

**I Am: The Journey to Know Jesus**

**Text John 8:58**

9/17-18/2016

When Helen Keller was 19 mths old she contracted an illness that left her blind and deaf for life  
Not until she was 10 did she have meaningful communication with others, when her teacher  
Anne Sullivan made a breakthrough with her

Her parents then arranged for Pastor Phillips Brooks to give her religious instruction

One day, she communicate to Brooks these words: *"I knew about God before you told me, only I didn't know His name."*

Plato taught that God is unknowable and if we found Him it would be impossible to tell of Him  
More recently, German philosopher Herbert Spencer named Him 'the Unknowable'

But God is knowable and He has shown us Who He is most beautifully through His Son Jesus Christ

**PP** *"Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, He has spoken to us by [His] Son. God has appointed Him heir of all things and made the universe through Him. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of His nature, sustaining all things by His powerful word."* Hebrews 1:1-3

The series we launch today is one that looks at 8 '**I am**' statements that Jesus made as recorded in the Gospel of John

And with each statement, Jesus shows us a part of His eternal character and power

7 of the 8 He includes a metaphor, like '**I am the light**', or '**I am the door**'

The goal of this new series, is to know Jesus more and as we do, to love him greater than ever  
And may that love propel us to worship and serve Him, and become increasingly like Him

There is a powerful principle of transformation that the Psalmist teaches us

***"Those who make [idols] become like them; so do all who trust in them."*** Psalm 115:8

What we bow down to, worship and trust, is what we will more and more resemble

If I worship power, then I will become scheming and manipulative

If I worship money, then I will become increasingly greedy and more in love with the things of this world

If I worship fame, then I will become all the more narcissistic and self-obsessed

What we bow down to, more and more we resemble as it dictates the trajectory of our lives

The same is true in a good way, as the more we worship Christ, the more like Him we'll be as the trajectory of our lives shifts away from us and self-fulfillment to Him and adoration

This series aims to help this shift to worship Jesus Christ become increasingly our life ambition

We will see how completely He answers our every need, our every desire, and not someday, but today, for '**I am**' is the God of past, present and future

We begin with a hostile group of men who try to kill Jesus, first with their words and then with stones

As you turn to **John 8:48**, let me provide us some context

The 8-day Festival of Tabernacles had just finished, it is sometime in late September or mid-October and Jesus is teaching at the temple in Jerusalem

The '**Scribes and Pharisees**' were looking to trap Jesus and find a way to put Him to death

These are Jewish lawyers and teachers and pastors

The Jewish people were wondering if He was the Messiah

**PP** He is, and He explains to them, ***“If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*** **John 8:31-32**

They deny their need for freedom, and He tells them that they are in bondage to sin

What we are about to witness is more graphic, if you truly stop and think about it, then watching someone getting killed on a surveillance video

Let me give you some context for that statement

Pastor Tim VanSumeren and I recently rode our bicycles from Pittsburgh to DC along the Alleghany Trail and the C&O Trail

5 other men went with us, and we were entirely unsupported, meaning all of our food, sleeping bags, tents, tools and clothes were carried on our bikes with us

Most of the men who went are not from our church and make no claims to be Christians, so it gave us the opportunity to live our faith before them and look for opportunities to share our hope in Christ

They know we are pastors, and it's not uncommon that someone would swear, and then look at us and apologize

I shared with them that the expletive that really bothers me, is when God's name is taken in vain, and particularly the name of Jesus Christ

It really bothers me, angers me really, when Christians in our church thoughtlessly say 'Oh my God', or write OMG on their Tweets or fb posts

The biblical thought behind a person's name is that it captures and sums up the person himself

**PP** ***“Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.”*** **1 Samuel 25:25**

To this day in orthodox Judaism, a dying person's name is sometimes changed in the hopes that a new name will bring health and a new life

**PP** ***‘A good name [reputation] is to be chosen rather than great riches’*** **Proverbs 22:1**

God cares very much about protecting His names, for they represent His identity, His reputation

**PP** ***“Yet He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make known His mighty power.”*** **Psalms 106:8**

He has revealed Who He is through His names and He will not idly sit by while His name is emptied of meaning and excellence

Two men got in a fight in the camp of Israel. One was an Israelite, the other had an Israelite mother but an Egyptian father. In the course of the fight, with people all around, the one with mixed blood 'blasphemed the Name, and cursed.' He was put in custody, then the LORD Himself instructed him to be brought out, the hands of those who heard him curse God were to be placed upon his head, and then he was put to death

This startling incident, found in Leviticus 24, inspired millennium of Jews, to this day, to severely guard this name of God that translates in English **'LORD'**

When Lord is in small caps in our OT, it is the name for God originally called ***Yahweh***

It has been translated into the Greek in the NT as **'Lord'**, but there without the small caps

**PP** ***Yahweh*** reveals God's nature in the highest and fullest sense possible, the name above all other names of God

