

**An Existential Exegesis of *ἵμ* in John 4:26 (taken for a swim in deep water): A Lesson
in Bestowed Realized Immortality - and a Wet Offense**

by

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Thesis

Using the Performance Objective¹ of Gagné the precise thesis statement is:

[Situation] Given the final paper requirements for NT7313, Fall 2014 [Learned Capability Verb] generate [object] a research paper [action verb] by writing [constraints] 13-15 pages with bibliography on the Fourth Gospel [tools] using scholarly text books/articles/notes and pertinent commentaries on John 4 [special conditions] by focusing on the existential exegesis of the theophany $\iota\mu, \acute{o} \tilde{\omega}$ in verse 26, so the learner (believer) will find the 1st century Words ($\iota\mu$) leave us with no disadvantage in 2014 (Clark-Soles) - even if the water is over one's head while swimming with the elephants.

John 4:21a, 23-26

²¹ Jesus said to her... ²³ **But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.** ²⁴ **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."** ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."

²⁶ Jesus said to her, **"I am he, the one who is speaking to you."**

New Revised Standard Version

Key words: existential exegesis, bestowed realized immortality, realized eschatology, ontological, theological, transformative conversion, compliant/resistance reader, Big Fish, theophany, apocalyptic/synoptic symbolism, ecclesiastical redactor, stumbling block, offense.

Introduction

To discuss a revealing verse in the Fourth Gospel (FG) is to discuss the tip or the corner of a large painting; however, the location or importance of this pertinent tipped verse maybe the keystone to hold the painting in the frame. The John 4:26 "I am" (*ego eimi*) expression does just that. This "I am" is the foundation for the story in 4:5-42 and connects with 1:1 "and the Word was God" to reflect the whole Gospel was written to show God revealing Himself in Jesus so that those who believe may have life (eternal).

The story of the woman at the well in John 4 has the deepest theology of any story in FG and therefore it can be said this story connects or holds together and provides the foundation of the truth in the Gospel "written so that you may come to believe" (20:31). The believing in this truth is what holds the painting to the wall. The existential question is "Will this painting float?"

This paper will take the Samaritan Woman story for a swim in the stream² going from the shallow to the deep and then push back finally at the response of the offense for getting into water over one's head - it is kind of like what the Johannine Jesus might say "Sink or swim."

Speaking of choices we have choices when reading and believing FG. We can stay in the shallow water (or just wiggle our toes in it) or one can really get wet. We can also stay in the light and enjoy the abundant life (light) - or not. The choices include how to read FG and who to read about FG - so, who are you going to believe? There are three joys infectively promoted in this short essay: () The joy of seeing how deep FG can be read, () The joy of feeling the astute contradictions of other writers, and () The joy of believing in what you read and study in your search for the truth in FG. Therefore, who has the truth? The Word, the writers, or yourself?

These choices end up being existential choices for all of us: we can choose to live (just like the Johannine Jesus lived) and we can choose to die (just like the Johannine Jesus died).

An Existential Exegesis of *ἴμ* in John 4:26

- Shallow Water (ankle deep) Impressionistic/Reflective

This is the greatest ontological story in the Bible. A *prima facie* look at the story of Jesus and the Woman at the Well in John 4:5-42, for most compliant³ reading believers who let the Scripture work for them, will be able to see, feel, and hear the words in 4:26 "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" as a theophany (appearance of God). Jesus is revealing and announcing more than just identifying himself when he says He is the one. The Samaritan woman's response was immediate and she left her empty water pot and charged back into the city to tell her brothers and sisters. Robert Kysar (Maverick, p. 181) captures the splendid insight "With joyful exaggeration she invites her neighbors to 'come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!' and then entices them with the question she⁴ knows very well is going to pique their curiosity, 'He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' (4:29)." Now she sounds like Jesus. She is asking the "Come and see" question. She became the first apostle, better: the Apostle of the Apostles⁵.

This ontological story carries the freight of reality for we know when someone looks into Jesus' eyes and hears the Word, they are forever changed. The change is leaving behind one's life and doing as Jesus asks earlier the Gospel "Follow me." The change is a response also in Jesus' words after his claim of who he is. The change is believing, staying in the light, getting up and walking, and washing one's eyes' and then seeing.

