

EXODUS PT.4 ch.3:11-22 10-6-13  
"I AM WHO I AM"

(Exodus 3) This is Janice Keihanaikukauakahihuliheekahaunaele. She is in the news because of a dispute with the state of Hawaii over her driver's license because they will not put her full name on the license. She says her name, with all 19 syllables and 35 letters is meaningful and the meaning is: ( I love this) *when there is chaos and confusion, you are one that will stand up and get people to focus in one direction and come out of the chaos.* What a great name! But if you think that is an awesome name, wait till you see what God tells us in our story in Exodus today. We pick up again our story of the exodus of the people of Israel from their captivity in Egypt. When we left off last Sunday, our hero, whose name is Moses, was in the desert of Midian standing before the Lord who appeared to him in bush that was burning but was not consumed. **7-12** *The Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."*

What a message God had for Moses! After all these years of oppression and slavery God has now decided to step in and rescue His people. Not only that, He promised to lead them to a great land, the land promised to his ancestor Abraham, the land of Canaan which flowed, we are told, with milk and honey. All of this must have sounded great to Moses as he listened, at least until he got to verse 10. It was in verse 10 that Moses learned this was not a newscast but a recruitment speech. **10ab** *Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh .* And Moses said, "Not me!" He said, "Who am I? I'm no deliverer, and besides, Lord, you just said You were going to come down and do this. I'd be delighted for you to do this but don't look to me." Boy, doesn't that

sound like the church! *We'd like a youth group, we want a school, we think we should have recovery groups.* And they are all behind plans for these things until it gets personal and God says, "You! Bubbaloo!" Moses, really was not looking for this call. He was happy when God said He was coming down to deliver the people but he momentarily forgot that God usually does His stuff how? Through humans, through us, and sometimes through me. God uses people doesn't He? God still does it. He really does work but He comes and empowers men to do His bidding. It is no contradiction to say that God delivered the people and to say as well that Moses delivered them. God worked through His man! His very reluctant man.

Moses says, "Who am I? ® that I should go to Pharaoh?" Think about what he is being asked to do? He is told to leave the sheep and go to the most powerful ruler in the world and demand that he let his entire slave force leave. That's like marching uninvited to the White House and asking the President to please stop taxing Christians. No wonder the first response of Moses was, "Who am I?" He felt himself completely unfit for such a job as that and with good reason. Remember who Moses is. Who is he? He's a sinner, a bad, low-down, guilt-laden sinner who buried a man in Egyptian sand whose blood stained his hands. Surely, one would think, Moses was morally unfit for the role of national savior. We want only the lily white for big jobs like that. But God thinks otherwise. God does some of His best work with some of the roughest material. He paints the most beautiful pictures with broken brushes. Why God, if He can use Moses, might even be able to use you. Secondly too Moses said, "Who am I?" because he felt not only morally unfit but positionally unable. Who was Moses? A shepherd. He didn't even live in Egypt. He was now an outsider. How in the world could he affect Pharaoh? And some of you look at yourself, not especially wealthy, not especially skilled and you doubt that God could use you. But He does! God does the greatest things with men who ask, "Who am I?" This was the same response God got from Joshua and Gideon and David, and Jeremiah. Peter had the same thoughts, and when Paul reflected on His calling he asked, "Who is adequate for these things?"

It is not a comfortable thing to feel that you are in over your head. But really, it's better than the alternative. The man who feels completely competent is likely to run off in the flesh and blow up. So, is it wrong to be confident? Can that be the point here? No! Confidence is desirable. Confidence is good -but only if it comes from the right source. Self-confidence is not what we want; God confidence is. Forty years before Moses had gone out in his own confidence and started swinging at Egyptians but now he is subdued. Now he sees his lack and he's ready to find a new

confidence centered in the Lord. When Moses says, “Who am I?” How does God respond? He says, “Certainly I will be with you.” *Certainly* he says. “Certainly you don’t think I’d send you out alone do you?” Whenever God calls us to go forth and act in His name, whether we go to do things great or small we go in the promise that He is with us. And that’s all we need to know ®. Over and over in Scripture we see this formula - God sends His servant to do some great and difficult job and when He sends He says, “I’ll be with you.” He said it to Jacob and Joshua and Jeremiah and the apostles. Our Lord’s final words in the gospels were, “Lo, I am with you always.” And what God means is, “I will give you the ability and I will give you success.”

