

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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THE CURE FOR TROUBLED HEARTS (Part I)

“We do not need a Gallup poll,” declares Comfort and Hawley, “to tell us which are the all-time favorite Scriptures. The most frequently read and beloved Scriptures are Psalm 23 and John 14:1-6. In the soul’s darkest night, there is great solace in hearing the promise of God that we are not left alone. The believers’ unyielding hope is in the fact that God loves us, that he will care for us along life’s pathway, and that he will take us to heaven at the end of the way. Such hope-filled conviction brings peace to the troubled heart.”¹ Herman Ridderbos, the noted Dutch New Testament scholar, writes: “The characteristic and remarkable features of the Johannine message of salvation are that it comes to expression in *I am* statements, and that the *I* is in effect the predicate: *the light, the resurrection, etc. – am I*. That is true here as well. All that Jesus says of *the resurrection and the life* is that it is he who constitutes them and that therefore those who believe in him receive the life that is no longer subject to the power of death. The resurrection and life he grants encompass both present and future because *he* encompasses both as the One in whom the Word reveals itself, the Word that was with God in the beginning and by whom all things were created, and who is therefore also the Son of man in whose hands the Father has put the future government over all things, in keeping with the prophecy of Daniel (7:12f; cf. John 1:51; 3:13; 5:27; 17:2, 5, 24).”²

There are seven of the “I Am” sayings.

1. ***I am the bread of life*** (John 6:35, 48). Jesus does not simply give bread; he is bread. This was said in a first-century setting in which bread was considered the basic necessity of life. In a similar vein, Jesus said that he had come to give life and to give it abundantly (John 10:10).
2. ***I am the light of the world*** (8:12; 9:5). Jesus is the source of the world’s illumination. This statement confirms what was said of him in the prologue (1:4-9).
3. ***I am the door of the sheep*** (10:7). Jesus is speaking of the entrance to a sheepfold, but evidently has in mind more than that. He is claiming to be the means by which sheep (his followers) have access into the presence of God and thus receive salvation.
4. ***I am the good shepherd*** (10:14-18). The imagery here is of care and provision for the sheep. It extends even to the shepherd’s laying down his life for them. There is intimate knowledge of the sheep, of each one, and they know their shepherd well.
5. ***I am the resurrection and the life*** (11:25). Spoken in response to Martha after the death of her brother, this statement is significant for asserting not merely that Jesus gives or brings resurrection and life, but that he is resurrection and life. In him, the life eternal, are put into proper perspective our life in this world and the death which brings it to an end.
6. ***I am the way, and the truth, and the life*** (14:6). Here again eternal life is in view: Jesus is the means to and the embodiment of eternal life. The exclusiveness of Jesus as the way to eternal life is underscored in the following statement, “No one comes to the Father but by me.”
7. ***I am the true vine*** (15:1, 5). Jesus again emphasizes himself as the source of life and underscores the importance of abiding in him.

In addition to these predicative or attributive sayings, there are, as Millard Erickson points out, “passages where John uses the verb *to be* to express Jesus’ absolute existence. While some see allusions to Exodus 3:14 in the various attributive statements we have listed, that is debatable. Where John uses the verb *to be* to express absolute existence, however, we have direct references or parallels to that Old Testament passage. In John 8:24, Jesus calls on his hearers to believe that *I am*, and in verse 28 he predicts that when they have lifted up the Son of man, they will know that *I am*. The most impressive statement, however, is found in 8:58, *Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am*. The Greek here is much stronger than the English translation. What Jesus actually said was, *Before Abraham was born (genesthai), I am (egō eimi)*. Friedrich Büchsel comments, *This is the only passage in the NT where we have the contrast between ‘einai’ and ‘genesthai.’* Whatever significance we may attach to Jesus’ words, it is instructive to observe the reaction of the Jews: *So they took up stones to throw at him* (v. 59), evidently regarding his statement as a blasphemous claim to equality with God or, in other words, a claim to deity. Guthrie says, *There seems little doubt, therefore, that the statement of 8:58 is intended to convey in an extraordinary way such exclusively divine qualities as changelessness and preexistence. The divine implication of the words would alone account for the extraordinary anger and opposition which the claim immediately aroused.*”³ Finally, “Jesus has repeatedly mentioned resurrection on the last day (5:21, 25-29; 6:39-40). In this he has been in line with mainstream Judaism. But these references have also insisted that he alone, under the express sanction of the Father, would raise the dead on the last day. The same truth is now repeated in the pithy claim, *I am the resurrection and the life*. Jesus’ concern is to divert Martha’s focus from an abstract belief in what takes place on the last day to a personalized belief in him who alone can provide it. Just as he not only gives the bread from heaven (6:27) but is himself the bread of life (6:35), so also he not only raises the dead on the last day (5:21, 25ff), but is himself the resurrection and the life. There is neither resurrection nor eternal life outside of him.”⁴

