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<< SLIDE 1 – SeriesTitle

ME (SERMON Introduction)

Well good morning again, and welcome to Riverside. My name's Keith and I'm one of the leaders around here. And this morning we're continuing in our sermon series in which we're going through the **I AM** statements of Jesus that are found mainly in the **Gospel of John**.

Some of the statements we've already looked at are Jesus saying, "**I am the resurrection and the life**" and "**I am the bread of life**" and "**I am the light of the world.**" Those are **descriptions** and pictures that Jesus used to **describe** Himself.

But today's **I AM** statement from Jesus is more than just a description, it's actually a **proper name** that Jesus uses to identify Himself. And this name that Jesus gives Himself actually comes from an O.T. account between Moses and God. So we need to get some background from the O.T. before we come to Jesus' actual statement in the N.T..

God (Scripture)

So this morning we're going to start in **Exodus ch.3** to get some background, and then we'll go to **John ch.8** to see how Jesus uses this background to describe Himself. But before we look at **Exodus ch.3**, lets first acknowledge God's presence here with us today, and let's ask the Holy Spirit to open up our hearts and minds for what God wants us to hear and respond to today...

[pray]

<< SLIDE 2 – Picture

Exodus3

Now, when we come to **Exodus ch.3**, we see Moses is in the desert. Prior to this Moses was in a position of influence and power in Egypt, but then he took matter into his own hands, which got him in trouble, so he fled, and ran into the desert. And by the time we come to **Exodus Ch.3** Moses had been in the desert for 40 years! He went from being the prince of Egypt to a shepherd in the desert.

So, for 40 years Moses raises a family, he's a shepherd in the desert, just going about his life. God was certainly forming Moses in this timeframe, but most days probably were pretty mundane

<< SLIDE 3 – Scripture

But then one day Moses is going about his business, and then this happens, v.1, Now Moses was tending the flock ... and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. (by-the-way, I don't have time to discuss what "the Angel of the Lord" means, **<< SLIDE 4 – Picture** but you should really go sometime this week and watch the **Bible Project's** video on this phrase. Go to YouTube and search "**Angel of the Lord Bible Project**," it's amazing!).

<< SLIDE 5 – Scripture

So Moses is in the desert, shepherding his flock, and ² 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. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

And when Moses gets to this burning bush, God speaks to Moses; it's an amazing encounter, and God tells Moses that He's going to deliver the Jews from slavery in Egypt, and He's going to use Moses to lead this deliverance. **<< SLIDE 6 – Scripture**

God said to Moses, ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

And while this is a pretty amazing encounter with God through a burning bush, Moses still has some pushback. ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

God then responses to Moses' objections. ¹² And God said, “I will be with you....

But Moses still is timid, ¹³ 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?”

<< SLIDE 7 – Scripture

And then God responds with a key and amazing **name** for Himself. ¹⁴ 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.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ... “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

God's Name - I Am Who I Am

This is an amazing encounter with God. Moses had previously been in Egypt **<< SLIDE 8 – Picture**

where they had many different gods, many gods, and each one had a name. And Moses would have known the names of these Egyptian Gods, but when it came to the God of the Bible, all Moses knew was that the Jew's God existed, but he only knew God as the “**God of his forefathers.**” He only knew God's title -- “**God!**”

<< SLIDE 9 – SeriesTitle

Moses wanted a **name**; something that would make the Jews and Egyptians sit up and listen. So God tells Moses that His name is “**I AM WHO I AM.**” This is huge! The God of the entire universe just revealed His personal name to Moses! “**I AM WHO I AM**”

“**I AM** the God who wants to be known. **I AM** the God who heard when no one thought I was listening. **I AM** the God who saw the misery of my people when nobody thought I was looking. Moses I knew you when you were a baby in the reeds, and I knew you in the desert as a fugitive. And now I've come down. **I AM** the God who comes down. Get your hopes up, Moses. **I AM who I AM.**” Man this is the great Name of God.

In Jewish tradition, God's people actually never speak this name out loud; they consider it too sacred. In the original language of the Bible this name is just 4 letters, **<< SLIDE 10 – Letters**

Y, H, W, and H.

We think it was pronounced “**Yahweh,**” some people pronounce it “**Jehovah**”.

