

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

12-1-1973

Christ Made Astonishing Claims

Walter F. Specht
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Specht, Walter F., "Christ Made Astonishing Claims" (1973). *Faculty Publications*. 4137.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/4137>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Christ Made Astonishing Claims

Walter F. Specht

Amidst the moral depravity and spiritual decadence of modern America there beams a star of hope: All over the country there is springing up a new interest in and a new devotion to Jesus Christ. A spiritual revolution is taking place, led by young people who have become disillusioned with the established churches but who have found new hope and a new way of life as followers of Jesus.

Isn't such a movement a real sign of hope? Devotion to Christ and loyalty to Him are the very essence of being a Christian. "Salvation is to be found through him alone; for there is no one else in all the world, whose name God has given to men, by whom we can be saved." Acts 4:12, TEV.

Isn't this a fitting time for us to consider anew the far-reaching significance of Jesus Christ for the world, for Christianity and the church, and, above all, for our individual lives? Perhaps there is no better way to do this than to reflect on a few of the astounding claims Jesus made for Himself as recorded in the Gospel of John.

"I Am the Light of the World"

In the eighth chapter of John's Gospel we find Jesus in Jerusalem attending the Feast of Tabernacles, a joyful festival commemorating the wilderness wanderings of the Hebrews. During the seven days of this festival the Jews slept and ate in booths made from branches of trees to remind them of those days in the wilderness. At night the temple blazed with the light of four huge lampstands. These lamps, which stood in the Court of the Women and illuminated the entire

temple area, commemorated the pillar of fire that guided and illuminated the ancient Hebrews at night as they journeyed to Canaan. See Exodus 13:21, 22; Numbers 14:14. Those who followed that pillar moved toward the Promised Land; those who did not, perished in the wilderness.

It was in connection with this commemorative festival of joy that Jesus boldly declared, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12, RSV. These words are so enormous and breathtaking that it is little wonder the Pharisees were incensed to hear them coming from this humble carpenter of Nazareth.

No other great religious teacher has made such claims for himself. For example, consider Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.), the founder of Buddhism which has influenced perhaps half the human race. Men called him Buddha, "the enlightened one." He believed that he had a marvelous and beneficent doctrine to offer men, but he never countenanced or encouraged anyone to worship him. Rather he urged his followers not to think of him but to concentrate upon his teaching. "The one that hath seen the doctrine hath seen me," he said.

Confucius (551?-479 B.C.) the first and greatest of Chinese philosophers, with winsome humility declared: "How dare I lay claim to holiness or love? A man of endless craving, who never tires of teaching, I might be called, but nothing more." (*The Sayings of Confucius*, tr. Leonard Lyall, page 35.)

Finally, Mohammed (A.D. 570-632), the Arabian prophet of the

sixth century A.D. and the founder of Islam, laid claim to no special significance for himself. He said he was just a man like other men. An old tradition has him say: "Praise me not as Jesus the son of Mary is praised."

But Jesus declared: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." How tragic it is that too often men love the darkness of ignorance and sin rather than the light of Christ's righteousness.

"I Am the Bread of Life"

Jesus' declaration, "I am the light of the world" is only one of seven great "I AM" sayings in the Gospel of John. Earlier in his ministry after feeding the 5,000 He announced,

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever." John 6:35, 51, RSV.

When the children of Israel murmured for lack of food in the Sinai Peninsula, God promised them: "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you." Exodus 16:4. The next morning there lay on the ground small white morsels, and the people asked, "What is it?" Exodus 16:14, RSV. Moses told them that this was the bread God had provided, and so the people called it "manna," that is, "What is it?" It was "bread from heaven." See Nehemiah 9:15.

As the psalmist puts it in Psalm 78:23-25, RSV:

"He commanded the skies above,
and opened the doors of heaven;



Every wonderful claim He made about Himself is true.



and he rained down upon them
manna to eat,
and gave them the grain of
heaven.
Man ate of the bread of the angels;
he sent them food in abundance.”

It was widely held by the Jews that in the days of the Messiah, stores of manna would again fall from above. Far greater blessings were expected of the Messiah than the ancient Hebrews enjoyed. And now Jesus had come, He had fed 5,000 men “beside women and children” by the use of five barley loaves and a couple of fish. The people were wild with excitement. They set on foot a movement to crown Him king at once. Jesus had to end it by dismissing the crowd and ordering the disciples to cross the lake. See John 6:5-15; Matthew 14:13-22.

Then, the next day He told the people that He had something surpassing the manna to give them. Those who partook of the manna had all died, Jesus pointed out; but He had bread to offer that would give eternal life. He Himself was that bread; He would nourish their souls unto everlasting life. Jesus

Christ is the author of life. He came to give men life, abundant and eternal.

“I Am the Door”

The tenth chapter of John contains the allegory of the shepherd and the sheepfold. In expressing its meaning Jesus asserted: “I am the door of the sheep.” “I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” John 10:7, 9, RSV. Jesus is the door of access to the fold of God. If you want salvation, if you want membership in the divine community, Jesus is the door of entrance.

“I Am the Good Shepherd”

Not only is Christ the door of access to the sheepfold, He is also the Good Shepherd. “I am the good shepherd.” John 10:11. He is the Good Shepherd because He lays down His life for the sheep. Verse 11. He completely sacrifices Himself to meet the wants of the dependent, needy, hungry creatures that have been placed in His charge.