- I. **TROUBLED HEARTS.** Jesus addresses these “troubled hearts” by urging them, first of all, to have faith. The answer to trouble is *trust*. The NIV, following earlier translations, uses *trust* here, which is defensible, though the Greek word is the basic verb for “believing” (*pistueō*). While the manuscripts indicate some support for a reading such as “You already believe in God, now have the same faith in me,” a double imperative is probably correct: “Have faith in God; have faith in me.” On any reading this reflects a high Christology. Jesus presents himself unambiguously as the object of faith. “For John there is only one faith and that is in Jesus and God at the same time.” Faith needs adequate grounding, however, if it is to experience serenity and to overcome the “troubled hearts” of the disciples. The effectiveness and strength of faith are bound up with the greatness and dependability of the God in whom the faith reposes. “Have faith in God” means “hold God’s faithfulness” (Hudson Taylor). Jesus accordingly relates the grounds for the disciples’ faith by showing them, in a series of thrilling paragraphs, that his leaving them is *not* the unmitigated disaster they imagine. On the contrary, all manner of remarkable blessings will flow from it. Jesus will even be able to assert in conclusion that his going away is something they can *be glad* about (28; cf. 16:7, “It is for your good that I am going away”).⁵

- II. **THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE.** One of John’s major themes is “the truth.” He uses the word *alātheia* twenty-five times, as against one occurrence in Matthew and three each in Mark and Luke. Similarly he uses the adjective *alāthās* fourteen times (once each in Matthew and Mark, not at all in Luke), and *alāthinos* nine times (not in Matthew or Mark, once in Luke). The very recital of these statistics shows that John is unusually interested in “truth.” He sees truth not only as a quality of words, but also of actions, for it is possible to “do” the truth (John 3:21). Moreover he sees truth as especially connected with Jesus, who indeed may be said to be “the truth” (John 14:6). It contrasts the true way to God with the false and inadequate ways outlined by other religions. Consequently it constitutes both a rejection of those ways and an invitation to men to walk in the right path.⁶ R. C. Trench points out that the Greek words used here are captured by the Latin *verax* and *verus*, which are translated by our English word *very*, as in John 15:1 where Jesus declared he is “true vine.”

Wycliffe in his English translation has “I am the *verus* vine.” This is how the word was used in the Nicene Creed – *very* God of *very* God, i.e., the true God.⁷

CONCLUSION: Ridderbos writes that Jesus’ declaration “I am the way, the truth and the life” constitutes the core statement of John’s Gospel. “It is striking because in this last and all-encompassing *I am* statement he, as the departing one, calls himself the *way*. It is a way he not only points to but *is*, the only way that gives access to the Father. And it is in that function that he is also *the truth and the life*. He is the truth as the reliable one, the one who is what he says he is and does what he says he will do, just as he is the *true* vine who will in fact yield fruit (cf. Jr. 2:21). For that reason he is also the life that is from God and that imparts itself as *the light of humans* (1:4) so that they can know the Father as the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom the Father has sent (17:3). In all these core sayings Jesus posits himself in his exclusivity as the one sent by the Father and hence as the only way: *No one comes to the Father but by me*. Other ways present themselves, but they do not prove to be true in accordance with *God is light and in him there is no darkness at all*. (1 Jn. 1:5).”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ P. W. Comfort & W. C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Tyndale, 1994), p. 223.

² H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 398.

³ M. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Baker, 1991), p. 27.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 412.

⁵ B. Milne, *The Message of John: The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 1993), p. 209.

⁶ L. Morris, *Studies In The Fourth Gospel* (Eerdmans, 1969), p. 119.

⁷ R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of The New Testament* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1973), p. 26.

⁸ Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 493.