

Sermon & Small Group Study Guide



The Seven Signs & Seven 'I Am' Sayings of John's Gospel

Contents

Passage	Sunday Sermon	Page
Welcome		2
Small Group Purpose Statement		3
Introduction to Series		4
Water into Wine (John 2:1-11)	3 rd May	5-6
Healing the Official's Son (John 4:43-54)	10 th May	7-8
Healing at the Pool (John 5:1-15)	17 th May	9-11
Feeding the 5000: I Am the Bread of Life (John 6:1-13 & 25-40)	24 th May	12-14
Pentecost Special (Acts 2:1-21)	31 st May	15-16
Walking on Water (John 6:14-24)	7 th June	17-18
I Am the Light of the World (John 8:12-30)	14 th June	19-20
A Blind Man is Healed (John 9:1-38)	21 st June	21-23
I Am the Gate (John 10:1-10)	28 th June	24-25
I Am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-30)	5 th July	26-27
Lazarus is Raised: I Am the Resurrection & the Life (John 11:1-44)	12 th July	28-29
I Am the Way, the Truth & the Life (John 14:1-11)	19 th July	30-31
I Am the True Vine (John 15:1-17)	26 th July	32-33

Welcome to this new study guide for the summer teaching series.

This term we are exploring John's Gospel by focusing on the seven 'signs' that Jesus performs and the seven 'I Am' sayings that Jesus proclaims.

You may be holding this study guide because you are a member of a small group at St James. That's fantastic! Small groups are key to our strategy for nurture and discipleship, so we are delighted that you are in one. We hope you enjoy using this guide to prepare for your group meetings and then to explore the material together. Being in a small group is by far the best way to learn and grow as a disciple of Christ.

You may be holding this study guide as a member of St James who, for whatever reason, is *not* in a small group. You can find out more about small groups by reading the Small Group Purpose Statement on page 3 of this study guide. If you would like to join one, then please speak to Rob or Johan. If you can't manage that, then we don't want you to miss out on the benefits of the studies. Why not work through the studies yourself after each sermon or, better still, arrange to do them with a friend over a coffee.

The study guide is also available on the church web site – www.stjames-streatham.org

We hope you like the new feature of blank pages for sermon notes. Why not bring your study guide to church on Sunday morning and take notes during the sermon. And, if you miss a sermon, you can always catch up by visiting the Resources section of the church web site where all sermons are posted soon after being preached.

So, buckle up, here we go!

Small Group Purpose Statement

Small Groups at St James are small, Christ-centred communities meeting regularly for Bible study, fellowship, prayer, worship and service, fun, mutual support, accountability and mission. Group members will encourage each other to grow as active disciples, rather than passive spectators, encourage others to join a group and support those who wish to grow in leadership.

Our expectation is that:

Group members will come to know the saving love of God in their lives more deeply as they pray and study the Bible together.

They will be mutually encouraged to become more like Jesus in every part of their lives.

Group members will support each other in prayer and keep all prayer requests confidential. They will come to trust each other and be accountable to each other for those things the Holy Spirit is prompting them to change in their lives.

Group members will share each other's practical needs and seek to provide what they can to meet them.

They will be encouraged to grow as active disciples rather than passive spectators.

Group members will encourage others to lead and join a group.



Introduction to the Series

Most books you read will tell you right at the beginning why the book has been written, what the author's purpose or intention was in writing it. When John wrote his Gospel towards the end of the first century AD, he waited until the *end* of the book before revealing his purpose. Here it is:

“Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20 v 30-31

When Matthew, Mark, Luke and John sat down to write their Gospels, they had to make a conscious decision which events and teachings of Jesus they would include and which they would leave out. This was a necessary choice. As John himself says in the very last words of his Gospel: *“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written”*. So, each writer selected his material according to the particular aim or purpose he had for his Gospel.

John's specific purpose in writing is to show that Jesus is the **Messiah** – the anointed King promised by God in the Old Testament, and the **Son of God** – God in human form. And his aim in showing this is that his readers and hearers may believe it and, by believing, may receive and enjoy the gift of eternal life.

So, John employs a powerful literary device to achieve his aim. He selects just seven of the many miracles performed by Jesus, which he calls '**signs**'. A sign is something that points beyond itself to something else more significant. So, these miracles recorded by John are meant to enable us to see a number of significant things about Jesus – who he is and why he came. We shouldn't be dazzled by the miracles themselves but look beyond them to the deeper truths about Jesus being revealed. As writer Don Carson puts it: *“Jesus' miracles are never simply naked displays of power, still less neat conjuring tricks to impress the masses, but **signs, significant** displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith.”*

In addition to the signs, John gives us seven *sayings* of Jesus in which he employs the words '**I AM**' to describe himself. Every Jew knows that the words 'I AM' are the personal name for God – 'I AM – YAHWEH'. Moses discovered this in his fiery encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). And so, in using these words to refer to himself Jesus was claiming to be none other than God in human form. John wants us to see this clearly. Oh, and don't forget, to the Jews, 7 is the perfect number – so 7 signs and 7 sayings is itself very significant!

John was a fisherman from Galilee, called by Jesus to follow him (Luke 5:11). He was one of the 12 chosen to be an apostle (Mark 3:13-19) and one of the 3 in the inner circle (Matthew 17:1, Luke 8:51). He was probably the disciple closest of all to Jesus (John 21:20). He was transformed by Jesus from being 'Boanerges – a Son of Thunder' to being widely known and the apostle of love. His Gospel, written almost 2000 years ago, still speaks today and continues to carry the power to transform human lives for eternity.

Study 1: Water into Wine

John 2 v 1-11

Context:

Cana, which lies a few miles from Nazareth in Galilee, is one of the sites we visit each time on our Holy Land Pilgrimage from St James. We go down into the ruins of the 1st century synagogue, beneath the present day church building, and see the remains of a stone water jar, the kind referred to in our study today. We gather around the jar and sing: “*Come on in and taste the new wine, the wine of the kingdom of God!*” In doing so, we pick up on the main theme of this first sign of Jesus in John’s Gospel - the breaking in of the new wine of the kingdom of God in the person and work of Jesus.

