

"I am He"

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First Baptist Church
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Text: John 8:21-58
Title: "I am He"
Series: Who is Jesus?

Prayer:

*With Christ my Saviour and my God
May the words of my mouth
and the meditations of our hearts
be pleasing and acceptable to you
Oh Lord our Rock and our Redeemer
Amen*

Sermon:

The question began to haunt me
while in university,
studying Physics and Theoretical Mathematics.

I had freshly fallen in love with Jesus.
I say "freshly fallen in love"
because
there is a sense in which
as far back as I can remember
I have loved Him.

It was just that
during my 3rd year in university
something happened ...
there was a passion for Jesus
I had not known before.

It was an invigorating time in my life ...
filled with joy
and newness of life.

My fellow Physics and Math students could see it!!
Apparently it radiated from me.

So much so
 many asked if I could meet after class
 to explain why I was so alive.

In those afternoon and evening conversations
 my fellow students
 pressed me and hard!
 Why Jesus?
 Why love Jesus?
 What is so special about Jesus?
 What makes Jesus
 any more important than
 any other religious or
 philosophical figure?

One day
 the professor who was teaching us
 Thermodynamics [the study of heat and energy transfer]
 asked if he could meet with me!!
 I was one of three or four students
 he had "taken under his wing";
 he had been trying to get me
 a summer internship
 at the Institute of Plasma Physics
 in Berlin, Germany.

I shared with him
 what was happening in me ...
 and shared that I was wrestling with a possibility of
 leaving Physics
 to go to Seminary
 and prepare for
 the preaching ministry.

And he asked me -
 with all seriousness -
 "Why would you throw away your brains
 and your promising future
 to preach Jesus?"

Even then I knew
 there were a number of significant things
 that set Jesus apart.
 But thanks to my Sunday School up-bringing -
 through the Baptist General Conference -
 I knew there was one thing
 that put Jesus in a class all by Himself.

Jesus of Nazareth,
 son of Mary,
 is the Living God
 in human form.

Jesus is the Creator
 become a creature.

Or ...

At least that is what the Church claims.
 For centuries the Church
 has proclaimed
 that the God who made the world
 "came down" ... to live in the world ...
 as one of us.

That claim is what generated the
 intense theological controversy of the
 first three or four centuries of Church history.

That claim, and the attempt to unpack it,
 lays at the heart
 of all the so-called "ecumenical creeds".

The Nicene Creed for instance,
 says of Jesus
 that He is
 "God of God, light of light,
 Very God of Very God".

The First Assembly of the
 World Council of Churches
 meeting in Amsterdam in 1948
 found its unity in the affirmation
 "Jesus Christ
 is Savior and God".

But the question began to haunt me:
 did Jesus of Nazareth Himself
 ever make such a claim?
 Did He ever say that He is God?

So ... along with textbooks on Quantum Mechanics and
 Differential Equations I decided to read the New Testament with
 greater vigor.

As I read,
 it appeared to me that the writers of the various New
 Testament documents
 believed Jesus was Divinity in some form.

The Apostle John says so right up front
 "In the beginning was the Word,
 the Word was with God,
 the Word was God,
 ...
 the Word became flesh and dwelt among us".
 (John 1:1,14)

The Apostle Paul is just as forthright.
 As a science student, I was particularly drawn to his
 epistle to the Colossians.
 In it he says things like
 "Jesus is the image of the invisible God ...
 by Him and for Him all things were created ...
 He is before all things and in Him all
 things hold together ...
 In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily
 form." (Colossians 1:15-17, 2:9)

I was further taken by the fact that the writers of the New
 Testament gave to Jesus names and titles which only the God
 of the Old Testament had. For instance they called Jesus
 "the Holy One" and "Lord".

As I read the New Testament,
 I saw that Jesus performs deeds and functions
 which only the God of the Old Testament performs.

Jesus forgives sins!
 Jesus raises the dead!
 Jesus stills the ragging waters of the Sea of
 Galilee;
 And Jesus makes people's response to Him
 the basis of their eternal destination.