This name is used almost 7,000 times in the Old Testament. In fact, whenever you see the word “**LORD**” in all capital letters in the NIV translation, it's the name “**Yahweh.**”

The name “**Yahweh,**” or “**I AM WHO I AM**” was considered **so** sacred that when scribes would write **YHWH**, they would take a bath beforehand, and destroy their pen afterwards! In fact, it was **so** revered that it was only

said out loud once per year, only by the high priest in the Most Holy Place of the temple. As you can see, the Israelites took this name very seriously.

But what does it actually mean? “**I AM WHO I AM.**” Well, it means that God can only define Himself using Himself. Let me put that another way.

When we define something, we always use something that’s greater than the thing we’re defining.

For example, if we want to define a single word, we use a dictionary that contains **every** word, it’s bigger than the thing we’re defining.

If we want to define creation, we use God, because He’s bigger than creation.

But how can we define **God**? God is above all, He created everything, and God defines all. There’s nothing bigger or more important than God, so God must define Himself using Himself!

“**I AM WHO I AM**” means that God exists without the need for anything or anyone else’s assistance. He’s always present, He’s always existed, and always will exist, and the only real way to define Him is, “**I AM WHO I AM.**” God is always there, always present, always listening.

It’s a powerful revelation of Who God is.

[pause]

John 8 – Jesus the Great I AM

One last thing of background about this name; before the birth of Jesus, Rabbis and other Jewish scholars taught that one of the signs of the Messiah would be that he would be able to pronounce the name of God perfectly. This was a big deal because the actual pronunciation was lost.

And then one day a Man showed us, and this Man began to teach about a new kind of life: life with God, life in God’s kingdom, life under God’s reign, life in God’s presence, life with God’s favor & power. And He taught that this life was now possible for human beings, ordinary human beings, men, women, slave, free, rich, poor, Jew, Gentile. And His name was Jesus.

<< SLIDE 11 – Scripture

And one day, after many miracles and interactions with the religious leaders, Jesus said, in **John 8:58**, “**Very truly I tell you,**” Jesus answered, “**before Abraham was born, I am!**” Considering all we just looked at in **Exodus**, Jesus is making a pretty clear and bold claim.

He doesn’t say, “**Before Abraham was born I was,**” or “**I already existed,**” or “**I was around.**”

He says, “**Before Abraham was born I AM.**” And to everyone around Him, this would’ve been a very clear declaration. “**I Jesus am God who has come down, God has come down, and I am God.**”

So, my name is “I Am.” That’s my title. I Am. That’s my name. Jesus is identifying Himself with the name that God used when He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush in **Exodus 3**.

“**Do you want to know me? I’m Yahweh.**” Jesus is making an unmistakable **direct** claim to being God.

<< SLIDE 12 – Scripture

That's why the religious leaders in v. 59 picked up stones to throw him. They didn't miss what Jesus was saying. ⁵⁹ At this, they picked up stones to stone him,...

It's a bold statement, with huge implications, which the religious leaders weren't ready for, so they try to kill Him. They were ready to kill Jesus because of this claim; eventually they did kill Him.

But a group of people, a small group at first, were convinced that this man Jesus, in His life, and His teachings, and then in His death on the cross, and in His resurrection, that this Man who claimed to be the "**I AM**," that in Him something much greater was available. This small group believed that in HIM a new life was available, and that their lives could be defined by His life.

Freedom From Jesus the I AM

And why did they think that? Why did they think they could find life in Jesus, the **I AM** of God? Well let's go a few verses prior to the statement to see what led up to it. Lets back up and get some context that led to this declaration from Jesus.

<< SLIDE 13 – Scripture

In v.31 we see some interactions between Jesus and the folks around Him, where Jesus said, **To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."**

That's an interesting claim, a claim that a lot of church's in America tend to gloss over. Some churches say that if you pray a 20-second prayer at one time in your life, then you are good. All you have to do is pray a prayer and that means you're saved and you're a Christian.

But that's not what Jesus said. Jesus said, **"Follow Me.... And if you're following Me you'll follow what I say, and if you yield to Me like that, then you are really my disciples."**

How can we know if our faith in Jesus is genuine, and not just some emotional moment we had years ago? What's the mark of **true living faith** in Jesus? Jesus is clear, **If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.** Literally, **"if you remain in, if you abide in, if you continue in, then you are one of my followers."**

You see, **faith** is a life-long journey, and this is shown throughout the Bible.

