

February 14, 2024  
Ash Wednesday  
Pastor Matt Duerr

## “I AM”

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, men. Do you remember Cassius Marcellus Clay, junior? Most of us probably remember him as Muhammad Ali. But do you remember his claim? He said, very simply, “I am the greatest.” “I am.” It's a common phrase that we all use. I am hungry, I am thirsty, I am tired, I am the greatest. It's an introduction to a phrase that. That describes our state or our condition. I think Muhammad Ali was trying to say I am the greatest boxer of all time. But whenever you make such a statement, you have to also understand there might be those who would challenge you. For instance, Joe Frazier, Ken Norton, Leon Spinks, who actually broke Muhammad Ali's jaw. Larry Holmes and Trevor Berbick, all defeated Mohammed Ali. Mohammed Ali's record, His fighting record was 56 wins, 5 losses. Of course, then there could be those who would say, no, he's not the greatest, you know, guys like Willie Pep, whose record in boxing was 229 wins, 11 losses and one tie. He has four times as many boxing bouts and less than two times as many losses than Muhammad Ali. We need to be very careful when we say ‘I am,’ because you might not be.

When it comes to the Jews, they hear that phrase ‘I am’ and for them, those are fighting words because it's the tetragrammaton. That means a four-letter word, but no, not the kind of four-letter word we think about. In the Hebrew language you only write the consonants. In the English “I am’ in Hebrew is written YHWH? You some of the consonants. It's an ancient language and it was simply preserving ink, but you insert the vowels and you get Yahweh, which means “I AM.” And I think we're all familiar with, and we heard it tonight, Exodus 3 verse 14 where God says to Moses ‘tell them ‘I AM’ has sent you. But notice there's nothing after that. He doesn't say I am God. He just says I AM. Just the Beginning of the state of being. I AM what? Yes. That's the point. I AM the state of being of everything. I AM the beginning and the end and the Alpha and the Omega which we see throughout Scripture. All the way from, you know, Exodus to Revelation 22 verse 13. He's everything. From creation to Judgment day to beyond Judgment Day and before creation. He is I AM.

When we take a look at that scene. Moses was there at the burning Bush. God was calling on him to say, go down to Pharaoh, tell Pharaoh, let my people go. And

of course, Moses's response is 'I do that because I don't know your name. I can't say who sent me.' And those Egyptians, they have all their gods. Their gods would say, 'I am the God of the Nile, I'm the God of the flies. I'm the God of the clouds. I'm the sun God.' 'I really can't go and say who you are because you haven't given me a name.' And that's when God says. I AM. Again, I AM the state of being. I AM, you can fill anything in that you want because I AM that.

And the Egyptians and the Israelites really got to know Him as He was. He was the God of the 10 plagues. He was the God who parted the Red Sea. He is the God of pillar of fire at night and that pillar of cloud during the day that also went up and over the people like a canopy. He is the God who brought the manna and the quail so they had food. He is the God who brought water out of a rock. He's the God of creation, of the whole testament. He's the God who sent His Son. His son who also had to deal with unwilling humans.

To be sure, servants of God are called to preserve knowledge, to intercede, pray for others and well, servants of God, the priests; were also called to make atonement and sacrifice, to lead temple worship. But yet those very people were the ones who were opposing Jesus. And so, in John chapter 8 we find Jesus going to the temple. John writes, "He came again to the temple." This is something Jesus did fairly often.

At the very beginning, the leadership religious leaders bring to him a woman caught in adultery. And they have a question for Him? What do you say? Do we stone her? What do we do? Because the law is clear, we should stone her. Jesus's reaction was to kneel down and begin to draw the dirt on the ground. And then He looks up and He says, Let he who is without sin, let him cast the first stone. Then he went back to writing on the ground. We read that one by one her accusers left, starting with the oldest, probably the wisest; until the youngest. When they were all gone, Jesus stopped, drawing on the ground, looked up the woman and said, Is there no one left to condemn you? Neither do I. Go and sin no more.