Further, I noticed that Jesus
 was worshipped,
 He was given the kind of
 praise and adoration which only the living
 God deserves.

He gives sight to a blind man and the man worships Him

I was especially impressed by the fact
 that when doubting Thomas falls at the feet of the
 Resurrected Jesus and cries out
 "my Lord and my God"
 Jesus does not rebuke him
 Jesus does not accuse him of the sins of idolatry
 or blasphemy
 Jesus welcomes Thomas' worship! (John 20:28)

But the question still haunted me:
 Did Jesus of Nazareth Himself ...
 the Carpenter from Galilee ...
 the flesh-and-blood human being whom other flesh
 and-blood human beings touched ...
 Did He Himself
 ever say anything remotely like
 "I am the living God?"

The question was intensified for me by
 the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar"
 Now the question sang
 in my soul [Darrell Johnson sings]
 "Jesus Christ
 Superstar
 Who are you
 What do you say you are?
 Jesus Christ
 Superstar
 Who are you
 What do you say you are?"
 Jesus Christ
 Superstar
 Who are you
 What do you say you are?"

This seemed to me to be so critical that I decided to re-read
 the four Gospels with that one question in mind.

To my good fortune
 I began with the Gospel according to John.
 As I had learned in a Baptist Sunday School
 that whereas
 Mark primarily focuses on Jesus' deeds
 and whereas
 Matthew primarily emphasizes Jesus'
 teaching especially about the Kingdom of God
 and whereas

Luke is primarily concerned to establish the
 historicity of the Jesus story
 and show how Jesus did what He did
 and taught what He taught
 (answer? through prayer and the Holy Spirit)

John's primarily concern is
 Jesus' own self-understanding,
 Who Jesus thinks He is.
 More than the other three evangelists
 John is interested in what the Nazarene
 has to say about Himself.

Now, as I read and re-read John
 I found myself especially intrigued
 with Chapters 7 and 8.

When I made my way through those chapters
 I felt as if I should take off my shoes for I was on
 Holy ground.

In these chapters Jesus makes enormously audacious claims about
 Himself.

Claims which caused
 the religious authorities to finally
 ask Jesus (John 8:25)
 "Who are you?"
 "Who do you think you are?" (John 8:53)

I noticed that John is careful
 to tell us his readers that
 those enormous claims were made
 during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2)

I set out to get my hands on all the resources I could find
 to better understand this Feast.

When I did,
 Jesus' words in John 7 and 8
 came alive in me.
 I should say,
 they exploded in me!

His words took on fresh meaning.
 And I found an
 answer to my question,
 which I offer you.

If I could preach just one sermon to the whole world, it would be one I now will preach.

There were three Feasts
 which every male adult living
 within 15 miles of Jerusalem
 was obliged to attend:
 Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Tabernacles was by far the most joyous.
 It was held in the Fall usually mid-October.

Jerusalem overflowed
 with hundreds of thousands of very happy pilgrims.

Those who came to the Feast
 would live in little huts or tents
 made of tree branches, which in Hebrew
 are called "sukkoth".

The worshippers did this as a way to recall
 the days when their ancestors lived in huts and tents
 as they made their way
 across the Sinai Desert
 from Egypt to the Promised Land.

The Feast of Tabernacles is extremely rich in
 symbolism and ritual and theology.
 There are three major components:
 (1) a water ceremony,
 (2) a light ceremony,
 and (3) a fundamental theological
 affirmation that is recited in the
 Festival liturgy.

(1) a water ceremony,
 (2) a light ceremony,
 and (3) a fundamental theological
 affirmation that is recited in the
 Festival liturgy.

The water ceremony, very dramatic
 recalls the fact
 that while traveling across the desert
 the ancestors found themselves without water.

On one occasion

God told Moses to go to a certain rock,
and strike it, ... promising that
water would flow out of it.

Moses did as commanded ... and
lo and behold there was water in abundance!
Rivers flowed!
Water from a rock!

The Feast recalls that miracle ...

and celebrates the fact that it was a sign
of the greater miracle:
the miracle of God pouring out of His Spirit
upon His people,
filling and flooding them with the Water of
Life.