Observation:

1. On which day did the wedding in Cana take place (v 1)?
2. Who does John specifically mention as being wedding guests (v 1-2)?
3. What crisis arose and what did Jesus’ mother do in response (v 3)?
4. What was Jesus’ reply to his mother (v 4)?
5. How does Mary respond to Jesus’ words (v 5)?
6. How many water jars stood nearby? How big were they? What was their normal function (v 6)?
7. What did Jesus command the servants to do (v 7-8)?
8. What happened to the water (v 9) and what was the banquet master’s assessment (v 10)?
9. What was the dual outcome of this first miraculous sign (v 11)?

Meaning:

1. The third day referred to in v 1 means the third day after Jesus meets Nathanael in v 43-51. This in turn means the wedding took place on the *seventh* day after the first event described in v 19-28 (count the days for yourself). In v 1-5 John refers to the creation of the universe, which Genesis describes as happening in the space of one week. He then gives us one week of events, from v 19 to the wedding at Cana, culminating in this first miraculous sign performed by Jesus. What do you think John is trying to tell us through these timings?
2. Jewish weddings would often last seven days (as Palestinian weddings do today) and the bridegroom was responsible for the catering. Running out of food or wine would not only be a source of shame but could also lead to a lawsuit by the bride’s relatives! But why do you think *Mary* got involved and tried to draw Jesus into providing a solution (v 2-3)?
3. Jesus’ reply to his mother (v 4) is not rude, but it *is* abrupt and is designed to put some distance between them. Why do you think he speaks to her in this way?
4. ‘My time (literally ‘hour’) has not yet come’ (v 4) is a stock phrase used by Jesus in John’s Gospel to refer to the time of his crucifixion and resurrection. Why do you think he answers Mary with these words?
5. John wants us to take note that the 6 jars were used for ceremonial washing by the Jews – religious washing of vessels, hands and feet – which was part of the Law of Moses followed by every religious Jew (v 6). What do you think we are meant to understand, therefore, by the fact that Jesus turned the water in *these specific* jars into wine? (see John 1 v 15-18 for a further clue).
6. In what sense did this sign reveal the glory of Jesus (v 11)?

Application:

1. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5 v 17: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.”* In what ways does the New Covenant instituted by Jesus surpass the Old Covenant instituted by Moses?
2. In what ways have you tasted/are you tasting the new wine of the kingdom of Jesus?
3. How can we see the glory of Jesus today?
4. Jesus knew that his hour had not yet come in Cana and he knew exactly when his hour *would* come – to go to the cross – how does it make you think and feel to know that Jesus was in complete control of his own life and death, that he went to the cross at the exact time of his choosing?

Pray:

- With thanks for the many blessings of the new wine of the kingdom of Jesus.
- With thanks for the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- For people known to us who have not yet seen the glory of Jesus, that they may do so and put their trust in him.

Sermon Notes:

Study 2: Healing the Official's Son

John 4 v 43-54

Context:

Jesus has been very busy since performing his first 'sign' in Cana (2:1-11). He has been to Jerusalem, where he cleared out the temple of the market traders (2:12-25) and, whilst there, he had an interesting encounter with a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, Nicodemus (3:1-21). He then spent some time with his disciples in the Judean countryside where he performed some baptisms, before heading back north to Galilee via Samaria where he led a town-wide revival in Sychar (Old Testament 'Shechem' and modern day 'Nablus'). After staying two days with the new Samaritan believers, he continues his journey home. We pick up the story in 4:43.

Observation:

1. What did Jesus point out in v 44?
2. How did the Galileans react to Jesus on his arrival and why (v 45)?
3. Where did Jesus go and who did he meet there (v 46)?
4. What did this man ask of Jesus and why (v 47)?
5. What was Jesus' initial response and how did the man react (v 48-49)?
6. What was Jesus' reply and what was the man's response (v 50)?
7. What news did the man receive on his way home (v 51)?
8. At what time did his son recover and why was this significant (v 52-53)?
9. What was the effect of this second miraculous 'sign' on the man and his household (v 53)?

Meaning:

1. At first sight v 44 and v 45 seem to contradict each other. However, when you add the word 'Therefore' at the beginning of v 45 (which is in the original text but is missing from our Bible) and refer back to 2 v 23-25, how do you think John wants us to make sense of v 44 and v 45 – i.e. what is the connection between them?
2. In light of the above, why do you think Jesus replies so harshly to the Royal Official in v 48?
3. What is so amazing about Jesus' words in v 50 (note v 46) and their effect in v 51-53?
4. What does this miraculous sign tell us about Jesus – his identity and mission?
5. Describe the *spiritual* journey the Royal Official makes from v 47 to v 53.

Application:

1. Jesus often chastised people for asking him to perform miraculous signs or for relying on miracles for their faith. What is so dangerous about relying on miracles for our faith? Why are miracles not *guaranteed* to produce saving faith?
2. How do we react when Jesus speaks a harsh word to *us*? Can you give any examples from your own experience? What can we learn from the way the Royal Official reacts?
3. Jesus is clearly showing through this sign that *he* holds the power of life and death as he gives permission for the son to carry on living. He is therefore God in human form. Read Matthew 10 v 28-31 – how do these words both challenge and encourage us?
4. What impact does John want this story of the healing of the son to have on us?

Pray:

- For grace to have faith in Jesus, with or without miracles.
- For all who are sick or in need today.
- With thanksgiving that Jesus cares for us and holds our life in his sovereign and loving hands.

Sermon Notes:

Study 3: Healing at the Pool

John 5 v 1-15

Context:

One of the highlights of our regular Holy Land Pilgrimages is a visit to the Pools of Bethesda. Located in the NE quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, accessed through St Stephen's Gate (also known as the Lion's Gate), pilgrims can see the ancient ruins of the pools mentioned in John 5 and visit St Anne's Church which boasts the finest acoustics in all Israel. As we sing: "*He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace*" the sound of our voices literally bounces off the walls and echoes spine-tinglingly around this ancient place of worship.

