

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Majestic Jesus**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-97

It is our great privilege now to open the Word of God to hear the Lord speak to us. I want you to turn in your Bibles to a text which may not on the surface seem to relate to Christmas, but it does, John chapter 8. John chapter 8. And I want to read to you a fascinating account of Jesus and the Jewish leaders.

In John chapter 8, beginning at verse 51, “Jesus said, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone keeps My Word, he shall never see death.’ The Jews said to Him, ‘Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham died and the prophets also, and You say if anyone keeps My Word he shall never taste of death? Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham who died? The prophets died too. Whom 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. And you have not come to know Him, but I know Him. And if I say that I do not know Him, I shall be a liar like you. But I do know Him and keep His Word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad.’ The Jews therefore 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 born I AM.’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.”

When you think of Christmas, you think of a baby being born. When you think of the birth of a baby you think of a beginning. The baby born in Bethlehem was a beginning, the beginning of the incarnate God in human flesh, the God/Man Jesus Christ. But here, would you please note that the very One, Jesus Christ, who was born at Bethlehem said, “Before Abraham was born, I AM”?

It is true that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, but it is also true that the Son of God, the person, the Christ, the Lord who came into the world in human form did not begin at Bethlehem. Yes, there was a birth and a beginning of the God/Man, but the second member of the Trinity was around before Bethlehem. He just took on human form.

And so as you look at Bethlehem and think of a beginning, you have to also realize that while there was the beginning of a life, the life that began was the life of One who had no beginning. Jesus makes that abundantly clear in one of the most shocking statements He ever made: “Before Abraham was born, I AM.”

When Jesus said that Abraham saw His day and was glad in verse 56, the Jews were absolutely shocked. What do you mean Abraham saw You? They knew that Abraham could not see into the future, and so they rightly concluded that if Abraham saw You, it isn't because he's alive now; it's because You're claiming You must have been alive then. If Abraham saw You, You must have seen him. That shock registers their response in verse 57, "You're not even 50 years old. How have You seen Abraham?" The number 50 is a round one, commonly referred to reaching maturity, or agedness. "You're not even an old man. You're not even mature yet, physically. How could You ever make us to believe that You saw Abraham who has been dead for millennia?"

And the Lord's responding statement is monumental: "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM." What a claim. If we were to translate the Greek literally in verse 58, it would read like this, "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham became..." What it means is there was a definite point in time when Abraham began, a point in past history when the man who did not exist came into existence. Jesus says, "Before that, I AM." That's the eternal present that indicates no beginning.

To become is to pass from nothingness and non-existence to existence. But "I AM" denotes a mode of existence which is not due to any such transition. It is a statement about eternity. It is a statement about everlasting life, no beginning, no end. And thus does Jesus attribute to Himself eternal existence in the absolutely divine sense, and even the word "before" is symbolic. It is a concession to human comprehension of time, for in the life of God there is no before and there is no after. Jesus says, "Then I Am the eternal existing one who eternally existed, whereas Abraham, at some point in time, began." And thus is Jesus claiming to be the eternal God.

Psalm 90, verse 2 says, "Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." You "are" God, not "You were," "You will be," "You are", the eternal present. Frankly, based upon the laws of grammar that reflects an impossible statement unless the speaker is God, and indeed He is.

And I believe of all the majestic and astounding claims that Jesus made in the New Testament, none has more elevated solemnity than this one. This phrase, "Before Abraham was, I AM," harbors, within it, the most authentic, the most audacious and the most profound claim Jesus ever made regarding His being, and the Jews didn't miss it. They knew exactly what He was saying. They knew He was claiming to be the eternal One, the timeless One, the God who is from everlasting to everlasting. They knew, therefore, that they must fall on their faces immediately and worship Him as the creator God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the eternal God or else they would stone such a claim because of its blasphemy.

And so they made their choice in verse 59, they took up stones to stone Him. Any man who would stand in the personification of such a claim, blasphemously claiming to be the eternal God, in the

temple making such a claim, should have his life crushed out, and so they attempted to do it and He escaped.

The temple, at this time, was under construction. There would have been plenty of stones for them to grasp. Jesus left them. There's no question what He was claiming. He was claiming to be the eternal God.