It is during this water ceremony ... on the last and greatest
day of the Feast ... says John ...

That Jesus cries out above the noise,
"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
streams of living water will flow from within him."
(John7:37-38)

The light ceremony, also very impressive,
recalls the fact that

while traveling across the desert
the people did not lose their way ... God
guided them
with a pillar of fire by night
and a cloud of smoke by day.
The light ceremony celebrated the God Who guides ...
the God Who can guide because God is light.

It is during the light ceremony that

Jesus says ... John 8:12
"I am the light of the cosmos.
Whoever follows Me
will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of
life". (John 8:12)

Now I invite you to listen
 to Jesus speak about Himself
 related to
 the about the fundamental theological affirmation
 celebrated in the Festival Liturgy.

As I said, those who came to the Feast of Tabernacles
 would live in little huts or tents
 made of tree branches

And as said the worshippers did this
 as a way to recall the days when
 their ancestors lived in little huts and tents
 while making their way to the Promised Land

But the worshippers also did this
 as a way to recall that
 during those days
 the Living God choose to dwell among
 the people in a tent
 called the Tabernacle
 (Hence the name, Feast of Tabernacles)

After the exodus from Egypt,
 God had commanded Moses
 to raise funds from the Israelites
 saying,
 "Let them construct a sanctuary for me
 that I may dwell among them".
 (Exodus 25:8)
 "That I may dwell
 among them". Picture that.
 "That I may dwell
 among them".
 In Exodus
 we find this sanctuary, this Tabernacle
 described to the smallest detail.

It was to be the place where
 the Living God would meet the redeemed people.
 God says to Moses, Exodus 29:45
 "I will dwell among the children
 of Israel and be their God.
 They will know that I am Yahweh,
 the Lord their God,
 who brought them out of Egypt
 so that I might dwell among them;

I am Yahweh, the Lord their God."
(Exodus 29:45-46)

Thus as Israel traveled across the Sinai Desert
there was this glorious
and abiding sense of the Presence of God
surrounding
this Tent-Tabernacle.

Therefore, the central affirmation of
the Feast of Tabernacles
is the Presence of the Living God.
The Presence ... of the Living God.

The Feast celebrates God's gracious decision
to dwell among His people
and to manifest His Glory
to His people.

This fact was celebrated verbally
throughout the Festival Liturgy.

A number of Old Testament texts
played a significant part
in that Liturgy.

These Jewish Feasts all have their special Liturgy.
Just like we do.

If you come to the Christmas Eve service, which I hope you do,
we are going to read from Matthew 1 and 2 or Luke 1 and 2.

You are not going to get Deuteronomy or 1 Corinthians 15 on the
Resurrection. You are going to get a text prescribed for
Christmas. Hopefully, right?

Feast of Tabernacles also had prescribed texts.

Let me read some of these texts.

As I do, listen carefully to how God is spoken of and
how God speaks of Himself.

Here are some of the texts.

Deuteronomy 6:4, the fundamental creed of Israel:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Psalm 115:9-11

"O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—
 he is their help and shield.
 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—
 he is their help and shield.
 You who fear him, trust in the LORD—
 he is their help and shield."

Did you hear the recurring pronoun "He"?
 Three times: He, He, He

Psalm 46, 50 and 81 were sung during the Feast.

Note particularly Psalm 46:4-5, 10:

"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
 the holy place where the Most High dwells.
 God is within her, she will not fall;
 God will help her at break of day.
 Be still, and know that I am God;
 I will be exalted among the nations,
 I will be exalted in the earth."

Did you hear the recurring pronoun "I"?
 Three times: I, I, I

Of most significant importance was that portions of Isaiah 40-55
 were also read throughout the service. Listen.

Isaiah 41:4

"I, the LORD - with the first of them
 and with the last - I am he."

Isaiah 43:10-11

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD,
 "and my servant whom I have chosen,
 so that you may know and believe me
 and understand that I am he.
 Before me no god was formed,
 nor will there be one after me.
 I, even I, am the LORD,
 and apart from me there is no saviour."

