

the **'I AM'** sayings
the image of the invisible God

Last week we considered how extraordinary it was for Jesus to use such striking metaphors to describe himself. But within the practice of the Jewish faith, to use the phrase 'I AM' in the way he did was dangerous, confrontational and blasphemous. Why did Jesus do it? What was he saying?

We look at **Jesus the 'I AM'** - the image of the invisible God.

The inspiration for this theme has been the 'I AM' calligraphic artwork dedicated to God on Advent Sunday and displayed in St John Chapel.

what's needed?

- Bible
- about 30 mins of your time
- being up for a challenge

available on
www.stgileschurch.co.uk

Week 2 – Jesus the 'I AM'

Nowadays very few people bat an eyelid when someone knocks over their mug of tea or hammers their thumb and relieves the tension with 'O God' or 'O Christ'. Perhaps at one time it was the beginning of a prayer, but not now I suspect!

In Jesus' day, even mentioning the word YHWH (Yahweh) in everyday conversation was forbidden because this was the truly personal name of God. YHWH (the Hebrew consonants used throughout the Old Testament for the Divine Name) means 'I am who I am',

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek and added to the Greek New Testament, YHWH was translated using ego eimi ('it is I'), which is the same phrase used in the 'I AM' sayings by Jesus. The full translation of YHWH in Greek is ego eimi ho on ('I am the one who is).

Understanding all the language stuff isn't as important as grasping the

significance of what Jesus said. The point is Jesus is recorded as deliberately using the same 'I AM' formula of words as is used in the Old Testament for the most holy name of God. Consequently this created offence and produced claims of blasphemy from the Jewish authorities.

In each of the seven 'I AM' sayings considered last week, Jesus uses this same formula, adding a different metaphor to describe himself. However John also records Jesus using an equivalent 'I AM' formula in response to questions of his identity. When he approached the disciples walking on water and they were scared witless, Jesus says 'It is I; don't be afraid' (John 6.20)

Very important are the occasions when Jesus uses 'I AM' as a title, in an absolute, unqualified way. "Truly, Truly I say to you, before Abraham was I am"

Thinking, acting and praying:

Turn up John 18.1-11. Verses 5 and 6 contain the same 'I AM' formula used in the 7 sayings.

Think about verse 6:

- Why is the reaction of the soldiers and the officials so revealing?
- What is it that they 'heard' Jesus say when he said 'I am he' in verse 6?

Look up the 4 times Jesus uses 'I AM' as his name: John 8.24, 8.28, 8.58 and 13.9.

- What is your reaction – re-assured, mystified, inspired or what?

Christians have understood Jesus' deliberate use of 'I AM' as a clear disclosure of his divine identity. Jesus is one and the same as God who revealed his identity to Moses as 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3.14).

The images of light, shepherd, door, bread, vine etc help us to see the characteristics of God in Jesus' fully formed humanity, but the 'I AM' part of the sayings reveal Jesus' full divinity. If we believe that Jesus is God, Advent is vital for Christmas. Without Advent, Christmas can be little more than the birth of a wonderful human being. But recognising that Jesus the 'I AM' pre-existed, Christmas is when God, in Christ entered the world that he created.

'The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.' (John 1.14)

Jesus didn't hide his real identity despite the opposition. Think of a situation where you have been reluctant to say 'I am a Christian', and resolve to speak more openly of your identity this week.

Prayer Suggestion:

'I AM' has the meaning 'I am the one who existed eternally'. Find a picture of space and in your imagination go back to a time when it didn't exist, but Jesus did. Using some of the names for Christ, thank him for his timeless enduring existence.