

“The Great I AM!”—Exodus 3:13-15

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Great I AM!”, is Exodus 3:13-15 → *Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘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, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How would you describe a “personal relationship with God?” Even though Scripture is filled with relationship language to describe our identity as God’s people, this question may still seem strange to some. Don’t we talk to “Dad” as “Our Father who art in heaven?” Listen to Luther’s explanation of these words: “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and

confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.” Sounds like personal relationship language to me.

The struggle with describing trust in the atoning work of Jesus in “personal relationship” terms is when the devil uses it to lead people into sin. How? It can feed a self-righteous attitude which questions the faith of other Christians because they don’t express it as it should be expressed—my way! It can lead to contempt toward others for whom Christ also died. Throughout history there have been many movements aimed at “revitalizing” the faith in the midst of what appears to be a “lifeless” expression of relationship with God. It can cause you to follow a reactionary movement rather than following the moving of the Holy Spirit as He reveals God and grants His blessings in the written Word of God and sacraments.

However, the most dangerous temptation connected with a “personal relationship with Jesus” perspective is submitting the written Word of God to my relative experience. Aside from making Scripture say more than it is intended to say, a person can end up understanding Who God is because I am who I am. It easily turns faith into my own private business, creates God in my own image and forgets accountability to others in this family into which God has brought us. The prayer is “Our Father who art in heaven.” You cannot get what you’re desiring in a personal relationship with the Lord by

exploring an intangible area in your life that you cannot reach or fathom. This relationship is given, not grasped.

If anyone could lay claim to a "personal relationship with the LORD" certainly Moses was a good candidate. Yet, he too needed to keep focused on the fact that this relationship began and continued by Yahweh's initiative on Yahweh's terms.

As God called Moses to go to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh let His people go, the LORD revealed His presence and power to Moses. In the midst of his discussion with the LORD, Moses put forth one excuse after another, trying to justify before the LORD why he shouldn't go to Egypt. His first excuse focused on himself when he told the LORD: *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?* (cf. Exodus 3:11) God directed Moses' focus to the promise of His presence and a *sign* of His working in the lives of His people. In Exodus 3:12 the LORD said: *But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.*

Moses' second excuse focused on the reaction of *the people of Israel*: *If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is His name?" what shall I say to them?* (cf. verse 13) God proceeded to reveal *His Name* to Moses: *I AM WHO I AM.*

(cf. verse 14)

Moses was not the only person to ask God *His name*. When the LORD appeared to Samson's dad to give instructions concerning his special son, Judges 13:17-18 tells us that *Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is Your name, so that, when Your words come true, we may honor You?" And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do You ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?"* When Jacob wrestled with God, Genesis 32:29 says *Jacob asked Him, "Please tell me Your name." But He said, "Why is it that you ask My name?"*

Since knowing a person's name gives one the feeling of a more personal relationship, could it possibly be that they wanted to know God's name in order to feel a more "personal" connection with Him? Possibly. However, this may have been a question asked in the midst of so much idolatry which was prevalent amongst God's people at this time. Since the experiences were so unusual, mystical and even "divine" they may have wanted specific clarification as to which god was messing with them. Even the LORD clarified who was sending Moses by instructing Moses to tell the Israelites that *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.* (cf. verse 15)

Many people are seeking to have a "personal" relationship with God. The

problem is that their idea of a “personal relationship” is to “know” God **on their own terms and with their own concepts**. Romans 1:19-23,25 describes what happens to the person who seeks to know God apart from a revealed knowledge of Him in His written Word. It says: *What can be known about God is plain to people, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. . . they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*

Left to themselves people will come to the conclusion: “God, You are Who You are because I am who I am.” They will create a god after their own image and according to their own imaginations. People cannot know Yahweh’s presence except by His initiative and the Holy Spirit’s revelation! That revelation is given you in His written Word and the Person & Work of Jesus, the Christ.

God's *name* actually reveals His past, present and future presence in our lives by His gracious activity! Whenever the LORD revealed Himself to people He introduced Himself by referring to the relationship which **He** established with them **by His grace** in the past, to work in their lives in the present, to ultimately give them a perfectly restored relationship with Him and all creation eternally on the Last Day! This relationship is yours only by faith in Him **on His terms!**

Those "terms" have been determined by the perfect obedience of His Son, Jesus; by His death on the cross to satisfy the punishment your sins deserve; by raising His Son, Jesus, from the dead to give you eternal life in a perfect relationship with Himself. The Holy Spirit is calling you to repent of your sins and trust in this work of God in Jesus for you. Then you will in humility confess that you are who you are because God is Who He is! By faith in Jesus Christ you are a forgiven sinner! By faith in Jesus Christ you are a saved child of God! In this relationship of faith in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit sustains you and keeps you in this faith along with your brothers and sisters in Christ, His Church!

It's a relationship alright! And it is personal. But it is not private or your own personal business. It is Yahweh's presence in your life, acting alongside the lives of the other relationships in your life, to guide you all through this

pilgrimage with all its struggles to the “promised land” in heaven! In the midst of Moses’ reluctance God stressed the fact that His presence would be with him through all the struggles which lie ahead, just as His presence had been with them in all the struggles of the past!

God is Yahweh—the Great *I AM*!! He is always involved in the lives of His people! No problems, struggles or challenges ahead of you are greater than the power behind you—the Great *I AM*! Amen.

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,  
“Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty.”*

(Revelation 1:8)

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