John tells us that, after an unspecified time in Galilee and during an unspecified Jewish feast, Jesus once again comes to Jerusalem and visits the Pools of Bethesda where he performs his third miraculous sign.

Observation:

1. Where was the Pool of Bethesda located and how does John describe its structure (v 2)?
2. Who used to lie around the sides of the pool (v 3)?
3. What was the condition of the man Jesus singles out and what does Jesus ask him (v 5-6)?
4. How does the man respond to Jesus' question (v 7)?
5. What does Jesus tell the man to do and how does the man respond to Jesus' command (v 8-9a)?
6. On what day did this healing take place and why was this a problem to some of the Jews (v 9b-10)?
7. Who does the man blame (v 11) and what do the Jews then ask him (v 12)?
8. Why did the man not know who had healed him (v 13)?
9. Where did Jesus find the man later and what did he tell him (v 14)?
10. What did the man then do (v 15)?

Meaning:

NOTE: Bethesda comprised 2 connected pools surrounded by 5 covered colonnades and, being located between the Sheep Gate and the Temple, it was used by pilgrims to wash their sheep before taking them for sacrifice. The waters often bubbled and stirred, probably due to some kind of thermal mineral spring, and the waters of the pool were therefore associated with healing. Superstition credited angels with the stirring of the waters and tradition suggested that the first person into the pool when the waters bubbled would be healed.

1. Why do you think Jesus singled out this particular man from the many blind, lame and paralysed people who were lying there (v 3-5)?
2. What do you think was behind Jesus' question to the man in v 6?
3. How do you think the man must have been feeling in his reply to Jesus in v 7?
4. What do v 8-9 tell us about the power of Jesus as opposed to superstition?
5. The man's mat could be rolled up and carried on the shoulder (a bit like a Pilates mat today), but to carry it on a Sabbath day was against the Jewish Law (v 10) as interpreted by the religious elders, though strictly speaking not against God's commands in the Old Testament. Work was heavily regulated on the Sabbath – there were 39 categories of work that were forbidden by the Scribes. Why do you think these Jews were more concerned about the man breaking one of *their* laws rather than rejoicing that he had been healed?

6. Why do you think Jesus seemed shy to take public credit for the healing (v 13)?
7. Whilst the Bible teaches that *all* suffering is an *indirect* consequence of sin (Genesis 3), it also teaches that *some* suffering is a *direct* consequence of sin (see Acts 5:1-11, 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 & 28-32, Revelation 2:20-22). How does this help us to understand Jesus' words in v 14?
8. What is the '*something worse*' that Jesus refers to in v 14 (see Luke 13 v 1-5 & 2 Thessalonians 1 v 6-10)?
9. What do you think John wants us to learn about Jesus from this third miraculous sign?

Application:

1. Is there a danger that, for some people, their sickness and problems become such a large part of their identity that they are reluctant to get better, as was possibly the case with the lame man?
2. Why are superstitions so dangerous? What kinds of superstitions exist today, even among Christians? Are there any superstitions you are holding on to which Jesus is calling you to ditch?
3. How do man-made religious traditions (e.g. Scribal Sabbath laws) sometimes get in the way of what Jesus wants to do in our lives? Can you think of any examples today? Are there any man-made religious traditions Jesus is calling you to ditch?
4. How can I make sure the '*something worse*' that Jesus referred to doesn't happen to me?

Pray:

- For those known to us who are sick and suffering.
- For those known to us who follow superstition or man-made religion rather than Jesus.
- For God's grace to continue believing in Jesus, the only sure way to avoid the '*something worse*' of the eternal future.

Sermon Notes:

Study 4: Feeding the 5000: I Am the Bread of Life

John 6: 1-13 & 25-40

Context:

At the end of our last study, we left Jesus in Jerusalem. As we begin *this* study he is back home in Galilee and here we have the first example of a 'sign' and an 'I Am' saying combined. The 'sign' we are about to witness in 6 v 1-13 serves as a graphic illustration of the 'I Am' saying that follows in 6 v 25-40.

Observation:

1. Where does Jesus go in v 1?
2. Why did the crowd follow him (v 2)?
3. Where did Jesus sit and what time of year was it (v 3-4)?
4. What does Jesus ask Philip in v 5 and why did he ask him this question (v 6)?
5. What was Philip's reply (v 7) and what does Andrew say (v 8-9)?
6. What did Jesus tell the disciples to do (v 10)?
7. How many people were there (v 10) and what did Jesus do next (v 11)?
8. What did Jesus tell the disciples to do after the meal (v 12)?
9. How many baskets of leftovers did they fill (v 13)?

NOTE: Between v 13 and v 25 Jesus walks across the water and we will be looking at this 'sign' in our next study.

10. What question do the crowd ask Jesus when they find him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee the next day (v 25)?
11. According to Jesus, why are they *not* looking for him and why *are* they looking for him (v 26)?
12. What does Jesus tell them to work for (v 27)?
13. What do they then ask Jesus and what is his reply (v 28-29)?
14. What cheeky question do they then ask Jesus (v 30) and to what historical event do they refer as an example of the kind of miraculous sign they want him to perform (v 31)?
15. According to Jesus, what or who is the 'true bread from heaven' (v 32-33)?
16. What does Jesus tell them in v 35?
17. What promise does Jesus make in v 37 and how does this explain v 36?
18. In v 38 Jesus says he has come to do the Father's will – what, according to v 39-40 is the Father's will?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think Jesus tested Philip with his question in v 5? What was he expecting Philip to say?
2. How do you envisage the multiplication miracle *actually* happened – i.e. as Jesus prayed did lots of bread and fish suddenly appear on the grass or did it just keep coming as he broke the bread and fish, or something else?
3. What do you think is the significance of the quantity of leftovers?
4. What is the meaning of the accusation Jesus makes in v 26?
5. How is it possible to *work* for something that is ultimately a *gift* (v 27-29)?

