesus wanted nothing of this.

John now shows us Jesus as Lord over our physical needs – the giver of our daily bread.

2.5 Walking on Water

John 6:16-21

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

This is the only other miracle (besides the feeding of the 5000) found in John that is mentioned in any of the other gospels. It is mentioned in Matthew and Mark. John omits the reference to Peter, probably wanting to avoid telling anything embarrassing about his friend.

Note the parallel to the opening of Genesis (1:1-2, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." At creation the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Now the Son of God is hovering over the waters.

In this miracle, John presents Jesus as Lord over Creation and over the Forces of Nature.

2.6 Healing the Man Born Blind

John 9:1-41

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

"Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided.

Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Do not try this at home. Before you spit in someone's eyes, make very certain that God is telling you to do so.

The nature of this healing is a bit different. Jesus was not simply restoring sight – not that this would be insignificant. Rather he is creating sight in someone who has never had it. This is looked upon more as an act of creation than of healing.

Again, this act required a response of faith in the part of the receiver. When this happened, Jesus had just left the temple grounds, which is in central Jerusalem. The Pool of Siloam is on the edge of the city. We don't know exactly how far this man had to walk with mud in his eyes, but doing so would have been a bit humiliating. The man had to be a fool for Christ – he had to take Christ at his word and obey his command before he could receive the benefit of what Christ wanted to do for him.

The events that follow this healing are pathetic. The Jewish leaders get incensed at this because the people are truly impressed at what has transpired. They don't know how to deal with it and are more interested in protecting their turf than in understanding what is going on in their midst. They question this man and question his parents and end up throwing him out of the temple for his role in what transpired. There is a remarkable exchange in verses 28-34, "Then they hurled insults at him and said, 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out." The Pharisees are not interested in the fact that a great miracle has been performed in their midst. They cannot handle the truth that the man is throwing in their faces. Their only response is to write the whole thing off, call the man a sinner, and throw him out of the temple.

Jesus responds to all of this by pointing out that spiritual blindness is a bigger problem than physical blindness. He says that he came to give spiritual sight to those who want it.

In the opening passages of this section, we see an exchange between the disciples and Jesus. (9:2-3, "His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'" At times there may be things going on in our lives that we do not understand or like, but they occur because God is allowing us to participate in the unveiling of his glory to the world.

John displays Jesus as Lord of Creation and of Spiritual Vision.

2.7 Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1-45

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha

had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

Similar to the situation with the man born blind, sometimes we do not understand or like our circumstances but they allow us to be used by God for great things. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had to endure his death, but their circumstance allowed them to be used by God. It was the setting for a truly marvelous miracle performed by Jesus.

It is interesting to draw a contrast between Mary and Martha in this situation. Remember the story in Luke 10:38-42:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Martha was a believer, as indicated by John 11:27, “‘Yes Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the son of God, who was to come into the world.’” Martha was the one who went about trying to relate to Jesus by doing things for him, as evidenced by her fuss over the meal.

Mary is the one who related to Jesus by spending time with him. She wanted to be with Jesus when Martha was busy getting the meal together. Mary was the one who crossed social boundaries and anointed Jesus at Bethany prior to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (chapter 12).

Note that when Jesus came to Bethany after the death of Lazarus, Martha greeted him first with “if you had been here my brother would not have died.” Jesus responds by consoling her. Shortly thereafter, Mary came up to Jesus and says the exact same thing, “if you had been here my brother would not have died.” This time Jesus wept. Is it possible that he was more moved by Mary because he related to her personally than by Martha who also believed in him and trusted him but never got close to him personally? There is a lesson in this for us. We should never get too busy serving Jesus so that we do not have time to relate to him personally.

After Lazarus was raised, the Jewish leaders, rather than being awed by what had happened, intensified their hatred of Jesus. The words of Caiaphas in verse 50 are very prophetic, “You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than the whole nation perish.” That was God's plan all along but Caiaphas never understood it.

In this last miracle, John shows us Jesus as Lord of Life and of Victory over Death. We also see Jesus as the Lord who wants to have relationships with us and is capable of being moved by the emotions of those close to him.

