



Exodus (Part 7) – God Speaks

Matt Chandler – October 2, 2016

[Video]

Female: From darkness to light, this is the story we all share as the people of God. He draws us out to draw us in. From the birth of Israel to the church today, God delivers and dwells with his people. He draws us out of our sin, our Egypt, and draws us into his presence, into relationship with him.

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Hey, good morning. How are you? Doing well? Excellent. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Exodus 3. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. I want to make sure you grab that. We're going to look through the entire chapter of Exodus 3.

We'll read through it, and then I'm going to come back and point some things out as we go through it again, so it's important that you see that I'm not making any of these things up. We're actually digging into the very Word of God. If you don't own a Bible, you can take that one. That's our gift to you. We're just glad you're with us.

On Wednesday of this week, I got a call from Lauren. Lauren said, "Hey, on your way home, will you stop and buy a fire pit?" I said, "Where do you buy a fire pit?" She said, "Just go to Lowe's or something." I love my wife, so I went to Lowe's, and I found a little fire pit on clearance there, and it wasn't just to get that fire pit, but it was also to find piñon wood, because it smells like fall.

I got the fire pit, and I also started looking for piñon wood, because it smells like fall. If I had to find a tree to cut down, I was getting that piñon wood. We got it all, and I set it up in the backyard. As non-handy as I am, I got it together, and every day since Wednesday, we have burned that fire. Providentially, that call came on the Wednesday of the week I would be preaching Exodus 3.

Here's what I mean by providence. It struck me this week as we were burning this piñon wood that actually does smell like fall that fire is one of the few things in the universe that is simultaneously inviting and terrifying. That's what it is. It's inviting. There is something about a fire that we want to be around, but there is something terrifying about fire.

Maybe not for you and where you are in life stage-wise, but I have three children, all of whom lack the gene of fear. Then I have two dogs. Gus is smarter than some people I know. Thank God Gunner is pretty, because twice he has tried to smell the fire. For us, you have the inviting warmth and the inviting smell of piñon wood and the terror that a kid is going to try to jump over it or in it, or the dog will try to eat it. This has been every night since Wednesday.

What struck me about this thing that happens around fire and human beings is that if fire is simultaneously inviting and terrifying, then it should not surprise us that when God shoves into the forefront of the story of Exodus, he does so as a flame. Right? God has been in the background. We've been watching God kind of move all of these pieces, but it's all in the background. He hasn't said his name. He has not revealed himself.

In chapter 3, this God who is inviting and terrifying makes himself known. Let's read this, Genesis 3. Even if you have no background in church, you'll be somewhat familiar with this story, Moses and the burning bush. The irony of that is that the bush isn't actually burning. It's on fire but not being consumed. That's neither here nor there. We don't have time. Let's look at Exodus 3, starting in verse 1. We're going to read the whole chapter.

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.'

When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' And he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.'

And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?' He 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.'

Then 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..."'

If you're not picking up on that, that's an important little phrase. If you're in the Genesis study, the women's or the men's, you're learning all about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It's a huge way God has made himself known to us. Let's get back to our text. **"...has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.**

Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

There is a lot going on in this text, but here's where we're going. Since God is revealing himself to his people in this text, what we're going to do with chapter 3 is we're going to let it help us understand rightly the nature of who God is. We're going to say out of the text that God is above us, that God is transcendent, but God is also among us. He is eminent.

The theological terms *transcendent* and *immanent* are... *Transcendent* means God is bigger. He is more than. He is above us. He is *immanent*. He is among us, and he is with us, and that is a distinctively Christian way of understanding the way the universe works. There's an all-powerful, mighty God who actually happens to be among us. When we say that God is above us, when we say God is transcendent, one of the things we mean by this is that, as we see in the text, God is self-defining. Are you tracking with that?

We live in a day and age when people believe it's our right to define God. We want to make God in our own image. We want to believe that we get to define who God is. You hear people talk about this all the time. It's crazy. If you stop for a second, it really is insane. People will say, "Well, I don't think God would do that. Well, I'm spiritual, not religious. Well, surely if there was a God, he would..." What is that? That is us making God a concept, not a reality, a concept we can bend to our image.

