

Series: I am

I am the I am

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Exodus 3:1-15

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, March 2, 2025

A reading from Exodus chapter 3, verses one through 15: “Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up, so Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up.’ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses, Moses,’ and Moses said, ‘Here I am. ‘Do not come any closer,’ God said. ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’ Then He said, ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering, so I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, and now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way that the Egyptians are oppressing them, so now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt,’ but Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ and God said, ‘I will be with you, and this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’ Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they ask me, “What is his name?” Then what shall I tell them?’ 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,’” the word of the Lord.

Good morning. Is everyone doing all right? Is anybody wondering why we are starting the series on John in Exodus? Yeah, we will get to that in a second, but before we dive into the message, I just want to give you a quick update. Last year we made it known that you guys were incredibly generous. Our church was incredibly generous with how we finished last year. I actually went back and looked, and we finished last year with all, receiving more in the offering or the giving budget than we had in almost ten years, so just incredible generosity for this church, and so, thank you for that. We are seeing a little bit of a different story as we step into 2025. As you can actually see on this graph, year to date, we are about \$60,000 behind budget to start the year. There could be a lot of reasons for that, and just to name a few, eggs are \$15 a dozen right now, and so maybe we are feeling the pinch. Maybe your family, like my family, we got through December and travel and Christmas and gifts, and we are like, “Oh, wow, we might need to rein it in a little bit.” December was a little bit more expensive month, so that could be going on.

Just to name it, we are still in the middle of a transition, and they often say when you transition pastors, there can be a dip in giving, so just naming all of that. Here is the call. It is to help us get caught up, and I am not very good at math, and so I put a few things into Chat GPT to tell them where we are and had them do a little math for me, because here is the thing. At a church our size, this can sound like a really large number, 60,000, but when we share the burden, it is actually not that heavy of a lift, so if four-hundred people, that is about half of our church, gave a one-time gift of \$150, we would be entirely caught up. If three hundred people gave a one-time gift of \$200, the gap in this year's budget would completely disappear, and if one-hundred-fifty people gave \$400, we would be on track. Do not check my math on that. Chat GPT did it for me, so I am pretty sure that it is good, but here is the thing. If you would join us in giving and help us to get caught up, we would greatly appreciate it. It would help us step forward into this year to some of the things we feel like God is calling us to and that we are very excited about, and this helps us. We would love to finish the end of the first quarter back on track, and so we thank you for investing in Waterstone. Thank you for giving. Thank you for supporting the church, and let's continue trusting God in this season together. Does that sound good?

All right, now a quick transition to the message. I do not know how to do that, from giving to the message, so I will just say it, transitioning into the message. This year we are starting a series called "The I am," and from now until Easter, we are going to be looking at the "I am" statements of Jesus in the gospel of John, where Jesus tells us who He is and what He is like. It could be simple on the face of it to say understanding more about who Jesus is could sound like an intellectual exercise, but here is what you need to know, because this series is deeply, deeply pastoral from my heart, because as a pastor, I get really a front row seat into conversations with a lot of people in their understanding of who God is and what God is like. I would say, I would make the argument that as a pastor, most of the time when I interact with people and I ask them what God is like or they tell me about their life, either explicitly or implicitly, there is this theme that begins to appear in my conversations with people, and it is this distorted view of who God is. What I have come to find in my conversations with people is that most people believe in a God who merely tolerates them. Their view of God sounds something like this, "I know God loves me, but I am not sure God likes me," and when they think of their relationship with God, they think this idea that, "I mean, He is God. He has to love me, but I am not sure if he enjoys me. He certainly probably does not delight in me. I think He mostly tolerates me. He puts up with me." The God we believe in is a God who simply deals with us, and it can lead to this relationship with God where we have incredible guilt and shame about our relationship with Him. We think that God is mostly disappointed with us, that He sees all the things that we have done wrong, or maybe how we act in the world, and we think that is the identity that He understands about us.

