

***THIS IS MY NAME FOREVER*****Exodus 3:1-17; John 8:48-59****(Read John 8:48-59)**

**INTRO:** It was early winter of 1979. I was in my second semester of my first year of college at Montgomery County Community College near Philadelphia, PA. I was 22 years old and very naïve and maybe even sheltered, having just returned a few months before from 3 years at our BIC Navajo Mission. Since I was finally following my calling to pastoral ministry, I thought it would be good to take what the school offered in the way of religion and philosophy. In the end it was probably unwise for one so untested in the stormy waters of the real world.

You see, atheism was the dominant viewpoint of practically all of my instructors. My psychology professor was outspoken in his hostility to religion of any kind. My sociology and English composition professors were similarly opposed to Christianity but much more politically correct about it. My philosophy professor was a delightful and kind man in his 80s who, as a communist, had been investigated by the FBI in the 1950s at the height of the anticommunist frenzy of McCarthyism. He was truly a sweet man who, as a “died in the wool” atheist, taught philosophy from that viewpoint with great confidence. My world religions professor, was NOT a sweet man. He was an angry man with a chip on his shoulder who slammed Christianity and Christians at every opportunity and I was the dummy who tried to challenge him on his views.

I’ve shared with you before that this particular time in my life was a turning point that nearly took me out of belief in God. Fortunately, in his faithfulness, God worked it for good, and instead it helped me mature me out of my childish and tenuous faith into one that has helped me withstand the challenges Satan throws into our path.

But it was something that angry religion professor said in a lecture one day that has a bearing on the series I’m embarking on today. He claimed quite confidently that Jesus never claimed to be the son of God. I challenged him quite confidently that he was wrong and cited some places where it indeed sounded that way from what I read in my Good News Bible. He responded that the original Greek did not have that. That night as I sat at the lunch table at my 2<sup>nd</sup> shift factory job I shared my interchange with the professor with some guys I worked with who were students at the nearby Valley Forge Bible College. They had biblical Greek and assured me they would dig in and find out if my professor was as wrong as we suspected. And they did. They found this in Mark 14: *Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”*

*“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death. Mark 14:61b-64*

I took my findings to my professor’s office and his response was “That might be so, but I’m the one with the red pen.” And I left his alpha male lair adequately warned to behave myself from there on out.

Indeed Jesus did say he was the Son of God there in Mark 14, but more than that, he proclaimed that he was actually God with his response of “I am.” So not only did he cause cries for his death from the religious leaders there in that Kangaroo Court, he knocked my professor’s socks off.

Jesus was referring back to God’s name for himself when Moses came upon him in the burning bush and showing how he too is the great I Am. Today I’m going spend a little time introducing that, and then through seven sermons, we will see the *I Am statements of Jesus* in the Gospel of John. My prayer is, that when we conclude on Labor Day Sunday, we will all know Jesus, God the Son, a lot better.

Let’s look at the text that Karen read, and especially at verses 14 and 15 and see what’s in a name. First . . .

**He is a God above all Gods**

- Let’s read that again, *God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. Exodus 3:14-15*
- Moses has seen and experienced a lot in his life. He had been born a Hebrew child who escaped the murder of male Israelite children. He had been, instead, raised as an Egyptian prince. This meant that not only had he been influenced by the Jewish religion but he knew about all about the many Egyptian gods. Now, as

he is a fugitive and herding sheep in the wilderness he has probably become acquainted with the gods worshiped there too. He knew ABOUT all those gods, but he didn't know God until he found a burning bush in the wilderness. He knew lots of names, but he didn't know the name of the one and only real and true God.

- A perceptive but unnamed commentator at CompellingTruth.com writes this, *This response set God apart from all the foreign gods the people may have known. This God is not limited to a first name or a particular domain. This God was not created by human hands nor named by human language. The statement "I AM" comes from the Hebrew verb "to be or to exist." With this statement, God declared that He is self-existent, eternal, self-sufficient, self-directed, and unchanging.* This is our God. Here's the powerful thing . . .

