

I AM!

Now I love Thanksgiving because it's a time when the family gathers, and food is being eaten and a time to reflect and be thankful. However, I don't know if some of you are like me, but I can struggle with that last part some years. Sometimes it feels like I don't have much to truly be thankful for. Maybe this past year was a time when friendships were lost, or perhaps a friend or family member passed away; maybe it's been a tough year in your marriage or a tough year with family. Whatever it may be, it can be difficult to truly be thankful. Now I'm not saying when you're going around the table saying what you are thankful for, you won't be able to come up with something on the spot, but that when the end of the day comes, and you regret eating that extra slice of pie and your sitting back reflecting on your year, it might be difficult and maybe the questions of why did God allow this to happen to me this year. Perhaps you look back and you are feeling like you are surrounded by darkness.

I. But what I want us to look at this morning trumps all those feelings. Something that no matter what happens on earth still gives us something to be thankful for. Today we are going to look at some of the "I Am" statements in John. Now I know some of you might be familiar with these statements and some of you aren't, but what I want to focus on this morning is not what they are, but the hope and promise these give us. When we look at these and are reminded of them, the thankfulness, joy, and happiness should be overflowing.

A. Seven times in the gospel of John, Jesus makes a powerful statement beginning with the phrase "I am." These comments echo the words of God to Moses in Exodus. Along with this classic instruction to "let my people go," God explained to Moses that His name should be called "I Am who I Am" (or "ego eimi" in Greek), which means "I exist" or "I be." This title of "I Am" was used by God. This phrase implies the simplest expression of God's nature: He is, He must be. When Jesus uses this phrasing, He is deliberately invoking that same essence.

1. The First one I want to look at is:

(SLIDE) John 8:12 – 12 Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

(SLIDE) John 9:5 – 5 "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

(SLIDE) Jesus says I Am the Light of the World

a. This incident occurs during a time when they are reflecting on the 40 years of the Israelites wandering in the desert. As part of this significant festival, lamps would be lit using wicks made from priestly garments. In addition, the light, a powerful metaphor in Hebrew thinking for the Jewish person, was the ultimate ideal, representing salvation, knowledge, and goodness. For Jesus to claim to be the "light of the world" was no small thing. In fact, it is a claim to equality with God. Even further, the Greek of this passage indicates Jesus' claim to be "the" light, not merely "a" light. In the text's original Greek, which explicitly claims He is the single, solitary source of "light."

(SLIDE) He is the Light of the World

b. What a blessing that Jesus tells us we will never walk in darkness. Even when the world around us feels dark and lonely, he tells us he is the light. He is who guides us down the path. He says we will have the light of life. But His light is the one true light that no other light shines brighter or longer, but that he is the true light source.

2. Now the one I really wanted to focus on is this one. Honestly, I hear the least about, but as I was studying all of them. It was one that truly was the most impactful for me. Again, most of us have heard this one, but it's when you understand their culture that it really makes the most impact.

(SLIDE) John 10:1-6 – 1 "Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the Shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Here we see Jesus telling us he is the gatekeeper. He is the door and the shepherd; Jesus is the way to eternal life, and He is the One who keeps us.

- a. But we see the shepherd calls the sheep by name, showing that the shepherd has a personal connection with the sheep. The shepherd leads them, providing direction and leadership. He isn't a shepherd who uses force, but he takes time with the sheep. The sheep know his voice and he knows the sheep by name.
- b. But I love how it ends with the Pharisees didn't understand. We see in verse 4 when he says the sheep follow him because the sheep know his voice. So, he is calling out the Pharisees saying you aren't one of my sheep, so you do not know my voice, but then what an amazing promise that is to us. That as sheep we get to hear His voice. That he not only watches out for us, but that he has a personal connection with us. That we get to hear him speak. That we will know his voice when we hear it. We will know that its Jesus talking to us and directing us.

3. But let's continue on in this passage and look at how else he is the Good Shepherd.

(SLIDE) Jesus the Good Shepherd

(SLIDE) John 10:7-15 – 7 Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. 11 "I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the Shepherd and does not own 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. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 "I am the good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me- 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep.

- a. Often times there would be multiple herds of sheep at one gate, and one Shepherd would sleep at the gate. In the morning, the shepherds would come and separate the sheep, and the sheep would recognize the Shepherd's voice and follow. Jesus is saying he is the gate to freedom! The bad shepherds will hop the wall, try to steal and mislead the sheep, and take away their freedom.
- b. He dies for his sheep instead of the sheep dying for the Shepherd. Sheep were considered clean animals. They needed protection. They were used as a sacrifice, but the good Shepherd died for his sheep so they may live.

(SLIDE) He is the Good Shepherd.

- c. But we see that when wolves come bad shepherds, unlike Jesus, run away. He (Jesus) runs toward us. He listens to us and hears our cries for help.

B. So, as we continue to go through life and struggle to find something to be thankful for, let us hold onto these promises that Jesus made and know that we are not left alone. We are not by ourselves; instead, we have a God who says,

(SLIDE) I am the light of the world, and I am the good Shepherd.

And because of that, how that truly changes our life.

1. Are we believing that Jesus will talk to us? Are we believing that we get to hear His voice? I don't know about you but to me that is amazing. That we serve a God that not only protects us but that he desires a personal relationship with us. That he will speak to us. That he will direct us.
2. When we look in verse 12 and when it says, "The hired hand is not the Shepherd and does not own 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." What wolves are coming into our life and scattering us? Why should we let those things come in and take our joy and thankfulness. When we have the good shepherd on our side who says he will not leave us alone in that, but that he goes and puts himself in front of us to protect us.

C. This is what we must be thankful for. We know our world is full of disappointment and hurt, but we serve a God who says I am here to protect you.

(SLIDE) You are my sheep.

1. I will be there for you. I will guide you. I will talk to you. You aren't just one of many in my flock that I don't really care about, but you are someone who I care so deeply about. So let us hold on to these promises of God. Let us be thankful through all circumstances, because we know we serve a God who says I am the light in this world, and I am the good shepherd.