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“ I Am …” (Nov 1957)

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We, as God’s people, delight to think about the seven “I am’s” of the Lord Jesus Christ found in the Gospel by John. How it thrills our hearts to contemplate Him as the Living Bread which came down from heaven, as the Light of the World, as the Door of Salvation, as the Resurrection and the Life, as the Good Shepherd Who gave His life for the sheep, and as the True Vine in Whom we must abide in order to bear fruit!

Our subject, however, is not the “I am’s” of Christ, but those of His great servant, the Apostle Paul who said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). The first of this series to which your attention is called might be entitled

The “I Am” of Salvation

In seeking to comfort the storm-tossed sailors, the Apostle Paul said, “God, Whose I am, and Whom I serve” (Acts 27:23). Before the Lord had saved him, he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an injurious person (1 Tim. 1:13). He, although very religious and well educated as a disciple of the illustrous Gamaliel, consented to the death of Stephen, and made havoc of the Church, entering every house and haling men and women committed them to prison (Acts 8:1-3). In this he thought that he was doing God’s service. Some years later, when speaking before Festus and Agrippa, he thus reviewed his past: “Which things I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priest; and when they

were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Acts 26:10-11). He, without doubt, was one of those who disputed with Stephen, and later held the clothes of the men who stoned to death the first Christian martyr. Moreover, he was on his way to Damascus to persecute other saints when God spoke to him, for we read, "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2).

As he journeyed suddenly there shone a great light from heaven, "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:3-5). Being thus brought face to face with the risen and exalted Christ, he would see himself as a poor guilty sinner fighting against the claims of the Lord Jesus. He was, consequently, subdued, filled with repentance, and yielding himself wholeheartedly to Christ, asked, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He was now willing to do and die for the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that he now belonged to the Lord, and that he could sincerely say, "God, Whose I am, and Whom I serve." Moreover, he readily learned

The “I Am” of Identification

Let us observe this fact in his statement, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). There were others besides the two thieves crucified with Christ, Saul of Tarsus and many others were also thus identified along with the Lord. Paul soon learned that he had died with Christ, was buried with Christ, and was to walk in newness of life (Rom. 3-5). His desire now was to live for the One Who loved him. Paul believed that, “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). Therefore, he could say, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14). All who are saved can look back to the cross and say, “It was there I died in the person of my Substitute.”

We are to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:11). The third and the fourth “I am” in this series are found in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Let us look at them.

The “I Am” of Indebtedness

“I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise” (1:14). The Apostle also suggests here

The “I Am” of Readiness

“So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome” (1:15). To both of these statements he added, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of

Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (1:16). He declared himself a debtor, yea, and more than a debtor, a burdened one, for his heart was burdened for the lost. Since the Lord had entrusted him with the gospel, he felt himself deeply in debt to humanity. He had been placed, by the risen Lord, under obligation to all men; accordingly, he affirms, "So, as much as in me is (that is, with everything that I have in the way of talent or strength), I am ready to preach the gospel." We are exhorted by Peter to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear. Paul was ready, willing, waiting, obedient, clean, and near to the Lord. Such were the attitudes of all of God's servants: of Joseph (Gen. 37:13), of Moses (Ex. 3:5), of Samuel (2 Sam. 3:8), of Isaiah (Isa. 6:8), and also of Jehovah's Perfect Servant, the Lord Jesus. Paul also declared, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (1 Cor. 9:16-17). Accordingly, he fully preached the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem even unto Rome. What a large territory! How he strove to preach the gospel where Christ had not been named lest he should build on another man's foundation! He preached at Rome, and also had a great desire to preach in Spain where some think that he did. How he tried to discharge his debt! If we had more of the compassion of Christ, more of the spirit of Paul, how much we could accomplish. Paul was a courageous soul, he preached the gospel knowing that it was the dynamite of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Let us look at another of the "I am's" in this list.

The “I Am” of Humility

We esteem the Apostle so highly for his work’s sake that we find it difficult to believe his statement, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God” (1 Cor. 15:9). Nevertheless, we value his appraisal of himself and of his work. When he spoke of himself as a sinner, he was the chief of sinners; when he spoke of himself as a saint, he was the least of all saints; and, here, when he speaks of himself as an apostle, he is the least of them all. It was with this humility of spirit that he served the Lord.

The “I Am” of Spiritual State

In this same passage the Apostle writes, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10). Some one has said, “I am not what I was, I am not what I should be, I am not what I would be, I am not what I could be, but by the grace of God, I am what I am.” How Paul revelled in God’s grace! He said, “The grace of God was exceeding abundant” (1 Tim. 1:14), for he, as well as we, had received abundance of grace (Rom. 5:17). His spiritual condition, although he could have wished it to be stronger and more perfect, had been developed under the grace of God.

The “I Am” of Conviction

We shall now consider the sixth salient point before us. Again the Apostle writes for our learning, “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which

is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38). What a persuasion; The Apostle was a satisfied man, and he entered into the triumph of Christ. Nothing in Time or Eternity could separate him from the love of God; the eternal relationship between them was the result of an indissoluble bond.

The "I Am" of Resignation

On the very eve of his martyrdom, the Apostle wrote to Timothy, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8). The Apostle, in his earlier ministry, had a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better (Phil. 1:23-24). Nevertheless, he realized that it was necessary that he continue in the flesh for the sake of his beloved children at Philippi. There were many things to do, and many things to suffer, before he could possibly finish his course with joy. Now these things had been done, and much had been endured, so he is ready to be offered as a drink-offering before the Lord. One flash of the executioner's sword, and Paul would finish his course. He had started well, gone on well, he would finish well, and he who bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, would receive an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus.

Oh, that we might be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "God, Whose I am, and Whom I serve;" "I am crucified with Christ;" "I am debtor;" "I am ready;" "I am not

ashamed of the gospel of Christ;" "By the grace of God I am what I am;" "I am persuaded;" and, eventually, "I am ready to be offered." May we, by the grace of God, emulate this great man.