

THE SAVIOR-WHO OFTEN SPOKE ABOUT HIMSELF

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What sayest thou? (John 8:5).

When I was sixteen years of age, I was asked to preach in my home church. It was an honor for which I was unprepared. At the end of the service an elder said, "Son, avoid the letter 'I'; don't speak so much about yourself!" Unfortunately, at that time, I had very little Bible knowledge and no experience of what was necessary to be an effective preacher. Many years later I became an author, and I remembered the old man's statement. The continual use of the letter "I" might suggest the speaker possesses an inflated ego. Authors of repute prefer to write: "This author thinks," or "This author believes," etc. It is better and wiser to focus attention on a theme or the characters connected with it. Unless a personal testimony is to be presented, it is wise to avoid expressions which might be detrimental to the message. It is worthy of attention that Jesus of Nazareth was an exception to this rule. Apparently John was the only disciple aware that Jesus consistently spoke about Himself.

The fourth Gospel reveals how Jesus said:

I am the Messiah (John 4:25-26).
I am that bread of life (John 6:48).
I am the light of the world (John 8:12).
I am the door (John 10:7).
I am the good shepherd (John 10:14).
I am the way (John 14:6).
I am the truth (John 14:6).
I am the life (John 14:6).
I am the vine (John 15:5).
I am-GOD! (John 18:5).

There were reasons why the Lord did this. Earlier the prophets predicted His coming to earth, and later the apostles repeated what Christ taught. The Savior claimed He was the

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only way by which sinners could approach God. There was no other spokesman capable of explaining that fact. If Christ had remained silent, the Gospel of the grace of God would never have been heard. It is important to remember Jesus constantly directed men and women to Himself, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Sermons which do not introduce listeners to Christ are uninspired. Miss Fanny Crosby wrote delightful words.

Tell me the story of Jesus,
Write on my heart every word;
Tell me the story most precious,
Sweetest that ever was heard.
Tell how the angels, in chorus,
Sang as they welcomed His birth,
"Glory to God in the highest!
Peace and good tidings to earth."

Tell of the Cross where they nailed Him,
Writhing in anguish and pain;

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Tell of the grave where they laid Him,
Tell how He liveth again.
Love in that story so tender,
Clearer than ever I see:
Stay, let me weep while you whisper,
Love paid the ransom for me.

Every claim made by the Savior was of the utmost importance, but when some of them are considered in sequence, it becomes easy to understand the significance of His remarks.

I Am the Door ... How Significant (John 10:9)
There was only one door in a sheepfold. The walls were sufficiently high to exclude marauding beasts. When the Savior delivered this message, every listener understood the significance of His words. If the sheepfold were the home of the sheep, the kingdom of God was the true sanctuary of God's

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sheep. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Deluded people insist there are many ways by which to enter God's kingdom. It is said that Muslims, Buddhists, and other people can reach heaven by observing their own religious rites. It cannot be overemphasized that these doctrines are false. Jesus taught He was the only door of the sheepfold. The apostle Peter emphasized also that fact when he said: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

I Am the Good Shepherd... How Supportive (John 10:11)
Within a land where shepherds and their flocks could be seen every day, it was to be expected that Jesus would refer to them. His example was followed by the disciples, who throughout their ministry, referred to Christ as the Shepherd of God's sheep. Jesus called Himself the good shepherd. The writer to the Hebrews said He was the great shepherd (Heb. 13:20). The apostle Peter stated Christ was the chief shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). There appears to be an interesting development in the three expressions. A good shepherd might be any man intensely devoted to his flock, A great shepherd seems to imply distinction of service, skill in finding excellent pasture, and bravery in defending the flock. When the Lord was named

the chief shepherd, the apostle ascribed to Him an honor not shared with another. As Paul wrote: "He was far above all" (see Eph. 4:10).

The Savior spoke of thieves and robbers who could not be trusted. They brought death, whereas He came to give life, and life more abundant (see John 10:10). The sheep not only recognized the voice of their shepherd, they were content to follow Him. The Lord also mentioned hirelings who accepted responsibility for services never rendered. They quit their post whenever more lucrative employment became available. Jesus said, "They cared not for the sheep." It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that their kind are still living! Jesus was never a shepherd; He worked in a carpenter's shop, but nevertheless,

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His early years were spent in a locality where sheep were a

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vital part of daily life. When in spare moments He walked in the fields, His eyes became misty, for He was destined to become the Shepherd who would lay down His life for the sheep. He said: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). Christ anticipated the time when He would be the Leader of God's international flocks, and the song of all believers would be

Where He leads me, I will follow.

I Am the Light of the World ... How Sufficient (John 8:12)

This statement was a bright star shining in a very dark sky. A desperate woman had been accused of committing adultery, and her captors were desirous of an immediate execution. Jesus had thwarted their plan, and completely amazed, she stared into the face of her Benefactor. It was difficult to believe that the arrogant Jews had gone away. Then the Lord said, "Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:10-11). Afterward the Savior said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Had any other man uttered those words, he would have become an object of scorn. Throughout history several misguided leaders desired to rule the world, but everybody knows what happened to them. Yet Jesus, who had no armies to support His cause, no bank balance from which to pay expenses, and no organization to advertise His virtue ultimately proved what He claimed to be. The story of His birth, life, death, and resurrection has thrilled all nations. Cannibals have been transformed, criminals changed by the power of divine love, and outcasts so influenced, they devoted their lives to His cause. The light of the Gospel shines throughout the world, and someday all nations will worship at His feet. It can be truthfully said:

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The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light:
they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them
hath the light shined (Isa. 9:2).