6. Why does Jesus single out *believing* in him as the work God requires (v 29)?
7. What parallel is Jesus drawing between God's provision of manna in the desert (see Exodus 16) and himself (v 30-33)? In what way does Jesus supersede Moses and the manna as the *true bread*?
8. 'I AM' is the Hebrew name for God ('YAHWEH'). What is Jesus saying about himself by using these words and what impact should it have had on his hearers?
9. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Bread of Life (v 35)?
10. What must we do to have eternal life and be raised up at the last day (v 37-40)?
11. What evidence do you see in v 36-40 of the mysterious relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in salvation? How do you think these two truths hold together without contradiction? (see also v 44-45 & 63-65).

Application:

1. Jesus tested Philip – does he ever test you? Can you give any examples?
2. The disciples served others and then were able to eat the leftovers themselves. Do you ever feel like you are serving without receiving anything in return? How do these verses encourage you to keep going?
3. Jesus rebuked the crowd in v 26. What is wrong with following Jesus just for the material blessings he gives without going beyond the blessing to recognise who Jesus really is and why he really came?
4. Why is it so important to believe in Jesus?
5. What kind of hunger and thirst does Jesus satisfy? Can you share about this from your own experience?
6. How does knowing you will be raised up at the last day to receive eternal life affect your life now?

Pray:

- For those you know who are spiritually hungry and thirsty but don't yet know Jesus.
- With thanksgiving that God, in his grace, has given you to Jesus and drawn you to him.
- For God's strength to serve him and others knowing that he will also supply all your needs.

Sermon Notes:

Study 5: Pentecost Special

Acts 2 v 1-21

Context:

We have a brief break from John's Gospel to celebrate Pentecost. Following the death and resurrection of Jesus, he spent 40 days with his disciples teaching them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He told them to wait in Jerusalem for an unspecified period of time until the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon them. Then they were to go to the ends of the earth as witnesses for Jesus. The Feast of Pentecost ('Shavuot' in Hebrew, translated as 'Weeks' in English) was just 10 days away.

Observation:

1. As the disciples were gathered together on the Day of Pentecost, what did they hear and what did they see (v 2-3)?
2. What was the effect of these phenomena on the disciples and what did they do as a result (v 4)?
3. Who else was gathered in Jerusalem that day (v 5) and from which countries did they come (v 9-11)?
4. What was the reaction of this multi-cultural crowd and why (v 6-8)?
5. What was the content of the disciples' message (v 11b)?
6. What two reactions were present in the crowd (v 12-13)?
7. Who stood up to explain the event (v 14)?
8. What explanation does Peter give for what they had just witnessed (v 15-21)?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think the Holy Spirit manifested himself in a way that looked like wind and fire? What do these symbols tell us about the Holy Spirit?
2. In light of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8, why do you think the ability to speak in other languages was such an appropriate effect of being filled with the Spirit?
3. Three Old Testament references help us to understand what was going on at Pentecost. First, there is a parallel with the story of the Tower of Babel (see Genesis 11 v 1-9) – how do these two events compare and contrast?
4. Second, Pentecost (or the Feast of Weeks/Shavuot) was a summer harvest festival for the Jews and also marked the time when God gave the Law to Moses at Mt Sinai after the Exodus. Looking at 2 Corinthians 3:6-18, how do the Law of Moses and the Spirit given at Pentecost compare and contrast?
5. Third, Peter says that Pentecost was a fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32. How does what happened at Pentecost fulfil this prophecy?
6. What do Joel and Peter say is the ultimate result of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (v 21)?

Application:

1. Note that Acts 2:4 says that *all* the disciples were filled with the Spirit and 2:38b-39 promises that *all* who are called by God receive the Spirit and Romans 8:9 says that if a person doesn't have the Spirit they don't belong to Jesus. So, how do you feel knowing that,

as a Christian, you have the Spirit, and in what ways do you experience the presence of the Spirit in your life?

2. Why do you think it was essential for the disciples to receive the Spirit before they went out to evangelise (Acts 1:4)? Why is it essential for us too?
3. The apostle Paul teaches that, though the Law of Moses was holy, righteous and good, it became oppressive to the Jews because their sinful hearts prevented them from keeping it. Read Galatians 5:16-25 – what good news about the work of the Spirit does Paul expound in these verses? How does this resonate with your own life and experience?

Pray:

- Thank God for the gift of the Spirit and all his benefits.
- For power to share the good news with others.
- For power to live a life pleasing to God, overcoming sin and walking in step with the Spirit.

Sermon Notes:

Study 6: Walking on Water

John 6 v 16-21

Context:

Back in study 4 we saw Jesus perform his fourth sign, the feeding of the 5000, leading to his first 'I Am' saying: 'I Am the Bread of Life'. But sandwiched in between those two is his fifth sign. After the feeding miracle, Jesus withdrew to a mountain by himself because some in the crowd were eager to crown him as king there and then (v 15). His disciples leave him alone and head to the lake shore, paving the way for a spectacular miraculous sign.

Observation:

1. What time of day was it and to where did the disciples head off in the boat (v 16-17)?
2. What was the weather like (v 18)?
3. After rowing for a distance, what did they see and how did they react (v 19)?
4. What did Jesus say to them (v 20)?
5. What happened when they took Jesus into the boat (v 21)?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think Jesus stayed behind on the mountainside while the disciples sailed off in the boat? (see Matthew 14:23 for a clue).
2. Why do you think the disciples were terrified when they saw Jesus walking on the water? (see Mark 6:49-50 for a clue).
3. The words '*It is I*' in v 20 literally translate as '*I AM*'. Why do you think Jesus said this and what would it have meant to the disciples?
4. What further miracle do we see in v 21? How would the disciples' knowledge of Psalm 107:23-32 have helped them to make sense of what Jesus did?