The John sequence of events show Jesus revealing who he is with the first of his "I AM" sayings. Many of us have been saved (to be born into eternal life), brought to Jesus, and now abide with Jesus by just reading and believing this story in John. The first level of learning, understanding, and following these words are literal words and do not require more than a

sincere, humble, and prayerful reading of the story. No profound acceptance is required. One must just accept. Therefore, at this impressionistic level no real exegesis is required.

The next section will be an exegesis on Jesus' "fullest revelation of his identity to this point in the gospel story" (O'Day, p. 53). This will eschatologically expand what this revelation really means - in the sense of revealing how going into deeper water changes the feeling to "wetter," seeing more objects, and believing as there are more questions as the water gets up around the waist and washes around one's belly button.

4:26 (taken for a swim in deep water)

- Deep Water (waist high) Interpretive

This is the greatest eschatological story in the Bible. More questions arise as the water gets higher. We see more, feel more, and are more inquisitive - this is called "the process of learning" (Barr). Raymond Brown discusses identifying Jacob's well, the sixth hour, and saying "Jews were allowed only three marriages." And on "I am he" (ego eimi) he says "it is not impossible that this use is intended in the style of divinity" (pp. 169-176). Bultmann says the Jn 4:26 " $\epsilon\mu$ is not used as a sacred formula" (p. 226n3). I will argue the words to the Woman of Samaria are absolutely, as Schneiders says "the superabundant fulfillment of Samaritan expectation" (p. 139) - and the fulfillment for the rest of us!

Lewis (2014) explains there are two categories of "I AM" in the Gospel. "The first type is the absolute 'I AM' statement which occurs nine times in the Gospel of John (4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8" and the "second variety of 'I AM' statements...are those with a predicate nominative (6:35, 51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25-26; 14:6; 15:1, 5." These statements "are images and metaphors by which Jesus describes himself" (pp. 62-63).

The following examples of Jn. 4:26 show the diversity of how the verse is translated using the absolute statement. No effort was made to show any kind of order as this sample is to illuminate how many different ways one sentence can be interpreted and how one word, a comma, or placement can possibly change the meaning. So, the question is which verse below best carries an authentic and theophanic message?

- ²⁶ Jesus saith unto her, **I that speak unto thee am he.** King James Version (KJV) and (ASV).
- ²⁶ Jesus saith to her, **I am he, that speaketh with thee.** Wycliffe Bible (WYC).
- ²⁶ Jesus said to her, **“I who speak to you am he.”** Revised Standard Version (RSV).
- ²⁶ Jesus said to her, **“I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”** New Revised Standard Version.
- ²⁶ Jesus said to her, **“I, the one speaking to you, am he.”** New English Translation (NET Bible).
- ²⁶ Then Jesus told her, **“I am the Messiah!”** Living Bible (TLB).
- ²⁶ Then Jesus said, **“He is talking to you now—I am the Messiah.”** Easy-to-Read Version (ERV).
- ²⁶ Jesus said to her, **“I Am—the one who speaks with you.”** Common English Bible (CEB).
- ²⁶ Jesus said, **'I am he, I who am speaking to you now.'** New English Version (NEV).
- ²⁶ **“I am Christ speaking to you now,”** said Jesus. J.B. Phillips (PHILLIPS).
- ²⁶ **“I am he,”** Jesus replied, **“the one who is speaking to you.”** International Standard Version.
- ²⁶ **“I am that one,”** Jesus told her, **“and I am speaking to you now.”** Contemporary English.
- ²⁶ **“I who am speaking to you,”** said Jesus, **“I am he.”** Jerusalem Bible (TJB).
- ²⁶ **“I am he,”** said Jesus. **“You don’t have to wait any longer or look any further.”** The Message.

As most Bible editions or versions will explain their reasons for the new or different versions they will expose the biases and assumptions in the introduction or preface; hence the 10 or so variations above. I would offer the most succinct answer as taken from the original Greek⁶

e εἶμ , ὁ which yields simply **“I am (he), the one speaking to you”** (NRSV). This

translated version, in my reading, is the authentic and theophanic message. "The person whom she has been asking after is Jesus; the Messiah for whom men wait is already present. Whoever hears these words spoken by the Revealer is faced with the ultimate decision: the *e eí* lays absolute claim to faith" (Bultmann, p. 192). When Jesus says "I am He" you have transformative conversion. When one looks into the eyes of Jesus and one believes, this is all that matters - "With Jesus, you have all you need" (Clark-Soles, p. 129).