Isaiah 46:4

Even to your old age and gray hairs
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.
 I have made you and I will carry you;
 I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Did you hear the
 recurring combination of the pronoun
 "He" and "I"
 in the phrase "I am He"?

Now, let me give a little foreign language lesson.

The Hebrew word fo "I" is "Ani".
 The Hebrew word for "He" is "Hu".
 The Hebrew for "I (am) He" is "Ani Hu".

Will you say the words with me?
 "Ani Hu".
 Again please.
 "Ani Hu".

Now, when the Hebrew Old Testament
 was translated into Greek
 the translators uniformly rendered
 "Ani Hu"
 by the Greek words "ego eimi".

Ordinarily "ego emi"
 would be translated
 "I, I am",
 or only, "I Am".

But because of
 the "Ani Hu" - "ego emi" connection,
 most translations
 rendered "ego eimi" as "I Am He".

Will you say the words with me?
 "I Am He".
 Again please.
 "I Am He".

Now, here is the point of all this data.
 It is the single most important piece of data
 I can ever pass on to you.

When we grasp it
 we finally "hear" who Jesus thinks He is.

On the Sabbath of the Feast of Tabernacles
 the Levitical priests
 sung the so-called "Song of Moses"
 recorded in Deuteronomy 32.

The highpoint of that song
 is verse 39 where we hear God speak:

"See now that I myself am He!
 There is no god besides me.
 I put to death and I bring to life"

The Hebrew
 for "I, I am He"
 is "Ani, Ani Hu".
 The Greek is
 "ego, ego eimi"
 "I, I am He"

According to the German scholar, Ethelbert Stauffer
 by the first century
 those little pronouns, Ani Hu or I He, had become
 "the all-inclusive summary
 of God's self-revelatory declaration
 in the ritual of the Feast Of Tabernacles"
 (Ethelbert Stauffer,
 Jesus and His Story, p177)

I'll say that again
 by the first century
 those little pronouns, had become
 "the all-inclusive summary
 of God's self-revelatory declaration
 in the ritual of the Feast Of Tabernacles"

The great Rabbi Hillel the Elder
 used to say
 in reference to this Feast

"When Ani is here,
 all is here.
 When Ani is not here,
 who then is here?"

At one point during the Feast
 a choir of Priests
 would sing at the altar
 "God is in His Temple."

Then, a Priest
 singing God's word would respond:
 "Be still
 and know that I am God."

Then the choir of Priests would chant
 "Ani, Ani Hu - Ani, Ani Hu"
 "Ego, Ego eimi - Ego, Ego eimi"
 "I, I Am He - I, I Am He"
 "Ani, Ani Hu - Ani, Ani Hu"

On and on and on ...

Thus, at the Feast of Tabernacles
 along with the images of water and light
 the words
 "Ani, Ani Hu"
 "Ego, Ego eimi",
 "I, I Am", "I Am He"
 were re-verberating
 in the minds and hearts
 of the Jewish worshippers
 as they anticipated
 that any moment now
 the Living God would show up

Now we are ready
 to hear Jesus of Nazareth
 speak for Himself.

John tells us that after
 Jesus made the claim "I am the Light of the world" (John
 8:12)
 the religious authorities engaged Him
 in an intense debate.
 Jesus says that He will soon be going away,
 and that they will search for Him
 and not find Him, and will end up dying in their
 sins.
 They discuss what all of this means.

Jesus says to them, (John 8:23)

"You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."

That in itself is a startling enough thing to say!

Then Jesus says .. listen (John 8:24)

"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins."

Did you hear Him? I/He

The authorities did ... loud and clear!

The Carpenter had just uttered those sacred pronouns of God's self-revelatory declaration ... and he has uttered them about Himself!

That is why they ask Him

Who are You?

They ask it in white-hot anger.

"Who are you Jesus ...

Come on man ... you've got to finish the sentence ... you can't leave it at I/He."

More debate ensues ...

Then Jesus says ... listen John 8:28

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man" ...

Son of Man was Jesus' favourite way of speaking of Himself ...

"lift up" refers to His being lifted up on the cross to die ...