So, is the Christian to operate with confidence in His work and ministry? Absolutely - and what kind of confidence? Self-confidence? No, No. God-confidence, the confidence of a little child in the arms of Daddy. Listen to Paul. II Corinthians 2:**14-16** *thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.* <sup>15</sup> *For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;* <sup>16</sup> *to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?* I think the apostle looked at his calling and then looked at himself and shook his head. The mission was so much bigger than the missionary! But he doesn’t stop there. He goes on in this very section of II Corinthians to speak about confidence. 3:**4-6a** *Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.* <sup>5</sup> *Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants.* That’s what we want to pray for and work toward, that God-based humble confidence that what God calls us to do He will equip us to do as He works with us. Next time you find God calling you to do something difficult don’t say, “I can’t.” Never say, “I won’t.” Simply ask the Lord, “Will You go with me?”

That is absolutely key to our confidence and success, to remember that God is with us when we are responding to His call. And beyond that, if we are to have confidence against great opposition we must remember who God is. Let’s read on in our story. **13** *Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”* As Moses was beginning to process all this, obstacle after obstacle kept coming to mind. First he felt unable to go to Pharaoh, now he’s thinking he can’t go to the people of Israel either. He envisions himself being challenged by the Hebrews. What is the name of this god who sent you to us? Remember, in

Egypt, the gods there all had names, Bob, Sally, Ramjar and stuff like that. The Hebrews may want to know the name of this god who met with Moses. Now, there is likely more here than just wanting to know what the god answered to. It is a question about God's character and being. The name will tell what He is like. **14-15** *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* <sup>15</sup> *God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons 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 this is My memorial-name to all generations.* So, what is His name? It is translated here as "I am who I am." What kind of name is that? It strikes me as if God is here refusing to give a name. I mean to say that I am who I am is about as close to not giving a name as any name I ever heard. God says, "Who am I? I am who I am, that's who I am." No name needed. This made me think of a story I heard a pastor tell. This pastor had preached a message in which he said that all people are taters. Some are imitators, others are dictators, others are agitators, but the pastor concluded, we all ought to be sweet taters. Now there's a sermon you can sink your teeth into. After this message a man addressed the pastor on his way out the door by saying, "Pastor, that was a nice sermon but I don't think I can change because I yam what I yam." God says the same thing. You should know, by the way, that this name of God is related to the normal Hebrew name for God which is *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*. *Jehovah* or *Yahweh* are different transliterations of the Hebrew term which, in fact, has no vowels in it. *Yahweh* - yohd, heh, vahv, heh - comes from the Hebrew word for *being* or *existence*. It is short for *I am who I am*. Translations of this phrase differ, interpretations differ but the classic understanding of this language is that God is, with this self-designation, affirming His aseity. Who in here is not familiar with the word *aseity*? Keep your hands up because I want to call on someone with hands down to define it for me. I see a few more hands went up. Aseity is a term used only in technical theology or philosophy to refer to the state or power of self-existence. That is, if something has aseity, it has the power of being in itself, and how many beings in the universe have that? Only God. Everything else in the world is dependent and derived. Everything else comes from something and somewhere. But not God. He has always been; He is eternal and is not even Himself subject to time. Everything to God is like an eternal present, and don't try to get your mind around that because you can't. The name *I am who I am*, or the short version, *I am*, speaks of eternity. From everlasting to everlasting He is.

It is this attribute, more than anything else, that separates God from the creatures. Ever since the Fall human beings have confused the created order, or even the self, with God. R.C. Sproul tells of being on a train and listening for quite a while to a young woman tell a couple seated next to her about her conversion to a new-age religion. She was evangelistic about it and she said that what really excited her about her new teaching was to discover that she was in fact, god! As she went on and on she noticed that R.C. was listening so finally she turned to him and asked, “what do you think?” R.C. said, “Boy, I really don’t know, this is the first time in my life I’ve sat down to talk with God incarnate.” R.C. said he put on his biggest smile and said, “Tell the truth, you don’t really believe you are god do you?” The young girl said, “Well, not really.” No, not really. You are dependent, fragile, mortal, derived. You had a beginning and your life as it is will also have an end. You live in constant need of all sorts of things to maintain your life. The Bible says our lives are as perishable as grass but the Lord endures forever. Pharaoh is, Pharaoh was, and tomorrow Pharaoh will be gone but there is no “was” with God. He simply is, or, as He puts it, I am.