If I were to ask you this question, "What is God like?" How would you answer? and not just in this Sunday school answer where you know all the right words because you have been in church for a long time, but I mean, when you think of your relationship with God and what God is like in your life and what your relationship with Him looks like, what is God like? If you were being completely honest with yourselves, and if no one were listening, how would you answer this question? Is your God kind or cruel? Is He involved in every detail of your life, or is he somehow distant and aloof? Is your God more like a fundamentalist preacher who preaches on the street corner about how all of your sins are going to cause

you to burn up for all eternity, or is your God more like a California surfer bro who just goes with the flow and is easygoing, the hair and the beard, right? You can see the correlation there. Is your God a God who votes Democrat or Republican? Is your God a cat person or a dog person? We know the answer to that one. Like, it doesn't take much guessing there. If you are questioning whether or not God is a cat person, you are wrong. I will probably get some e-mails about that one.

All right, I would argue that this question, "What God is like?" will actually define who you are and shape your existence in this world. It is one of the most fundamental questions of life. I mean, if you think about it, different people who answer this question differently, it leads them to all sorts of different places. The Jewish rabbi who is trying to follow kosher dietary laws, the Buddhist monk who decides that they want to give up material possessions and seek enlightenment, the political person who is trying to bring about policies on immigration or reform or whatever it might be, the street preacher proclaiming the gospel on a busy street corner, the atheist who believes that God is not real, and not just that He is not real, but that He is actually a delusion and a detriment to society, the woman who decides that she wants to forgo medical assistance because she believes in God as a divine healer, the missionary who leaves behind the comfort of the western world to go live among the people that do not know the name of Jesus, the megachurch pastor who gets out of his Audi after having late night drinks with Justin Bieber believes something about God. So does the Jihadist who beheads the infidel or the American sniper who prays to God before he takes the shot. What we believe about God deeply shapes who we are, and most of the time this question, "What is God like?" how we answer that question comes from our own experience. It comes with us as the expert. How we define God through our experience, our circumstances, our worldview informs the question. We treat ourselves as the ultimate source, the ultimate person who can define what God is like.

This plays out in all sorts of different ways, but one of my favorite anecdotes is from a professor. His name is Scott McKnight, and he teaches a class, New Testament theology, on what Jesus is like, and at the beginning of his class every semester, he always asks the people in his class to do a survey. There are two parts of the survey. The first part of the survey, everybody writes down and answers questions about what they like, what they dislike, what they believe in, what is important to them, and so they do that survey, and then a few weeks later, they take another part of the survey, where essentially they ask all of the same questions, but it is in reference to Jesus. What is Jesus like? What is He not like? What does He dislike? What does Jesus believe? What does Jesus care about? What is most important to Him? What is least important to Him? Over the years of doing this, and he has received a lot of surveys back, what he has found is that ninety percent of the time, people's answers for what they like, what they believe, what they dislike almost match, exactly ninety percent match what Jesus is like, what Jesus believes, and what Jesus thinks, essentially revealing that so many times we just end up making Jesus look a lot like us, and what we believe about God is usually what we believe about the world. In fact, this quote from Anne Lamott, the one that I love, it says, "You can safely assume that you have created God in your own image when it turns out God hates all the same people you do." If God is angry at all the people you are angry at, and God likes what you like and dislikes what you dislike and votes the way you vote, it might be that you are not worshipping the God of the universe, but you are worshipping yourself dressed up as the God of the universe.

What we believe about God has massive implications for how we live life. It defines us, which is why we need a series like the “I am” series, where we do not look at God through our lens, our worldview, what we like, and what we dislike. We look at God through his own words, what Jesus says about Himself, “This is who I am. This is what I am like.” Jesus does not leave us guessing about the kind of God He is. That question, “What is God like?” He answers it for us. He does not make us guess the answer to the question. That is why this series is so important, because when we fundamentally misunderstand the character of God, when He looks like us rather than like who He is, then it sets everything off its axis, and our relationship with God, with ourselves, with each other, and with the world, is jeopardized. It is one of the most important questions, and so as we go through this next eight weeks leading up to Easter, we look at these, “I am” statements of John, what Jesus said about Himself, before we can get to those statements, we have to go back to their source, because before Jesus said, “I am the bread of life,” or before He said, “I am the light of the world,” God told us his name in the story of Exodus.