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man,

then you will know that I am He [the one I claim to be]" (John 8:28)

Ego eimi. Ani Hu.

The very words by which Yahweh the Almighty, Yahweh the one and only, chooses to be known to Israel.

And the Man from Galilee,
 the Son of Mary,
 dares to say
 "unless you believe that I am He
 you will die in your sins ...
 When you have lifted Me up
 on the cross
 then you will realize
 that I am He."

The debate understandably intensifies!!
 Jesus is even accused of being possessed by a demon (John
 8:48,52)

Toward the end of the argument
 Jesus says ...
 "Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced
 that he would see My day,
 he saw it and was glad."

The authorities say to Him, probably with a cynical
 chuckle,
 "You are not yet fifty years old,
 and You have seen Abraham!" (John 8:57)

Then Jesus drives home the magnitude of
 His Tabernacle claim.
 Listen. John 8:58
 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered,
 "before Abraham was born, I am!"

Ego eimi, Ani Hu!

Note, not "before Abraham was, I was" ...
 but "before Abraham was, I am."

John tells us that immediately the authorities picked up stones
 to throw at Jesus.

Why?
 Why throw stones at Jesus?
 Why throw stones at the gentle Carpenter?
 Why throw stones at a Man who heals you?
 Why throw stones at a Man who loves the way no one ever had
 loved?

They had to thrown stones at him because
 right in the middle of the Feast that

celebrates the Living God
 dwelling among His people,
 Jesus of Nazareth
 says
 "I Am He."

A few months later,
 at the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukah,
 the authorities again
 take up stones to throw at Jesus.
 We read in John 10:31-32
 Jesus responds by saying
 "I showed you many good works
 from my Father;
 for which of these are
 you stoning Me?"

They answer,
 "For a good work
 we do not stone you, but
 for blasphemy;
 because You, a mere man,
 claim to be God." (John 10:33)

That is precisely what
 He had done.
 "I Am He."

Now, once I discovered this
 my eyes and ears were opened
 to a multitude of places
 [to other times and places]
 where Jesus says the same thing
 Let me give you just a few illustrations
 also found in the Gospel of John.

1. In the fourth Chapter of John
 Jesus is talking with a Samaritan woman at a well.
 They are discussing worship.
 She wants to know where the proper
 place to worship is: on the mountain in
 Samaria or in Jerusalem?

Jesus tells her that
 the place is not the issue:
 He says,

"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:21-24)

The woman likes what she is hearing
 but she is not sure about Jesus
 so she says

"I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming.
 When he comes, he will explain everything to us."
 (John 4:25)

Then Jesus says to her ... listen John 4:26
 "I who speak to you am he."

Is Jesus simply saying, "I am the Messiah"?
 I do not think so.

I think He is saying
 "I am He"

"Woman, you need not go to another place,
 for I am He, the very One
 you seek to worship."

2. In the sixth Chapter of John
 we find Jesus, after feeding the 5,000,
 walking on the water.

When the disciples first see Him
 they become very frightened (John 6:19)

Then Jesus says to them ... John 6:20

"I am He" (ego eimi)
 ["It is I; don't be afraid."]

Is Jesus simply saying, "Hey guys, it's OK
 don't worry,
 it's me, Jesus"?

I do not think so.
 They could see it was the Man they knew.

John is careful to tell us that
 this event took place during the Feast of Passover.
 During Passover one of the texts of Scripture
 read during that Feast
 was Isaiah 51:6-16.

There Isaiah recalls how God dried up
 the Red Sea so that the people could
 pass through, or as Isaiah puts
 it,

"cross over". Isaiah 51:10

The Isaiah text

exalts Yahweh, the great "I Am He"
 as the One who has control over the sea
 as Maker (Isaiah 51:13)
 and Lord over the sea (Isaiah
 51:10)

You can see then that what Jesus is saying to His disciples is
 so much grander.

He is saying

"You need not be afraid,
 I can control the seas, for
 I am He".

["Who is this
 that even the wind and waves
 obey Him?" (Mark 4:41)]

3. And then, in the eighteenth Chapter of the Gospel of John
 we find these little pronouns again.

But this time in a very solemn occasion
 in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Judas the betrayer has come with the Roman battalion
 and with the officers of the Temple.