***Yahweh*** stresses the absolute, unending faithfulness of God and was only given to His people

The unchangeableness of God is in view, especially as He wonderfully demonstrates His Word to the fullest degree by working out His redemption among His people

**PP** Yahweh is the great ***I Am and always shall be***, the unchanging God Who demonstrates His faithful love and mercy to His people at every moment

His name means that He is eternally self-existent, owing to no one for His life

His name means He is ever-above us, greater than we will ever be, greater than anyone

His name means He is personally aware of and concerned for you and I

His name means He is utterly unable to change, He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow

His name means He is righteous, and absolutely unable to do wrong to anyone

To protect this name for God, devout Jews would never pronounce it, and it became a capital offense to utter the name Jehovah

The only exception was on the Day of Atonement when the high priest could say the name as he entered the Holy of Holies

When the Jewish scribes copied the scriptures, they would stop when coming to the name YHWH, bathe, put on clean clothes, take a new, unused pen, and then write it

When reading the OT, Jews would substitute either Elohim or Adonai, which is the English word ***'Lord'***

By the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the name YHWH-which has no vowels-was given the vowels from Adonai, forming the safe-to-speak-and-write name of Jehovah

Yet there is something even more incredible about the name Yahweh and it begins to bring us back to our passage in John 8

It is, as I have said, the greatest name for God in the Old Testament

But listen to the Apostle Paul's statement in **Philippians 2:9-11**

**PP** (Put both passages on one slide) ***"Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord [Kyrios-Greek equivalent for Yahweh], to the glory of God the Father."***

It is clear from my underlines, that Paul was drawing on Isaiah 45 when he wrote this

**PP** ***"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.' 'Only in the LORD [YAHWEH], it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him.'"*** Isaiah 45:22-24

Notice what Jesus said in **John 8:58**, ***'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'***

The voice speaking from that burning bush to Moses, was the voice of Jesus Christ

**PP** ***"So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, **"Whom do you seek?"** They answered him, **"Jesus of Nazareth."** Jesus said to them, **"I am he."** Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, **"I am he,"** they drew back and fell to the ground."*** John 18:3-6

In your bibles, you would do well to note that the pronoun ***'He'*** isn't in the original Greek

Here, as in **John 8:58**, Jesus self-identifies as the ***'I am'*** and the power of the name above names dropped the soldiers to the ground

I want to end our time looking specifically at John 8:58

Again, Jesus said, ***"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'"***  
Why did Jesus say this?

In fact, why didn't He say, *'Before Adam was, I am'*?

It certainly would have been true, for Eve, in Genesis 4 said after giving birth, ***"Now Adam knew PP Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.'"*** Genesis 4:1

But throughout **John 8**, the name Abraham had come into the conversation 12 times

If you notice in verse **33**, the Jews said, ***"We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"***

They couldn't have been speaking of national freedom, for they had been enslaved by Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and among others, at that moment, Rome

They meant spiritual freedom, and the great deception of the Jewish people was that they believed Abraham's righteousness guaranteed their own

They believed they were accepted and favored by God through the righteousness of Abraham

And now we are firmly in the domain of the gospel

There is only one way that a person can be right with God, and only one Person in whom we can place our hope and confidence

No one is declared right with God through Abraham, only Jesus Christ

**PP** ***"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*** Acts 4:12

The point of 8:58 is to open the eyes of His listeners, I existed before Abraham

I am Yahweh, the One Who keeps the promise to faithfully redeem My people

You must believe that, put your confidence in Me, not Abraham

Bring this into our context today

Let me ask each of you to answer this question: *Who or what are you trusting to save you from the guilt of your sins?*

Your religious background or religious training?

A very good friend of mine told me that as soon as their daughter completed confirmation in their church, they have hardly been back

Their confidence is in their daughter giving a profession of faith after being prepared for it by completing a program of religious instruction

Have you put your confidence in your own morality...you try and do the best you can?

How do you ever know if you have done enough?

The answer is, you don't, you just hope at the end of your life, God will see your effort and direct you to eternal life

Century after century, from the earliest times in human history, men and women have tried to make their own way to God, one that they are in control of

Yet Jesus said in verse 51, ***"...if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."***

To keep His word is to believe and submit to Him, to have faith in Jesus that produces obedience Predictably, the Jews asked just who does He think He is, greater than Abraham or the prophets?

And the answer is...verse 58, Yes!!

I am Yahweh, the eternal, covenant keeping, name above all names, God!

I am the One that Abraham saw from afar off, knowing one day He would be with Me!

***“So they picked up stones to throw at him...”***      **John 8:59**

We saw that Jesus made a statement so shocking that the Jews tried to kill Him over it

Jesus is Yahweh, He is the eternal Son of God, having always existed and always will

And as Yahweh, He has revealed Himself to people of every age, and John's gospel will show  
how He uses common metaphors of His day to show people Who He was and what He  
does

In the OT, Yahweh was often combined with another name to describe attributes of God

In the gospel of John, Yahweh is combined with metaphors to do the same

Welcome to the I Am series, our journey of Christ-discovery!

Amen?

Pray