Gail O'Day (2002) adds the predicate (he) "is not present in the Greek for the *ego eimi* saying" (p. 52). Her exegesis: "Jesus has just made the fullest revelation of his identity to this point in the gospel story...Jesus proclaims to her that the very one with whom she speaks is the one who is able to pronounce the 'I AM,' the one whose true identity is known through his relationship with God. Nothing in her tradition could have prepared her for the radical power of Jesus' self-revelation. No prior words in this text have had such an impact and force as the 'I AM,' nor have any other words been spoken so directly" (The Word: Disclosed, p. 53).

As there are different versions of "I AM" there are different opinions in the translations of FG by scholars, writers, and commentators. The next section will existentially look at realized eschatology under a recent new term "Bestowed Realized Immortality."

A Lesson in Bestowed Realized Immortality

- Deeper Water (swimming with the elephants) Theologically

This is the greatest theological story in the Bible! "The Samaritan woman in chapter 4 is certainly the most theologically sophisticated interlocutor of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel" (Schneiders, p. 251). When the Samaritan women looked into Jesus' eyes and He said to her "Hey lady, you're looking at him!" the NOW! of The Gospel of John was born. If John is the masterpiece of the Bible this story is the masterpiece of the Gospel. She looked into the eyes of

the Son. Good for Jerome picking the eagle for the symbol of John⁷ as it is a soaring and majestic theological book - the theological book of the Gospels! The NOW! introduces life now, eternal life, realized eschatology, and bestowed realized immortality. I promise the reader these terms will not be covered definitively but are hereby introduced together to get deeper into the water, swim with the elephants, maybe even breath, but formally push to the end of our swim with the existential offense.

The theme of Jesus' teaching⁸ in FG is "*eternal life*." "By this he does not mean some future event or place, but a present quality of life that is above time and physical death... This means that eternal life is present and not future. It exists 'now,' whenever a person chooses to enter into the new relationship with God. At the same time it is timeless, eternal not only in duration but in quality. It also involves judgment as a present experience" (Bauman, p. 160).

A sample of the major verses promoting the "here and now realities"⁹ of John are:

4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" ...²⁴ "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

6:47 "Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life..."

10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

15:3 "You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you."

16:32 "The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone."

17:1 " After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come."

20:22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Two major verses reflecting the hour is coming and now is here:

4:23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth..."

5:25 "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

Kysar discusses these *realized eschatology* verses: "One is already judged by his or her response to Christ" in 3:18, " Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God." 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."

"Some (most adamantly, Rudolf Bultmann) contend that the Fourth Evangelist wrote only the passages espousing a present eschatology. The evangelist entirely rejected the future eschatology and believed only in the fulfillment of the promises in the present...When the evangelist finished the Gospel, there was no futuristic eschatology at all to be found in its pages " (Kysar, p. 122). At this point, given the most succinct verses supporting eternal life and realized eschatology - with two supporting commentators - I would point out, in agreement with Bultmann, the verses reflecting Apocalyptic or Synoptic symbolism were editions or redactions not in the original work promoting "present eschatology." I would argue these latent and lurking verses tend to not support the main theme of the FG and cause no small number of students of the Word to stumble¹⁰; for sure, the "hour is now" and "on that day" are not on the same page.¹¹ Kysar's comment is adequate: "For Bultmann's view of the 'ecclesiastical redactor,' see both his commentary *The Gospel of John* and part 3 of *The Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2."

The notion "the FG maintains a *bestowed, realized, immortality* (italics edited) for believers rather than a doctrine of future resurrection " (Clark-Soles, p. 113) is "immortality is bestowed, not innate. It is realized, not future...unlike Paul's bestowed futuristic immortality, which *follow* resurrection, the FE claims that the believer never dies and has *already* passed from death to life...death has been rendered inconsequential for the believer - and only for the believer (p. 132)."