Exodus is probably a story that many of you are familiar with, and so I am not going to go all the way down into detail, but just to make sure we are all on the same page. Everyone seen the movie, “The Prince of Egypt?” Okay, you, way more people need to see that movie. If you are not raising your hand, you need to go see this movie. It is one of the best cartoon movies ever. I like to call them animated films, because it sounds more important. It is amazing, but it tells the story of the people in Exodus, and the story begins with Israel groaning under the weight of oppression from Egypt, where they have begun in this place that was a refuge for them, and now they have been turned into slaves, where Pharaoh is fearing their numbers and the way that they are growing, and so he seeks to break them under the yoke of slavery, and so, ruthlessly for four-hundred years they serve the greatest empire in the world as slaves, and they are stuck under the weight of oppression and injustice, but it continues to get worse, because Pharaoh, he continues to see their numbers growing, and he continues to see their power growing, and so he perceives them to be a threat to his empire, and he chooses to send out an edict, a decree that all of the baby boys born to Hebrew mothers should be killed by being thrown into the River Nile.

That is the backdrop for this story, and the question is, I think that the Hebrew people would be feeling in that moment, is what kind of God allows his people to experience four-hundred years of slavery? What is God like if He is a God who allows babies to be murdered by being thrown into the river? What is that God like? What is God like when the entire world is falling apart? That is what the Hebrew people are sitting with, and then it goes on to tell the story of a man named Moses. He was born in this time when Pharaoh was trying to kill all the baby boys, and his mother takes a leap of faith, puts him in a basket, and hides him from Pharaoh and sends him out into the Nile, where he is rescued by Pharaoh’s own daughter, and he is brought up in Pharaoh’s house as a prince of Egypt. That is where they got the name. Pretty clever, and he is raised with this dual relationship. He knows that he is a Hebrew. He knows that he was enslaved and that he comes from a people who experience slavery and oppression, and yet he is living in a place of immense power and wealth and empire, and it is in this tension that he begins to struggle with who he is and what his identity is to the point where he sees an Egyptian slave master beating a Hebrew, and he goes so far as to kill this person, and suddenly the Prince of Egypt is the most wanted man in Egypt, and he flees to the wilderness, into the desert, and that is where our story picks up.

It is because Moses is this person living in exile, living in obscurity, and it takes the story a level deeper, because it is one thing to ask, “What is God like when the world is falling apart?” but it is an entirely different question to ask, “What is God like when your world is falling apart?” and that is where Moses is. He is living in obscurity in the wilderness. He is suffering, and he is listening to people who have been living under slavery and oppression, and he is powerless to do anything about it, and it is in this place of exile that God comes to him, in this place of Moses experiencing this valley, this low point. In fact, you can get a picture into Moses’s worldview at the time, because he names his firstborn son as he is living in exile. He names his first-born son essentially like, “this kid is a stranger here.” He has no home, which is what we call transference in psychology today, so he is down badly, and he is seeing the world through this particular lens.

God comes to Moses as he is tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law. That is how bad it is for Moses. He is not even tending his own sheep. He is working for his father-in-law, who is the priest of Midian, and “He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, and there an angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush, and Moses saw that the bush was on fire and did not burn up, so Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up,’” and as Moses is looking at this bush, a voice from within the bush begins to speak out to Moses. We are familiar with this story, but let’s pause for a moment. If you are hiking through the mountains of the Rocky Mountain region in Colorado, and you are going through, and you see a bush that is literally on fire, and nothing else is being burned up around it, it is not starting to forest fire, just the bush is on fire, and it is not being consumed, you would think this is really weird, but then if a bush starts to talk to you, you would think you are going a little crazy, right? Moses would probably be thinking, “I have spent too much time with the sheep out here. This is not going well,” and so he has this conversation with the burning bush, and he says essentially, “Here I am,” and God says to him from the bush, “Do not come any closer. I want you to take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground,” and after Moses has taken his sandals off, He reveals to Moses who He is. “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,” and at this Moses hides his face. What you have to understand is Moses is not sure who is talking to him. We know looking back on this story, but at this moment, this bush is speaking to him. This bush is on fire, and he is wondering who this person is, who this God is. It is as if this God is having to reintroduce Himself to Moses. It is as if they have been stuck in slavery, and they have been under oppression for so long, crying out, nothing has been happening, that God has to come back and reintroduce Himself: “You remember all those stories of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob. I am that God that you have heard about, but you have been wondering where He is your entire life.” That is what God says to Moses in this story.