Yet, God will not have this. God defines God. We don't define God. The insanity of us defining God would be like me coming up and going, "Hey, what's your favorite kind of fish?" You answer that question with, "A Labradoodle." Listen. A Labradoodle is not a fish. "No, it is." "Bro, I'm telling you that a Labradoodle is not a fish. It's a genetically modified dog that probably is a link toward the zombie apocalypse." That's neither here nor there. "It's not a fish."

At some point, I have to bow out of that conversation, right? Because you have left reality. This is the exact same thing as saying, "This is what God does. This is how God would act." When you say, "I just can't believe in a God who would..." you realize that doesn't matter. It just doesn't matter. You don't get to define God. God has defined himself. He has let himself be known.

What we see in this text is God introducing himself with his personal name. I am a man named Matt Chandler. That is my personal name. I have some nicknames. Those are none of your business. This is God introducing himself with his personal name. Let's look at this, verse 14. **"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.'"**

Now, this seems meant to deliberately blow up our categories, right? If I say, "I am," there's going to be something that follows that. "I am a husband. I am a father. I am a pastor." I have to fill in the blank there, but this is a circular argument by God, and he's making a point with it. He doesn't say, "I am *this*." He says, "I am who I am."

Now, honestly, a better translation... I always hate when I have to say things like this. A better translation would really be, "I be who I be." That felt good to say. It's a better translation, because what is going on in the Hebrew here is God is saying his personal name, "I am who I am," which your Bible translates as Yahweh or Jehovah. The most common way you'll see it in the Scripture is simply "the LORD," all capitalized. Right? That's his personal name.

If you have a baby or are having a baby, you get one of those baby books because everybody wants their kid's name to mean something great. Nobody is going to pick a name for their kid that means dum-dum or moron, right? We're looking for, "Heavenly warrior princess," or, "Gift from God on high." We want to name our kids that stuff, right? We don't want to give them a derp name.

Ultimately, if you have that name book, and you were to look up Yahweh, Jehovah, or the LORD, the meaning would be, "I am who I am," "I be who I be." The way the Hebrew is built out here is this. God is kind of saying in this really unique way, "I have been who I have always been, but I am consistent. I am who I am. I am not shaped by others, and I will be who I will be. I am what matters in the future."

This is what this statement means. It is a stunning circular argument about the grandeur and transcendence of God. Because this is true, we can believe that all of the promises of God are true. Why? Because, "I am who I am." He's able to keep those promises in ways that we are not able to keep our promises. Let's look at that. Look at verse 16.

"Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I have

observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey."

And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.

So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

What is stunning about this is to think... Keep in mind... Some of us have already seen the movie. We already know the story. We're kind of missing out on what is happening here because the great, "I Am," the great, "I be who I be," just said to Moses, "Here's what's going to happen. You're going to go to the elders of Israel. You will tell them this. They will believe you.

Then you will go to Pharaoh. You will tell him this, and he will not believe you unless he is compelled by a mighty hand. I will outstretch my mighty hand, and I will undo him. I will destroy Pharaoh, and you will plunder Egypt." *Plunder* is language of victory. You have overcome the, "I am," of Pharaoh. See, there is a war about to break out between two "I am's."

"I am Pharaoh. I am the most powerful man on earth. I lead the most effective, efficient, brilliant nation that the world, to this point in history, has ever seen. I command armies and legions. We are technologically more advanced than anyone else on earth," and, "I am who I am. I be who I be. And you will die, and Egypt will be destroyed, and Egypt will be plundered." See, the promises of God can be trusted as true because, "I am who I am."

This is hard for us, right? I have to fill in something here. "I am something." Not only that, but I never commune and talk like this. God here is like, "They will listen. You will go. He won't. I will." If I can just put it into maybe the relationship I have with my wife, I have learned that there are some things that I need to watch how I say them around my bride. I'll give you just simple examples.

