



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

To Know Him By Name: YHWH

December 20, 2009

Rev. Stephen G. Bringardner

~ Scripture: Exodus 3:1-15 ~

INTRODUCTION

The lead verse for our series of sermons on the Hebrew names of God has been **Psalm 18:10**—

*The name of the LORD is a **strong tower**;
the righteous run to it and are **safe** [lit “set on high”]*

In other words,

*“the person who is consistently upright and in right standing with God
runs into it and is safe (high above evil and strong).”*

Knowing God and being able to call Him by name seems to be a sure defense against whatever comes against us.

Among the ancient Jews there was one divine name which had peculiar sacredness. It was so holy that they never uttered it in public. When they came to it in reading, they would pass over it in reverent silence, not daring to let the sound of it pass between their lips. And yet it was the most frequently used name for God—occurring over 6800 times in the Old Testament.

THE UNUTTERABLE NAME AND WHY WE SHOULD REVERENCE IT

When it was written, it was written with four letters—all consonants **YHWH**—making it impos-sible to pronounce. You might have thought I left out a few letters of the title to the sermon. But that’s how it was written by the scribes whenever they were copying or translating the Old Testament. Before they transcribed it, they would stop. . .take off their clothing. . .completely bathe. . .put on clean clothes. . .and use a new unused pen to write this most venerated Name. All this *pomp and circumstance* because they did not want to profane His holy name. They were keenly aware of the command: “*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God. . .*” [Exodus 20:7].

How far we’ve come in our day & age—when people carelessly fling God’s name around like slang (e.g.: in casual conversation; in the media & entertainment). Granted, I know it’s not His proper name (as we’ll see in a moment). But still, when we say “*O God*” or “*O my God*” (other than in prayer), we’re taking the Lord’s name in vain (i.e.: *misusing* His name). We’re making His name worthless...useless...without power...devoid of significance.

Think of a famous person brought down by his own treachery. I hate to keep picking on him, but Tiger Woods is the most recent example. His name will never be the same. We’ll never think of it the same way when it is spoken. Do we want to defame the name of God like that?

Let’s handle His name with reverence. Let’s handle it carefully. “*Hallowed be Thy name,*” we pray. No thunderbolts here, but do remember Whose name you are uttering.

A BIT ABOUT THE WORD ITSELF

The letters YHWH stood for many centuries, until around the 6th century AD when vowel points were added. What they did was add the vowels of *Adonai* (recall last week) to the consonants of *YHWH* to form **YAHWEH**. At least that allowed us to pronounce the word.

Later, it was anglicized to **JEHOVAH**. And it is also translated **LORD** (all caps.) to distinguish it from *Adonai* (=Lord). So, every time you read JEHOVAH or LORD (in caps.), it's YHWH.

WHERE DID THIS NAME COME FROM?

Moses tells us. The Children of Israel were in bondage to the Egyptians. Moses was tending sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro, and he wandered out to the back side of the desert. There was a mountain out there in this remote, isolated area called Mt. Horeb. He climbed to the top of it and was immediately encountered by an angel (“the angel of the LORD”). The angel appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush, but the bush wasn't burning up. So he started to move in closer to get a better look. We pick it up at **v. 4**:

⁴When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

God proceeded to tell Moses that He had indeed seen the misery of His people in Egypt, and heard their cry for help. He commissioned Moses to return to Egypt and free his nation from captivity. After four decades of lonely isolation (i.e.: sheep herding), this command seemed utterly overwhelming. Yet in the backwash of his own feelings of inadequacy and fear, Moses was about to learn the limitless power of a single name—the personal name of God Himself (not a title). We pick up the story in **v. 13**, as Moses says to God:

¹³"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?"

¹⁴God said to Moses, "I am who I am. [That's the translation of YHWH.] This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM [YHWH] has sent me to you.' "

¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD [YHWH], 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, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

In **Isaiah 42:8, NIV**, God speaks and says: *"I am Jehovah. That is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to graven images (idols)."*

THIS NAME IS UNIQUE

When God gave Moses His name, He didn't just give him a title. He said, "I'm going to give you my personal name." Even the term "God" is a title (for highest being)—similar to Pastor (Matt or Steve) / Doctor (physician) / Your Honor (judge) / Senator or Representative.