A second characteristic of the Good Shepherd is that He has an intimate knowledge of each member of His flock. “I know my own and my own know me.” John 10:14, RSV. He knows their needs, their idiosyncrasies, their trials, and their triumphs. And they know Him—His watchful and unselfish care, His unrelenting interest. They know they are in the keeping of One they can absolutely trust.

“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

Our next great “I AM” was uttered to Martha just after her brother Lazarus had died. Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me,

though he die, yet shall he live.” John 11:25, RSV. What a hope to poor souls stunned and agonized, lowering their dear ones into the dull, senseless earth! How futile to attempt further comment on a passage so majestic and unfathomable!

“I Am the Way”

We go now to that scene at the Last Supper. Jesus had announced that He was leaving. But He reassured the lonely disciples with the promise that His departure did not mean eternal separation. He would prepare a place for them and then return to take them with Him to His Father’s home. And He added, “You know the way where I am going.” John 14:4, RSV. But Thomas exclaimed: “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Verse 5, RSV.

In reply there came from Jesus this profound declaration: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” Verse 6, RSV. Jesus is the way to the Father because He is the truth and the life. There is no other way.

“I Am the Vine”

Later that evening, after they had left the upper room and were walking toward Gethsemane, Jesus called the disciples’ attention to a grapevine which they could see in the bright, full moonlight. He exclaimed, “I am the true vine.” “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:1, 5, RSV. Thus our Lord illustrated the inner fellowship the disciples were to have with Him. It was to be intimate and permanent. They were to recognize that they were utterly dependent upon Him for their spiritual existence.

In each of these seven great "I AM" sayings the definite article is used with the predicate, indicating that Jesus is each of these in the supreme and ultimate sense. Not only is Jesus Christ light, but He is *the* light. That is, He is the true and proper light, which alone deserves the name. He is not only bread, but *the* bread, the only real bread, the only living bread. He is not only life, but *the* life, the genuine life, the source of life. He is not only truth, but *the* truth in the supreme and ultimate sense.

The Great "I Am"

But in addition to these "I AM" sayings where a predicate is expressed, Jesus also referred to Himself simply as "I AM." In John 8:56 He declared that Abraham was overjoyed at the hope of the coming Messiah. "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad." To which the Jews replied that He was not even fifty years old, and yet, they asked, Have you seen Abraham? Then came Jesus' profound statement (verse 58), "Before Abraham was, I am." That is, "Before Abraham came into existence, or was born, I AM." In these words Jesus identified Himself with the great "I AM" of the Old Testament.

When Moses was called to be the instrument through whom God would deliver the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery, this 80-year-old shepherd tried to make excuses. Among other things he asked, "If I go to the Israelites and tell them that the God of their forefathers has sent me to them, and they ask me his name, what shall I say?" Exodus 3:13, NEB. "God answered, I AM; that is who I am. Tell them that I AM has sent you to them." Verse 14, NEB.

God is. He has the ground of His

being within Himself. *I AM* means an eternal presence. *I AM* means that God is the Eternal One, the Self-Existent One, the Self-Sufficient One. All other beings owe their existence to Him.

In the Old Testament the phrase "I am he" also occurs to express God's claim to exclusiveness. In Deuteronomy 32:39, for instance, are the words, "See now that I, even I, am he"; and in Isaiah 48:12 God says, "I am the first, and I am the last." *I AM* is then a claim also to exclusiveness. *I AM* and there is no god beside Me. *I AM* god alone. *I AM* designates all that distinguishes God as God from false deities. *I AM* means that God has had the first word and that He will have the final word.

When our Lord designated Himself as the *I AM*, He implied that He has the grounds of His own being within Himself. He implied that He stands outside the range of temporal relations—that He is superior to time. He is not only above time, but king of time. *I AM* asserts his transcendent authority. To believe in Him and to accept Him as Saviour and Lord is our only hope to escape from the tyranny of death.

Jesus frankly told the unbelieving Pharisees: "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." John 8:23, 24, RSV. The Pharisees belonged to the world of sinful, rebellious mankind, alienated from God and mobilized in defiance of the divine purposes. They were from below, the world order controlled by Satan which stands at enmity with God and Christ. Jesus came from above, the sphere of the Holy God. Unless men and women place

their faith in Jesus Christ there is no hope. They will die in their sins.

The death to which Jesus here referred is not ordinary physical death. He was referring to a doom beyond earthly existence; to that ultimate death described as perishing and as the second death. It was to this death that He referred when He said, "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." John 11:26, RSV. Or, "If any one keeps my word, he will never see death." John 8:51, RSV. And so Jesus plainly told the Pharisees, "You will die in your sins unless you believe that I am." (The word "he" in this verse is supplied.)

What kind of faith does Jesus here demand? A faith that sees in Him merely a great ethical teacher, or an unusual performer of miracles, or even an outstanding prophet is not sufficient. Jesus wants to go much farther. He wants us to see the Father in Him and to love and worship Him too.

He came to give us a concrete picture of what God the Father is like. "I and the Father are one," He declared. John 10:30, RSV. Father and Son are so closely united in character, in purpose, in work that Jesus could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9, RSV. "Believe me," He declared, "that I am in the Father and the Father in me." John 14:11, RSV.

Jesus' words and acts were a revelation of the great heart of His Father with whom He is one. So, looking to Jesus, we can say with confidence that God is for us. For He is what God is. This is how God feels toward us. This is how He spends His life in sacrificial giving. Can we not then stretch our hands in faith to Jesus and exclaim with Thomas: "My Lord and my God"? □