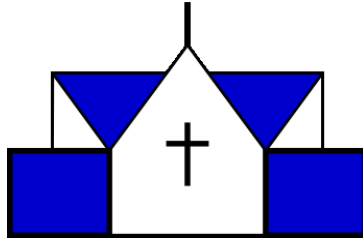


UPPER BEEDING BAPTIST CHURCH



HOME GROUP STUDIES

AUTUMN 2010

A series of studies from the Gospel of John
focussing on Jesus' statements

I AM

Our aims for this series of studies.

There are two main purposes behind this series of studies in the ‘I AM’ sayings of Jesus in John’s Gospel.

The first, and fundamental one, lies in the purpose that Jesus Himself had. He was presenting truth about Himself and His character, encouraging people to trust and follow Him. We can see how He meets people where they are, whatever their condition, and gives each individual good reason to follow Him. If anything holds us back from committing our lives fully to Jesus, these statements help to dispel our doubts and fears and draw us on to know Him better.

The second purpose is to show how Jesus’ life gives us an example that we can follow. Each of these ‘I AM’ statements is then linked to an incident in the narrative that illustrates what Jesus said, and shows us how we might follow His example in the way we live our Christian lives. It is by following His example that the quality of our lives will make a difference wherever God has placed us in society. We can ‘**become Jesus**’ to the people around us.

One important thing to note however is that Jesus says ‘I AM ...’

It is not that He offers us bread, or light, or life – He **IS** those things! What He offers is Himself,

not some gift, or degree of enlightenment. Everything is bound up in knowing Him, and experiencing a life in union with Him. We can only begin to follow His example and go on to serve others as He did when our life is totally bound up with His life.

Throughout the series therefore we will find ourselves challenged by the quality of our relationship with Jesus. The question will not be ‘How well are you following the example of Jesus (although we have to face up to that eventually!), but rather ‘How well do you know Jesus and live in a close relationship with Him?’ It would be a poor kind of bible study if there were no challenge to action however, and that will surely come as the weeks go by. The basic direction of the series is to help us know Jesus better and learn to live in union with Him. Action will follow!

An introduction to John's Gospel

John's Gospel was the last of the four to be written, probably around 70 AD, which is later than all of Paul's letters for example. Early Christian writers associated John with the city of Ephesus, and tradition suggests that John wrote the gospel while there. The Apostle had a very definite purpose in writing it. He puts it this way: '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 Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20 vv 30-31)

John selected his material carefully with the express intention of helping his readers to understand the true identity of Jesus. In fact around 90% of the material John uses is unique to his Gospel. On the other hand there is no narrative concerning Jesus' birth and childhood, nothing about the temptations, no record of His parables, not even anything about the appointment of the 12 disciples! But in every part of the book Jesus' deity shines through. John chooses the miracles (or 'signs' as he calls them) to reveal the power of His deity and the compassion of His humanity.

The key words of the book are 'life, light, and love'. Jesus is portrayed as coming to give a fuller, more abundant life to men and women; as the light that was in the world in conflict with its darkness; and the source of humanity's true life. John writes of Jesus as the one who sacrificed His life for the world as an expression of God's love.

As we read substantial sections of the Gospel, we should not therefore view it simply as a complete historical record of the life of Jesus. Nor is it a complete record of Jesus' teaching. It differs from the other three Gospels (called the Synoptic Gospels because of their similar material and approaches), but there is no conflict between them. John's approach to the stories, his language and even his written style are different. He writes as an eyewitness of the events, but also as one who has had an opportunity to reflect on them over a long period of time and make sense of their meaning.

The whole book breathes the air of a personal and powerful glimpse of Jesus – The Man who was God, God in the flesh. It was written to encourage us to believe in, trust, and follow Him. May these readings help you to do just that!

Suggestions for an approach to all these Home Group studies.

Focus on the passage.