3. The Seven "I Am's" of John

Just as John contains seven miracles, it also contains seven "I Am's" spoken by Jesus. Jesus surely spoke the words "I Am" many times every day of his life. Why did John pull out seven of these and include them as significant? These were significant teachings about who Jesus was (and is). They include "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," etc.

In these settings, there is also something significant about the very words, "I am." When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, he asked God what his name was. God responded with more than just a name. He responded by revealing his very nature. (Exodus 3:14) "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."'" The name that God chose for himself was "I AM." This is an expression in Hebrew that carries a meaning of "I am now, I always have been, I always will be." It is a word meaning self-existent. It is the Hebrew word that we transliterate as YHWH and pronounce Yahweh or Jehovah. God was revealing his eternal and self-existent nature to Moses and told him to communicate that to the Hebrew people. In these teaching settings, Jesus was applying that same name to himself. "I AM" was the name of the God of Moses. Jesus made seven "I AM" claims about himself.

3.1 I Am the Bread of Life

John 6:35

This section takes place shortly after the feeding of the 5000, in which Jesus miraculously fed the people with bread. John 6:25-69 says:

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

So they asked him, “What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

This teaching occurred the day after the feeding of the five thousand. People were impressed by that miracle, but impressed in the wrong way. Rather than realizing that it was a sign indicating who Jesus was, the people came back looking for Jesus because they thought they had found a meal ticket.

Jesus told them not to worry so much about the material bread which they eat but still later find themselves hungry again. He encouraged them to search for that which would sustain their souls and never leave them hungry again. Then he made some very bold statements. He claimed to be that bread of life. In verses 35-40 and other places in the section he claimed a very unique relationship with the Father. Furthermore he said that he offered eternal life to those who believe in him.

The people had an interesting response. Jesus could not be from heaven because they knew his parents, Mary and Joseph. Since they knew of Jesus' human origin, how could he be from heaven? The response shows that they misunderstood that the Messiah, the Son of God, would be born of a woman. If they were unwilling to accept a Messiah with human parents then they were going to miss what God had planned.

Jesus went on to make some more bold claims. He pointed out that Moses did not give the people manna – that it was from God. Furthermore manna was only a temporary bread that sustained for a time. He was the bread of eternal life. Jesus was clearly claiming to be greater than Moses, which was a very bold statement to make to a bunch of Jews. Moses was the prime leader in the Old Testament – the one closest to God.

Jesus went on in verses 53-59 to make some statements about the consumption of his flesh and blood – looking ahead to the time of the Last Supper. To the Jews, the idea of consuming the flesh and blood of another human being was abhorrent because of Jewish dietary laws. They could not look beyond the surface of what he was saying to really understand what he meant. Many people fell away because of this.

In the end, Jesus turned to the 12 and asked them if they would fall away as well. Peter replied in verses 68-69, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." This is where we all need to be. Even when we don't understand what Jesus is telling us to do, we need to realize that we have no other place to go because he has the words of eternal life.

Thus in this John shows us Jesus, the Lord who sustains us and nurtures our souls and who will keep us unto eternal life. We also see Jesus, the Lord who is not always easy to understand, but whom we need to follow anyway.

3.2 *I Am the Light of the World*

John 8:12

John 8:12-30 says:

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

Then they asked him, "Where is your father?"

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."

This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"

But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."

"Who are you?" they asked.

"Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. "I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."

They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me

is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

The theme of Jesus being light runs throughout the Gospel of John, e.g. 1:4-5, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." The image harkens back to the creation story, where God said "Let there be light" and called forth light out the chaos and darkness.

The implication is that the world is living in darkness, e.g. sin, broken relationship with God. Jesus came as light in opposition to that darkness. It is a wonderful metaphor. Light has some very interesting properties that "illuminate" this metaphor even more.

Light and darkness are opposites, but never equal. Light can always dispel darkness, but darkness cannot dispel light. Where the light of Jesus shines, the darkness of the world must flee.

Light is used by plants to make food and is the ultimate source of nourishment. It is turned into fuels and is the ultimate source of all heat. It is the source of all things upon which our physical lives depend. In like manner, Jesus is the light upon which our spiritual lives depend. He is our ultimate source of nourishment and energy. Without him we would die.