But when He said, "Before Abraham began, I AM," in that little two-word phrase, "I AM," Jesus opened up vast understanding for us about who He is. The familiar Greek words are *eg – I – eimi – am* – familiar words. They are really the Greek equivalent of an Old Testament name for God that we call Yahweh. It's called the Tetragrammaton, made up of four letters. It is the name of God in the Old Testament used 6,800 times. I believe it comes from the Hebrew verb "to be," and it is the Old Testament way of saying "I AM." The Jews knew the name of God to be "I AM." When Jesus said, "I AM," they knew He was claiming to be God.

To give us understanding of the greatness and the vastness of this name, we need to go back to the Old Testament. So turn in your Bible to Exodus chapter 3, and I believe you're going to be immensely enriched as you come to grips with the fullness of this name.

In Exodus chapter 3, I call your attention to verse 13. God has made Himself manifest to Moses in a most startling, shocking way, in a burning bush, and God has commissioned Moses to lead 2 million or so Jews out of Egypt to the Promised Land. In verse 13, Moses speaks to God. "Behold, I'm going to the sons of Israel, and I shall 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?" There were many false gods. They all had names. Moses said, "Now when I go to them and say, 'I'm coming from the God of your fathers, and God has sent me to lead you out,' and they say to me, 'Well, what God? What is His name?' what do I tell them?"

Verse 14: "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." I AM, that's His name.

Now, what is bound up in that name? Well, certainly eternal existence. The ever-living One, the continual eternal present tense, God has no before and no after and no past and no future, one eternal existence, that's bound up in I AM. But that's not all, and I think most people stop at that point. That's not all.

Go back to verse 11 for a moment. 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?" What he's really saying is, "Lord, You are overestimating my leadership ability. Who am I to pull that off?" Verse 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...'"

Now, we learn a second thing about I AM. I AM is the eternal One who is present with His people – I AM, not in the distance sense; I AM in a near sense. What does it matter to me if God is the eternal present if He is not present with me? God says, “I AM the I AM. I am the eternal living One who is present with His people. I will be with you,” present with His people.

Go down to verse 17: “So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittite, Amorite, Perizzite, Hivite, Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.” Here is a third element in the name I AM, and He says, “I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt. I am not only the ever-present One. I am not only the ever-present One who is near His people. I am the ever-present One near His people who delivers them, who redeems them.”

And now the richness of His name starts to become visible. He is present permanently. He is not only present in the vast sense but He is near to His people, and He is near with a particular desire to redeem and deliver them.

This is greatly enhanced, if you'll turn to chapter 6, in one of the most remarkable of conversations. God and Moses are still talking as Moses tries to figure out what the name of God fully means. And God, in verse 2, says to Moses, “I AM the LORD.” Would you please notice the word “Lord”? If you have one of the newer translations it should be in all uppercase letters, all capitals. That is how the translators have translated the word “Yahweh,” I AM. If you see “Lord” with a capital “L” and small letters O-R-D, it is *Adonai*, the word for master. If it is the “I AM,” they are all capital letters. God says again to Moses, “I AM the I AM. I AM the eternal One who is near His people with a purpose of redeeming them.”

And then, in verse 3, the most remarkable thing: “And I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty...” Stop right there. He says, “Abraham knows Me. Isaac knows Me. Jacob knows Me – because I appeared to them but I appeared to them as God Almighty, that's El Shaddai, God the Almighty One. I appeared to them in strength. I appeared to them in power. I appeared to them in might.”

Back to verse 3: “But by My name Lord,” which is I AM, “by My name I AM, I did not make Myself known to them.” Isn't that interesting? “They knew Me as El Shaddai. They knew Me as Almighty. They knew Me as powerful. They didn't know Me as I AM.”

Well, you say, “Now, wait a minute, are you saying that the Tetragrammaton Yahweh doesn't appear in Genesis?” No, it appears a 100 times, but it's not fully defined. Yes, they knew He was the eternal God. Yes, they knew He was near, and they drew near to Him, and He to them. But what they didn't know was God the Redeemer. They didn't know that God was the Rescuer of His people.