I don't ever tell Lauren what time I'll be home; I'll tell her what time my last meeting starts. What I learned is that with the nature of what I do, sometimes I just can't go, "Okay, we're done here." A guy will be in my office, the world is burning to the ground, in tears, just wanting to talk through life and Jesus and what all that means, and I can't go in the middle of him sobbing, "Oh, bro, listen. I told my girl I would be home at 5:45. I know your world is burning to the ground, but if I'm not there, two worlds will burn to the ground. Love you, brother. God bless you. We can pick this up later."

I don't do that. I can't say, "I will... I will..." I do, but I shouldn't because I can't control it. I really can't. There are so many variables that I can't control. The Lord never says, "I may..." or, "If..." He doesn't use that language. He knows. The I Am is outside of time. He will be what he will be. He is there. He knows. The reason he's able to tell Moses, "This is what is going down," is not because he has some vague view of the future and is sort of hoping it kind of pulls out his way. He knows. He's already there. "This will happen. I am who I am."

We can be confident in the promises of God. Listen. I also think... Let me do *immanence*. I almost skipped over *immanence*; we can't have that. This all-powerful, mighty God, "I am who I am," is not just terrifying, but he's inviting. He's not just above us. He is also among us. In fact, look at verse 7. **"Then the Lord said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians...'"**

Now, this God, who even in the Psalms would say, "God is in the heavens. He does whatever pleases him," this immense, transcendent God above us, God of the universe, this sovereign King of Glory, also sees, hears, knows, and has come down. He is among us. He is with us. In fact, Jesus would be called Immanuel, which literally means, "God with us."

Now, it's important that we understand all of these deeply, not just kind of intellectually but in how they operate. What happens is if you don't grasp both of those... By the way, to grasp both of those is distinctively Christian. See, there are plenty of monotheistic religions that would have God as transcendent but not necessarily immanent. The Eastern religions are going to have God immanent, among us, but not necessarily transcendent. Both create massive problems for the human experience.

Maybe I can kind of unpack it this way. If God is almighty and all-powerful and just can do whatever he pleases, and we don't get to define him, we don't get to shape him, and he is self-defined, then he's a God who exists, but he's not necessarily a God who is among us. We believe in him, but he makes no difference in our everyday lives. He does not see. He does not know. He has not come down.

On the other side of the pendulum are those where God is immanent but not transcendent. Think Eastern religions. Think of the movie *Avatar*. "God is everywhere and in everything, including my ponytail, and I can hook my ponytail to a tree, and now we're all God together." This is immanence gone too far. You're not God. Your dog is not God. The tree is not God. God is God, and he is among us. He hears us. He sees us. He has come down.

If you land too far on the immanent side and forget his transcendence, you more than likely have a tee shirt that says, "Jesus is my homeboy," and there is no seriousness in your heart about sin, and you live as though God does not see, does not hear, and has not come down. There is no holy fear in your heart. There's no striving for holiness while resting in his grace. Did you hear how I said that? There's no striving for holiness while resting in his grace.

It is the Christian who goes, "No, no, no. Transcendent, above us, but also among us." I think getting those two into our guts addresses the real decay that is going on in so many of us, many who even claim the name of Jesus. Let me tell you what I mean by that. Look at verse 11. **"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?' He 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.'"**

Now, Moses asks a question that I believe is *the* question that we can't seem to answer that is crushing us. The question is, "Who am I?" It's a question of identity. "Who am I?" See, here's where we are in human history. We're in a period of time when we love to create our own identities. There is no root anymore. We're not really from anywhere. You can kind of change what you do for a living at any time. You can kind of get up and move any time, and you can remake and redefine yourself any time you want.

When that happens and all of the kind of institutions and history that were meant to shape and give us an identity are gone, we're only left with ourselves. When we're left to our own devices to kind of create our own identities, we almost always enslave each other. We almost always enslave

ourselves. In fact, I'll just boldly say it. If you have created your own identity you have enslaved yourself to that identity.