Two points about never dying as this pertains to the Holy-Spiritual life. A believer in this uninterrupted "life" continues forever; but, one must still die the first death - some will only die the first death and not attain the Holy-Spiritual life forever (eternal).

Here is Clark-Soles' answer to the first death with comments about the disciples. "Jesus' way to the Father prepares a place for them so that they will dwell intimately with God...This is the effect of 14:23: 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and will come to them and make our home with them' [*ean tis agapa me ton logon mou t r sei, kai ho pat r mou agap sei auton kai pros auton eleusometha kai mon n par' aut poi sometha*]. I must emphasize that this constitutes the ultimate Johannine answer to the problem of death: God and Jesus making their dwelling place among the believers here and now, in this life and then projected into an eternal future. Absolutely contrary to the typical interpretation that imagines individual Christians being whisked away upon their deaths to some mansion in the sky"¹² (pp. 139-140). The hour is coming - indeed! it is here NOW! Those who follow the new life and abide with God will not have a second death but those who do not believe "are condemned already."

Next we are going really deep hoping to not stumble (or drown) - or cause someone else to stumble (by not making it clear to them that there is an existential choice in believing).

- and a Wet Offense

- In water over our heads

This is the greatest existential story in the Bible! When people get into water over their heads (really deep water) they learn the deep water lesson about this story. The deeper the water the deeper the questions. A resistance¹³ reader may ask who is telling the story? Or who is the narrator? How could this woman of the well not have a name? Maybe, where is Sychar on the map?

The answers may really not matter but most shallow water questions and comments are about the woman and her wicked ways having had five husbands. Jack Spong says "People forget that his woman is a mythological symbol of Samaria and so they read...moralistically... She is not a real person. She is a symbol of Samaria itself...This story is not real" (p. 104). This story, embracing the weird bubble of the FG, is about Jesus. The evangelist in his/her Johannine way¹⁴ is telling a story to show Jesus is the person in God and his revealing to the woman at Jacob's well is to cross lines and show not only inclusiveness with her, but also exclusiveness with all people - even half-bred Samaritans.

Not real? Really, not real? I cannot tell you how upsetting it was to finally realize the story was just a story. My picture of the woman and my picture of Jesus looking into her eyes was holding a story together that saved my life - I would have given a fortune to have been her and heard his transformative and theophanic words at noon, by the well...not real?...pretty devastating - for a shallow water reader. But, it is pretty easy to see in the deep water - the painting won't float. The facts do not hold up. In deep water you can see this was just a story, you can feel someone is telling a tale, and you can believe there is more to it than the announcement "I am the man."

This "not real story" is like the Big Fish movie. The senior Bloom tells stories all his life and few believe his stories were just stories - until he dies. It was not until they put him in the deep water that he lived and then they told his stories at his funeral. Unlike Bloom's son who did not believe the stories (Big Fish) some of us believe the stories (Jesus at the well) that are really stories.

Hang with me while we dry out in this deep water that is over our heads. We must unpack this Johannine bubble and breath. Jesus said "Come and see." We know the Gospel is shallow for the kids and deeper for those who want to hear the words "If you believe me you may have life." This is an existentialists dream: "I have a choice to make!" It is either sink or swim, or swim or sink (depending on KJV or CEB...). If you believe and stay in the light you have life. If you do not stay in the light you will have only the one death and you will not live in the life forever with the Father. You will not abide in the Holy-Spiritual bosom of God.

Not abiding in the Word is an offensive failure. The evangelist tells of the disciples being challenged. "This is the real test of the disciple: 'If you continue in my word [], you are truly my disciples' (8:31)" (Culpepper, Anatomy, p. 117). Jesus' words drive them away. Jesus' words drive us away. The words are an offense. This paper, by taking the Samaritan woman for a swim in deep water is also an offense - but we must go deep. However, what this swim must not do is be a stumbling block by not letting the real offense swim with the elephants. Staying in the shallow water may not reveal the offense of the word.

The choice is to continue in the Word. This is not a cake walk, it is sink or swim. Will your painting float in the deep water? One must believe and go into the offensive deep water. One must get wet. You have a choice.