Light, when shined upon a surface, will either be absorbed, refracted, or reflected. It is a tragedy if we take the light of Christ and simply absorb it – if there is no evidence of it to the rest of the world. It is perhaps a bigger tragedy if we refract it – distorting the image of Christ to the world. We are to be true reflectors of the light of Christ to the dark world.

In this teaching, we see Jesus, the Lord who brings us Light from the Father and the Lord who dispels spiritual darkness.

3.3 I Am the Gate for the Sheep

John 10:7

John 10:1-10 says:

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

A Palestinian sheepfold consists of a low, circular enclosure. On one side is an opening about 6 feet wide and this is the only place where entrance can be gained without climbing over the wall. There is no door that can be closed and locked. It is unnecessary because at nightfall the shepherd will stand in the breach and call his sheep, counting one by one until all are safely

inside. Then, with his staff by his side, he lies down in the opening and sleeps with his body across the opening, guarding his sheep. The gate is actually a living person. There is no way to enter without the shepherd allowing passage. No intruder could harm the sheep without first harming the shepherd.

Jesus uses this image to describe the Kingdom of God. You only gain passage because he calls you to enter. Once there, he guards and protects you. You are in his care and no intruder could harm you without first defeating him.

The sheep know the voice of their shepherd. A shepherd can go to a large flock of sheep and call out to his. They recognize his voice and will follow him. They can tell his voice from other voices and trust him enough to follow him wherever he calls. We are to know the voice of Jesus well enough to be able to tell it from others who might call us and we are to trust him completely to lead us where he sees fit. There are many strange voices both inside the church and those masquerading as the church. We must be able to sort them out and discern the voice of Jesus.

Jesus wants you to have life and he wants you to have it abundantly. His intention is to protect your life and to lead you places where you can live in abundance.

We see Jesus, the Lord who guards our safety with his own life.

3.4 I Am the Good Shepherd

John 10:11,14

John continues with 10:11-18:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

This continues the sheep/shepherd image started in the first part of chapter 10. Many of us tend to think of the good shepherd as the Jesus of the children's Sunday School pictures. When we were kids we used to see these pictures of Jesus with a big grin on his face playing and holding a little lamb in his lap. Maybe that is a good image to give to young children, but it hardly describes a good shepherd.

The good shepherd was a much more macho image. He was responsible for defending the flock against thieves and beasts. If a sheep got into trouble, the good shepherd would put his own life between the sheep and the trouble. A hired hand was under no obligation to defend the sheep against an attacker. If a wolf came it was acceptable for the hired hand to run to his own safety. He had nothing at stake. The shepherd would not. He would defend his sheep.

Just as the sheep knew the voice of the shepherd, the shepherd knew which sheep were his.

The good shepherd did not drive his sheep; he led them. They follow him because they know and trust him. As he was leading them, if one began to stray he would gently prod it back into place with his staff.

The passage also references the "other sheep." At this time, the ministry of Jesus was extended strictly to the Jews, but Jesus foresaw the day when the Gentiles would be included.

The image of the good shepherd is a solid one in the Old Testament, such as in Psalm 23 (The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...). Jesus claims to be that good shepherd.

In these two sections, we see Jesus, the Lord who is the only way into the Kingdom, the Lord who knows those who belong to him, the Lord whose voice we need to know, the Lord who leads us to places of safety and abundance, the Lord who cares enough about us to keep us in line, and the Lord who will lay down his life to protect us.

3.5 I Am the Resurrection and the Life

John 11:25

John 11:21-26 says:

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

The exchange between Martha and Jesus indicates that she missed his point. In that day, the Jews were divided up into several sects, the primary ones being the Sadducees and the Pharisees. One of the major issues that divided the Sadducees and the Pharisees was the belief in a final resurrection. The Pharisees believed that there would be one and the Sadducees did not. The Pharisaic view was predominant among the Jews. Martha's response to Jesus indicates that she held to that point of view. It also indicates that she understood "Your brother will rise again" in verse 23 to be a reference to the final resurrection. She did not understand what he was about to do. She took this to be a general and rather empty word of consolation. Her response paved the way for Jesus to deliver an important message.