Application:

1. Why do you think it was so important for Jesus to take time out to pray? How does this encourage and challenge you in your praying? How is your prayer life at the moment? What pattern of prayer do you follow? What helps you when prayer is difficult or you don't feel like praying?
2. At first the disciples were terrified, but when they realised who Jesus was their fear was calmed. What causes us to be afraid and how does knowing who Jesus is calm our fears?
3. There is a lovely echo of this incident in Exodus 33:18-20. Moses asks to see God's glory and in reply God tells him that he will make all his goodness pass in front Moses and proclaim his name, the LORD (I AM/YAHWEH). In Mark's account of Jesus walking on the water he says that Jesus was about to '*pass them by*' (Mark 6:48), the same phrase as in Exodus 33:19. Jesus then pronounces his name: 'I AM', just as God did to Moses. So, putting all this together, what are we supposed to see and learn from this incident?

Pray:

- For God's grace to deepen your prayer life.
- For God's presence and power to calm your fears.

Sermon Notes:

Study 7: I Am the Light of the World

John 8 v 12-30

Context:

The second of Jesus' 'I Am' sayings comes in the context of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (see John Chapter 7). This autumn harvest festival was an annual reminder of the 40-year period the Jews spent in the wilderness after their release from slavery in Egypt and before their entry into the Promised Land. During this time God led them in a pillar of fire at night (see Nehemiah 9:9-12), giving them light on their way. This God-light would eventually lead them right into the Promised Land and all the blessings that awaited them there. So, every autumn the Jews would recall God's protection, provision and guidance in the wilderness as they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. During the week-long feast four large lamps would stand burning each night in the Temple courts, symbolising the pillar of fire from the wilderness days. One ancient writer describes it like this: *"Men of piety and good works danced through the night, holding burning torches in their hands and singing songs and praises. The Levitical orchestras cut loose, with the light from the Temple area shedding its glow all over Jerusalem."* So, the scene is set for Jesus' second 'I Am' saying.

Observation:

1. What does Jesus tell the people in v 12?
2. What challenge did the Pharisees put to Jesus in v 13?
3. How does Jesus answer their challenge in v 14-18?
4. What question do they then ask Jesus in 19a and how does he respond in v 19b?
5. Why did no one lay a hand on Jesus despite his provocative words (v 20)?
6. What further provocation does Jesus make in v 21 and how do they respond in v 22?
7. What reason does Jesus give in v 23 for their inability to understand him?
8. What fearful consequences does Jesus warn of in v 24?
9. What question do they ask in v 25 and how does Jesus respond in v 26?
10. As they still don't understand, what does Jesus tell them in v 28?
11. Who is always with Jesus and who does he always seek to please (v 29)?
12. What was the impact of Jesus' words (v 30)?

Meaning:

1. In light (pardon the pun!) of the background of the Feast of Tabernacles, what are we meant to understand by the saying '*I Am the Light of the World*' in v 12?
2. To what extent does Jesus' reply in v 14-18 answer the Pharisees' question of v 13?
3. Knowing the unusual circumstances surrounding Jesus' conception and birth, why is the Pharisees' question in v 19 so cruel?
4. What are the shocking implications of Jesus' words in v 19?
5. What does the end of v 20 tell us about the sovereignty of God?
6. The words '*the one I claim to be*' in v 24 do not appear in the original text. So, it should say: '*if you do not believe that I Am, you will indeed die in your sins*'. What does Jesus mean by this?

7. The same applies to v 28. So, what does Jesus mean by saying: *'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I Am'*?

Application:

1. In what ways do you experience the blessings of following Jesus as the Light of the World?
2. Jesus spends a lot of time in the passage emphasising the validity of his claims, and the implications of this for us are huge – if he is telling the truth it would be eternally devastating not to believe him, but if he is lying then we should reject him as fake news. So, how can we assess if Jesus really is telling the truth about himself?
3. What are the fearful implications of dying in our sins and what is the solution?

Pray:

- For patient endurance in following Jesus.
- For friends and family who don't yet believe in Jesus.
- For courage to share our faith with others.

Sermon Notes:

Study 8: A Blind Man is Healed

John 9 v 1-38

Context:

Jesus' fifth miraculous sign appropriately follows quickly after his declaration: '*I Am the Light of the World*' and serves as an illustration of it. It also brings Jesus into yet more conflict with the religious authorities who, as in the case of the lame man in study 3, seem more concerned to keep their man-made regulations that to see a man healed. It is a stark warning of the deadly dangers of a religion that is not founded on Jesus.

Observation:

1. How long had the man been blind (v 1)?
2. What question did the disciples ask Jesus in v 2 and how did Jesus reply in v 3?
3. What does Jesus go on to say in v 4-5?
4. What did Jesus do and say to the man in v 6-7 and what was the result?
5. What question did his neighbours ask in v 8 and what were the various responses in v 9?
6. What question do they then ask in v 10 and how does the man reply in v 11?
7. Where did they then take the man in v 13?
8. On what day did Jesus heal the blind man (v 14)?
9. In what way did Jesus' actions divide the opinion of the Pharisees in v 16?
10. What is the blind man's assessment of who Jesus is in v 17?
11. Who did the Pharisees question next (v 18-19)?
12. How did they respond and why (v 20-23)?
13. What do the Pharisees then ask the man in v 24 and how does he reply in v 25?
14. When they ask for more details on how the miracle was done, how does the man reply (v 27)?
15. What is their angry response to the man's provocative question (v 28-29)?
16. What is the man's logic in v 30-33?
17. What is the Pharisees final word to the man in v 34 and how does it ironically echo the disciples' question to Jesus back in v 2?
18. What significant question does Jesus ask the man when he finds him (v 35) and what is the man's final response to Jesus in v 38?

