

THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS

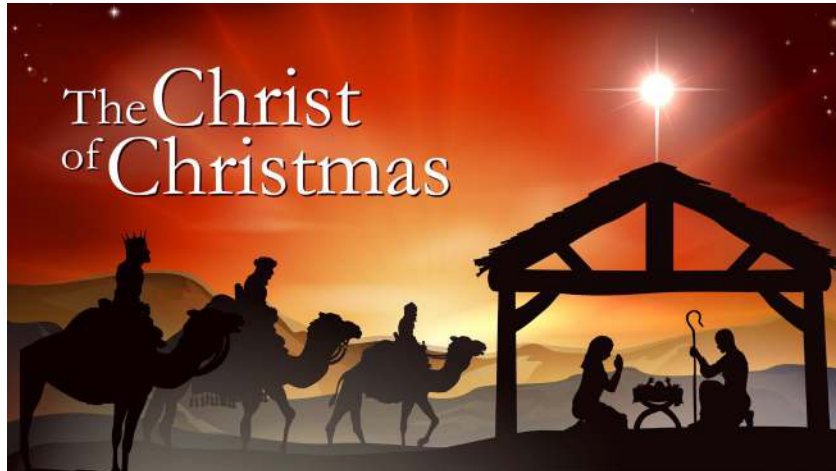
Expositional Study Of Christ's "I Am" Statements

John 10

Written By

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Christmas is such a joyous time, is it not? Many old and familiar Christmas carols attempt to catch and project that joy. *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, whose lyrics were written by Charles Wesley in 1739 and whose music was composed by Felix Mendelssohn in the mid-1800s, is a case in point. Consider the opening verse:

Hark! The herald-angels sing
 Glory to the newborn king;
 Peace on earth and mercy mild,
 God and sinners reconciled
 Joyful all ye nations rise,
 Join the triumph of the skies
 With the angelic host proclaim
 Christ is born in Bethlehem
 Hark! The herald-angels sing
 "Glory to the new-born king."¹

The joy of Christmas is directly related to the fact that the messianic, long-awaited Davidic king had been born, as prophesied in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:1-2). But, as we see from Christ's *I Am* statements in the gospel of John (Bread of Life, John 6:35; Light of the World, John 8:12, The I Am,

¹*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, Charles Wesley, 1739.

John 8:58, The Door, John 10:7; The Good Shepherd, John 10:11-14, The Resurrection of the Life, John 11:25, The Way, The Truth, and The Life, John 14:6, The True Vine, John 15), Jesus gives us much more to be happy about because He clearly identified himself upon His arrival. No doubt, He was, and is, the King the prophets foretold; however, with each of these powerful declarations Jesus leaves us with no doubt He was not an ordinary king, but THE King to end all kings.

Just what kind of king was/is Jesus? In John 6:35-51, identified Himself as *the bread of life*, the heavenly manna, which came down from heaven. All who partake of Him by faith will, according to Christ, live forever. *Question:* Have you partaken? In John 8:12ff and 9:1ff, He claimed He was/is *the light of the world*. Translated, He, and He alone, is the only true spiritual light. Other so-called spiritual lights are really darkness. Again, the person who comes to Him in faith will immediately find that His light will shine most brightly in their life for now and for all eternity. *Question:* Is Christ your light? In John 15, Jesus went to far as to claim that He was the true vine, the heavenly Father was the vinedresser, and that all those who come to Him in trusting faith that He is their King and Savior, are His branches called to produce spiritual fruit for the Father's glory. *Question:* Are you part of the vine called Jesus?

I told you Jesus was, according to His words, some kind of king. But there is more He had to say about Himself. In John 10, verses 1-10, He makes two further identifying claims. Let's read the text and see what He said exactly.

¹Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers. ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus said to them again, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10).

Who does Jesus say He is? He makes an implicit statement verses 1 through 6, while in verses 7 through 10 He offers an explicit one. So, just who did He say He was here in this divinely inspired narrative?