I have lived in this area now for 16 years. I have been the pastor of this church for 14 years next month. I live eight minutes from here driving the speed limit. My kids are in the schools here. We are as embedded in this community as we can be in this community. Here's what I know about DFW. DFW has some real specific faux identities that we're just drawn to. Maybe it's where we are in the world. Maybe it's the fact that so many of our campuses are in the suburbs.

I'm just telling you there are some faux identities that are rotting us from the inside out. I want to try to expose those for our own good as we talk about identity and misplaced identity and faux identities. Let me walk through some of the most common that we see in The Village Church and in our communities.

1. *"I am in control."* "I have got this." This is killing us. Why? Because you're not, and life continually teaches you that you're not in control. Here's what's crazy. The more life teaches you that you're not in control, the more you try to control it. Rather than surrender, "Oh my gosh. I can't control this. Somebody surely can control this. I can't." Instead, we go, "Oh, I can't. I'll try harder to control."

When your identity is, "I have it all together. I can control this," you have no choice but to either be anxious or angry. There is not a third option for you if your identity is, "I have it all together. I'm in control." Anxiety and anger will be the emotions you feel most often, because you know you can't. You're going to get really angry about that or you're going to get really nervous about that. This isn't the only faux identity.

2. *"I am what I do."* This one is just as common. Another way I can put this one in our area is, "I am what I own." This is again a faux identity. What happens is if your self-worth, your value, your mattering in existence and in life is built on what you do or what you own, you will always be depressed or in debt or depressed *and* in debt.

Here's why. I don't know if we can do it. Let's just do it. Let's just have some real talk. If you are what you do, then what happens when it's time to retire? Look right at me. No one is building a building with your name on it. You're going to retire. Maybe there will be cake, and then they'll replace you with a guy. Within nine months, you're off the radar. Who are you now?

If you are what you own, brother, sister, you will always be enslaved because you live in a part of the world where new subdivisions are going in all the time. It's Texas. We have nothing but land and guns. We're just going to roll out another 10 miles and build a massive suburb, starting in the low 800's. Right? What happens is you have a nice house. You have a nice car.

Man, other people moved in there. That friend of yours who you love just moved into that new neighborhood. What does that say about you? What a colossal failure you are. "You're not in Castlewood? You're where? Are you serious? Oh, gosh. You know what? Come see it. We'll help you. We'll walk with you through your only \$500,000 house. We're just praying for you in that. We feel so terrible."

This is such a weird, "Have to have more." Why? "Because my value and worth is built on it, so I'll leverage everything. I'll leverage peace of mind. I will buy a house I cannot afford, drive a car I cannot afford, wear clothes I cannot afford to impress people I don't even know and probably don't like." This is a faux identity. "I am what I do. I am what I own." It will lead to depression or debt or depressive debt. This isn't the only one. I know if you're like, "How long is this going to go?" A little bit longer.

3. *"I deserve an easier life."* There was this weird thing that happened. I remember when it happened. I was in eighth grade for the second time. Oh, I guess it's not an okay place to not be okay? I was in eighth grade, and there was a shift in the way education was done. I don't know where it started. I've looked into it. I can't track it.

All of a sudden, the education system became really concerned about how I saw myself. Really dumb things started happening. If you're in education, I'm not trying to start a fight. I'm just saying this is dumb. Forgive me.

All of a sudden, the message was, "You're great. I know you just made a 32 on this exam. We're going to let you just take it five or six more times. In fact, here's the key to it. We just don't want you to feel bad about yourself. Here's my key. Just copy the right answers off of my key onto yours, and we're going to give you an A, and we're going to roll you up to ninth grade. You're amazing, Matt Chandler." I just remember when that happened.

What happens when self esteem washes over a culture is we begin to believe that our lives should be easier than they'll actually be. This is a faux identity in our church, in this part of the world, and

it's heartbreaking, because when you think your life is going to be easier than it actually is you will walk in entitlement, bitterness... I'll just say this. The sheer volume of sexual perversion in our community is directly tied to people who think life should be easy, think marriage should be easy, think children should be easy, think work should be easy, think play should be easy.

