TWO POWERFUL WORDS. ONE AMAZING SAVIOR.

Let the astonishing words of Jesus penetrate your heart and draw you closer to Him. In Jesus’s time the magnitude of His claims were astonishing to the people around him, especially the religious leaders of the day. There’s no better source for understanding who Jesus is than the statements he made about himself. Be transformed by some of the most powerful “I am” claims of the Savior and gain an understanding of how wonderful He truly is.

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introduction

I Am the Way
The Amazing Claims of Jesus

In the movie *Talladega Nights*, racecar driver Ricky Bobby begins to say grace at a meal with his best friend, Cal, his sons, Walker and Texas Ranger, and his wife, Carley.

**Ricky:** Dear Lord Baby Jesus . . . we thank you so much for this bountiful harvest of Domino’s, KFC, and the always delicious Taco Bell . . .

**Carley:** Hey, you know, sweetie, Jesus did grow up. You don’t always have to call him “baby.” It’s a bit odd and off-putting to pray to a baby.

**Ricky:** Well, I like the Christmas Jesus best, and I’m saying grace. When you say grace you can say it to grownup Jesus, or teenage Jesus, or bearded Jesus or whoever you want . . .
Cal: I like to picture Jesus in a tuxedo T-shirt, ’cause it says, like, “I wanna be formal, but I’m here to party, too.” Cause I like to party, so I like my Jesus to party.

Walker: I like to picture Jesus as a ninja fighting off evil samurai.

Cal: I like to think of Jesus, like, with giant eagle’s wings. And singing lead vocals for Lynyrd Skynyrd, with, like, an angel band. And I’m in the front row, and I’m hammered drunk.

Carley: Hey Cal, why don’t you just shut up?
Cal: Yes, ma’am.

When you ask people today who they think Jesus was, their responses usually aren’t as outlandish as the characters in Talladega Nights, but they’re still intriguing. Some will reply that Jesus was the greatest teacher that ever lived. Others will call him a wonderful moral example, a prophet, or even the Son of God.

But when you ask these same people whether they have read the first-century accounts about Jesus’s life and ministry, many will admit they have not. These four documents, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and known as the Gospels, provide us with eyewitness records of what Jesus did and said.

In our search to find the real Jesus, it’s crucial to consider these written records. In this booklet we will focus on one of those four books—the one written by John. We’re going to look at 4 (of 8) astonishing statements in which Jesus describes who he is and then backs up his claims.

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Jesus said, “I am”

Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me…. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

“You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”

“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:54–58)

Throughout history, many people have thought highly of Jesus even while dismissing the notion that he ever did anything supernatural. Thomas Jefferson was one of those people. Jefferson even edited the four gospels.
so that they retained the words of Jesus but excluded his miracles and his claims to be God.

Jesus is talking with religious people who were challenging his authority and accusing him of being demon-possessed. Their statement here, “you have seen Abraham,” is sarcastic and contemptuous.

“We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists,” Jefferson wrote to John Adams. (By evangelists, he meant the gospel accounts.) He told Adams that he would “select . . . the very words only of Jesus,” adding that these words were “fragments of the most sublime edifice of morality which had ever been exhibited to man”—high praise for Jesus indeed! Yet Jefferson refused to admit that Jesus could be God.

Jefferson knew that Jesus claimed to be God. But many today who believe that Jesus was merely a great teacher or a wonderful moral example are surprised to learn that Christ never made such claims. But what did Jesus say about himself?

The Jewish people view their ancestor Abraham as the patriarch of their religion. According to their holy Scriptures, God told Abraham to leave his country as well as his father and mother to travel to the land now called Israel. The Lord promised
Abraham the land and told him that his descendants would be as impossible to count as the stars in the heavens.

Since Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Christ, Jesus astonished his audience when he stated that Abraham anticipated his coming. That’s impossible! they thought. Jesus was not even fifty years old, and yet he claimed to know the thoughts of one who lived over two millennia before he was born.

This is where the plot thickens. Because many of us are unfamiliar with the Jewish Scriptures (what many call the Old Testament), we miss the original shock-value of Jesus’s reply: “Before Abraham was born, I am!” But Jesus’s audience knew exactly what he was saying.

When God first appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush, Moses asked him, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God replied to Moses,
“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:13–14). One scholar explains, “The name should thus be understood as referring to [God’s] being the creator and sustainer of all that exists and thus the Lord of both creation and history, all that is and all that is happening.”

One reason God performs miracles is to grab our attention and show his authority. The Jewish book of Exodus tells us that God got Moses’s attention by a flaming bush that didn’t burn up. Curious, Moses approached the bush. That’s when God spoke to him and told him who he was: “I AM WHO I AM.”