<< SLIDE 14 – Scripture

For example, Jesus said in **Mark 13:13**, **Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.**

1st Corinthians 15:1, Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

<< SLIDE 15– Scripture

Hebrews 3:6, But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory. And then 6 verses later, ¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

Friends, Jesus is clear, He is **God**, He is where **true** life and purpose is found, and Jesus Himself said, **If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.**"

<< SLIDE 16 – Scripture

In this we see that faith in God is a journey, it's a life-long adventure and journey, and at times our faith will be tested, and purified, and strengthened through many situations.

[pause]

Now, you might be sitting there thinking, "**Ummm Keith, Are you saying, are the Scriptures saying, that if I stumble, or if a family member of mine, or a friend of mine stumbles along the way that we're not saved? That we lose everything? That we lose our salvation?"**

No, I'm not saying that at all. Jesus is NOT saying that a person who stumbles loses their salvation; we **all** stumble, we **all** have doubts, we **all** still mess up. This statement from Jesus is a calling to relationship, and a calling to obedience, and faithfulness.

It's not about us being perfect, or earning salvation, or loosing salvation if we stumble; it's about an enduring love relationship with Jesus, and an enduring **submissive** relationship to Jesus.

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples."

Friends, what direction is your life heading? Where are you at right now? Did you pray a prayer 15-years-ago at a summer camp but nothing in life has really changed? Are you in a tough season of life, and even though you have doubts and pain and struggles, are you holding to Jesus as the source of life, as the bread of life, as the light of the word, which He claimed to be?

<< SLIDE 17 – Scripture

You see, most churches like to ignore v.31 because we want **cheap** grace, and we still want to do things on our **own** and by our **own** standards. And if v.31 is one of the more ignored verses in the Bible, I'd have to say v.32 then is one of the most **misapplied** verses in the whole New Testament. Jesus continued, **Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

That phrase is misused all over the place. **<< SLIDE 18 – Pictures**

As you can see on the screen, it's engraved on the American History building at the University of Texas, it's engraved on a wall and the floor at the CIA building, ... as if these words from Jesus were meant to prop-up the global American Spy organization. I can guarantee that Jesus wasn't trying to prop up the CIA when He said, **Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

And church people do this too, so many times **John 8:32** is misapplied by people who decided that they can define "**truth**" to be **anything**, **any** type of knowledge unrelated to Jesus, and that if you simply know **some** sort of **truth**, then you'll be set free.

But friends, Jesus is not saying that **any** truth will set you free.

He's not saying that the truth of Supreme Court decisions will set you free.

Or the truth of particle physics can set you free.

He's not saying that the truth learned in a culinary school will set you free, although I can tell you that Lynn-Joice, you can always bring that truth over to my house with those baked goods you make, you're baked goods have some good truth in them, it's just not the truth that Jesus is talking about here.

<< SLIDE 19 – Scripture

No, v.32 is linked to v. 31 with a “then.” To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

If you want freedom, you have to go to Jesus. Go to Jesus and hold onto **His** teachings. Then and only then will you truly be free.

The truth that sets us free is found in **Jesus'** teaching. And not just **in** His teaching, but in us **holding onto** His teaching, obeying them, persevering in them, submitting to His teaching.

Again, there's a misunderstanding here. It's not just **reading** Jesus' words in the Bible, it's not just **studying** the Bible, or memorizing Bible facts.... No, the words of Jesus bring freedom when they're treated as truth and when they're believed, applied, obeyed, submitted to, and that's freeing.

[pause]

But, how does freedom come by having to follow someone **else** and follow **their** teachings? Having to follow and submit to Jesus doesn't sound all that freeing, it actually sounds controlling.

And to answer that we need to understand the nature of slavery and the nature of freedom. You see, we tend to think of freedom primarily from **external** restraints. We are freed from **external** political oppression. Freed from our parents' **external** supervision.

“Thank God I quit that job and now I'm on my own running my own business. I'm freed from having a boss telling me what to do.

Thank God, I'm divorced. Now I don't have to live with that witch anymore, or that emotionally unavailable man. I'm freed from an unhappy marriage.”

