

THE CHRIST OF CHRISTMAS

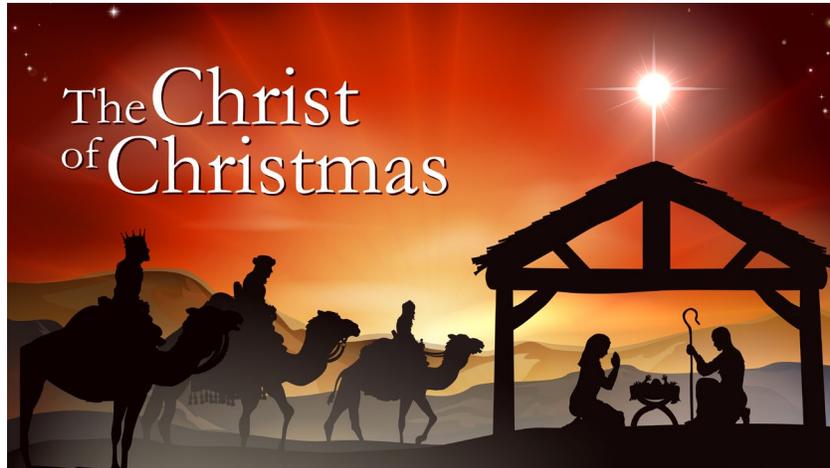
Expositional Study Of Christ's "I Am" Statements

John 9

Written By

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Who is Jesus Christ? Is this not the question of Christmas? Indeed. According to Christ's *I Am* statements recorded solely in the book of John, Jesus stated categorically that He was nothing short of the prophesied divine and human Messiah (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:1-2). In Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, He uttered His first *I Am* statement by equating Himself with the eternal bread of life (John 6:35-59). Sometime later, as He visited Jerusalem to observe the holy Feast of Tabernacles, He went one step further and declared to all the worshippers around Him that He was none other than the only eternal divine spiritual light of the world (John 8:12). This is what He said about Himself.

In order to prove He was both of these tremendous titles, Jesus performed jaw-dropping, over-the-top miracles. It was one thing to *state* these titles are true of yourself. It was quite another to *show* them to inexorably true by verifiable miracles which defied the natural function of earthly laws. How He went about this differed. Prior to claiming Himself as the bread of all spiritual life, He fed the 5,000. The point was well-taken: Since He could multiply a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish to feed the temporal hunger of thousands, He could easily feed people spiritual bread resulting in spiritual, eternal life. With His statement regarding Himself as the light of the world (John 8:12), Jesus reversed the validation order. Here, He creatively made the bold statement to the masses on the Temple mount, and then He debated them. It is not until chapter 9, He moved from *stating* His identity to *showing*, or proving, His identity by means of an off-the-charts miracle: the healing of man blind from birth.

Interestingly enough, this is the only time Jesus restated one of His *I Am* statements in another context. As I said, He claimed He was the light of the world in John 8 during the Feast of

Tabernacles; however, sometime later, as He walked around Jerusalem with the disciples, He made this claim a second time (John 9:5), and then He moved to prove its intrinsic truth by performing a miracle to beat all miracles (John 9:6-7). Since the entire chapter is devoted to unequivocally demonstrating that Jesus was, and is, the light of the world, it behooves us to investigate it further.

What will we discover as we move through this lengthy, colorful and instructive historical narrative? From a pragmatic, applicational perspective, one motif readily emerges:

The Light Of The World Desires To Be Your Light (John 9:1-41)

If anything, the Scriptures are quite clear that we are all born spiritually blind. Regarding our status, Paul is clear in his second letter to the Corinthians:

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4).

Our problem is not that we need more religious information so we can see, or more religious ritual to improve our eyesight. On the contrary, we are congenitally spiritually blind, lacking the capacity to see any spiritual light unless God draws toward His light, Jesus, the Christ.

In this unique story, we will encounter several characters who will either be protagonists or antagonists: the disciples, a blind man, the blind man's friends, neighbors, and family, as well as the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Israel. Through them, Jesus, in His providence, sought to shine His powerful spiritual light into their lives so they could move from spiritual darkness to light. The question which logically arises from this story will be wedded to the response of the various colorful characters. *How will they respond to Jesus as the light of the world?* Naturally, this question will become highly personal, *How will you respond to Jesus as the light of the world?* As we work our way through these verses, we will see how people, like you, will typically head in one of two directions concerning Christ's bold claim. One, they will either, by faith, embrace Him as the true spiritual light, or, two, they will push back hard against the evidence of Christ as *the* light of all spiritual lights. Which camp will you be in when we conclude our study of this divinely ordered process?

Since the passage is quite lengthy and our time is limited, I think the best way to study the passage is to move systematically through its three structural panels, while making pertinent and concise observations and applications along the way.

Panel One: Somewhere In Jerusalem (John 9:1-12)

As we have seen in our two prior studies, there is a definite structure to John's re-telling of this historical account. This structure is no accident, but is designed the Spirit of God working through John to make sure we fully understand the spiritual message of the story and are challenged to make a spiritual decision. How this is accomplished is through a series human *problems* followed by divine *provisions*. Located smack dab in the middle of all this vacillation is the *process* of how one man in particular slowly moved from spiritual darkness to spiritual light. By the literary device known as the law of proportion, this section, viz., John 9:13-34, forms the heart of the passage, while the climax, or zenith of the story is not reached until we arrive at the last

divine *provision* section in John 9:35-39. Please, the Spirit does not want you to get lost in the structural panels but to identify with them so you can see that you are spiritually blind and in need of new eyesight which only Jesus can grant. With this in mind, we turn now to study the import of the first panel.

You Have A Problem (John 9:1-2). From the opening verse, we learn several things.

One, Jesus placed Himself in proximity to the blind man. This tells us that He is the Good Shepherd who pursues the one lost sheep, you (Luke 15:4-6). It also tells us that Jesus purposefully looked for lives to radically change, lives which were hopeless and full of despair, and lives which were, and are, enshrouded in deep, dense spiritual darkness.

Two, we learn the blind man was congenitally blind. His blindness was not the result of some unfortunate accident, but came with his birth. He was, then, totally and completely blind, having never seen light before in his life. His world could not have been any darker or bleaker.

Three, the second verse reminds us, we who have embraced Jesus as the Light, that we are prone to be more caught up with posing intricate philosophical questions than we are in being God's light and bringing God's light to those who are spiritually blind we encounter as we move through a given day.

Four, the question of the disciples also demonstrates who we can pose misguided theological questions which don't dovetail with good theology. The disciples had adopted the false premise of the friends of Job that if someone had a physical malady it *must be* related to sin. They put an even finer point on their theological observation, too, by wondering if the blind man had sinned in the womb of his mother or if his parents had sinned somehow when he was in the womb. Did they visit a pagan temple? Did they eat pagan food? What?

Five, physical blindness is an apt metaphor, as I have noted, for spiritual blindness. For the Jews, God had placed a curse of double blindness on them for failing to listen to the voice of the prophets of old prior to the fall of the nation in 586 B.C. Isaiah gave the original divine curse, and both Matthew and John stated how this curse still applied to the nation in their day during the ministry of THE prophet Jesus (Matt. 13:13-15; John 12:37-43). This truth, coupled with Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 4, definitively demonstrates that none of us come into the world with spiritual vision. No, we are all congenitally spiritually blind. What is a spiritually blind person like? That is another series without a doubt. The short answer is he willfully and arrogantly suppresses God's gospel and the truth of God's existence (Rom. 1:16-18), choosing to worship anything and everything other than God (Rom. 1:19ff), and he runs after sinful things instead of toward spiritual things (Rom. 3). He calls spiritual darkness, light, and spiritual light, darkness so he can justify his dark actions and silence his conscience (Isa. 5:20), and he thinks the gospel and Christian truths are simply intellectual foolishness (1 Cor. 1:20-29).

This discussion moves me to ask you, Are you spiritually blind? Is spiritual blindness your problem? If so, Jesus is the solution as we see in the next movement of the inspired story.

God Has A Provision (John 9:3-7). Lovingly, Jesus corrected His disciples with these moving words:

³ Jesus answered, "*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*" ⁴ "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work." ⁵ "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world."

The blind beggar hadn't sinned somehow in the womb, nor had his parents sinned while the mother was pregnant. This man's blindness was divinely ordered by the providence of the Father

so that his healing could be used to validate the divinity and messiahship of Jesus. You might need to read that statement one more time. Yes, sometimes maladies are related to sin, and, in fact, all maladies are traced back to man's fall in the Garden. However, in some instances, God is doing a special work in the malady. After all, He is sovereign over the good and the bad.

Is sovereignty not the key word? Sovereignty means that God is in full control of the cosmos at all times. James Bordwine defines this magnificent word this way:

To say that God is sovereign is to say that His power is superior to every other form of expression of power; it is to say that God is completely free of external influences so that He does what he chooses, as He chooses, when He chooses.

Jonathan Edwards sheds more light from a different angle on this word:

“Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. God's sovereignty has ever appeared to me, a great part of his glory. It has often been my delight to approach God, and adore him as a sovereign God.

Why did Jonathan feel this way? Because if you believe in the sovereignty of God, then you understand that all that transpires in and on this ol' earth is part of His loving plan and purpose.

Consider a couple of verses which address God's sovereignty:

⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷ The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these” (Isa. 45).

Here's another enlightening portion of Scripture:

³⁷ Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? ³⁸ Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?” (Lamentations 3).

Because God is sovereign, then, trials like blindness are never pointless. Couched differently, just because your life is adverse doesn't mean you're in reverse! Your adversity, like the blind man's situation, just might be the divine method God will use to bring spiritual life and light to your life.

For the blind man, Jesus moved first to address his physical blindness in a miraculous, mind-numbing fashion. His method was most unusual.

⁶ When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, ⁷ and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing.

He who created us from the dust of the ground, used His spit and the dirt He gathered in His holy hand to make mudpacks, of all things, for the man's eyes. Perhaps He did this to highlight the double blindness of the Jew. Talk about a hopeless situation. Talk about a bizarre healing method. I have a question. If you were the blind man, would you have allowed this stranger to place these clay balls on your eyes? Would you have, then, walked down to the Pool of Siloam with the clay

balls affixed over your eyes for all to see? Would you have tried to negotiate the steps to get handfuls of water to wash the clay off or your eyes? This man did exactly what Jesus told him because he was desperate and he had faith in Christ's counsel.

Don't you know people laughed and snickered when they heard him coming with his cane and blobs of mud over his eyes? Don't you know he didn't care what they thought? He, by faith, did what Jesus commanded him, and he instantly went from having no sight and darkness to having sight and only light. What's missing in the text? His response when he could see people at the pool? I'm sure he didn't say nonchalantly, "Oh, this is really great. Wow. Wonderful." No, I'm sure He was jumping up and down and telling everyone as he threw his can and beggar's cup to the ground. He, for the first time in his life could see!

Let me ask you a question. Did the mudpacks designed by Jesus somehow magically give the blind man eyesight? No. His faith, coupled with Christ's power as the Lord of Light, is what gave him new eyes. Never forget this. Jesus, as the Light of the world, is in the business of coming to you in your blindness and telling you what you must do to gain spiritual eyesight. You must place your faith in Him.

How did the people respond to an outright miracle of God? They didn't immediately turn to Jesus, the Messiah. No, their response illustrates they had a spiritual problem called spiritual blindness. Perhaps you are in their camp. God has given you the light of revelation, but . . .

You Have A Problem (John 9:8-12). Neighbors who had known the blind man said "Isn't this the blind beggar?" They weren't totally convinced because his presence completely shook their worldview. They had never seen anything like this before. He had begged for so many years, nobody really paid him any real attention as they dropped a few shekels in his quivering cup. "Yea, I think it looks like him." Others concluded it must a body-double, a look-alike. Why? Because in their closed minds there was no way congenital blindness could be overcome, ever. What was their problem? It's called the blindness of skepticism. Are you suffering from the same type of blindness? No amount of facts and evidences will convince you, of all people that there is a living God who can give people physical and spiritual eyesight. Perhaps you need to reconsider your tenuous position.

How did the former blind man respond to their questions? He simply gave them the facts like Joe Friday of *Dragnet* fame (it's on old TV series from the sixties for those Millennials and Generation Zs among us). How did the skeptics respond? Like skeptics,

¹⁰ So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?"

"Hey, buddy, tell us how this happened. Give us the hard, cold facts. Give us the mechanics so we can determine if this event is believable.

I love the former blind man's innocent, simple, and humorous reply.

¹¹ He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight."

Right. Sure. When that testimony didn't pass muster, they asked the next logical question.

¹² They said to him, "Where is He?"

Funny. They asked the former blind man to locate someone he had never seen. That's why he responded so quickly with . . .

He said, "I do not know" (John 9).

Is the man a believer at this point? No. All he knows is that something spectacular has occurred in his life and it's tied to a man he'd never met before named Jesus.

What did the skeptics do? In Panel Two they brought the man in question to religious authorities to sort out whether this miracle was true or not, but still, *none* of them made a faith move toward Jesus, the source of all spiritual eyesight. They merely sought to gather more information. You know, the place of eternal punishment will have its share of people who simply went through life encountering the revelation of Jesus as the Lord of Light only to be content to simply gather more and more facts about Him. Is this a screenshot of your spiritual life?

Panel Two: Probably At A Local Synagogue (John 9:13-34)

Here we encounter this Christmas a spiritual reality about spiritual blindness.

You're In A Process (John 9:13-34). Translated: from the various interviews recorded here, you are either in a process, like the blind man, of moving toward a full faith acceptance of Jesus, or you are, like the Pharisees, moving toward an angry denial of revelation of Jesus, followed by outright opposition to Him. Which is it in your life? Since this is lengthy narrative, I propose we read it through, and then circle back and talk about the process of moving from darkness to light or darkness to further darkness by analyzing the responses of the Pharisees and the former nameless blind man. [Read the text]

What were the blind legalists like?

- They were more worried a sabbatical law prohibiting work had been broken than a blind man had received new eyes. For them, mixing spit and clay constituted work, therefore, Jesus must be a sinner because He dared to break their understanding of the Law. Such is how legalists operate. They don't care about people at all. All they care about is the laws they create or read incorrectly so they can dominate, control, and condemn others.
- Their minds were completely made up before the fact. Jesus was a sinner, therefore, He couldn't have performed this miracle. Hence, they didn't want to be bothered by the facts. Even when they brought the parents in for questioning and discovered that their son had, in fact, been born blind, they STILL would not believe, nor leave their *a priori* position that Jesus was sinful (John 9:24).
- They wouldn't embrace the cold, hard facts of how the blind man received his sight no matter how many times they heard them (John 9:26-27). What skepticism. It reminds me of the skepticism of the scientist, Paul Davies. His educated response to why there is something (*viz.*, a complex cosmos) instead of nothing is most interesting, "There's no need to invoke anything supernatural in the origins of the universe or of life. I have never liked the idea of divine tinkering: for me it is much more inspiring to believe that a set of

mathematical laws can be so clever as to bring all these things into being.”¹ Huh? When did a mathematical law ever do anything on its own? When did it ever make its own willful decision? When did the laws of motion ever cause the billiard balls to move all over the pool table on their own? Right. Only a fool would believe this. Balls move when they are hit by a cue ball which has been set in motion by a real, live player.

- They saw everyone else’s sin but their own. They are spiritual legends in their own minds and think they, of all people, are followers of Moses, the spiritual man of all time (John 9:28). Moses, on the other hand, witnessed divine miracles, viz., the bush which burned and was not consumed, and believed the miracle’s origin was God.
- They became easily enraged when they should have been intellectually engaged (John 9:28).
- They lied about the facts when they said they didn’t know where Jesus was from (John 9:28). He had told them He was sent from heaven by God the Father (John 4:34; 5:23, 24, 30, 36; 6:29, 44, 57; 7:16, 18, 28, 29, 33; 8:26, 28, 36, 29, 42) and that He was, and is, the eternal divine One (John 8:58). This is what skeptics do. They play fast and loose with the biblical facts so they can defend their deeply entrenched skepticism.
- They were not teachable (John 9:30-34). Why? Because they arrogantly felt they were right and holy and had keen spiritual insight above all people, including a man who had received a miracle of sight.

Is their process your process? Do you see yourself in their reaction to spiritual facts and spiritual light? If so, beware. If you do not come to Christ with your blindness, you, who think you see, will only descend in to greater darkness.

What was the former blind man like? You will note how his statements with the Pharisees readily demonstrate how God permitted more and more spiritual light to flood into his soul as he stood his ground on the facts of what he knew about Jesus.

- He connected the factual dots, even if they defied his presuppositions. Since Christ gave him eyesight, then he had to be, at least a prophet of God, for this is the type of activity a prophet would perform. Remember Elijah? He prophesied the onset of a dangerous drought and it occurred. He also raised a boy from the dead (1 Kings 17).
- He never wavered from what common sense told him was true. Dirt plus spit plus clay balls packed on his eyes plus washing in the Pool of Siloam gave him new eyes (John 9:13, 25). He didn’t argue with the facts. He embraced them wholeheartedly. How could he not?
- He merely followed the evidence to conclude Jesus had to be, at least, from God (John 9:30-33).

These are steps of how a physically blind man progressively moved from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight. God gave him ever increasing light and he kept believing it to be factually true no matter what.

¹Ravi Zacharias, *Beyond Opinion* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 118.

Perhaps this Christmas God is doing the same in your life. Perhaps this Christmas you look at some amazing things God has done or revealed to you and you are starting to see the light, as it were. And as you sit in Christmas sermons, sing Christian songs, and hear Christmas hymns you are starting to see most clearly that Jesus was no ordinary baby, but the God-man Himself. Perhaps this Christmas, a real physical malady has arrested your attention like never before. Perhaps this Christmas, for the first time, in perhaps a long time, you are seeing this malady in a new light, as the means by which God is attempting to get your attention so you replace the darkness of your soul with His brilliant spiritual light. Yes, perhaps this Christmas, for the first time in your life, you see the positive side of the divine process of redemption with 20/20 vision. So you ask, What am I to do? That answer is written upon the ancient, yellowed parchment of the third panel.

Panel Three: Somewhere In Jerusalem (John 9:35-41)

This panel heads in two distinct directions based on how people respond to the process God has them concerning the revelation of His Son's identity.

God Has Provision (John 9:35-39). Boy, does He. Please note how Jesus is the one who comes to you with His spiritual provision. As He sees your proper response to the process He sovereignly places you in, He comes to you so that your spiritual darkness becomes eternal light:

⁵ Jesus heard that they had put him out; and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

We aren't told how He heard, just that He did. Don't you know He was concerned about the former blind man? Mark well how Jesus, the lover of man's soul, heard about how the former blind man had been mistreated and He immediately did what He had to do to locate him. What love and compassion. He went to find the man because He knew spiritual blindness was a far greater problem than physical blindness.

Jesus wasted no time asking the man THE question, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" This is a statement calling the man to embrace Him as the true Lord of Light.

How did the man respond? In humble fashion:

³⁶ He answered and said, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

Don't you just love his innocence and naiveté? Folks, this is what we call low-hanging spiritual fruit. Jesus wasted no time picking it.

Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you."

Imagine the former blind man's joy. He looked into the face of the Creator who gave him life and eyesight. Awesome. How did He respond? With the faith of a child:

³⁸ And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. (John 9).

There is nothing greater than watching a person move from spiritual darkness to spiritual light at the moment of faith in the person and work of Jesus, the Christ. Are you ready to do that right now based on how Jesus has worked and is working in your life?

There is, also, nothing sadder than listening to people who can't and won't let go of their false religion and intellectual legalistic snobbery so they can receive new eyes from Christ. They definitely have a deep-seated problem. Is this you? It was the Pharisees who were within earshot of Christ' conversation with the former blind man.

You Have A Problem (John 9:39-41). Christ's words here are a balance between a warning and hope:

³⁹ And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind."

This is a direct statement to the blind man and the Pharisees. Jesus came into the world to specifically give people who realize they are spiritually blind new eyesight at the moment of faith. On the contrary, He also came to use His light to blind those, like the Pharisees, who arrogantly thought they had spiritual sight, but who feverishly worked to thwart the advancement of Christ's true light. We see this warning in bold relief in the closing words of the third panel:

⁴⁰ Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

So, which person are you this Christmas? Are you a person who has been given new spiritual sight? Then I rejoice with you. Are you a person who sees your need for a pair of new spiritual eyes? This is good because Jesus stands ready to give them to you when you place your faith in Him. Or, are you the religious legalist, the ardent skeptic who thinks that you, of all people, see most clearly? If this is you, I'd suggest it is the perfect time to humble yourself before only One capable of forgiving you of your darkness and giving you real spiritual sight.

David Hume, the father of modern skepticism, is a classic study of a person who pridefully believed his carefully contrived tests for truth were THE tests. For a proposition to be true it had to meet two stringent Humian criteria:

- The truth claim is abstract reasoning such as a mathematical equation or a definition (e.g., "2+2=4" or "all triangles have three sides") or
- The truth claim can be verified empirically through one or more of the five senses.²

According to Hume, since religious claims cannot pass the muster of his two tests, they are worthless and should be immediately discarded. Do you see his inherent blindness? Hume's tests for truth didn't pass his own tests making his test entirely self-defeating and worthless. Yet many still arrogantly cling to his tests so they can confidently enjoy their skepticism. As Geisler notes, "The claim that 'something can only be meaningful if it's empirically verifiable or true by definition' excludes itself because that statement is neither empirically verifiable nor true by

²Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 57.

definition.”³ Such is the darkness of those who think they can see. If this is you, God calls to embrace the light of truth which can only be found in His Son, Jesus.

³Ibid., 59.