John writes, (John 18:4-5)

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went
 out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said.

"Ego eimi"

Again, is Jesus simply saying,

"You have found Him ... I am the Nazarene"? No!

And John makes that clear in the next verses (John 18:6-8) ...

Listen

When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered.

Why?

Why draw back and fall to the ground?

Why fall to the ground before a Man they came to arrest?

Were they taken by His courage?

Were they overwhelmed with the moral innocence of the Man they came to throw in prison?

Or were those Jews so accustomed

to prostrate themselves immediately when they heard the Divine pronouns "I am He" that they responded without thinking?

I want to point out

that John is not the only Gospel writer to record Jesus' use of

"God's self-revelatory" pronouns.

Mark records two instances

where Jesus utters the words.

The first is in Mark 6:48-50

the walking on water event

We looked at in John 6.

"Do not be afraid, 'I Am He'."

... "he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

The other is in Mark 14:62,

during Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin.

The High Priest asks

"Are you the Messiah,
the Son of the Blessed One?"

Jesus replies ... Listen ...
 "I Am."

"the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."
 Mark 14:61-62

The Greek is ego eimi,
 the words we have been rendering
 as "I Am He".

Mark tells us that the High Priest
 tore his clothes
 saying

"Why do we need any more witnesses?"
 "You have heard the blasphemy.
 What do you think?" Mark 14:63-64

The vote was unanimous
 Jesus was guilty
 of using the Divine Pronouns
 in relation to Himself.

Given the strict monotheism of the first disciples
 and all the writers of the New Testament,
 you can imagine how Jesus' Tabernacle claim
 raised all kinds of
 serious theological struggles.

John, Peter, Paul,
 the author of Hebrews,
 strain the Greek language,
 grasp for analogies,
 search for philosophical categories
 to express the totally
 unprecedented and unexpected.

The wrestling continued way beyond
 the New Testament period.
 Council after Council met
 to try to come to terms with Jesus.

Out of all the wrestling emerged
 the two mysteries at the centre of the Christian faith
 (J.I. Packer)

The mystery of the plurality of Persons
 within the Godhead,
 leading to the doctrine of the Trinity;
 and the mystery of the unity of humanity and Divinity
 in the one person [Saviour],
 leading to the doctrine of the Two Natures,
 fully God, fully man
 [to the "fully human, fully God"
 affirmation]

Now a person can dismiss that as theological mumbo-jumbo if you
 want

 but what remains
 is the fact of what Jesus said at the Feast of
 Tabernacles [Jesus' Tabernacle claim].

Here I want to read a paragraph from C.S. Lewis, the British
 scholar from Oxford,

 It comes from his essay
 "What are we to Make of Jesus Christ?"
 (in God in the Dock)

Lewis writes:

 "If you had gone to Buddha and asked him,
 'Are you the Son of Brahman?'
 he would have said
 my son, you are still in the Vale of
 Illusion."

 If you had gone to Socrates and asked,
 'Are you Zeus?'
 he would have laughed at you.

 If you had gone to Mohammed and asked,
 'Are you Allah?'
 he would have first rent his clothes
 and then cut your head off.

 If you had asked Confucius,
 'Are you heaven?'
 I think he would probably replied,
 'remarks which are not in accordance
 with nature are in bad taste'."

But when the Temple authorities went to Jesus of Nazareth
 during the Feast of Tabernacles in AD 32 and asked,

"Who do you make yourself out to be?"
 Jesus replied,
 "Truly, truly, I say to you,
 before Abraham was born,
 I am." (John 8:58)
 "When you lift up the Son of Man
 then you will realize
 that I am He." (John 8:28)
 "Unless you believe that
 I am He you will die in your sins."
 (John 8:24)

The implications of all of this are literally endless ... and staggering. Let me point to three.