In essence, Jesus is telling his listeners that he is the One who spoke to Moses. He existed long before Abraham was born because he is the eternal, everlasting God who has no beginning or end. He simply “is.” And in case we think that we’re reading into the text something that Jesus didn’t really mean to say, John’s gospel adds the following: “At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds” (John 8:59).

Why would they attempt to kill Jesus for making such a statement? We get the plain answer later, when they again tried to stone Jesus. He was in the temple courts when the people asked him point blank, “How
long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). Jesus told them, “The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep” (vv. 25–26). Then he got their attention with a statement they couldn’t miss: “I and the Father are one” (v. 30).

At that, the crowd picked up stones to kill him. “‘We are not stoning you for any good work,’ they replied, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God’” (v. 33).

If Jesus’s claim is true, it changes everything. Throughout the centuries, countless people have claimed to teach us about God, but their teachings often contradict each other. Why should we believe one rather than another—or any of them for that matter? But Jesus is different. He is not merely a religious teacher or even a prophet sent by God. He tells us he is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Our Creator came to earth in the person of Jesus so that we could know what he is truly like and not have to rely on religious speculation. No wonder people were astonished—and put off—by his teachings!

As we read the other “I am” statements in this booklet, we may be confused by the fact that Jesus
prayed to his heavenly Father. How can God pray to himself? The earliest Christians wrestled with this conundrum. They knew that one of the most important teachings of Judaism was found in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (6:4). In other words, there is only one God and all others are mere idols. Therefore, Jesus could not be claiming to be a second God.

The early church eventually concluded that they were dealing with a mystery beyond human comprehension. They called this mystery the “Trinity.” There is only one God who exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Throughout the centuries, many skeptics have rejected the idea of the Trinity because it seemingly defies logic. Jefferson wrote that the “paradox that one is three, and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea?”

Jesus is not merely a religious teacher or even a prophet sent by God. He tells us he is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.
And yet today we know that many scientific discoveries are beyond our comprehension. Light sometimes behaves as a wave and at other times like a particle. It cannot be both, but it refuses to obey the dictates of human logic. The Big Bang theory tells us that the universe had a beginning, but science reaches its limits in trying to explain either how or why. And when we measure a particle in one part of the universe, that measurement instantaneously affects its twin particle in another part of the universe, because the two are mysteriously “entangled.” Einstein called this “spooky action at a distance.” It’s humbling to realize the limits of our understanding.

In the first sentences of John’s gospel, he stretches our thinking when he describes the mystery of the Trinity in the following way, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1–3).

John makes it clear a few verses later that this “Word” is Jesus. He wrote, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14).
Reflect:

Thinking about Jesus, if he is God, how does your perception of God change when you think about what Jesus said and did?


two

Jesus said, “I am the gate”

“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They 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.” (John 10:7–10)

Many people who live in an urban or suburban environment have only seen sheep in a petting zoo. But in Jesus’s day, shepherds and sheep were common sights, and John’s original readers would have been familiar
with sheep herding. They would also have been aware of the many Old Testament references to God as the shepherd of Israel, including the well-known twenty-third psalm, which begins with the words, “The LORD is my shepherd.” So the imagery of this “I am” statement and the next (“I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD”) would have been very familiar to Jesus’s audience.

He begins by describing a typical first-century sheep pen and the way it functioned for both shepherds and sheep:

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. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 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. 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. (John 10:1–5)

A few years ago, a friend of mine invited me to join him and twenty-five others on a tour of Israel. On one of our first stops, we visited a sheep pen. If I had heard
the words “sheep pen” prior to this trip, I would have imagined an enclosure made of either wood or metal. But in Israel the most common material is stone, and therefore the enclosure we saw that day was made of large white rocks piled on top of each other to a height of about three feet. This is the type of pen that Jesus’s readers would have seen in first-century Israel.

At sundown sheep were led into this enclosure to protect them from predators and thieves. Some sheep pens, including the one Jesus describes, were large enough to house more than one flock. For security, there was only one gate into the pen. A watchman, who was a hired hand, only allowed certain shepherds and sheep to enter that gate. If anyone tried to come into the pen at night by climbing over the wall, it was clear that he was a thief and a robber, not a legitimate shepherd. In smaller sheep pens, the shepherd himself would sometimes lie down at the entrance to the pen, becoming a human gate that protected the sheep from all intruders.

Surprisingly, Jesus does not begin this story by describing himself as the “good shepherd” but rather as the “gate” into the sheep pen. He thereby claims to be the one and only way into the pen—a theme he will repeat in some of his other “I am” statements. Only those sheep and shepherds who come through
Jesus can experience the benefits of his promise: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (v. 10).

