

Water and Light
Chapter 25, pages 293-295 (John 7-8)

In the Gospel of John there are seven “I am” sayings. Seven is the number of perfection and is important both in the Gospel and in the book of Revelation. The seven “I am” sayings are:

I am the bread of life - 6:35

I am the light of the world – 8:12

I am the gate for the sheep – 10:7

I am the good shepherd – 10:11

I am the resurrection and the life – 11:25

I am the way, and the truth, and the life – 14:6

I am the true vine – 15:1

“I am” is the name of Israel’s God – Exodus 3:14

John 7:11-15, 25-31, 37-43 – pages 293-294

“The festival” here is the festival of booths or tabernacles, in Hebrew *Sukkot*. This is a fall festival, occurring September 19-25 in 2013. It is one of three pilgrimage festivals. *Sukkot* commemorates the time of wandering in the wilderness, according to Leviticus 23:42-43. Exodus 23:16 describes it as a celebration of the harvest. Like some other Jewish holidays, there is both a historical and an agricultural significance to *Sukkot*. At the time of Jesus there was a strong emphasis on water. “For seven days water was carried in a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple as a reminder of the water from the rock in the desert (Num 20:2-13) and as a symbol of hope for the coming messianic deliverance (Isa 12:3).”¹

Our excerpt begins with popular discussion about whether Jesus is a positive or negative influence. Further speculation concerns the fact that Jesus teaches openly and is not molested by the authorities, suggesting that they may actually think he is the Messiah. The Gospel writer enjoys a little joke with the readers when he has the crowd say, “But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” Where Jesus “is from” is a theme throughout the Gospel; only Jesus really knows where he is from—he is “from above.” Other characters speculate about geography, which is completely beside the point. Echoing John 3,

¹ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., Annotations to the Gospel of John, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed., 2001, NT 161.

some people comment that the signs (miracles) that Jesus does lend credence to his being the Messiah.

Picking up on the theme of water (remember the scene at the well with the Samaritan woman?) Jesus declares, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” Actually, “the Scripture” says only that the thirsty should come and drink the water that God provides: Isaiah 55:1. Not until Jesus gives the Holy Spirit will there be rivers of living water from within believers. The connection of water with the Spirit of God is already present in Isaiah 44:3-4 and is an important symbol in the Gospel of John.

Jesus’s claims again raise questions about who he is. At this point someone points out that Jesus is “from” Galilee, whereas the Messiah is supposed to come from Bethlehem, according to Micah 5:2. Scholars are undecided as to whether the author of John, who does not include a story about Jesus’s birth, did not know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, or whether the author is again making a joke at the expense of those who claim to “know” where Jesus “is from.” Is the author winking at the readers as if to say, “we know where Jesus was really born!” **Which do you think is going on here?**

Although this passage is not literally an example of an “I am” saying, Jesus is nevertheless making the claim to be the source of the water that gives life—the water that he offered to the Samaritan woman (page 271).

John 8:12-14, 21-24, 30-31, 51-59, pages 294-295

The eighth chapter of John is long and consists mostly of arguments between Jesus, the religious leaders, and members of the crowd. Again and again, Jesus and those with whom he argues talk past one another. In our excerpt Jesus claims to be “the light of the world.” This recalls the prologue to the Gospel (page 255). The Pharisees object that Jesus cannot serve as his own witness, but the Gospel writer has already established the truth of Jesus’s claim in the very first verses. Again the issue is where Jesus comes from and where he is going.

When Jesus says that he will “go away,” the leaders think that he is threatening suicide, but they cannot understand Jesus because he is “from above” and they are “from below.”

March 3, 2013

What is needed in order to understand the truth is to put trust in Jesus. To those Jews who believed in him Jesus promised the freedom that comes only from the truth. But the truth comes only with trust; it cannot be known objectively.

Jesus has claimed to be the source of real life and the source of truth. His final claim in this section is that the life given to those who give themselves completely over to him “will never see death.” This leads into the story of Lazarus, which we will read next week. But to Jesus’s stubborn contemporaries it means only that Jesus is demon-possessed.

Reflections on Christian maturity

Sometimes we speak as though faith and knowledge were opposites: “Well, I just don’t know whether he’s telling the truth or not, so I will just have to take it on faith.” The Gospel of John insists that when it comes to God, there is no knowledge without faith. By reading the Bible we can “know” that Jesus lived and taught certain things and died on the cross and was raised to life. But that information is worthless to us unless we put our trust in Jesus, receive the forgiveness available because of the cross, and put our hope in the life Jesus gives now and even after physical death.

This is also true of our growth as followers. The Bible gives us the information that God will provide for us. But we will never “know” this until we give back to God money that we are afraid that we can’t afford and experience God’s provision.

The Bible tells us that we cannot hide from God and that real freedom is found in coming clean before God and before the Christian community. But we don’t “know” this if we choose to wear our carefully constructed mask to protect ourselves from being seen as we really are. It’s the difference between “knowing about” God’s faithfulness and power and knowing God by experience.

What are some other examples of the difference you have found in your walk with Christ between having information and really knowing?