Read right through the passage set for the occasion and invite people to respond to it immediately with some comment about a lesson they learn from it, or a vital truth they see in it. Try not to impose some kind of artificial order or questioning on the story, but allow God to speak directly to people through it. (It is an important element of a Home Group meeting to encourage everyone to participate with a comment of some kind so that all feel they belong to the group and have something to contribute.)

Invite responses to questions such as:

1. Imagine yourself as being on the scene. How would you have felt about what was going on?
2. What aspect of Jesus' character seems to stand out for you?
3. What situation, or human need, was Jesus responding to?
4. What might the disciples have learned from Jesus' actions and words?
5. How might Jesus' words have encouraged people to follow Him?
6. Is there any evidence that people might have misunderstood Him?
7. Do Jesus' words encourage you to trust Him in some fresh way?

Focus on relationships with Jesus.

1. What kind of person – or people – was Jesus reaching out to in this incident?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Jesus and others involved in the story?
3. Did anything change as a result of Jesus' words and actions?
4. How did Jesus improve the lives of those with whom He came into contact?
5. What did Jesus add to their lives?

Focus on your personal relationship with Jesus.

1. Are you aware of anything lacking in your spiritual experience?
2. Is your walk with Jesus satisfying – or has it grown dull and mechanical?
3. How might this story, and what it shows of Jesus, add to your joy of walking with Him?
4. How might life be changed for you if you knew Jesus better and walked more closely with Him?

Focus on how this might work out in practice.

1. In what way might the example of Jesus cause you to take action of some kind?
2. How might you make a difference to the lives of others as you follow the example of Jesus?
3. Are you prepared – seriously – to make this change in your life a priority?

In each study select the approach with which you are most comfortable and which will be helpful and productive for your own group.

September 12th

John 4 vv 1-42

Jesus encourages faith, bringing hope to those enmeshed in sin.

John 14 v 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

AIM. To help us to know and understand Jesus better and then lead others to put their faith and hope in him however dire their circumstances.

"Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way. That is why he so often says, 'Follow Me'."

Use the generally suggested approach to the studies and then come to these more specific questions.

1. Reflect on the kind of woman this was and how she might have been regarded by others in the community. Do you view her as a sexual predator, stealing women's husbands – or is she perhaps a vulnerable, serially-abused woman on the fringe of society?
2. How does Jesus awaken this woman's spiritual concern? (Notice how plainly Jesus declares who he is! v 26)
3. Do you feel that this woman becomes aware of her wrong-doing, and her conscience is touched? Should we expect that to happen as we talk about Jesus as Saviour?
4. How appropriate is it for us to challenge sin, and what kind of sins might we talk about as we speak to people?
5. Can "Jesus is Saviour and Lord" mean anything to people who are not aware of wrong-doing in their lives?
6. What does Jesus offer the woman that appeals to her? What will attract people to follow Jesus in our day and age?

In conclusion, read Psalm 38 together. Might the feelings of the Psalmist here reflect the experience of this woman in some way? Do you ever feel that way yourself?

It is wonderful to know that you are forgiven and accepted by Jesus in spite of everything. This woman's life was probably changed for ever as a result of this one conversation. As you speak about Jesus to others they too could find the way to the peace and satisfaction that He offers!

September 26th

John 6 vv 1-59

Jesus brings compassion to bear, meeting material and spiritual need.

John 6 v 35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

AIM. To appreciate for ourselves how Jesus meets our deepest needs and then learn how to deal with hunger and other needs in a compassionate way.

‘These are indeed dear and precious words, which it is not enough for us merely to know. We must turn them to account, and say, “Upon these words I will go to sleep at night and get up in the morning; leaning upon them I will sleep and wake, work and travel.” ‘ (Martin Luther)

Use the generally suggested approach to the studies and then come to these more specific questions.