1. First, in light of Jesus' Tabernacle claim we now understand why He can make the other claims He makes.

If He is "I am He", the great "I am",
 then of course He can say
 "I am the Bread of Life"
 "I am the Resurrection and the Life"
 "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"

Of course He can say
 "Let anyone who is thirsty
 come to me and drink"

Of course He can say
 "I am the Light of the world"

Of course He can say
 "I am the Vine, you are the branches
 apart from Me
 you can do nothing"

Of course He can say to us
 that He is absolutely necessary
 for human life

This Man is the Ground of all our being
 without Him we simply cannot live.

2. Second, in light of Jesus' Tabernacle claim
 we can now appreciate why
 the rest of the New Testament puts Him at centre
 stage ...
 We can see why the New Testament puts Jesus at the centre
 of everything!

And we can understand why it is
 so critical what we decide what we are going to do
 with Him.

Given who He thinks He is
 He has every right to walk into our lives ... interrupt our
 plans ...
 and command us ...
 command us ...
 "Come to me,
 follow Me,
 loose your life for Me"

And given who He thinks He is
 we are crazy not to obey ...

We are crazy not to come,
 not to follow,
 not to loose are lives for Him.

Given who He thinks He is we see how irrational ...
 how just plain irrational it is
 for governments to operate without reference to Jesus.
 We see how irrational it is
 for corporations to operate without reference to
 Jesus.
 We see how irrational it is
 for universities, scholars to operate without
 reference to Jesus.

In light of His great Tabernacle claim
 we see why life is so miserable
 when we do not do it Jesus' way.

The only sensible, rational, logical, truly realistic thing to
 do is surrender to the Centre of Life.

In the C.S. Lewis essay
 from which I read a few moments ago,
 Lewis observes that

Jesus produced only three effects on those He met:
 "Hatred ... Terror ... and Adoration.
 There was no trace of people
 expressing mild approval."

Mild approval for the "I am He"!

If Jesus is in fact Who He thinks He is,
 then He is worthy
 of our impassioned worship ...

He is worthy
 of our impassioned love ...

He is worthy
 of our impassioned allegiance
 in every sector of life.

3. Third,
 in light of Jesus' Tabernacle claim
 we now understand
 why the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 is the greatest news
 anyone can ever hear.

For what event stands at the heart [centre] of the Gospel?
 The crucifixion, right?
 Jesus ... lifted up ...
 Jesus, arms out stretched, hands
 nailed to the cross!

But who is this Jesus?
 Who is this Man on the cross?
 Whose arms are stretched out?
 Whose hands are nailed to the cross?
 Whose blood ... whose blood ...
 Whose blood is dripping from that cross [to
 the ground]?

Those arms are the arms of God!
 Those hands are the hands of God!
 Those bleeding wounds are the wounds of God!

It is God who suffers there.
 It is the Creator who suffers there!

It is "I Am He" who becomes sin there!
 It is the great "I Am" who takes upon Himself
 the just punishment for the sins of the
 world.

It is "I Am He" who cries out
 "It is finished."

Everything that needs to be done
 about sin ... has been done.

"It is finished!"

Everything that needs to be done
 about my sin, your sin ... has been done.

God is satisfied ...
 God is satisfied with the sacrifice of this Man
 because this Man is God.

In light of Jesus' Tabernacle claim
 you can appreciate why
 my favourite hymn is
 Charles Wesley's "And Can It Be?"

"And can it be
 that I should gain
 an interest in the Saviour's blood?
 Died He for me,
 who caused His pain,
 for me who Him to death pursued?
 Amazing love, how can it be,
 that Thou my God shouldst die for me?"

God died for me?
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 A thousand times, Yes

At one of the most sacred moments in the religious life of
 Israel
 during the Feast of Tabernacles,
 when people were celebrating the Presence of the Living God
 Who uses the pronouns
 "Ani Hu", "I Am He",

Jesus of Nazareth stands up and says,
"Unless you believe that I AM He
you will die in your sins;
when you lift up the Son of Man
then you will know that I AM He;
before Abraham was born,
I AM."

That is why Thomas is not guilty of idolatry or blasphemy
when he worships Jesus, saying, "My Lord and my God".

And that is why I have not thrown away my brains to preach
Jesus!

Bless you Lord!