Jesus claimed to be the source of the resurrection and the source of life. He then raised Lazarus to impress upon people that he really meant it.

The words in verse 26, "whoever lives and believes in me will never die" do not mean that such a person will not experience physical death. Resurrection would not make sense if there was no physical death. It means that such a person will not suffer spiritual death and that death claims no victory over such a person.

We see Jesus as Lord of the Resurrection and the Lord who gives life.

3.6 I Am the Way and the Truth and the Life

John 14:6

John 14:1-6 says:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

This takes place as part of the Last Supper. Jesus knew his time was short and was trying to let the disciples know what was about to happen. Even at this late date, they still did not really understand.

He indicated that he was about to go to the Father to prepare a place for us there.

Thomas was honest enough to confess that he still did not know where Jesus was going and did not know the way.

Jesus indicated that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by Him. He did not say that he was a way, a truth, a life, and one of the ways to the Father. You hear people claim that Jesus was one of the great prophets and that Christianity is one of many ways to God but you cannot reconcile such a statement with this teaching of Jesus. Either he is it or he is not. He is not one of several. He does happen to be the only one who ever rose from the grave to prove his point.

Jesus is not only the way, he is the truth. John has spoken about truth several other places. One of the more well-known verses is 8:31-32, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" The truth that Jesus brought us results in freedom. We have been freed from pharisaic ritual and regulation and freed to a spiritual life that restores our relationship with the Father.

We see Jesus, the Lord who is the Way to the Father, the Lord who brings us Truth, and the Lord of Life.

3.7 I Am the True Vine

John 15:1

John 15:1-17 says:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Jesus pointed out many implications of this relationship:

- All nourishment and life-sustaining things flow to the branches through the vine. The branches cannot live apart from the vine.
- The vine gives stability to branches. Apart from the vine the branches would be blown about.
- The branches cannot bear fruit apart from the vine. Even more amazing, the vine only produces fruit through the branches. What a staggering thought to realize that Jesus has chosen to bear fruit only through us!
- Branches are pruned to improve their ability to produce fruit. We should expect and should want to be pruned so that we can be more fruitful.
- Branches that do not produce fruit drain the system and are of no use. They will be stripped away and burned.
- The section goes on to be specific about the sort of fruit expected. The primary evidence of fruit is that we love one another. There are a number of important (even overwhelming) statements in this section:
 - If we remain in the Father’s love our joy will be complete.
 - If we do what Jesus commands (specifically love each other) then we are his FRIENDS.
 - Jesus has taught us all he knows from the Father. He has not held anything back.
 - He chose us.
 - He appointed us to bear fruit and the Father will give us what we ask when we are operating in that realm.

We see Jesus, the Lord who sustains us, who bears fruit through us, who prunes us in order to improve us, who wants us to love one another, who chose us to be FRIENDS.

3.8 Before Abraham was, I Am

John 8:58

Before leaving the "I Am's" completely, there is one other we need to consider. This one is not normally considered as part of the 7 "I Am's" because the formula is a bit different. We read in John 8:48-59:

The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

"I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

In the early part of this passage, Jesus was stating to the Jewish leaders that his followers would have victory over death. They replied that the patriarch Abraham had died. Was Jesus claiming to be greater than Abraham? Jesus' response indicates that Abraham had looked forward to the day that Jesus would bring. He is claiming several things in making this statement. First of all, he was claiming to be the Messiah – the one who would bring the time anticipated by the Jews. He was also claiming to have some special knowledge about Abraham. They reply, "you are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!" His response is "Before Abraham was, I am." The implication of what he was saying could not have been clearer to the Jews. The verb used for "I am" is "Yahweh." The construction is exactly the same as when Moses asked God what his name was at the burning bush and God replied "I Am." (Exodus 3:14). The hearers had no doubt about what he was saying because they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus got away. Jesus was claiming divinity, clear and simple. He was giving himself the name ascribed only to God. He was either God or he was a blasphemer. It cannot be taken any other way.

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