He goes on to tell Moses, “I have seen what is happening to my people. I have seen their misery, the injustice, the suffering. I have heard them crying out because of their slavery, and I am concerned for their suffering, and I have a plan. I have come to rescue them, but Moses, I want you to play a role in the story. I want you to be a part of what I am doing. I have seen the injustice. I have seen the oppression. I have seen their situation. I have seen them crying out, and I am going to do something. I am going to rescue them. I want to send you to play a role,” and in verse 11, Moses says this: “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Here is Moses, and he is interacting with a burning

bush that is speaking to him, and the bush tells him that it is God, and he says, “I want you to go back to the most powerful empire the world to this point has ever seen, and I want you to go back to your family that is in control of that empire, and I want you to advocate for the people that you were born into that have been stuck in slavery. I want you to speak for me, and I want you to call them out into freedom,” and Moses hears this call, and you can hear the doubt, and the self-insecurity. “Who am I? Who am I that I should go?” Moses only sees his weaknesses, his past failures, his lack of eloquence, his fear. “Who am I to go before you and to go on your behalf?” He feels unqualified. He is unworthy of what God has called him to do.

Notice God’s response. You would imagine that if you started talking to God and saying, “I do not know if I can do this. I do not know if I have what it takes. Who am I? I am not good enough,” that maybe God would come back with a response like, “Hey, you know what? You’ve got it. It is going to be all right. You have what it takes,” and He gives a pep talk. God does not say that at all. God says this: “I will be with you,” to Moses’ insecurity, to his doubt, to his frustration, to his questioning, to his wondering whether or not he is worthy. God does not respond with anything about Moses. He responds with who He is. He responds with his character. He responds with a promise, “I will be with you,” and this is a present and future statement. He is saying essentially that I have been with you, I am with you, and I will continue to be with you. As Moses is questioning this call that God is placing on his life and questioning who this God is, God essentially says, “Moses, I was with you when your mom placed you in the basket in the Nile River. I was with you as you were brought up as a prince in the palace. I was with you when you were wandering through the wilderness. I was with you when you were tending the sheep for forty years wondering what I was doing, and I will be with you when you go before the throne of Pharaoh to tell him to let my people go. I will be with you.” He offers Moses, not any statement about who he is. He essentially says, “Moses, it is not about you. It is about who I am.” This is God revealing something very deep about who he is, “I am the God who is with you on the mountain top, but especially in the valleys. I am the God who is with you, even when you do not know what I am doing in the world.” It is a promise to Moses, and it is a promise to you and me.

He is revealing the kind of God He is, but Moses is not really convinced, and let’s face it, he probably has some good reason to not be convinced. It is one thing for God to say, “I am with you,” but it would be so easy for Moses to say, “You will be with me, but where have you been? Because I have been living in obscurity for forty years, and my people have been enslaved for four-hundred years. Where have you been?” So, in this questioning space, Moses does this thing where he asks for a friend, and he says, “Okay God, so you will be with me, but suppose I go to the Israelites, and I say to them,” and he is like, “I am just asking for them. It is not a question I have, but what would you say to them potentially, if they said, ‘Who are you? What is your name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

It is so important that we understand Moses is not simply just asking Him this question, like, “What is your name?” “I need to be able to give them a name, so I can say like, ‘Steve sent me to rescue you.’” It is much deeper than that. In the ancient Near East and in that world a name was not just a statement that gave you information about who a person was. It actually went deeper than that. It went to their essence, to their character, to their identity. What Moses is asking in this moment is, “What kind of God is sending me? What kind of God are you? What are you like? You say you will be with us, but how can I trust that?”

So, God responds to Moses' question again, to his doubt of whether or not he can trust God, and God says to Moses, "I am who I am," which, let's be honest for a moment, if I come to you, and I say, "Who are you? What are you like?" and you say, "I am me," that is not very helpful, right? It feels a little ambiguous. It feels a little vague. It feels like you are not really answering the question, like I need to know a little bit more than you saying, "You know what? I am me," and that is what it feels like on the face of it. It feels like this very philosophical answer that God is giving, "I am who I am. I am me. That is all you need to know, Moses. I am me," but it goes again much deeper than that. God is not just saying that I am me. He is revealing something about his nature and identity and character. We miss it, but I love the way that the Bible Project translates this statement, "I am who I am." It is the best definition I have seen of what God is really saying and what He is trying to communicate to Moses. He says, "I am and will continue to be what I am and will forever be." Again, it is this promise of what God is saying He is like, what his character is like. "I am and will continue to be what I am and will forever be."