Jesus Is The Shepherd And The Door (John 10:1-10)

Before we look at this divine declaration, we must first remember the context. Jesus had just given a young man blind from birth brand new eyes just as the prophet Isaiah said the Messiah would do upon arrival (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7). Since the outright, verifiable miracle had occurred on the Sabbath, the Pharisees, who loved the Law of God, coupled with the oral law they said God had also given Moses on mount Sinai, took issue with Jesus. Never mind a desperate man locked in eternal darkness had received his sight. These arrogant religious men discarded the miraculous

proof and retreated to their fortress of skepticism as they verbally attacked the young man when he appeared before their makeshift tribunal. After they angrily expelled him from the Jewish synagogue or life for daring to believe in Jesus as the Christ, Jesus lovingly found the young man and told him that He was, in fact, the divine messianic Lord who had given him eyesight. He logically worshipped Jesus based on the evidence at hand, while the Pharisees had the prideful gall to ask Jesus, "Are we blind also?" (John 8:41). Jesus minced no words when He told them they were spiritually blind because they had rejected His messianic proof. He then contextually turned and gave them, and us, further details regarding His identity. His words were both judgmental and compassionate. Judgmental insofar as he judged the religious skeptics for their entrenched and illogical unbelief, and compassionate insofar as He still pointed them to the path to true spiritual life by making sure they knew exactly who He was.

Perhaps you are that skeptic tonight. Jesus, the lover of your soul, seeks to lead you from spiritual darkness to light by telling you in clear terms who He was and is. And just who is He?

Jesus Is The True Shepherd (John 10:1-6)

Every Jew who had studied the Old Testament understood that God Almighty was the true Shepherd of His people. Psalm 23, which is familiar to us today, echoes this sentiment. In Ezekiel 34, the prophet, who prophesied pre-siege of Jerusalem (593-583 B.C.; during the siege, 587-586 B.C., and post-siege and fall of Jerusalem, 586-571 B.C.), castigated the greedy religious leaders of the flock of Israel who failed miserably to care for the flock. They did everything they could to line their pockets and to push false teaching upon the sheep. No wonder the prophet took them to task. He also gave them a prophetic word: That He, Himself, would come and care for His sheep like a good Shepherd (Ezek. 34:10-16).

Tapping into this prophetic motif, Jesus, like Ezekiel, confronted the religious leaders again for their failure to follow God and care for the sheep. Some sins die hard, don't they? Selfish skepticism is one of those. Jesus accomplished this goal in John 10 by setting up a stark contrast just as Ezekiel had. First, Jesus declared . . .

There Are Many False Shepherds (John 10: 1, 8, 10a). Who were they? They were the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Christ's day, the men steeped in the Toranic and Oral Law. Originally, they had called themselves the *Chasidim*, or the pious ones. Later their opponents, the Sadducees, called them the *Perushim*, or the separated ones. It was a pejorative term, but it stuck and they embraced it wholeheartedly. They loved the form of religion and religious traditions and ornate ceremonies, but they denied its intrinsic power, and this misplaced love in the wrong object, by definition, caused them to be, in their arrogant minds, a cut above the lesser enlightened than they. To them Jesus made some scathing, jaw-dropping statements in order to cut through their blind skepticism:

¹Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. . . . ⁸ All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. . . . ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;

They should have known what Jesus just said, but according to verse 6, they didn't:

⁶ This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

Ever looked at one of those optical illusions which contains a hidden word or picture? Ever had trouble seeing it, while others saw it with no problem? For example, here is a stereogram of toast and eggs hidden on a slice of toast. Can you see them? I can't.



By way of analogy, we could posit that this is something akin to skepticism. It blinds you so you can't see the image before you. It takes special skill and proper technique to cut through the skepticism and see. The Pharisees lacked the eyesight to see the proof of Christ's identity because their skepticism kept them from seeing, no matter how well He defined Himself.

According to Jesus, these blind spiritual leaders were nothing more than false shepherds. They attacked the sheep, like the blind man who received new eyes, instead of listening to and learning from him. Further, as Jesus said, they weren't part of the fold of Israel at all, but attempted to rule and reign over the fold by force. Their endless legalistic laws were, no doubt their means to control the unsuspecting sheep, and they wasted no time stealing from the sheep. The blind man was a case in point. They attempted to steal his joy of being miraculously healed, his faith in the facts which pointed to Christ's divinity, and his desire to be part of the local synagogue.