God had revealed Himself to the patriarchs in supernatural control over nature, supernatural control over history, supernatural control over people, supernatural control over events. They saw God as El Shaddai the powerful One, but they never really knew Him as the saving God of the Covenant, the quality, the full rich quality of His name I AM was now to be revealed for the first time in its fullness.

In what sense? Verse 4: "I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. And furthermore, I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage and I have remembered My covenant," that is the promise to give them the land. "Say therefore to the sons of Israel, 'I AM the LORD,' I AM the I AM, "and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also," there's the key word, "redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments."

God had never done anything like this before. "Now, you will not only know that I Am the eternal One, that I AM eternally powerful, that I AM eternally near My people, but now you're about to see My great strong arm of redemption." Verse 7: "Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I AM the I AM your God who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession. I AM the I AM."

And you see, God is defining what it means. Who is the I AM? The eternal One, the eternal One who comes near to His people, the eternal One who redeems them, and then, according to verse 7, who takes them for His own people, becomes their God – verse 8 – does all that that He might pour out blessing upon them. That's the redeeming, saving God.

So when you hear God called the I AM, you're not just talking about His eternity. You're not just talking about the fact that He is everlastingly existing – much more than that. He is ever near to redeem, to form a people, and to be their God for the sake of their blessedness. He is the I AM, the Savior, the Deliverer, the Redeemer. That is the essence of His name because that is His person. God is not just an eternal being. He is an eternal being who draws near to men because He loves them. He does not just draw near. He redeems them – not just redeems them but makes them His own people and He, their God, and then pours out endless blessing upon them. That is who God is. And when you say I AM, all of that is summed up in that great name.

Exodus chapter 6, then, is a monumental text in the definition of the very identity of God. It is a salvation name. God is a God who has come to redeem His people, who has come to make them His own and to give them a new quality of life forever. The whole saving enterprise of God is wrapped up in the name I AM. The whole redemption that God has worked out from the beginning until now is bound up in the name I AM.

And so when Jesus comes into the world as the Savior, He must, then, be the I AM, the saving God. "I AM the eternal transcendent God," He was saying. "I AM the eternal transcendent God who has come to rescue His people from sin's bondage and to bring them in to an eternal relationship with Himself. I AM," He is saying, "the One who will make them My people that they might enjoy the unimaginable bliss of My blessings in this life and in the life to come in the glories of heaven."

To know the meaning of that name is to understand God's redemptive purpose from the beginning to the end. This is an honored name. This is an awesome name. This is a blessed name.

The Jews knew it, and when Jesus said "I AM," they picked up rocks to kill Him because the blasphemy overwhelmed them because they knew exactly what He was claiming. And as I noted earlier, they had a choice – either fall on your face and acknowledge the God of creation and redemption, or stone this blasphemer who has the audacity to come into the temple and do this.

They made the wrong choice. He is the I AM. John loves that term. He tried to capture the essence of the I AM in the words of Jesus when Jesus said, "I AM the bread of life," when Jesus said, "I AM the light of the world," when He said, "I AM the door. I AM the Good Shepherd. I AM the resurrection and the life. I AM the way, the truth, and the life. I AM the true vine.

John, by quoting Him in all those phrases, is using those substantives to fill up the content of who the I AM is. He is the bread of life. That is He is the One who savingly feeds the hungry soul. He is the light of the world, the One who savingly leads the sinner out of darkness into light. He is the door, the One who savingly opens the way to the Kingdom. He is the Good Shepherd, the One who, in salvation, protects and guards and feeds His flock. He is the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life. He is the true vine through whom we can produce fruit unto the glory of God. That's who the I AM is. All of those are saving titles and they fill up the content of the I AM.

The Jews should have made the right choice. They made the wrong one. That is the most serious crime to be committed in the universe. In Deuteronomy 28, verse 58, we read these words: "If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book," listen, "to fear this honored and awesome name, the I AM your God..." Did you get that? If you don't fear this honored and awesome name, the I AM your God, "...then the Lord will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses. And He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. Also every sickness and every plague which not written in the book of the law, the Lord will bring on you until you are destroyed."