Meaning:

1. We saw in study 3 that the Bible teaches that, whilst *all* suffering is an *indirect* consequence of *general* sin (Genesis 3), *some* suffering is a *direct* consequence of *specific* sin (the lame man by the pool). However, the Bible also teaches that we cannot assume that *every* case of suffering is a consequence of *specific* sin (e.g. the Book of Job). So, what theology do you think sits behind the disciples' question in v 2? (see also Luke 13:1-5 for a further example).
2. What are the implications of Jesus' reply in v 3 for God's sovereignty?
3. v 1 tells us that the man had been born blind, so this is not so much a *healing* by Jesus as a *creation* miracle – Jesus doesn't *restore* the man's sight, he *creates* it (see v 32). With that in mind, what is the significance of Jesus' actions in v 6 (see Genesis 2 v 7)?

4. In Genesis 49:9-10 we read a prophecy of Jacob concerning the future of a descendant of his son, Judah: “*You are a lion’s cub, O Judah...the sceptre will not depart from Judah nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs (or until Shiloh or Shilohah or Siloam comes) and the obedience of the nations is his.*” With this in mind, what is the significance of where Jesus tells the blind man to wash in v 7 and what does John want us to conclude from this?
5. Why were the Pharisees so troubled that the healing has taken place on a Sabbath?
6. Why had the Jews already decided that to believe in Jesus as the Messiah was blasphemy and worthy of being kicked out of the synagogue?
7. How does the blind man’s faith develop during this episode (compare and contrast v 11, 17, 25, 30-33, 38)?
8. How does this miraculous sign illustrate Jesus’ claim to be the Light of the World (v 5)?

Application:

1. How would you reply biblically to someone who says that suffering is *always* a sign of God’s punishment for a *specific* sin?
2. How do you feel about the claim that Jesus had a sovereign purpose in this man being born blind and therefore has a sovereign purpose in everything that happens in the world that he has created and rules, including our lives? What difference should knowing this make to our daily lives?
3. How can we guard against being so hard-hearted that we miss what Jesus is doing and saying because of our obsession with man-made religious rules? How do we distinguish between rules *God* has given and we should therefore keep and rules that *man* has made?

Pray:

- For those known to us who are sick and in need.
- With thanks for God’s sovereign purpose in and for our lives.
- For God’s grace not to allow our hearts to harden through man-made rules.

Sermon Notes:

Study 9: I Am the Gate

John 10 v 1-10

Context:

The third 'I Am' saying of Jesus is perhaps the least well known and often gets joined together with the fourth saying, which follows very quickly after. Both come in John Chapter 10. Jesus loved to use imagery and word pictures from everyday life in Israel to help his hearers understand what he was teaching about himself. Here he employs a very familiar image taken from 1st century Israelite farming practices. Shepherds would keep their sheep in pens overnight, and flocks belonging to several shepherds would be kept in a single pen, guarded by a hired watchman. There would be one single way in and out of the pen, the gate. Sometimes the shepherd himself would lie across the entrance at night, his own body serving as the gate. So, what does Jesus mean when he says: '*I Am the Gate for the sheep*'? Let's find out.

Observation:

1. How does Jesus characterise the person who *does not* enter the sheep pen by the gate in v 1 and the person who *does* enter by the gate in v 2?
2. Who opens the gate for the shepherd and what does the shepherd then do (v 3)?
3. Why do the sheep follow the shepherd (v 4)?
4. Why would the sheep run away from a stranger (v 5)?
5. What does Jesus say about himself in v 7?
6. Who came before Jesus and how did the sheep react to them (v 8)?
7. What are the benefits of entering the sheep pen by Jesus the Gate (v 9)?
8. How do the motivations of the thief and of Jesus contrast (v 10)?

Meaning:

Jesus seems to be referring to himself in v 1-6 as the Shepherd of the sheep, but this only becomes clear in v 11. So, we will save the exploration of this image for our next study on '*I Am the Good Shepherd*'. For now, let's focus on the image of the gate.

1. Combining v 7 & v 9, what does Jesus mean when he says he is the gate?
2. What does it mean to be saved in v 9? (see John 3:16-18 for a clue).
3. What does Jesus mean by '*coming in and going out to find pasture*' in v 9? (see Psalm 23:2-3 for a clue).
4. Who do you think Jesus is referring to in v 8? (see Ezekiel 34:1-6 for some examples).
5. In what ways can false spiritual teachers & leaders steal, kill and destroy people (v 10)?
6. What does Jesus mean by having life to the full in v 10? (note the following verses we have already seen in John for clues – 1:4, 3:14-16, 3:36, 4:13-14, 5:21, 5:24, 5:39-40, 6:27, 6:40, 8:12).

Application:

1. How do we ensure that we 'enter through Jesus the Gate'?
2. How can we recognise the spiritual thieves and robbers?
3. What are the benefits in your experience of being saved, of finding pasture, of having fullness of life?

Pray:

- For people who don't yet know Jesus as the Gate.
- For those we know who are or have been influenced by false teachers.
- For a deeper and richer experience of the fulness of life Jesus offers to us.

Sermon Notes:

Study 10: I Am the Good Shepherd

John 10 v 11-30

Context:

In our last study we learned about Jesus being the Gate for the sheep with hints about him being the Shepherd too. Today we continue in John chapter 10 as Jesus develops the shepherd image in remarkable ways. Sitting in the background to Jesus' use of this shepherd image is Ezekiel chapter 34 which would have been very familiar to Jesus' listeners and Jesus contrasts the *bad* shepherds of the past with himself as the *Good* Shepherd.

Observation:

1. What is the distinctive quality of the Good Shepherd in v 11?
2. Why does the hired hand run away when he sees the wolf coming and what is the consequence for the sheep (v 12-13)?
3. To what relationship does Jesus compare his relationship with his sheep in v 14-15?
4. What will Jesus do for his other sheep that are not yet in the pen and what will be the result (v 16)?
5. Why does the Father love Jesus so much (v 17)?
6. Who was ultimately responsible for the death and resurrection of Jesus (v 18)?
7. What were the divided opinions of the crowd in v 19-21?
8. What special time of year was it when Jesus was walking in the temple area in v 22-23?
9. What question did the Jews ask him in v 24?
10. What evidence for his Messiahship does Jesus point to in v 25?
11. What reason does Jesus give in v 26-27 for their failure to believe in him?
12. What encouraging news does Jesus give to his sheep in v 28-30?