Somewhere deep in our souls, we bought into the lie that life is easy. Life is not easy. The Bible has never guaranteed you a life of ease. Never. You won't find a text that says, "Give your heart to Jesus, and all of your dreams will come true." No, give your life to Jesus, and he will be enough regardless of what comes. I'm telling you, the sheer amount of adultery and the type of nonsense...swinger stuff...that is going on all over our community is directly tied back to this lie: "I deserve an easier life." Look at me. You don't. Gosh, you don't. I don't know where we're getting this. It's nonsense.

Now, when this has happened, all of a sudden, your relational capacity is hammered thin. If these are your identities, then all of your relationships will be built on usury. You will use people to your gains. That means you have no legitimate, deep relationships that can anchor your soul. I'm telling you that if this is you, and you're going, "I'm in control," or, "I am what I do," or, "I am what I own," all of your relationships will be meant to serve that faux identity of yours.

The easiest way to see if you have fallen privy to some of that is how many of the people you hang out with can give nothing to you? How many people that you have in your home, that you do life with, that you are friends with can give nothing to you? The people you run with, are they one step ahead, just that little step ahead that if you think if you can get to *there*, you'll finally be satisfied? Do you ever look back, or are you always looking forward? It hammers relationships flat.

4. *"I can get a lot done in less time."* I know we're predominately a white-collar community. White-collar communities are all build around production and what we can produce and what we can get done. There's no real Sabbath, no real connection to the soul. What happens is everything gets flat. Everything gets thin. Depth disappears, and we're left longing and wanting and frustrated and confused. This is just as much in the church as it is outside the church.

Look at what happens here when Moses asks this question, "Who am I?" You would think that to that question, God would answer, "Are you kidding me, Mo? Do you not remember that I brought you out of the Nile, into Pharaoh's house? You speak Egyptian, bro. What do you mean, 'Who am I?' You know the outlay of the law. You know the outlay of the palace. I could SEAL Team 6 you up in there. We could end this thing quick."

He doesn't say any of that. The statement he responds with is crazy. "Who am I?" "But I will be with you." The answer to the question of, "Who am I?" is answered by God like this: "But I will be with you." What is happening here? If you're wondering how I'm tying all of this identity stuff together, I'm making the argument that we can base our sense of self on God. We can find our confidence and worth in knowing that he is here for us, and he is here with us, and he is transcendent enough, above us enough to protect, provide, and get us safely home.

Now, maybe this illustration will help us. It's not my illustration. It's an illustration from a guy named Tim Chester in the UK. In fact, his commentary on Exodus was super helpful for me as I built out this message in particular. This isn't mine. This was his illustration, but it's brilliant, so I'm just going to steal it and let you know this is Tim Chester's illustration.

Let's just say we were in London, and we wanted to go meet the queen. We just wanted to hang out with the queen and see her house. We wanted to go up to Buckingham Palace. We're going to knock on the door and go, "Hey, I would like to see the queen." Then we're going to come in and check out all of the rooms in the house, even the secret rooms. We can have full access. We get in one of those weird cabs, and we head over there. Then we kind of knock on the door. They open up the door. I guess it's a door. I don't know. They open up the gate or something.

"Can we help you?"

"Yeah, we're here to see the queen. Also, we would like to check out the palace, maybe even some of the secret rooms in the palace."

"Who are you?"

"Matt Chandler."

"Okay, sir, we're going to need you to leave the premises immediately."

Don't giggle. You're not getting in. What, are you going to drop your name? "Oh, come on in. Check it out." No, we're going to be denied, just categorically denied. "The queen is busy today. No, you can't look around the palace." It's just going to be access denied. Do you know who that was true about at

some point also? Kate Middleton. At one point, Kate Middleton, 15 years old, came up and knocked on the gate.

"Hey, I would like to see the queen."

"Who are you?"

"Kate Middleton. I would also like to see the palace while I'm in there. In fact, I would like full access. I would like to be able to go into every room. I would like no security. I would just like to come in and make myself at home."