God is self-defined, and what He is essentially saying in this moment is, "Moses, if you have heard that I am a God of justice, then I am just and will continue to be just, because I am just and will forever be just. If you have heard that I am a God of love, then I am love and will continue to be love. What I am and will forever be is love." What God is saying is that He is self-defined by who He is. He is self-existent and independent of all categories that we would try to place on Him. He simply is. When everything else in creation requires and is dependent on something else to sustain us, God simply is. God is unchanging and faithful. He says, "I will continue to be what I have always been." He is speaking to his nature and this idea that unlike human rulers or people, that their minds are dictated by their circumstances or shift with the wind, God remains constant, and so if He was holy, just, and loving in the past, then He will always be holy, just and loving. It is a promise that God will not change, and when He makes a promise, He keeps it. It is this idea that God is eternally present and active. Is not just a statement about God's existence. It is a statement about his presence, that God is fully present in every moment of time, with every person who has ever existed, and He has been the same today and tomorrow and for eternity.

What is so fascinating is when we look at each other, even the best of us, if we think, "Yeah, I am a very loving person," even the best of us is only loving sometimes, or a good person sometimes. I mean, think about your best friend in the world. You love this person. You think they are awesome, and maybe you were in a time where you loved hanging out with them and you had the ability to move in with them and become roommates, and you thought, man, they are just like the most fun. They are so kind. They are so generous, and then you move in with them, and what do you discover about that person? They are only sometimes really fun and sometimes kind and sometimes generous, and it turns out they leave the dishes out where they are not supposed to, and they leave the lights on, and they have too many people over, whatever it might be. The same thing goes for us in dating. You encounter someone you think, "Oh, my goodness, I love this person so, so much. Like, I could never get enough time with them. I want to spend the rest of my life with them. They are amazing. They are this. They are that. They are the other thing," and then you marry them, and then what happens? Don't laugh. It is all true. It is not like no one has ever disappointed you at all. Just telling me, be careful, and I'll just tell you, Steffi wrote this part of my message, that she is talking about me. I am not talking about her, so it is okay. We are good.

You get into this relationship, and you realize that this person, even though you love them so much and you want to spend the rest of your life with them, they still disappoint you. They still let you down. They are not consistently the best part of themselves that you were attracted to, but it is not that way with God. The weight of who God is, the weight of his name, what God is like, He says “I am.” He is everything. He is our creator and our sustainer and our redeemer. He does not shift with culture, He does not weaken with time, and He does not fade in power. The same God who spoke to Moses in the burning bush and said, “I will be with you,” is the same God who is with you on the worst day of your life. He does not change. He remains consistent and constant. “I am and will continue to be what I am and will forever be,” and do not miss this, the circumstances, the story that brings about God revealing the most intimate name He has for Himself is a response to the brokenness, injustice, and evil in the world. It is at the low point of his people that He says, “I need you to know who I am and what I am like.”

When God describes Himself, I find this so fascinating, the people are under the injustice of the largest empire in the world, and He does not come and say, “I am about to conquer.” He does not come and say, “I am the most powerful.” He does not come and say, “I am the most sovereign.” What does He say? “I am with you. I will be with you.” All those other things are true of God, but it is as if the most important thing He wants us to know about who He is, is that in the suffering of the world, in the injustice of the world, in the brokenness of the world, on the worst day of our life, He is with us. He is with you, and He will continue to be what He is and will forever be. He is constant. He is reliable. He is trustworthy. That is what God says about who He is, and we have to understand that story. We have to understand God coming to Moses and saying, “This is who I am,” because in John’s gospel, when Jesus begins to go around and say things like, “I am the bread of life,” He is not just making a statement about Himself or about bread. He is tying his story to this story in Exodus, saying that the God that came to Moses is He, and we see this play out.