Meaning:

1. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16 & 23-25. How does this Old Testament background help us to understand what Jesus means when he says he is the *Good* Shepherd?
2. Jesus refers many times here to laying down his life for the sheep (v11, 15, 17, 18). What are the benefits to the sheep of Jesus laying down his life? (see v 28-30).
3. We often think of Jesus as a helpless victim of other people's cruelty when he was crucified. But how do Jesus' words in v 18 shed a different light on this?
4. Why do you think the Father's love for Jesus was so closely linked to his voluntary death (v 17)?
5. Linking v 16 with chapter 11:51-52, it is clear Jesus is referring here to Gentiles and is promising that he will bring Gentiles to be part of his people alongside Jews. What impact do you think this would have had on his Jewish hearers?
6. Linking v 16 with v 26-27, it seems that Jesus is referring to predestination or election (see also John 6: 37, 44, 64-65). Predestination or election, means that in a mysterious way which we don't fully understand, without ever removing human responsibility, God infallibly chooses, before the beginning of time, who will believe and be saved. So, in a sense they *belong* to him before they even *believe* in him! This is why Jesus speaks of having other sheep that are not yet in the sheep pen (v 16) – they *belong* to him (they are his sheep already) though they don't yet *believe* in him. And this is why some of his listeners refuse to *believe* in him, because they don't *belong* to him - i.e. he hasn't chosen, predestined,

elected them – (v 26-27). What do you think and feel about this doctrine of predestination or election? Are there other passages in the Bible that teach this doctrine? How can this doctrine be misunderstood and misused?

7. What do Jesus' words in v 28-30 teach about salvation?

Application:

1. What feelings arise in your heart as you think of the lengths Jesus went to in order to save you? What difference should this make to the way we live our daily lives?
2. How does knowing that God was fully in charge during the events of his death and resurrection strengthen your love and faith (see also Acts 2:23-24, Acts 3:17-20, Acts 4:27-28)?
3. How does knowing that, if you are a *genuine* believer in Jesus, you cannot ultimately lose your salvation (v 28-30), give you *comfort* in times of trouble and doubt and *courage* to take risks in the cause of the Gospel?

Pray:

- For all those who *belong* to Jesus but don't yet *believe* in him.
- That God would empower us to share our faith with others, because faith comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).
- For *comfort* in our troubles and doubts and *courage* in Gospel ministry, fired by our eternal and unshakable salvation through Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Sermon Notes:

Study 11: Lazarus is Raised

I Am the Resurrection & the Life

John 11 v 1-44

Context:

Jesus often spent time in the village of Bethany, located as it was en route from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south. He enjoyed the hospitality of a particular family there – sisters, Mary & Martha and their brother, Lazarus. Jesus loved this family. Here in John 11 we have another example of one of the seven miraculous signs being combined with one of the seven ‘I Am’ sayings of Jesus, as one serves as a powerful illustration of the other.

Observation:

1. What act of Mary’s are we reminded of in v 2? (see John 12 for the act itself)?
2. How do the sisters describe Lazarus in v 3?
3. What does Jesus say when he first hears the news of Lazarus’ illness in v 4?
4. How did Jesus feel about this family (v 5) and what did he do at first (v 6)?
5. Why were the disciples so surprised when Jesus finally announced their departure for Judea (v 7-8)?
6. What was Jesus’ reply in v 9-10?
7. What bad news and good news does Jesus break to the disciples in v 11-14?
8. Why, according to Jesus, was he glad not to have been in Bethany (v 15)?
9. For how many days had Lazarus been dead and buried by the time Jesus arrived (v 17)?
10. Who went out to meet Jesus and who stayed at home (v 20)?
11. What does Martha say to Jesus in v 21-22 and what was Jesus’ reply in v 23?
12. How does Martha misunderstand Jesus in v 23 and what is His reply in v 25-26?
13. When Mary eventually goes to meet Jesus, what does she do and say to him (v 32)?
14. What does Jesus do and say in v 33-35?
15. How do Jesus’ words and actions divide the crowd in v 36-37?
16. What does Jesus ask the people to do in v 39? What is Martha’s response and how does Jesus reply to her (v 39-40)?
17. What is the gist of Jesus’ prayer in v 41-42?
18. What does Jesus then do in v 43 and what is the result in v 44?

Meaning:

1. What does Jesus say is the main reason for Lazarus’ sickness and temporary death (v 4, 15, 40)?
2. The word ‘yet’ at the beginning of v 6 should actually be translated as ‘therefore’. How does changing this one small word alter the whole meaning of v 5-6? How can deliberately staying where he was a further 2 days be an act of love?
3. Jews of the first century believed that once a person died their soul remained in or around their body for 3 days after death, at which point it would leave. Tombs had a special window built in for the soul to depart through (the naphish window). So, how does this give significance to Jesus’ deliberate timing of arrival in Bethany (v 17)?
4. How do Martha’s words combine both complaint and faith (v 21-22)?

5. Martha, like many Jews of the day, believed that people would rise again *at the end of time* (v 24). So, how do Jesus' words in v 25-26 come as a massive shock to her? What does Jesus mean by these words?
6. Why was Jesus so moved in v 33, 35 & 38, when he already knew what he was going to do for Lazarus?
7. Jesus simply commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb (v 43) – what does this tell us about who Jesus is and what power he holds?

Application:

1. Jesus seems to be teaching us that seeing his glory is more important than anything else, even health and life. What do you think and feel about that claim?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the Resurrection & the Life? What difference does it make to your living and your dying?
3. What does it mean to you that Jesus is deeply moved by your pain and grief, even though he allows it to happen? How can this comfort us in times of suffering?