They would have gone, "Little girl, get out of here," but they don't say that to her now. Do you know why? Kate's title is Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cambridge. Now she has full access. When she says, "I want to see the queen." "Who are you?" Her response is, "I'm with him." I am the princess married to the prince. I am Her Royal Majesty. I am with him."

That, "I'm with him," has moved Kate from, "Who are you? Access denied," to, "I'm with him," every door open, full access. The, "I am with him," has fundamentally changed her access to royalty and to power and to wealth and to all the heart is hungry for. She is now fully accessed because she's with him.

So it is with the Christian. One of the illustrations most commonly used about Christ and his church is that the church is the bride of Christ. We're with him. In fact, Paul would argue as much in Ephesians 5:25-27. Here's what it says.

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

See, here's what he's arguing. He's arguing that the church, us, the people of God, are the bride of Christ. In the same way that Kate wanting access to the queen, wanting access to Buckingham Palace, says, "I'm with him," we, to get access to God, say, "I'm with him." Now we have full access. Now, this is phenomenal news, right?

This is what we mean when we read Romans 8 and see, "What then can separate us from the love of God that is found in Christ Jesus?" Then you have this long list of things. "Can nakedness? Can famine? Can sword? Can suffering? Can angels or demons? No. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is found in Christ Jesus." Why? Because we're with him.

Now, think about how this attacks and establishes itself as our identity. I'm not in control. I know I'm not in control, but I'm with him, and he is in control because he is transcendent but also immanent. He is above me, but he is also with me. I don't have to be in control. I can just breathe out and acknowledge, "I'm not in control." I think one of the biggest damages your self esteem did to your mind and heart is it made you believe you were more than average. Look at me. We're average. Breathe.

I had a professor in college. I took him for 21 hours. He started every class with the same speech. He said, "By definition, a C is average. Most of you will be getting C's. Maybe there are one or two of you, maybe, who is above average, and you'll get a B. Maybe (but probably not) there is one exceptional student out there, and if you're even here, you'll get the A." His point was actually a good one. We've all been brought up to believe we're not average. We're more than. We're better than. Then we're just constantly letting ourselves down.

I want to let you off the hook. Look at me. We're average. Listen. We're just average husbands. We're just average wives. We're just average parents. We're just average Christians. Just breathe out. You're average, and the Lord loves you. The Lord doesn't need you to be a superhero. He has you. Breathe. I don't have to be in control because I'm with him. I'm also not defined by what I do. I'm with him.

If you think about it and were really honest about it, "What could I fill in the, 'I am...' blank with that could be taken from me in a second?" I am a husband. I am a father. I am the pastor of this church. All of those things could be taken from me in an instant, but they don't define me. I'm with him. All of my stuff doesn't define me because I'm with him. The freedom that is found there is stunning.

I know life isn't going to be easy, but it's okay because I'm with him. He is with me. He hears me. He sees me. He has come down. Maybe you're in here, and you're like, "It kind of feels like a stretch. You're back here talking about Yahweh and Jehovah. Now you're talking about how Jesus does all of this stuff." Again, I love when you ask the kind of questions that I plan on answering.

In John 8, there is this exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. It is a hostile exchange. They start the exchange like this, "Is it true that you have a demon?" You're not asking that question if you want reasonable conversation, right? Now, confession time. How many of you have been tempted to ask someone that?

"Do you have a demon? I'm just asking. I'm not trying to start a fight. I don't even want this to be offensive. Are you possessed?" There is this exchange between Jesus and the religious rulers of the day about who he is and the nature of who he is, and we're going to dive into that, starting in verse 53 of John 8.

"Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, "He is our God." But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.' So the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was...'" What does it say? **"...I am."** That doesn't even make any sense. "Before Abraham was, I was," would have made sense, except he's saying something.

What is this? This is the name of the lord. This is Yahweh, Jehovah. Jesus has just said, "I am God. Do you want to know how I know who Abraham was? Do you want to know how Abraham saw my day and rejoiced? I am who I am. That's how." They knew he was saying it, which is why they tried to kill him right after he said it. Jesus is the I Am.