I first heard that promise the night I became a Christian, when someone read to me from a booklet that told me, “God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.” That was followed by the quote from John’s gospel, “I came that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly’ [that it might be full and meaningful] (John 10:10 KJV).”

I would never have thought of Jesus coming to give me abundant life. Like many who had never read the first-century accounts about him, I imagined that he came to make sure I kept a bunch of rules and stayed out of trouble. Or, possibly, he came to make sure I went to church regularly, and that I spent most of the rest of my time praying and reading the Bible—all of which sounded completely boring and the opposite of the life I longed for!
Imagine my surprise when I learned that Jesus didn’t come to make me a religious fanatic but rather to give me a full and satisfying life. He promised to give me everything I truly wanted, and that caught me off-guard.

I’m not suggesting that Jesus doesn’t care about how we live. His analogy of the gate, the shepherd, and the sheep makes that clear. Jesus’s sheep are identified by two key characteristics: (1) They realize that a full life, both now and eternally, can only be found in Jesus, and (2) his sheep know his voice and follow him. Following Jesus involves not only believing in him but following his teachings, especially those related to loving God and loving others. But these commands aren’t intended to enslave us but rather to liberate us by transforming us into the loving, relational people God intended us to be. As we will see in the next section, the Good Shepherd truly cares about his sheep.

**Reflect:**

Jesus makes a claim of exclusivity—he is the gate. How do you currently compare Jesus with other religious beliefs?
Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life”

“I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25–26)

Jesus spoke these words to a woman named Martha after the death her brother Lazarus, who was one of Jesus’s dearest friends. He tried to comfort Martha in her grief by assuring her: “Your brother will rise again” (11:23). Martha assumed that Jesus was referring to the resurrection of the dead
at the end of time, and so she replied, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (v. 24). But Jesus had something more immediate in mind.

Likewise, Martha viewed this future resurrection as something distant and remote. But she completely missed the fact that the true source of life and resurrection was standing right in front of her. Jesus boldly states, “I am the resurrection and the life”!

Shortly after graduating from seminary, I was asked to speak at the funeral of a man named Frank Nelson, who was the father of a dear friend. I had never spoken at a funeral before, and I decided to use this passage from John’s gospel. While preparing my message, I discovered that Jesus is actually making two significant claims, although they are closely related.

His first claim is “I am the resurrection,” which he explains by saying that “the one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” Many people today believe that when they die they will live eternally as disembodied spirits. But that notion comes from ancient Greek culture, not from the Bible. I assured those at the funeral that even though Frank Nelson had died, he would one day be resurrected from the dead, and his body and spirit would be rejoined forever. His new body, however, would not be like
the old one, which was subject to decline, disease, weakness, and death. Instead, as the apostle Paul explains, “The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53). Our current bodies are not fit for eternity. But our resurrection bodies will be immortal and imperishable.

Jesus’s second claim is that he is “the life,” which he explains by adding, “Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.” To those attending the funeral that day, Jesus’s statement that those who believe in him will never die must have seemed hollow—even cruel. Frank Nelson had believed in Jesus, and yet he had died and was lying in a casket right in front of us.

But Jesus was not claiming that those who believe in him would never die physically. Clearly, our bodies will die and will need to be raised from the dead. Instead, Jesus was focusing on the moment of death, when we draw our last breath and then die. I have
always wondered what that moment will be like, and to be honest it is somewhat frightening. My father-in-law, who is now deceased, once said: “Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die to get there.” I agree!

Yet Jesus tells us in advance what we might expect, and his words are full of encouragement and hope. Even though our bodies at that final moment will die, everything else we are—whether we call it our spirit or soul or personality—will not die. Instead, we will make a transition from life in this world to life in the next. And in that very important sense, we will never experience death. A famous preacher who lived in the Victorian Era once said, “Someday you will read in the papers, ‘D. L. Moody of East Northfield is dead.’ Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now.”

At the funeral of Lazarus, Jesus didn’t merely claim to be “the resurrection and the life,” he proved it. He walked to the tomb where his friend’s body had been for four days, and asked that the stone covering the entrance to the burial cave be removed. “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’” (John 11:41–44).

Reflect:

How does it affect your view of death to understand the dying of the body as a transition from one life to another life?

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4 https://www.crossroad.to/Quotes/faith/moody.htm
Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life”

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Christians are often criticized for claiming that Jesus is the only way to God. After all, there are billions of non-Christians in the world. Are we really so narrow minded and bigoted that we think these people will be excluded from heaven just because they happened to be born in the wrong country or have been taught the wrong religion?
Rabbi Schmuley Boteach summed up the feelings of many when he said, “I am absolutely against any religion that says that one faith is superior to another. I don’t see how that is anything different than spiritual racism. It’s a way of saying that we are closer to God than you, and that’s what leads to hatred.”