And so that's the setting. The religious leaders tried to capture Jesus or catch him in some form of breaking the law of Moses. They have failed. Jesus went right into the temple, began to preach. This is where he gave us the "I AM the Light of the World," which we're going to talk about in a couple weeks, I'm the Light of the World. He taught if you abide in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Free, when those religious leaders heard Jesus say that, they challenged Him. They said, 'we are the offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone!' That makes me kind of think of Muhammad Ali saying, 'I am the greatest!' Really? You lost five fights. When we take a look at the Israelites, you've never been enslaved to anybody? Why did God deliver you out of the Egypt there? What

happened when Sennacherib came and took the 10 northern tribes into slavery or bondage? Then the Babylonians with Judah. What about Persia? Greece. Hey, what about the Romans who have their own Antonia fortress attached to this temple right now?

But Jesus doesn't go there. He continues and says, "Truly, Truly," "Amen, Amen, Yes, it is so. Yes, it is so. If you commit sin." He's going back to the very beginning of the chapter. The woman caught in sin. If you commit sin, you are the slave to sin. And then He continues. They're speaking about stuff and they're totally wrong. And so, He says, "I speak of what I have seen from my Father. You do what you have heard from your father." Of course, the Jewish leaders come back to well, Abraham is our father. But Jesus then contests that. Well, if Abraham really was your father, then you would do what he did. But you don't. Why not? Because Abraham is not your father. Your father is the devil. And when he speaks, he lies. Because lying is his native language. Remember that statement guys? We've never been enslaved to anyone. Think about that.

See, Jesus was calling them on it. In the heat of the moment, they were just saying whatever they felt like saying to try to get the upper hand. And Jesus calls them on. And by the way, there's a big lesson there for us on "Be careful about what you say." But Jesus then continues on, you don't hear my words because you are not of God. Of course, the religious leaders at that time resort to the thing that we always see people resort to when they don't have a good answer, where they can't back up their position. They start calling Jesus names. We weren't born in immorality like you were. In other words, saying that Mary and Joseph had an affair. We are not a Samaritan like you. Where they got that, I don't know, But just think of our political climate today and how many people are accused of things that just aren't true. And then, you're the one who has a demon in you. This is a sure sign of desperation. But Jesus doesn't go there, you know, fight back, doesn't calm names. No, he just comes back with, "If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

And of course, The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious leaders are like, 'We got him! We are going back to Abraham. Are you saying that you are better than Abraham? Because Abraham died, the prophets died. Who are you? What do you think you're saying? See, we got you. But that's where He says, basically, 'you want to keep talking about Abraham? OK, Abraham was glad to see my day, he rejoiced when he saw it. Of course they blow up. You're not yet 50. How can you say? Abraham was glad to see your day, and He comes back with. "Truly, truly," again, literally Amen. Amen. Yes, it is so. Yes, it is so. Listen to this. Now listen carefully. Truly, truly, I say to you. Before Abraham was. Was what? Was born. Father of. What was his state of being before Abraham was? Was what? Well, what was before

Abraham? Before his state of being? Well, the ultimate state of being. I AM. Before Abraham was, I AM. And He uses the name of God, Yahweh. Because God always has, always will, always is, everything. He is the state of being. That is why we call Him God the Father Almighty.

Now some people might say “oh, that's a misunderstanding of what Jesus was saying, really? Look back at what the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes, the Priest did at that moment. They picked up stones to stone Him because of blasphemy. He claimed to be God. And notice what Jesus does. He acts like God. Because He is God. John records that He hid Himself? Now think about that. He's having an argument with these guys. He makes the statement; they pick up stones to stone Him. How do you hide yourself? If you are surrounded by people who are questioning you and now want to kill you. You blind their vision so they can't see you. They could see everything else, but they couldn't see Jesus. John records, He hid himself and walked away.

Seven times. Jesus uses that name. The ultimate name of God. The name that the Jewish people won't even dare to say. Yahweh Each time He says that, He's claiming to be God. And He gives us one of those states of being of God. Like I AM The way. But He's also the truth. He's also the Life and the Good Shepherd, and the Light of the world. Is all of it because He is I AM. And that is our focus this Lenten season. Because I think you will agree with me, we are in a time and a place in this world, in this country, in this state. Where we need the Ultimate. We need the Everything. We need the One and Only God, the great I AM to save us. In our Savior's Name. Amen