### **God just is**

- He doesn't change. He doesn't waver.
- He isn't "I was." or "I wish." He is I AM. This means he always was and always will be. I AM WHO I AM would have been designated in Hebrew as YHWH and, with vowels added probably would have been Yahweh. It was so holy a name that Jewish scribes would not write it, but would instead have used what we translate as LORD. The problem with that is, LORD just doesn't do justice to the name.
- John Piper points out 6 other implications of what I AM means and they're really helpful at helping us know him.
  - One is that no reality exists behind God. In other words is, if no God then there is nothing. Piper says, *"But when we ask God how he got to be who he is, he answers, I AM WHO I AM. In other words, "nobody gave me a set of genes. Nobody and no power brought me into existence or shaped my personality. I had no beginning. There is no reality outside myself that did not come from me. And so there is no force or influence upon my character and power except what comes from me and is controlled by me. I am utterly absolute. Behind me, there is no reality."*
  - God does not change. Piper writes, *"In Malachi 3:6 God says, "I Yahweh do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." Within the name Yahweh is the affirmation I AM WHO I AM. But if who God is not determined by any forces outside himself, then he is not subject to the changes we are. People change their mind because of unforeseen circumstances or weak resolution. God foresees all circumstances and has no weaknesses. Nothing in all creation takes him off guard and backs him into a corner where he might have to act out of character or compromise his integrity. He is who he is, and therefore, as James says, "With him there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). His absolute name is the granite foundation of our confidence in his ongoing faithfulness."*
  - God is an inexhaustible source of energy. He is all powerful and he never grows weary.
  - This one is huge, especially in light of today's wishy-washy take on truth. Piper writes, *"The fifth implication of the name I AM WHO I AM is that objectivity is crucial. What I mean is that it is very important that we believe in objective truth that is more than our own subjective feelings or desires. We may desire God to be a certain way. We may feel that he simply can't be the way some people say he is. But what we feel or what we desire does not make God what he is. When God says I AM WHO I AM, he summons us to humble objectivity. He puts an end to the notion that everybody's view of God is as good as everybody else's. God is who he is and nobody's opinion of him makes any difference. Therefore, our calling as his creatures is to strive to know him for who he is, not for who we would like him to be."*
  - The next one is also very timely in this age where human beings, and, sadly, even Christians want to make God into their own image. Piper writes, *... if God simply is who he is and not who we make him out to be, then it is we who must conform to God and not he to us."*
  - And finally, where we will end this talk up in a bit . . . God has drawn us near to Christ.
- God just is. This isn't a confining thing – it's a comforting thing. Finding a burning bush with a voice coming out of it in the quiet solitude of the wilderness would seem to be pretty creepy, but the truth is, in

the sacredness of being in the very presence of the God of the universe, there is great solace in the thought. It shows more than ever that I AM WHO I AM is proof that . . .

### **God is all we need**

- F. B. Meyer writes, “*Fill in this blank check with whatever you need for life on godliness and God will do that and more also, with exceeding abundance.*” This is the God we serve. This is our God eternal. This is I am who I am and it is who he has been for all eternity and what his name is forever. He is all we need. That is why he sent his Son.

### **Jesus is I AM**

- This is where I wrap up and next week we will move into our study of Jesus’s I AM statements. In the text I read from John 8 Jesus used the name I AM prior to the instance recorded in Mark 14 which I read at the beginning of this talk. The commentator at CompellingTruth writes, *Jesus self-identified as part of this holy, present God in John 8:58 when He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." The Jews recognized this reference to God and were ready to stone Jesus to death for such blasphemy (John 8:59). Of course, because Jesus is fully God, it was no blasphemy for Him to claim the name I AM.*
- And that’s it. Jesus is God! He’s not some nice guy with great hair and piercing blue eyes – he’s God the son who came to show us the way. He didn’t back away from confrontation and he promised *whoever obeys my word will never see death.* John 8:51. That’s a promise only God can make.
- Jesus is I Am.

**Conclusion:** That’s all for today. Next week we’ll proceed with this study of all the ways Jesus is I AM. This week, believe him when he says. This is my name forever. Amen.