Do you see how this revelation of the name and character of God would prepare Moses for His task? Moses needed to know that God wasn’t going to be shaken by Pharaoh’s stubbornness. He needed to know that God was so far above us that any human problem is small in His eyes. He needed, as you and I do, to see that the *I am* God is a God who never changes. What strength there is in that for us! Deuteronomy 33:**27ab** *The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* Think of that. You are supported by the arms of the I AM God. What is there to fear? ® Certainly not Pharaoh! Now, to most people, a visit to Pharaoh would be terrifying. How Moses ever got in to see him is perplexing enough. Those opportunities are hard to obtain, but Moses got in and then what did he have to tell him? *Well, Pharaoh, I was out with my sheep when this bush started talking to me---*Really? Moses needed to be sure that God was with Him and that God could handle the likes of Pharaoh. The very name God uses for Himself makes that abundantly clear. Our God is an awesome God. We worship Him for what we understand to be true of Him and we worship Him for being greater than our minds can conceive. The God who has the power of being in Himself is well able to take care of whatever concerns you this week.

Pharaoh was certainly to prove no match for God. Let’s finish the chapter. **16-18** *Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, ‘I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.’<sup>17</sup> So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to*

*the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”’<sup>18</sup> They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’ This was not the ultimate goal but they were to ask for something small because God was planning to harden Pharaoh anyway. **19-22** *But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion.*<sup>20</sup> *So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go.*<sup>21</sup> *I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed.*<sup>22</sup> *But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians.”* Question: did God treat Egypt and Israel the same? Was He even handed with these two peoples? Or did God play favorites? I point this out now so you’ll think about it as we study Exodus because you will begin to see that God is pro-Israel and anti-Egypt. Pharaoh is set-up for destruction, the Hebrews for salvation and God is behind it all.*

We will wait to next week to get to chapter four and more of Mr. Moses meets his Maker. But let’s finish with a look at how Jesus Christ relates to what we have read. There is a story of Jesus in John 8 in which He is having a tense exchange with the Jewish leaders and Jesus says in **56-58** *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”<sup>57</sup> So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”<sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”* The I AM name of God was the sacred name, the name no Jew would even pronounce for fear of being irreverent and here we have Jesus not only using it but referring to Himself with it. The implication is clear. Jesus Christ is equating Himself with the eternal God. We see from this that Jesus did not have His beginnings in the stable of Bethlehem. His existence predates even that of Abraham because his existence is in Himself. Jesus never came into being, He just is. The Great I AM is Yahweh, Jehovah, Jesus. The Jews of His day understood what Christ was saying. They picked up the language right away so **59a** *Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him.* I admire what they did. Let me change that. I respect what they did about Jesus more than I respect what some of us have done about Him. I’m not saying they should have killed him but that’s better than just ignoring His claims. What I mean

is this - when someone as great as Jesus makes a claim to be God, which He did, you have only two sensible choices: you either stone Him, or you worship Him. I had lunch in Atlanta last month with my friend Jim Whittle who has been witnessing to a young man from Estonia which is the most non-religious country in the European union. Atheism is assumed there. This young man who came to the US on a track scholarship was taught growing up that Christians are ignorant and unscientific. My friend Jim opened his mind considerably on that score and as they discussed who Jesus was and is the young Estonian looked at him and said, *If this is true, it changes everything.* ® Jim told him, *it does change everything.* So again, I say, when someone as great as Jesus makes a claim to be God, which He did, you have only two sensible choices: you either stone Him, or you worship Him. ® To ignore Him makes no sense! I challenge you to take sides. Quit sitting on the fence. Look into this Jesus. Read what He said and read what He did and then make Him your enemy or make Him your King. There is no other place for one who says that before Abraham was "I AM." You think about it, and let's go this great God whom to know changes everything.