We Americans basically think of freedom as the freedom to do whatever we want without having anyone tell us what to do. For **us**, freedom means that **we** get to call the shots.

<< SLIDE 20 – Scripture

The here, Jesus is speaking of a slavery that goes much deeper than having to listen to other people. Jesus continued in v.34, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”

Jesus is talking about a slavery that's **far worse** than slavery to some external foreign occupying power, or slavery due to some boss at work. Jesus is talking about the slavery to **sin**, the slavery to **yourself**, slavery to your own lusts, to your own unstoppable habits, slavery to our own addictions.

[long-pause]

Let me ask you a question, I was thinking about two people this past week and this slavery and freedom thing.

<< SLIDE 21 – Pictures

Who do you think was more free when they lived on the earth, Michael Jackson or Mother Theresa. Who do you think was freer?

I think if you reflect upon both of those people, CLEARLY Mother Theresa was freer. Now, Michael Jackson had hundreds of millions of dollars, he had so much money he could do whatever he wanted. He had enough money to call the shots, to be the boss, to buy dozens of cosmetic surgeries, to own an animal zoo and all kinds of fairground rides on his private property. The dude seemed to have everything.

But if you look at his life, and compare it to the life Mother Theresa lived, a life of working with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta India, a life that radiated joy and compassion in the midst of that poverty. Who do you think was more free?

Michael Jackson sure seemed to be a slave to himself, and his ego, and to other people's perception, and it killed him. That's what sin does. Sin, in its most basic form, is the **self-centered life**. Sin is living self-focused, self-oriented, self-consumed.

[pause]

<< SLIDE 22 – Scripture

Friends, Are you a slave? I'm not asking if you're being pushed around by a boss, or being told what to do by someone else, I'm just asking what Jesus asks of us. Are you a slave?

Are you a slave to some uncontrollable addiction?

A slave to substance abuse?

A slave to food?

A slave to other people's opinions of you?

A slave to your anger?

A slave to your job? Or making money?

Are you a slave to your sexual appetites or brokenness?

Are you a slave to yourself?

Are you a slave to your own habit of self-promotion?

Are you a slave or are you free?

[pause]

<< SLIDE 23 – Scripture

Jesus then says in v.35, ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

And in this statement, Jesus is saying that through Him we can move from slaves to family members of God, move from slaves to sin to children of God. That's an amazing claim.

<< SLIDE 24 – Scripture

Later He makes another claim, **verse 51, Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death."** In other words, this liberation and freedom from sin, it's freedom and power that lasts forever.

Of course, with these statement ,you can see why the people around Jesus start to say, "**Um, Who do You think You are?"** These are absolutely bold claims.

<< SLIDE 25 – Scripture

And then after some more interactions, Jesus made that claim that backs up all other claims, the claim to be God, **58, “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”**

And in making this claim, He's pointing back to **Exodus ch.3**, where God's leading and presence brought Moses the strength to overcome his slavery to fear. God's name empowered Moses to overcome the slavery he had to fear.

And in using that name Jesus is making the claim to have the power and authority to bring us **truth that will set us free**, because **He** is the truth, **He** is the great **I AM**.

And friends, in Jesus, our identity can become secure, and our lives can become secure. Friends, what's your identity? Are you a slave or are you free?

It's counter intuitive, but **real** freedom comes from holding to Jesus, and His teachings, and letting Him call the shots. He's God, which means He's a much better boss of your life than you are.

Jesus, the great **I AM**. Jesus, the truth bringer, Jesus, the Freedom bringer, Jesus, our God who conquered death and moves us from slaves to sons and daughters.

[pause]

Conclusion/Communion

At this point we're going to **respond** to Jesus and **respond** to His declaration to be God, **respond** to His promise to bring freedom to those who follow Him. We're going to respond in three ways:

- Singing
- Communion
- Prayer in the Back – every single one of us have areas where we are not free, areas where we are paralyzed like Moses was paralyzed, areas of brokenness and hurt and pain and confusion....

--SONGS--

Closing Announcements/Benediction

??? Ministry Time ???

So let me speak a blessing over you, and then you're free to stack your chair and go:

May The Lord bless you and keep you
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.
And may (we/you/Jesus....)

OR book of Romans....

So....May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

<http://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/07/benediction-index.html>