

Don't you love it when someone leaves you a message on your phone and says "It's me." If you don't recognize the voice, you're left wondering who "Me" is. Jesus doesn't want us to wonder who He is or what He has done for us. So He tells us who he is. When Jesus says "I am ..." He is telling us that He is God Himself. When Moses asked God at the burning bush what is your name, God answered "I am." What a great name. God is, always has been and always will be. God has no limits. There are no limits to His love.

Jesus didn't hide his identity. When Judas lead the temple guard and some of the religious leaders of Israel to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him, Jesus asked who are you looking for. They answered Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered "I am he." He didn't hide from the mob that came to arrest him. He didn't try to escape under the cover of darkness. He identified himself to people in the mob and asked that His disciples be allowed to go free. The mob led Jesus away, brought Him to the High Priest's house and held an illegal trial.

Early on Friday morning Jesus was brought under armed guard to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor and accused Him of claiming to be the King of the Jews. When Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews, Jesus answered "yes." Jesus was from the line of King David, the one promised by the prophets in the Old Testament who would rule over God's people forever.

Jesus didn't even hide his identity on the cross. The Centurion who was in charge of the crucifixion had been given this duty before. He had seen criminals die. He had heard their cursing and swearing. But Jesus was different. He wasn't a common criminal. He had broken no law. He caught the Centurion's attention. So after Jesus died this man said, "Surely He was the Son of God."

The day the Jesus died was a day that changed the world. But few people recognized that at the time. The disciples ran away when Jesus was arrested. John is the only disciple specifically mentioned in the Gospels as being at the crucifixion. None of the disciples believed Jesus when He said that He would rise on the third day. My guess is that most of the religious elite of Israel celebrated when Jesus died. They thought they had removed another threat to their personal power and put an end to a potential revolution that would have forced the Romans to respond with force. Pilate responded to the threats of the Sanhedrin by ordering Jesus' execution and was able to keep his job. He wasn't really concerned about the truth or about Jesus. Most of the people who had heard about Jesus were confused. They hoped He would liberate their nation from the Romans. But he didn't. The soldiers who served under the Centurion were just doing their job. They gambled for Jesus' robe, but didn't think any more about him.

Jesus' final words from the cross revealed His identity. Jesus said, "It is finished!" With these words He declared that His work on earth was done. It was the fulfillment of God's plan. According to God's Law, the price for sin is death. All people have sinned and deserve to die. There is nothing that we can do to rectify the situation. We can't undo it or pay a great enough price for it. Because God loves us, He decided to take our sin upon Himself. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. He died in our place so that we would not have to die eternally. He literally suffered the torments of hell for us.

Some people see the cross as a scandal and wonder why would Jesus die on the cross. The cross is foolishness to those who don't believe. But because Good Friday is followed by Easter Sunday, we know that the cross is glorious, not scandalous. The cross is a symbol of the power of God. Sin was paid for on the cross. Death was defeated when Jesus rose from the dead.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus' death was not a tragic mistake. He was not a passive victim. His death was the ultimate act of self sacrifice for the benefit of all people. Jesus knew that. After He announced, "It is finished," he then committed His spirit to the Father. Jesus trusted God the Father to raise Him back to life and He did. Like Jesus, we too need to put our trust in God the Father whenever we are facing death.

Jesus' death on the cross requires a response. Some people try to ignore it. Others try to deny it. But those who take a good look, those who are willing to see with the eyes of faith see the meaning of the cross. Because Jesus died for our sins, we have to confess our sins and ask God to forgive us because we did it. We put Jesus on the cross. Every time we lie, every time we cheat, every time we turn our backs on someone in need, every time we let something else take God's place in our lives, we nail Jesus to the cross. We've all sinned.

After we've confessed our sins, we need to confess our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Jesus is the Lord, God with us to save us. He is the one who has acted to save us, to rescue us and restore us to God's family. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to confess our faith in Jesus and to put our trust in Him.

Because we are loved by God, forgiven in Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit we can live the new life of faith. We can follow Christ's example of love and service. We can live productive lives of service to the Lord and to others.

Finally, we respond to Christ by giving Him our worship and praise, by thanking God for all that He has done for us in Christ. He is worthy of our praise. Jesus is God with us to save us, to

rescue us, to restore us to God's family. Praise God! The cross is empty. The tomb is empty. But our hearts are full because Jesus fills our hearts with His love and Spirit. Take a moment now to think about who Jesus is as you watch this video clip on the "I Am's" of Jesus. Amen.