God says, "If you don't honor the name I AM in its fullness, I'll destroy you." He's done it. When Jesus came into the world said "I AM" and they would not fear this honored and awesome name, but they

crucified Him on a cross, God destroyed them. A few years later, in 70 A.D., came Titus Vespasian and the Roman horde, and in the city of Jerusalem alone 1,100,000 Jews were killed. And in succeeding months, 985 towns in Palestine were destroyed by the Romans acting as the arm of the judgment of God. You must fear this honored name, this awesome name.

When Jesus said, "I AM," He was saying, "There was a child born at Bethlehem, I Am the child born at Bethlehem, but before Bethlehem I AM. Before Abraham, I AM." This is the eternal One. Jesus is saying, "I came into the world as the I AM to redeem, because that's what 'I AM' means, to bring to Myself a people and then to bless that people forever and ever." That's why He came.

To accomplish this redemptive purpose, as the sovereign over salvation, our Lord had to exercise power over several elements. To be the I AM and accomplish redemption, He had to exercise power, first of all, over sin. Look at Mark chapter 2. Mark chapter 2. This is a very familiar story about four men who brought a paralytic to Jesus. The place was so crowded they couldn't get him in the door so they tore the roof off and lowered him down the roof in front of where Jesus was standing.

And do you remember when the man finally landed at the feet of Jesus on this pallet or hard bed, that Jesus saw the faith of these four men and also the paralytic? In verse 5 of Mark 2, He said, "My son, your sins are forgiven." This is astounding. This is absolutely shocking for anyone to say, "I forgive you your sins." Verse 6: "Some of the scribes were sitting there, and they were reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?' And here, again, they're faced with the same choice. He is either God who can forgive sins, or He is the worst blasphemer.

And, of course, in verse 8, we learn that Jesus, reading their minds, "He was immediately aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, so He said to them, 'Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?'" That must have been a shock. Then He said this: "Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk?'"

"Which is easier?" It's a fair question. Easy to answer. I'll tell you which is easier. It's a lot easier to say your sins are forgiven. It's easy to say. Well it's impossible to do, but it's easy to say. Priests all over the place say it every day, "Oh, my son, your sins are forgiven. You do your confession; your sins are forgiven." It's easy to say. I could say it: "Your sins are forgiven," easy to say. That's what Jesus said, "Which is easier to say?" That's easy to say.

Verse 10: "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I'll say the hard thing. So I say to you, 'Rise, take up your pallet, and go home.'" That's hard to say. You know why? Because immediately we're going to find out whether you're God, whether you have any authority at all. I can say to you, "My beloved, your sins are forgiven," and some of you might

even believe that. But if I go to the hospital and I say, "Everybody rise up and walk," and nobody moves, you know I don't have that power.

It's easy to say your sins are forgiven because it can't be verified. So Jesus said, "I just forgave the man his sins because of his faith, and just to show you that I really forgave his sin, I'll do the hard part: 'Get up and walk,'" and he got up and walked. And in verse 12, they were all amazed. They went in to some kind of fright, panic, and they were glorifying God saying, "We've never seen anything like this."

You see, if He is the redeemer God, then wouldn't we expect that He could forgive sin because He'd have to forgive sin to redeem, wouldn't He? And He did. And to prove that He forgave sin, He did the hard part – He healed the man. That could be verified; the forgiveness couldn't be. But once you verify the authority and the power that He demonstrated in the healing, you can see the authority and the power that He expressed in the forgiveness.

There's a second thing. As you think about Christ, if He is to be the sovereign I AM, the Redeemer God, He not only must exercise power over sin but He must also exercise power over spirits. Why? Because men are held in bondage to damning sin. They are held captive to demons and devils. He must have power over them as well.

Look at Luke, chapter 4, and let's see if He has such power. Luke, chapter 4 verse 31, "He came down to Capernaum, city of Galilee. He was teaching them on the Sabbath. They were amazed at His teaching for His message was with authority. Now there was a young man in the synagogue possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon." Here's a demon-possessed individual.

All demons are sinful, wicked, and unclean, but some are designated in the New Testament as unclean demons only to emphasize that they tend to produce deviant, perverted behavior. There are white-collar demons also. There are religious demons. You know, there are those clean, sharp demons in a gray-flannel suit. There are those kind that are more subtle. This is the vicious, wicked, perverted kind of demon that has come to dwell in this young man.