1. This is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. Reflect on why that might be, and why it is so significant.
2. The Jews were steeped in the miracles of the Old Testament story – especially the story of the Exodus and the birth of their identity as a nation. Consider the connection between the events of Exodus 16 and Jesus’ statement in vv 30 – 33.
3. Does Jesus satisfy your soul? How does that happen? Talk honestly about your experience of knowing Jesus in this way.
4. Is there a hunger and thirst in society for knowing something better than just material satisfaction? What evidence might there be?
5. Should we be following Jesus’ example of helping to meet the material needs of the famine-stricken or others hit by natural disasters? How?
6. Consider one of the outcomes of this miracle (v 66). Should we continue helping people regardless of any outcomes?

In conclusion, take time to read Psalm 104 together. Consider the generosity of God and how He provides for and sustains all life. Add your thankfulness to this for the ways He has provided for you and spend time praising Him together.

October 10th

John 9 vv 1-41

Jesus brings sight and healing to those in darkness.

John 8 v 12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

AIM. To see beyond the physical aspect of sight and grasp the nature of the spiritual sight to which Jesus refers.

Jesus' manifesto in Luke 4 v 18 included specifically 'recovery of sight to the blind'. So, not surprisingly, miracles of healing blindness are recorded in the gospels more frequently than any other.

Use the generally suggested approach to the studies and then come to these more specific questions.

1. Look at 2 Corinthians 4 vv 4-6 and consider who really were the blind people in this story.
2. Reflect on the fact that the blind man had to respond to a command of Jesus by going away to wash his eyes. (v 7) This would not have been easy. Do you think his obedience was an outward expression of the faith he had in Jesus?
3. The blind man had a very simple story to tell (v 25). Have you a story to tell about how you have been 'called out of darkness into light' (1 Peter 2 v 9.) ?
4. Consider 1 John 1 vv 5-7 and the many references to 'Light'. What do you think it means to walk in the light?
5. Look at Revelation 3 vv 14-22 which is the Letter to the church in Laodicea. Why might that Church have been described as 'wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked' (v 17) ? Blind to what?
6. Is there any sense in which we might be blind to the reality of our situation and lifestyle?

In conclusion, take time to read Psalm 27 together, and consider what David might have meant when he wrote v 4. He is clearly thinking of an earthly experience. Have you ever caught a glimpse of 'The beauty of the Lord' ?

October 24th

John 10 vv 1-42

Jesus sets the pattern of true leadership, demonstrating that He is worth following.

John 10 v 11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

AIM. To grow in our understanding of Jesus as the compassionate leader and encourage that quality of leadership in the Church today.

There is no time lapse between the events of chapter 9 and the teaching of chapter 10. Jesus is still addressing the Pharisees in the presence of a crowd. (Look at the reaction in vv 19-21). Jesus is explicitly comparing the sacrificial nature of His leadership with that of the self-seeking Pharisees.

Use the generally suggested approach to the studies and then come to these more specific questions.

1. What is your idea of a good leader in the world today? Do you expect the same, or different qualities in the Church?
2. The Jews would have been familiar with the idea of the Shepherd-Leader. Look at Psalm 28 v 9; Psalm 78 vv 70-72; Isaiah 40 vv 10-11. If you have time read right through Ezekiel 34 where there is a fearful denunciation of bad, selfish, unloving leadership.
3. Pick out from John 10 as many qualities as you can of Jesus' leadership as the Good Shepherd. Contrast those with the qualities of false leadership seen in Ezekiel 34.
4. Jesus speaks of knowing His sheep – and being known by them. (v 14). Does this have implications for good leadership in the church? What might it mean in practice?
5. Read 1 Peter 5 vv 1-4 and reflect on this advice given to leaders by Peter. You might wish to refer back to Peter's re-commissioning by Jesus in John 21 vv 15-17.

In conclusion, take time to read Psalm 23 together. It pictures David's response to the Good Shepherd. How do you respond to loving and gracious leadership? How might this understanding of Jesus as the Good Shepherd encourage people to commit their lives to Him and follow Him?

November 7th

John 11 vv 1-44

Jesus confronts death and helps us deal with the realities of life and death.

John 11 v 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.

AIM. To help us talk honestly with one another and others about death, the bereaved, resurrection, and related matters.