Those who make such objections have a point. If Jesus is merely one more religious teacher out of countless others, then his claim would be absurd. How can one person have a monopoly on the truth or proclaim his “way” as the only way to God? After all, humans are finite and fallible, while God is infinitely greater than our small minds can comprehend.

But if Jesus is, in fact, God himself, that puts his claim in an entirely different light. An infinite being has the ability to say with certainty whether there is one God or many, and whether there are multiple ways to know him or only one. Jesus doesn’t say that he merely speaks the truth; he claims to be the embodiment of Truth. He doesn’t say he can
give life; he tells us he is the source of life itself. And he doesn’t say he is one pathway to God among many; he asserts he is the only Way.

Earlier in John’s gospel, Jesus made this claim to the Jewish people who came to hear him. They were some of the most religious people on earth. They worshiped the God revealed in the same Bible that Jesus read, and they were passionate about obeying his commands. Yet Jesus told them, “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39–40). Later, he told the same audience: “If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24).

Consider this somewhat imperfect analogy: The movie Braveheart described the exploits of William Wallace as he led the Scottish people in rebellion against Edward Longshanks, the king of England. As Wallace’s victories became more numerous, his reputation grew exponentially. Then one day he came to lead some Scottish warriors into battle who had never met him.

He announced to the soldiers, “Sons of Scotland! I am William Wallace.” But one incredulous warrior exclaimed, “William Wallace is seven feet tall!” “Yes,
I’ve heard,” Wallace replied. “Kills men by the hundreds. And if he were here, he’d consume the English with fireballs from his eyes, and bolts of lightning” (laughter from the soldiers). “I am William Wallace! And I see a whole army of my country men, here, in defiance of tyranny . . . Will you fight?”

Suppose they had replied, “We will not follow or fight for you. We will wait for the real William Wallace to appear.” Do you grasp the absurdity of that situation? There was no other William Wallace. And if they didn’t follow him, then their wait for another would be delusional.

In a similar way, the people of Israel had read about God in their Scriptures, but now he had shown up in person. It was ludicrous to think that they could reject him and still claim to follow the God they had only read about.

On the same evening when Jesus made the claim, “No one comes to the Father except through me,” he added, “If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.”
my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him” (14:6–7).

One of his disciples named Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” (vv. 8–9).

Jesus was not displaying arrogance nor was he trying to foster “spiritual racism.” He simply stated the truth. There is only one God, and he became a man in the person of Jesus. As Jesus walked this earth, he showed us what he is really like and gave us the opportunity to truly know him. We can wait for another to show up who is seven feet tall and has fireballs in his eyes, but there is no other. Jesus tells us plainly, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Reflect:

Jesus says he’s the Way. What he means is that he’s the only way. Sometimes following Jesus means giving up other things. What might you have to give up to follow Jesus?
http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0001/12/lkl.00.html
Conclusion: So what?

What are we to do with Jesus’s claims about himself? Do we even need to decide? Jesus declared, “Whoever is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30). In other words, neutrality is impossible. This simple fact confronted a man named Sheldon Vanauken after he had carried on a lengthy correspondence about Christianity with the great Oxford professor C. S. Lewis.

In a book entitled A Severe Mercy, Vanauken wrote that he came to the chilling realization that he “could not go back”:

I had regarded Christianity as a sort of fairy tale; and I had neither accepted nor rejected Jesus, since I had never, in fact, encountered Him. Now I had.
The position was not, as I had been comfortably thinking all these months, merely a question of whether I was to accept the Messiah or not. It was a question of whether I was to accept Him—or reject. My God! There was a gap behind me, too. Perhaps the leap to acceptance was a horrifying gamble—but what of the leap to rejection? There might be no certainty that Christ was God—but, by God, there was no certainty that He was not…. If I were to reject, I would certainly face the haunting, terrible thought: ‘Perhaps it’s true—and I have rejected my God!’ This was not to be borne. I could not reject Jesus.

Vanauken decided that there was only one thing he could do: “I turned away and flung myself over the gap towards Jesus.” He wrote in his journal, “I choose to believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in Christ, my lord and my God. Christianity has the ring, the feel, of unique truth. Of essential truth. By it, life is made full instead of empty, meaningful instead of meaningless.”

The same decision faces each of us. Jesus challenges us with his claim that he is God in human form, the Savior of the world, and the source of life—both now and forever. How will we respond to him?

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