

The “I am” sayings of Jesus. 1.

An Introduction:- To understand the reaction of his Jewish hearers to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to remember the background to the phrase “I am”. Read Exodus chapter 3, verses 13 – 15; here we see that “I AM” is the very name of the Lord God. In the Gospel of John there are a number of the sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ where he deliberately uses “I am”. The most direct reference back to Exodus 3 comes in John chapter 8, verses 57 – 59. The Gospel of John makes the claim for the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ from the very first verse - *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”* The “I am” sayings of Jesus need to be read and understood in this context!

“I (who speak to you) am he”- John chapter 4, verses 1 – 26:- Read these verses carefully and try to picture the scene at the village well at midday in the hot sun!

Verses 1 – 6:- The opening verses of this chapter suggest that at this point Jesus was wanting to avoid trouble with the Jewish authorities. The direct route from Judea to Galilee would take him through Samaria. This encounter with the woman at the well appears to be a coincidence! However, the Lord Jesus uses it to teach about his role and authority. Looking ahead to verses 39 - 42 it does mean that the Samaritans had the opportunity to receive his teaching and accept him as the Messiah.

Jacob’s Well was near Shechem (see Genesis 33, verses 18 – 20) and Sychar may have been one of its satellite villages. The well there was known as Jacob’s Well because of its associations with his field. As a matter of interest it would have been an underground cistern filled by a trickle of water from a spring – probably slightly stagnant in the dry season leading to the idea that it was “dead water”!

Verses 7 – 10:- The woman was a Samaritan national and as such would be avoided by strict Jews. She is surprised by the request of Jesus for a drink of water. It would have strictly against custom for a male Jew to share a drinking vessel with a woman, let alone a Samaritan. Jesus turns the conversation away from his own need onto spiritual things. His gift would be of “living water” in contrast to the “dead water” from the well. Read John chapter 7, verses 37 – 39 for the teaching on this given by Jesus himself.

Verses 11 – 12:- The woman was still thinking in earthly terms. Jesus could not reach the water at the bottom of the well, so how could he give some to the woman to drink. Jacob would have spent time and effort digging and lining the well for himself and his family. The woman naturally questions the ability of Jesus to do the same!

Verses 13 – 15:- The woman is still thinking in practical earthly terms. The water Jesus gives is that of everlasting life, a constant inner renewal given by the infilling of the Holy Spirit – again remember John, 7, verses 37 – 39. In verse 15, the woman is now receptive but still lacking in understanding. She was thinking in daily practicalities, not in spiritual renewal and life.

Verses 16 – 18:- Before the woman could receive the gift of living water she had to be made to realise how desperately she needed it. This gift was for the inner life, which in her case was empty indeed.

“. . . your husband . . . no husband . . . five husbands . . . not your husband”. The dreary history of her marital life was unfolded by the penetration of Jesus and by her own admission. Probably divorce had entered into some of the past relationships which preceded the final illegitimate status. Morally and socially the woman was in a bad place!

Verses 19 – 24:- To the woman, Jesus was first of all a Jew, then someone to be called “Sir” of Rabbi status and now “a prophet”. He had looked into her very soul and she knew it. The reference to Mount Gerizim could have been a diversionary tactic but maybe it was an expression of a desire to know and worship the Living God. For the Samaritans Mount Gerizim was the place which God had chose to place his name -see Deuteronomy chapter 11, verse 29 and chapter 12, verse 5 – 7. Jesus points her towards the reality of spiritual worship. Not in the future but a present reality! The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the possibility of true spiritual worship. *“The time is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. . . .”*

Verse 25:- *“When the Messiah comes . . .”* There was no need to yearn for the future! In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ spiritual worship was already a reality. The declaration of Jesus *“I who speak to you am he.”* leads to the woman leaving her water jar (her present concerns!) and going back into the town to share her experience with others.

In John’s Gospel the truth that the Lord Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world is revealed through the experience of individuals. Read for example John 4, verses 46 – 54, the whole of John, chapter 9 and John 11, verses 17 – 27. How far can your experience of the Lord Jesus be a witness and testimony to others?