Middle eastern shepherds knew how to protect their sheep near their towns. A walled structure some twelve feet high with one door, which was guarded by one man devoted to this job, held the sheep of *multiple* shepherds at night. To gain proper access to the fold, you had to come through the front door and past the guard. The Pharisees didn't do this. They climbed into the fold on their own power and started binding up all the unwary sheep with all their rules and regulations so they could profit from them in a monetary manner. These misguided, selfish men were nothing more than thieves and destroyers, fall shepherds, according to Christ. Our world, unfortunately, is still full of them. They are people, really spiritual skeptics, who reject Jesus as the Christ and who hold tightly to a form of religion of their own making. I this you? Realize Christ attempts this evening to arrest your attention so spiritual light can flood your soul.

Over against the false shepherds, Jesus makes an astonishing statement.

There Is Only One True Shepherd (John 10:2,4-6). Jesus will expand on this image in detail in John 10:11-21; however, we will leave that eye opening discussion for the Christmas of 2019. For our limited purposes this evening, we offer some salient observations about Christ's implicit words concerning Him being Israel and mankind's true spiritual Shepherd. First, we'll read the text again.

² But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, . . .

Jesus was the true shepherd because he came to Israel in the proper manner. He came to the door of the sheepfold and presented himself to the doorkeeper as the true shepherd. Who was the doorkeeper? John the Baptist who identified Jesus as the Messiah.

³² And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³ And I did not recognize Him, but He who

sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (John 1).

John knew that Jesus was the Messiah based on Holy Trinity playing a part in His baptism, and because Jesus fulfilled all the precise messianic prophecies. As the gatekeeper, all John had to do, other than see the trinity in action at the baptism of Jesus, was to consider that Jesus fulfilled all sixty-one ancient prophecies to the letter. He just had to talk to Jesus, remember the words of the prophets, and check them off as he moved down the list.

- From the tribe of Judah? Check (Genesis 49:10; Luke 3:23, 33).
- From the family line of Jesse? Check (Isaiah 11:1; Luke 3:23, 32).
- From the house of David? Check (Jeremiah 23:5; Matt. 1:1ff).
- Born in Bethlehem? Check (Micah. 5:1-2; Matthew 2:1).

As I've said before. Mathematically it is impossible that one man could happen fulfill all sixty-one exact prophecies. John McDowell's *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* quotes evidence which states that just to fulfill one of eight prophecies is a staggering one in ten to the seventeenth power.² That is one in 100,000,000,000,000,000. That's one in a quadrillion. Translated, that is never going to happen, and this is just with eight prophecies being fulfilled, not sixty-one. No wonder John knew who He was talking to as Jesus approached to gate of Israel.

How did the true shepherd speak? Read on and learn:

... and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.



Remember that Jewish shepherds typically herded their flocks into the safety of walled pens at night. With that in mind, you can't help but see Jesus walking into the fold and calling for His sheep *by name* to follow Him. Who are His sheep? All those, like the former blind man, who move from spiritual blindness to sight based on Christ's revelation to them. Yes, Jesus came into the fold of Israel as the true and prophesied shepherd and called lost sheep to come and follow Him.

- He called Matthew to be His sheep when He passed by his tax booth one day (Matthew 9).
- He called a paralytic lying on his bed to follow Him (Matthew 9:1ff).

²Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (San Bernardino: Campus Crusade For Christ, 1972), 175.

- He called Zacchaeus, the chief-tax collector in Israel to be His sheep as the short man climbed up in a tree to try and see Jesus as He passed by in a crowd (Luke 19:2).
- He called a former blind man who had new eyes to be His sheep (John 9).
- Perhaps tonight He is lovingly calling out to you too to follow Him.

Scholars of middle eastern ancient culture tells us that shepherds in the time of Christ had distinctive vocal calls they would employ to get the attention of their sheep. They also tell us that when they would entire a fold comprised of many sheep, sheep would always know and respond to the unique call of their shepherd, while rejecting all other calls. Had not the blind man with new eyes not rejected the call of the false shepherds? Indeed. Did he not only respond, by faith, to the special call of the true shepherd, Jesus. No doubt.