During my stay in Africa, I spoke with a Zulu one day and asked how many cows he would have to pay for the daughter of a chief. Rolling his eyes and lifting his arms, he replied, "Oooo, anyt'ing up to fifty." I looked with a smile at that fellow, Samuel, and told him that perhaps, after all, his people were better off than the Europeans. He was so puzzled I had to explain what I meant.

"Samuel, you pay to get a wife. The white man pays because he's 'got' one." He thought for a moment, then his radiance shone forth, and he said, "Tha's so, Master, tha's so."

"Samuel," I said, "I know of Another who had to buy his wife. Once there was a great Man who so loved poor sinners that He wanted to 'marry' them. He wanted them to be near Him for ever. His name was Jesus, and He wanted a church as His Bride-but He had to buy her. Yes, He was very wealthy, for the Bible-the white man's book-says that every beast of the forest is His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. Yet all His cattle were not enough to pay for His bride. He had to

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pay a greater price. Samuel, do you know what He had to do?"

"Yes, Master, He had to give Himself-He died for us." I marveled as I listened, for at that moment, into the boy's eyes came an exquisite tenderness. I wondered what David Livingstone would have said had he been present.

I Am ... the Truth ... How Substantiated (John 14:6)

Within a world of conflicting ideas it is sometimes difficult to recognize truth. Teams of eloquent lawyers argue against each other, and enormous sums of money are spent trying to ascertain what is true and what is false. This is very evident among religious people. Since the beginning of the Christian era, men disputed the claims of Christ, and successive editions of the Scriptures claimed to be superior to predecessors.

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When conflicting opinions are expressed, people generally say, "It is a matter of interpretation." It is sometimes difficult to decide which of the ideas is correct, When Jesus stood before Pilate, He was asked, "What is truth?" When Pharisees and Sadducees argued, ordinary citizens hardly knew what to believe. Jesus said, "I am the truth," and stated a fact which has endured through time. He was the embodiment of truth, the Spokesman for the Almighty. What He taught was meant to be the standard by which all opinions would be accepted or rejected. When His authority is ignored, stability and reason are destroyed. The claim made by the Savior has been substantiated in various ways.

When the Lord was upon the Mount of Transfiguration, "Behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). God endorsed the teaching of Christ because, as John said, Jesus was THE WORD (see John 1:1-2, 14). The only function for a word is the conveyance of thought. Jesus was the means by which God revealed Himself. What was expressed was written, and the Bible became a light shining in the world's darkness. If nations would listen to, and obey, the instructions of the Almighty, earth's problems would disappear.

I Am the True Vine ... How Sustaining (John 15:1)

Palestine was filled with vineyards; people worked in them every day. The prosperity of the nation depended upon the production of grapes. When Jesus stated He was THE TRUE VINE, He suggested many things. As the husbandman devoted his attention to the cultivation of fruit, so God was supportive of everything done by the Savior. The Lord said, "My Father is the husbandman" (John 15:1), and He referred to the words of the psalmist who compared Israel to a vine planted by Jehovah (see Ps. 80:8). The Savior emphasized that He was the true vine; all others were insignificant.

Christ was the Vine which drew nourishment from inexhaustible rivers. Jesus taught that every believer was a branch through which His life could flow. The entire plan of

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salvation was expressed in this parable. God was in charge of the operation. Jesus was the Vine through which the Almighty perfected His plans. The branches were used in the production

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of fruit which would enrich the nations. Jesus never hesitated
to state His claim, for this was a fact that needed to be
publicized.

I Am...God!...How Strong (John 1&56)
Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon
him, went forth, and said unto them, whom seek ye? They
answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I AM
As soon then as he had said unto them I AM, they went
backward, and fell to the ground (John 18:4-6).

Throughout His ministry, by word and deed, Jesus indicat-
ed He was infinitely more than a mere man: He claimed to be
equal with God. The Jewish people denied that fact, but they
had no illusions about His message. Their accusation before
Pilate was self-explanatory. "He ought to die, because he made
himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). There were, and still
are, men and movements which deny the deity of Christ, but
the people who crucified the Lord clearly understood His
words. It is interesting to observe that when they charged Him
with blasphemy, He never denied the accusation, for it was
true. He did make Himself equal with the Almighty. The

apostle John wrote:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh,
and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of
the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John
1:1, 14).

The greatest endorsement of the claims of Christ was
provided in the Garden of Gethsemane, when a large crowd
was overwhelmed by a manifestation of divine power. When
the Lord confronted His enemies, His majesty shone through
the barrier of flesh and the glory of the Almighty overwhelmed

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the forces of evil. Centuries earlier, Moses asked for evidence
to prove he had been authorized to deliver Israel, and God
said, "Tell them the I AM sent you" (see Exod. 3:13-14). A
former President of the United States of America, Ronald
Regan, was correct when he said, "If Jesus of Nazareth were
not what He claimed to be, He was the greatest charlatan who
ever lived." Any diligent student can count the occasions when
Jesus used a personal pronoun to enhance His claims. What
He said was so vital that had He remained silent, even the
stones would have protested! (see Luke 19:40).

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