Only three occasions are recorded in the Gospels where Jesus encounters a dead person. Nobody asks Him or expects Him to bring the person back to life. But on each occasion He does! In doing so each time He announces plainly His ultimate victory over death.

Use the generally suggested approach to the studies and then come to these more specific questions.

1. Without becoming maudlin or long-winded, try if you can to explain how you felt when someone close to you died. Can you put yourself in the shoes of Mary and Martha?
2. Would you have expected Jesus to be so deeply moved and weep on such an occasion? (vv 33-36)
3. Share any experiences of talking to or praying with someone who has lost a loved-one.
4. Why is death such a taboo subject in general conversation?
5. Have you ever thought about planning your own funeral service? What would be the nature of any songs and readings you would choose?
6. What do you believe about death and resurrection? Can you turn to parts of the Bible that encourage you in those beliefs?
7. What will you say as you stand alongside someone who has lost a loved-one who – as far as you could see – was not a Christian?

In conclusion, take time to read Psalm 22 together. It is a Messianic psalm pointing to the suffering and death of Christ and spoken by Jesus on the cross. It must also reflect some real experience of David – a moment of serious crisis when his life was in the balance and he poured out his deepest feelings to God. Never be afraid to speak to God out of your deepest emotions.

November 21st

John 15 v 1-16 v 4

Jesus shows the way to a fruitful and satisfying life through union with Himself.

John 15 v 1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

AIM To help us understand the nature of our union with Christ, along with 'pruning' our lives and the fruit-bearing that results from it.

The image of Israel as a vine was well known to the Jews (Isaiah 5 vv 1-7; Hosea 10 v 1 for example). So Jesus was claiming to be the 'True Israel' and that all those united with Him – 'In Him', as others express it – are also part of the new Israel, the people of God.

Use the generally suggested approach to the studies and then come to these more specific questions.

1. There are two types of cutting back, both mentioned here in v 2. First, cutting right off because a branch is utterly unproductive. It may be dead or diseased and adversely affect the growth of the vine. Second, pruning that shortens a productive branch in order to maximise the fruit-bearing capacity. Reflect on each of these as ways God, the Gardener, may deal with people. Can you give examples from your personal experience?
2. God's aim is to make the church, and individuals in it, productive. Look at Galatians 5 vv 22-24 and 2 Peter 1 vv 5-8 and consider the fruit that He might want to develop.
3. Think about the difference between being a servant and a friend as Jesus describes them. (vv 13-17)
4. Being 'in Christ', or united with Christ in the Vine, defines who we are, the culture in which we live, the values we adopt and the purposes for life to which we adhere. Is this noticeable in your life – now?
5. Consider Jesus' warning in vv 18-19. Why might a fruitful Christian life cause such antagonism?

In conclusion, take time to read Psalm 80 together. This is a lament for the sad condition in which Israel found itself at that time. It ends as a prayer for renewal – a revival in appreciating God and His goodness. It can also be read as a plea for revival in the Church right now!

Space for notes, dates, times and places of meetings etc.

Studies in John's Gospel for the Autumn of 2010

All the dates given are Sundays. Home Groups meet on different days in the week following these dates.

- September 12th John 4 vv 1-42
Jesus encourages faith, bringing hope to those enmeshed in sin.
I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.
- September 26th John 6 vv 1-59
Jesus brings compassion to bear, meeting material and spiritual need.
I am the Bread of Life
- October 10th John 9 vv 1-41
Jesus brings sight and healing to those in darkness.
I am the Light of the World
- October 24th
(Half Term week) John 10 vv 1-42
Jesus sets the pattern of true leadership, demonstrating that He is worth following.
I am the good shepherd.
- November 7th John 11 vv 1-44
Jesus confronts death and helps us deal with the realities of life and death.
I am the Resurrection and the Life
- November 21st John 15 v 1-16 v 4
Jesus shows the way to a fruitful and satisfying life through union with Himself.
I am the true vine
- December 13th Currently left free.
(School Term ends on Friday 17th December)