All other names provide some description of His character and His activity. Some are compounded (like El-Shaddai), et.al.—and put various characteristics together:

- *El-Shaddai* == God who is sufficient (or, All-Sufficient One)
- *Elohim* == God who creates (or, Almighty One)
- *El Roi* == God who sees
- *Jehovah (YHWH) Jireh* == God (I AM) who provides
- *Jehovah (YHWH) Shalom* == God (I AM) will send peace
- *Adonai* == God who owns us (remember, we are His!)

But when you want to address God NOT for what He has done or can do. . .NOT for one of His great characteristics. . .BUT directly, personally, person-to-person—YHWH is His name. Perhaps we should address Him as such in prayer!

I always used to think that this name YHWH made God distant, transcendent, unreachable, unapproachable. But a God who give us His name and invites us to call Him by it is a very, very personal God.

After all, this is the God who *heard* Israel's cry. . .who *took notice* of their plight. . .and took action to do something about it. This is a God who loves. . .who cares about justice. . .who makes things right. This is a God who enters into relationships with His people. . .who establishes covenants. . .who stays involved—even when we ((nation)) turn away from him.

NOW WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

I AM THAT I AM == I am the self-existent one.

In other words, He is not dependent on anything in His creation; rather, everything in His creation is dependent on Him. He was not created; He does all the creating.

He stands outside His creation, just as an artist who stands outside his painting. He stands out-side all time. In fact, He has no beginning and no ending. He always was + He always will be. So, all time is wrapped up into one eternal moment called “now”. Hence his name is “I AM”.

God is all about the present tense.

Many of us relate to God as though He were a thing of the PAST:

I remember when. . .I remember the good ole days.

It seems like God was active in the days of the Bible, but not so much now.

And many of us look forward to a FUTURE (and that's good):

I'm looking forward to His return, when He will gather all of us to be with Him forever

(e.g.: Harold / Pat / Vila / etc. who have passed on this year).

More short-term, I'm looking for God to be at work in our church and in our lives.

But what I want us to get this morning is that God is at work RIGHT NOW:

He is the eternal “I AM”. All time is wrapped up in him! Your days are in His hands. Your life is hid with God. Our lives, our world is wrapped up in Him.

He's got the whole world in His hands! He's got your world in His hands

(including all your yesterdays + all your tomorrows)!

This God—the great I AM—is very real and very present. He is more real than the chair you are sitting on right now.

We don't always think He is. Sometimes He seems distant. . .unconcerned. . .not real at all (e.g.: just a figment of my imagination from happier days). I tell you, my friend, after you have read His Word (as we have this morning), so that you have this on the HEAD level. . .then you have live it by FAITH. You won't always feel the “awe” Moses felt on Mt. Horeb. You may come to moments in which you cry out, “Where is He when I need Him?” “Why doesn't He see my situation? relieve my pain?”

ILLUSTRATION> Many of you have no doubt heard of **Corrie ten Boom**, who along with her family was part of the underground resistance movement to save persecuted Jewish families from the Nazis during WWII. Corrie and her sister, Betsy, were arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps themselves—and were left with nothing to cling to but their faith.

It doesn't get any worse than a concentration camp. Their story is beautifully told in the book *The Hiding Place*. A movie was made back in the 70's, and I want to share a brief excerpt with you. Corrie and Betsy are having a Bible study with some of the other women. The reality of their circumstances is very vivid and grim; but even more real is God's presence. Listen.

VIDEO CLIP from THE HIDING PLACE
[Chapter 33 from 2:49 to 4:08; about 1 hr.-52 min. into the movie]

Can you see how real God's I AM-ness was to them? Just how real is He to you this morning? You have to take it on faith, not feeling. If you will look close enough, sometimes God's presence is most manifest in the hour of deepest need.

IS THERE A JESUS-GOD CONNECTION?

Indeed there is! JESUS is also the "I AM" who by His Spirit transforms and empowers us for daily living and difficult circumstances. He says so very pointedly in **John 8:58** — "*I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I AM.*" Same phrase as when God the Father identified Himself at the burning bush. So, whatever your present tense need, Jesus is the "I AM" of God.

- He wants to be active in your life helping you overcome doubt, depression, et.al.
- He can be the present tense answer to the healing of broken relationships.
- He can deal with your anger and resentment, and change your life.

CONCLUSION

You're never NOT in His presence. Sometimes our awareness needs a little "boosting". That's why we "come to WORSHIP". Would you open yourself to the presence of the great I AM—and for a sacred moment, let no doubt interfere.

~ MOMENT OF SILENCE. . .AMEN! ~