Now, there is this moment in Jesus' ministry when he looks out at a crowd that is just worn out and haggard and beat up and exhausted. Here was his sermon. It was a great sermon. "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I won't put anything on you that will crush you. Come to me." It's the type of invitation we don't give, right? We don't go, "Oh, you're socially awkward. You're a lot of work. You're an exhausting person. Come. Let's hang out."

We don't do that, but this is what Jesus does. Oftentimes, I think we think about this text in light of what we'll maybe call just more horrific sins. "Are you strung out on heroin? Get in here." How

about this. "Are you a control freak and constantly anxious or angry?" The invitation from the great I Am is, "Hey, you don't have to carry that. I'll carry it. I'm stronger than you. Let me carry it."

If you are what you do, you're constantly depressed, leveraging the money you have to go in debt to built out this façade, the invitation from the great I Am is, "Come. I'll carry that. You don't have to be defined by those things. You can be free." If you're starting to learn that life is not going to be easy, then the great I Am says this morning, "I will be with you. I will be among you. I have heard you. I am here. I will not let you down."

This is the great I Am. The mantra of the Christian heart is, "I'm with him." Christian, we are not immune from the drift away from our identity rooted in Christ and buying into faux identities. The Christian can suffer and struggle with control just like the unbeliever can. The Christian can struggle with and wrestle around being defined by what he does. What we like to do (God help us) is put religious language around that.

We like to busy ourselves. Our accomplishments are our religious accomplishments, but that's still, "I am what I do." "I am a part of this Bible study. I'm a part of this. I'm a part of that. I do this. I seek out isolation. I meditate. I memorize the book of Leviticus. You did Philippians. I did Leviticus. Look at what I've done." We define ourselves this way.

Yet, the only true way for the Christian to walk in the peace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is to say, "I'm with him, and I'm just going to surrender into that, and I'm going to war within myself to continue to surrender into that." Then if you're here and you're not a Christian, I love that you're here. I hung out in church for a couple of years before I actually became a Christian. I didn't know the Lord was kind of wooing me at the time. I just kind of listened to the guy and would be like, "That guy is a moron."

"Do you want to come back?"

"Sure." And I would come back.

If you're here, and you're not a Christian, I just want you to hear me say that maybe as we talked and looked through this text today, maybe the Spirit of God pricked your heart, and you went, "Oh my gosh. Yeah, I try to define God like I want him to be defined. Oh my goodness. I really am angry

and anxious because I do try to control everything. It's not working. I can feel myself getting more anxious or more angry."

Maybe it's, "I'm totally enslaved to what people think about me, so I'm constantly trying to project this image of strength, this image of, 'I'm going to get the raise. I'm going to get the promotion. We're going to move into that new neighborhood. We're going to get that newer vehicle. We're going to buy nicer stuff. We're going to...'" You feel enslaved and trapped. It is the mercy of God that you are here today.

The invitation from the great I Am to you is, "Come, all who are weary and heaven laden." Look right at me. Unbeliever, you have not out-sinned the grace of God. The, "I am who I am," is available to all who will lay their yes down, confess their sins, pray for forgiveness, and receive the mercy of God in Christ. From there, new identity begins, and our mantra is, "I'm with him." Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you are above us, that you are mighty and powerful. As the psalmist says, you are in the heavens, and you do whatever pleases you. We thank you for that strength, that power, that might. We praise you that you are with us, that you are immanent, that you are among us, that you have seen, you have heard, you do know, and you have come down.

We praise your name that both of those are simultaneously true, and I just pray that you would expose our hearts today for what they are, that you would expose our hearts where we have built kind of faux identities. We are not in touch with self. Our relationships are flat. We are surrounded yet lonely. We are successful yet anxious and angry. We are perpetually worried about being outed as a fake and a failure. I pray that you would free us from those chains by your mercy, Jesus. Spirit of God, help us. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.