There is one of my favorite stories in John’s gospel. It is one of the “I am” statements, but for some reason it is not ever counted as the other, “I am” statements. There are seven that we most commonly refer to, like “I am the bread of life.” “I am the light of the world.” “I am the resurrection and the life,” and you can see many of them back there, but there is this other “I am,” statement that happens in John’s gospel that we sometimes forget about. It happens in John chapter eight, and Jesus is teaching in the temple courts when the religious leaders and the Pharisees, they come to Him, and they essentially say, “Who are you? You have been teaching all of these things about God, and we do not really agree with very many of them at all. You are forgiving people, and you are choosing to forgive people’s sins, and you are choosing to forego the Sabbath, and you are shifting our understanding of what God is like,” and so they begin to have this debate. I wish we could go into the minutiae and the detail of this story, because it is fascinating, but it is so dense that we do not really have the time, but essentially what happens is Jesus and these religious leaders, they come to each other, and they have a debate about what God is like on the temple room floor, in the courtyard of the temple. Jesus is presenting one view of what God is like, and they are presenting a different view of what God is like, and they go back and forth with God being on trial, and it gets to the point where it is so heated, it is so intense that the people are so angry about what Jesus is teaching and what He is saying is true of God that pushes against their assumptions and their presuppositions of who God is that they call Him demon-possessed. They say, “You are not of God. You are God’s enemy because

of what you are trying to say about what God is like,” and through this debate there are several times that they ask the question, “Who are you? Who do you think you are?” It is as if in this debate where God is on trial and they are trying to decide what God is like, Jesus Himself, his identity is on trial, and it comes to this crescendo, to this point at the end of the story where they are pushing back against Jesus. They are asking Him who He is and what He thinks about God, and He says this: “‘Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am,’ and at this point they picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus Himself hid and slipped away from the temple grounds.” There is absolutely no question what is happening in this story. They hear Jesus say, “I am. Before Abraham was born, I am. The God who spoke to Moses in the burning bush, I am.” He is directly connecting Himself to that God and to that story. He is saying, “That God, the one that you claim you believe in, the one who says He always was, always is, and always will be, I am He,” and it goes deeper than Jesus just declaring his divine nature. He is tying Himself to the story of who God is and how He shows up in the world. Jesus is saying that He has stepped into human history. This God who is with Moses at the burning bush has taken on flesh and stepped into human history. He has drawn near. This omniscient, this self-existent one who holds all things together has drawn near in Jesus, and He is the light in the darkness. He says, “I am the truth in your confusion. I am the good shepherd in your suffering. I am the bread in your longing. I am the resurrection in your death. Before Abraham was, I am.” Jesus is the answer to the question of what God is like. God is like Jesus, and He has always been like Jesus, and He will always be like Jesus. If we want to understand what God is like, then we begin with the person of Jesus, because He declared and said that He is the “I am,” and if God’s promise was that He would be with us, then Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

One theologian says that the story of scripture is simply this, that God refuses to be God without us, that the whole story of scripture can be summarized in the statement that God is with us. He is with us in the wilderness. He is with us in slavery and oppression. He is with us on the worst day of our life. When we get the diagnosis that causes our knees to buckle, when she says she is done and walks away, when your kids say they no longer believe, Jesus is with you. That is the truth of what He says. He is the answer to the question what God is like, and it is not just a theological statement. It is an invitation for us to trust. It is an invitation for us to experience the character of God that I am and will continue to be what I am and will forever be. God is with us, and so over the course of these next eight weeks, as we look at these statements about who Jesus said He was, we have to go back to this story, because it sets the foundation for us understanding what God is like, and I have my prayer. My prayer for our church is that as we look at these statements, as we see who Jesus is, that He would become more beautiful to us, that we would become more enamored with what He says He is like, that all the places of question and doubt and longing, where we are not sure if we are enough or if He is enough, would be answered in the simple statement of Jesus saying, “I am.” That is the journey that we are about to go on. Are you ready? Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, God, we come before you, and this statement that we find in a wild story that may be too familiar to us of a God who came down in a bush in flames to reveal his name to us in the oppression and injustice and brokenness and evil of the world, that this promise that you are with us is not a promise that begins with Jesus. It is a promise that went all the way back to the very beginning, that was simply fulfilled in Jesus, and it is the promise that we carry with us today that you are with us, despite our doubts, despite our questioning, despite wondering whether or not the world is falling apart, or despite

believing that our world is falling apart, you declare that you are with us, that you will be with us, and that you are unchanging with us. God, may we trust in your name. May we live from a different place, not because of anything that we are, but because of who you are and that you are the “I am,” and it’s in Christ’s name we pray, amen.

40:46 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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