With that imagery in mind, I can't help but ask you, "Now that you have the powerful prophetic facts of who Jesus was and is, do you hear Him calling your name? Do you hear Him this Christmas summoning you to leave the fold of unbelief and join His fold of belief?" The best counsel I can give you is to follow Him for He is the true shepherd.

Turning from a graphic image of a shepherd, Jesus turns and shows how He relates to the door of the fold of sheep. In verses seven through ten, He makes quite another astonishing claim:

Jesus Is The True Door (John 10:7-10)

Let's read what He said and then offer some additional observations:

⁷ So Jesus said to them again, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. . . .⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Ah, Christ's words here are most enlightening, encouraging, and challenging.

One, He emphatically states, in Greek that He is perpetually the only door of this particular sheepfold. Once again, the first person personal pronoun, *ego*, followed by the first person singular verb to be, *eimi*, is the epitome of grammatical emphasis in the original language.

Εἶπεν οὖν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς: ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα τῶν προβάτων (John. 10:7).

The article "the" before the word "door" tells us that He is not "a door," but "the door," or the one and only door into the fold containing all of His sheep who believe in Him. Translated, there are no other spiritual or religious doors into this heavenly fold. Only one and His name is Jesus. If you sit here tonight thinking there are other doors, you need to reconsider your position.

Two, a door is an easy thing to walk through, is it not? How much effort does it take? All you have to do is believe that by moving a certain latch and pulling on a certain handle and you almost effortlessly walk into another domain and you shall. Such is an apt description of lost sheep who approach Jesus as the door of His sheepfold. You must believe that He is the true spiritual door who came to become your Shepherd and Savior and at that precise moment you trade the fold of spiritual death for spiritual life. Ah, but we get ahead of ourselves. For now, simply focus on what the Shepherd asks of you. He went to the cross and rose the third day from

the grave to give you the prospects of moving past Him as the door to His fold. He did all the hard work. How easy it is for you now to simply move, by faith, through this door of all doors. Will you?

Three, as Jesus said, whoever, and this includes Jews and Gentiles, enters His fold by coming through Him, the door, will immediately be delivered from God's wrath against sin. We know from other places in the book of John where Christ taught that not only does He take His new sheep out from under impending divine judgment, but He forgives their sin and gives them life eternal (John 3:16; 5:24-25). What about it? Have you let the Shepherd save you yet? What or who is keeping you from walking through Christ, the Door, to the true sheepfold of God? I'd say tonight is a perfect night to get moving through that threshold for awesome things await from the good hand of the Shepherd.

Four, those who enter Christ's fold find true pasture, which is nothing short of abundant living. What does this mean? It means they, for the first time in their lives find food which feeds their souls. Having been in Christ's sheepfold now for fifty-two years, I'd tell you the food from the Word of God is, well, the best I have ever eaten.

- It gives wisdom, knowledge, and understanding for the path of life.
- It brings encouragement when the winds of adversity blow.
- It gives hope when times seem hopeless.
- It tells you how God wants you to treat others.
- It tells you why you were created and what God wants you to do while you are here in this pasture.
- It tells you how to live like a man of God.
- It tells you how to live like a woman of God.
- It tells you how to respond to your parents.
- It tells you how to raise your children.
- It tells you how to perform at work.
- It tells you how to treat the less fortunate around you.
- It tells you how to respond with false shepherds mistreat you.
- It brings excitement as it teaches you what is in store when you, the sheep of God, one day walk into His presence.
- It, my friend, shows you how to *really* live life to the fullest, and it has got absolutely nothing to do with what all the false shepherds of our world tell us each day. Conversely, it has everything to do with knowing the true Shepherd, Jesus.



So, what is all the joy about this time of year? It's all about who Jesus really is. In a world chock-full of false shepherds, He is THE true Shepherd who waits to be your shepherd. In a world chock-full of false spiritual doors which lead nowhere, He is THE Door which leads to THE sheep-fold of all sheepfolds.

What, then, is the greatest thing which could happen to you this Christmas? For you to come to the fold, for you to say, "Lord, I hear you calling my name and I want to respond right now to you in simple faith, knowing that you will become my door to spiritual salvation and life."

And for we who are already in the sheepfold of Christ, don't you know it's a perfect time to tell him something like this, "Lord, thank you for being my Shepherd, and thank you for making me part of your sheepfold."