Pray:

- For those recently bereaved.
- For those undergoing suffering.
- For faith to trust Jesus in the midst of suffering & pain.
- For eyes to see the glory of Jesus and to value his glory above all things.

Sermon Notes:

Study 12: I Am the Way, the Truth & the Life

John 14 v 1-11

Context:

Since our last study, Jesus has made the short journey from Bethany, where he raised Lazarus, to Jerusalem. After his triumphal entry on Palm Sunday and several days of activity, it is now Maundy Thursday and he shares the Passover with his closest disciples. He washes their feet, predicts Peter's denials, and seeks to encourage his troubled followers ahead of his arrest and crucifixion. It is time for the sixth of his 'I Am' sayings.

Observation:

1. What does Jesus tell his disciples *not to do* and what does he tell them *to do* in v 1?
2. What good news does he tell them in v 2-3?
3. How does Thomas contradict Jesus in v 4-5?
4. How does Jesus answer him in v 6?
5. What does Jesus tell them in v 7?
6. What request does Philip make in v 8 and how does Jesus respond in v 9?
7. To what evidence does Jesus point as proof of who he claims to be (v 10-11)?

Meaning:

1. Why were the disciples' hearts so troubled (v 1) and how would trusting in God & Jesus help? What have we seen so far in John's Gospel that would encourage them to trust him?
2. In 1st century Israel, when a couple wanted to marry, they would go through a 2-stage process. First came the betrothal or engagement followed by a year in which the groom would take time to build an extra room onto his family home. Once this room was ready, the couple would formally marry and move into the newly prepared room. How does this help us to understand what Jesus is saying in v 2-3?
3. In what ways does Jesus' response in v 6 answer Thomas' question in v 5? What does it mean for Jesus to be the Way, the Truth and the Life?
4. From what we have seen already in John's Gospel, why is Jesus the *only* way to the Father?
5. How can Jesus say that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father (v 9)?
6. In what ways are the words of Jesus and the miracles of Jesus in John's Gospel, evidence that God was doing his work through him (v 10-11)?

Application:

1. How can trusting in God help us when we are troubled and how can we increase or strengthen that trust?
2. How do Jesus words in v 2-3 encourage you? What difference should this make to your living and your dying?
3. What are the implications of v 6 for a) believers, and b) atheists and those of other faiths?

Pray:

- For those known to us who are troubled.
- For those known to us who are not yet Christians.
- For faith to believe the promises of Jesus.

Sermon Notes:

Study 13: I Am the True Vine

John 15 v 1-17

Context:

So, after our long exploration of John's Gospel we arrive at the seventh and final 'I Am' saying of Jesus. Jesus is still sharing the last supper with his disciples (which started back in chapter 13) and here he appeals to them to stay connected to him in order to show themselves to truly be his disciples. Once again, he uses an agricultural image which was very familiar to them, but also had significant connections to the Old Testament, namely, the vine.

Observation:

1. Who is Jesus and who is the Father in v 1?
2. What does the Father do in v 2?
3. Why are the disciples already clean (v 3)?
4. How does a vine branch bear fruit and how do the disciples bear fruit (v 4-5)?
5. What happens to branches/people that do not remain connected to the vine/Jesus (v 6)?
6. How does Jesus say we remain connected to him and what will be the result (v 7)?
7. What will be the triple result of these answered prayers (v 8)?
8. With what standard or quality of love does Jesus love us (v 9)?
9. How do we show that we are remaining in his love (v 10)?
10. Why has Jesus told them (and us) these things (v 11)?
11. What is Jesus' primary command to us and what is the standard (v 12-13, see also v 17)?
12. How can Jesus call his disciples '*friends*' rather than '*servants*' (v 15) and how do we show that we really are his friends (v 14)?
13. What does Jesus tell them in v 16?

Meaning:

1. Read Psalm 80:8-18 and Hosea 10:1-8. How do these verses help us understand what Jesus means when he says 'I Am the *True* Vine'?
2. Bearing good fruit that will last means obeying the commands of Jesus. What is the main flavour of this fruit, i.e. what is the primary command of Jesus? (see v 12-13 & 16-17)
3. How does bearing this specific fruit prove that we are Jesus' disciples (v 8)?
4. Staying connected to Jesus is the key to being able to bear this fruit. What is the specific way Jesus tells us we remain in him and he in us (v 7a)? How do the *words* of Jesus *specifically* and the Bible *generally* enable us to stay connected to Jesus and bear good fruit?
5. Jesus says he prunes (literally 'cleans') *fruitful* branches and, again, he does it through his word (v 2b-3). So, how does this work – how does Jesus prune/clean us through the Bible?
6. What does Jesus tell us will happen to people who do not bear his fruit/obey his commands/stay connected to him (v 2a & 6)? What does this mean? (see Matthew 3:7-12 for more clues).
7. Is Jesus telling us that he will give us *literally* anything we ask for (v 7 & 16b)? How do the contexts of these two verses help us understand what Jesus *actually* means?
8. What is it like to have the joy of Jesus in you (v 11)?
9. What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus rather than a servant (v 15)?

Application:

1. What does bearing the fruit of sacrificial love actually look like in practice? When have you shown this quality of love to others and when has it been shown to you?
2. What is your practice of Bible reading? What level of importance do you give it in your life? How can you improve/develop it so that it produces even more fruit in you?
3. What does it feel like to be pruned/cleaned by Jesus through his word and what is the result? Can you give any examples from your own life?
4. How should knowing the ultimate fate of those who reject Jesus spur us on to love them, pray for them and share Jesus with them?
5. What is the normal content of our prayer life? Do we pray enough for God to empower us to bear good fruit, specifically the fruit of sacrificial love or is our focus too much on other things?
6. How can I experience more of Jesus' joy in my life?
7. How can I enjoy my relationship as a friend of Jesus without losing my reverence and respect for him?

Pray:

- For a greater hunger to read the Bible.
- For God's enabling power to love as Jesus loves.
- For those who reject Jesus, that they may repent and come to know him.

Sermon Notes: