

**Title: "I Am"****[Slide 1]****Text: John 6:1-21****An Exodus moment****Comparisons, anyone?****[Slide 2]**

How do you describe the taste of a cup of coffee? You may settle for "Okay," "Not bad," "Really good," or "Yuck!" But if you are a professional coffee taster, you are going to need a whole lot more terms, words called "descriptors." It turns out that there are hundreds of descriptors for coffee. It took 109 different words to describe one Columbian coffee: La Gloria.

Out of a spectrum of 1281 coffees, the word *sweet* was used 1,195 times. *Chocolate* came in second at 821. But *sweet* and *chocolate* are just scratching the surface! The bigger the font in this word cloud, the more popular the descriptor. So, anybody up for a buttery, currant and peach, velvety, bright, clean, crisp, smooth, complex coffee – with a hint of chocolate?

Why do we use descriptors? Because that's the way our brains work. We try to understand something new by comparing to what we already know. We do the same with people. Just think of how someone describes to you a person you don't know. They might say, "He's real tall, like Uncle Jim. But he's in really good shape, like that guy on Ninja Warriors."

So you start forming a picture of your uncle Jim dangling over a pool of water surrounded by thousands of screaming fans.

Sometimes the descriptors work. Sometimes they don't!

**A Prophet-like-Moses?**

This was the challenge facing the writer John as he told the story of Jesus. How could he ever describe Jesus in a way that people could actually come to see Him for Who He really is? What kinds of descriptors should he use?

Moses, the leader who brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, offered one such descriptor. He promised that one day God would send someone like himself into the world to lead God's people on a New Exodus:

**[Slide 3]**

*Deuteronomy 18:15 NIV*

*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.*

Somebody like Moses: someone who would free Israel from oppression; someone who lead Israel through the desert; someone who would provide food and water in desolate places; someone who would reveal God Himself to them.

If John was going to try to explain Who Jesus truly was, this was the best place to start.

**An Exodus moment:**

And so it is that John tells a New Exodus story. He begins by relating that Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee, with a great crowd of people following Him. He tells us that they followed "because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick." (John 6:2 NIV)

Already, we're in Exodus country: Moses had gained Israel's trust by performing miraculous signs in Egypt. Israel had followed him across the Reed Sea into the desert.

John goes on to tell us that Jesus went up "to the mountain," (John 6:3) and sat down to teach the crowd. Again, we're to think of Moses going up the Mountain of God, Mount Sinai, and returning to teach Israel God's Law.

And then, just in case we've missed the clues, John says:

**[Slide 4]**

*John 6:4 NIV*

*The Jewish Passover was near.*

Passover was the festival that celebrated the escape from Egypt and the beginning of the journey to the Promised Land.'

Could it be that Jesus was the new Moses, leading Israel on a New Exodus?

## **Mistaken Identity**

### **Feeding the 5000:**

Long ago, when the Israelites complained to Moses about the lack of food in the desert, Moses said to God:

#### **[Slide 5]**

*Numbers 11:13, 22 NIV*

*"Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!'"*

*"Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?"*

Now Jesus found Himself facing a hungry crowd in a deserted place. He asked His disciple Philip much the same question:

#### **[Slide 6]**

*John 6:5 NIV*

*When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"*

But this time, the leader isn't frustrated or at a loss. John tells us that Jesus already knew what He would do to feed the crowd. Taking a little child's lunch of 5 barley loaves and two sardines, He commanded that the disciples seat the crowd, gave thanks for the little lunch in His hands, and proceeded to feed everyone until they couldn't eat anymore! They even had leftovers.

A prophet-like-Moses?

## **A Prophet?**

That's certainly what the crowd thought! John tells us:

### **[Slide 7]**

*John 6:14 NIV*

*After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."*

And can you blame them? Jesus had just provided bread in the desert like Moses did. The rabbis had predicted that when the Prophet-like-Moses came, he would once again cause manna to appear in the desert. They put 2 and 2 together and decided that this Jesus must in fact be the long-awaited prophet who would deliver them from the power of Rome once and for all.

### **Mistaken Identity:**

John tells us that the crowd then decided to take matters into its own hands, forcing Jesus to beat a hasty retreat:

### **[Slide 8]**

*John 6:15 NIV*

*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.*

It was a case of mistaken identity. The crowd had squeezed Jesus into its own expectations, forcing the comparison to Moses into their own story. They had a plan for this Jesus. He would serve their agenda. Like Israel at the bottom of Mount Sinai making a golden calf to worship, this crowd was determined to turn Jesus into an idol that would meet their needs.

And so it is that Jesus, like Moses, once again goes up the mountain alone.

## **"I Am"**

### **A wild night:**

John tells us that the disciples headed home to Capernaum by boat without Jesus. Imagine what must have been going through their minds that night as they rowed against a rising wind? They had just lived through an amazing

day. They had seen Jesus teaching on the mountain, healing the sick, and feeding a vast crowd from a little child's lunch.

I wonder what they had been thinking when the crowd surged forward to make Jesus their king? Were they shocked and frightened? Or were they hoping that *this was the moment*? It was perfect, after all, in so many ways. Jesus had revealed Himself as the Prophet-like-Moses. Let the New Exodus begin right now!

But then Jesus had slipped away and gone alone up the mountain to pray. What was that all about? Was He the Prophet-like-Moses? Was He supposed to be King? Who was He after all?

### **Walking on the water:**

The answer to their question came in a way they could never have imagined:

#### **[Slide 9]**

*John 6:19 NIV*

*When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened.*

This was no ordinary mortal walking toward them on the water. Moses had parted the Reed Sea through the power of God, but Jesus was striding on its surface. As the psalm-writer had written:

#### **[Slide 10]**

*Psalm 77:18-20 NIV*

*Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,  
your lightning lit up the world;  
the earth trembled and quaked.*

*Your path led through the sea,  
your way through the mighty waters,  
though your footprints were not seen.*

*You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

This Jesus was more than any earthly king. He was none other than the God of the Exodus – the God who had led His people like a flock.

## **“I Am”**

Jesus Himself provided the final clue to His true Identity:

### **[Slide 11]**

*John 6:20-21 NIV*

*But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.” Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.*

The little phrase “It is I” is literally, “I Am.” The words “I Am” designated the LORD, the One True God. So you could take it as Jesus simply saying, “It’s just me.” Or you could take it as Jesus revealing the fact that He was the Great I AM, the God of Creation, the covenant God of Israel, Yahweh.

Put all the pieces together – all the descriptors – and you find that you have to leave Moses behind. Jesus is not just a new Moses. He is the Prophet-like-Moses, but so much more. He is not just an earthly hero or king. He is none other than God Himself with us.

When we meet Jesus, we start with comparisons. We try to squeeze Jesus into our world, our needs, our situation. We think we know what Jesus would do. But He is so much more. He doesn’t part the sea before us; He walks on it. And He promises to bring us to safe haven.

So how would you describe Jesus? In the end it comes down to those two little words: “I Am.”