"The Fourth Evangelist found that the present is pregnant with possibility and wanted readers to be sensitive to those possibilities and to actualize them. Eternal life? It is yours now as you live a new kind of existence on the basis of the revelation of God in Christ. Resurrection? Being born to a new life as a result of faith in Christ is resurrection. Judgment? You are judging yourself by the kind of response you made to the proclamation of the Christian gospel. Parousia? Christ comes again when you believe in him" (Kysar, Maverick, p. 124).

Conclusion

...the learner (believer) will find the 1st century Words (μ) leave us with no disadvantage in 2014 (Clark-Soles) - even if the water is over one's head while swimming with the elephants.

So, how did we do?

(By the way, Jesus does have blue eyes.)

Excursus: Score one for the evangelist

Sometimes we have to be taken into the deep water by the evangelist and held under until we realize the story of the Samaritan woman is just a story - and held under a little longer to believe the theophanic words of Jesus written down in 4:26 are as true today as if we had heard them at the well along with the woman of Samaria (her name, by the way, is Samantha). We should give the credit to the evangelist¹⁵ for this narrative (which could also be an epiphany) which has irrevocably altered our perception of the profound truth. We are wooed, beckoned, and challenged by the story - noting: reading 4G may never be the same again...

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End Notes

¹ This Performance Objective serves as an abstract.

² Paul Anderson, in his introduction, says John can be read by all ages and the water is like a stream shallow at one end for the children to wade in and deep enough in the other for elephants to swim.

³ A compliant reader will read from the point of view of the evangelist "and the other followers of and believers in Jesus" (Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*, p. 27)

⁴ I am impressed he came up with this pithy remark as it should have been already made by a female writer - and it may have been but I have not seen it.

⁵ The striking parallel or linking of this story to Mary Magdalene is another Johannine comparison story.

⁶ See Bultmann (John, p. 192) for his Greek commentary from his Big Blue Book (BBB).

⁷ See Bauman, p. 153.

⁸ This teaching of Jesus first came to me when I was in Korea back in '68-'69 watching Edward Bauman on a video film on An Introduction to the New Testament.

⁹ See Box 2.6 of Paul Anderson's book *John: The Maverick Gospel*, p. 33.

¹⁰ A stumbling block would be having someone who causes a person to stumble over an issue and miss the real issue. This paper could be a stumbling block for a reader who might get hung up over the Samaritan woman not being real and thus miss the punch line of how the evangelist has Jesus reveal who he is. A stumbling block may be an offense but it should not cover up, mask, or deter the real offense of what it means when faced with Jesus when he says "I'm the one" as the declaration requires a follow up "real offensive response." See Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, p. 737 for about 17 references.

¹¹ An interested reader will be able to see the edits and redacts to FG using Bultmann's re-ordered work in a future paper that is in progress.

¹² See her treatment of heaven and mansions in the sky on pp. 130-131 as "many dwelling places do not have anything to do with heaven...it is a 'descending' movement from the divine realm to the human, not an 'ascending' movement from the human to the divine...not a castle in the sky." "He certainly never uses languages such as 'believers go to heaven when they die'" (p. 131).

¹³ A resistant reader according to Reinhartz, is one who will align "with those who are cast as the Other within the text" and "in doing so, I also place myself squarely within the Gospel narrative" which "touches me as a real reader" (pp. 27-28)

¹⁴ Yes, his or her; however, this is another paper - and another disagreement among the commentators.

¹⁵ For the sake of academic freedom and literary criticism I have referenced below the sentences that best show how the text - especially in 4: 5-42 - is a mirror in which we can "see" the more real world we live in: "The implicit purpose of the gospel narrative is to alter irrevocably the reader's perception of the real world...it is the literary creation of the evangelist, which is created with the purpose of leading readers to 'see' the world as the evangelist sees it so that in reading the gospel they will be forced to test their perceptions and beliefs about the 'real' world against the evangelist's perspective on the world they have encountered in the gospel. The gospel claims that its world is, or at least reflects something that is, more 'real' than the world the reader has encountered previously. **The text is therefore a mirror in which readers can 'see' the world in which they live. Its meaning is produced in the experience of reading the gospel and lies on this side of the text, between the reader and the text**" (Culpepper, *Anatomy*, pp. 4-5). [highlight is mine.]