"And so the spirit cries out with a loud voice," verse "Ha!" That's interesting, isn't it? That means demons have emotion, feeling. "Ha!" This is panic. "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the holy one of God." This is a demon talking.

Did you know that all demons are fundamentalists? All of them. They're all evangelicals. They all have an absolutely accurate theology about Christ. No demon would join a cult that denies the deity of Christ. They know better. That's for witless men and women. They may work through those systems but they know they're lying. They know He's God. They know He's the holy One of God.

So the demon says, "Is this our time? Have You come?" And this demon is in fear. "Ha! Is this the time? Is it now we have to go to the pit forever?"

"And Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be quiet, come out of him.'" Just like that. And the demon was mad so he slammed the guy down one final time and left. This is amazing. And Jesus was saying, "The final doom isn't yet, but, for now, get out of that man," and the demon's gone.

You say, "Well why did God let him slam the guy down?" Because He wanted it very apparent that something dramatic had just happened, and everybody watching would have known, and they did. Verse 36: "They were all amazed, and they began having a discussion. 'What is this message? What is this word? With authority and power, He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!' And the report about Him was getting out into every locality in the surrounding district."

Listen. This is the saving I AM, and the saving I AM, if He's going to do His redeeming work and gather a people whose God He will be, and if He's going to pour out blessing upon them for eternity, He's going to have to have power over sin that binds them and power over the demons over this world that hold them captive to satanic institutions and schemes. He is sovereign over sin. He is sovereign over demons. Yes, this is the I AM. No one else could do this.

The third thing we note is that He would need to be if He were going to redeem the sovereign over Satan himself – over Satan himself. A couple of passages that are key, one is John 14:30, a very, very important statement made by Christ. In John 14:30, Jesus, of course, in the last supper of the evening that He was going to be taken captive, talking to His disciples, and, in verse 30, He starts to feel the arrival of Satan. Satan is coming. Satan is approaching. He can feel it.

And He says, verse 30, "I will not speak much more with you..." This conversation is about over. "...for the ruler of the world is coming. I can feel him coming. He's moving toward Me." He'd seen him before. Oh yeah, he had been around trying to destroy the Messianic line so no Messiah could be born, trying to destroy the Jews altogether so there would be no nation to redeem. He was there when the baby was born because he was killing all the rest of the babies trying to kill this one. He had been there trying to tempt Christ to abandon His obedience to God and follow him. He had been around a lot, but here he came again, and this was the final major conflict. He's coming. Jesus can feel it this night.

And then He says the most incredible thing: "And he has nothing on Me." What? That's right. "He has nothing on Me. I've lived 33 years or so, and Satan does not have one single valid accusation against Me of any wrong thought, word, or deed whatsoever. He has nothing on Me." What a statement. "He is powerless over Me. I feel him coming. He has no power."

Way back in Genesis, we were told that someday the seed of the woman would go into conflict with the enemy, the serpent, and He would bruise his head and exercise a fatal blow. The cross was that fatal blow.

Jesus said He's coming. In Luke 22:52 and 53, we read, "And Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple, the elders who had come against Him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as against a robber?'" Later that night, do you remember in the garden? "While I was with you daily in the temple, you didn't lay hands on Me. Why are you here now?" And then He answers His own question, "But this hour and the power of darkness are yours."

"Why are you here now? Because it's time for Satan, the power of darkness, to act. Let him come. He's got nothing on Me." No vulnerability, no weakness, no flaw, no sin, no place for Satan to strike a fatal blow, so Jesus says, end of verse 31, "Let's go." And where was He going? To the cross. "Let's go. I'm not afraid. Satan's got nothing on Me. He can kill Me there, but he can't keep Me dead because I'm without sin."

And according to Hebrews 2:14, when Jesus went to the cross, this great thing happened, "Through death, He, Christ, rendered powerless the devil." Through death, He rendered powerless the devil. If He is the I AM, and He is, if He is the Redeemer God, He must have power over sin, and He did exhibit that – power over spirits, and He did exhibit that; power over Satan, and He did exhibit that.

There is one other over which He must have power, and that is death or sleep. It was death, according to Hebrews 2:14 and 15, the fear of death that held men bondaged and doomed them to hell. The power of death had to be conquered. He had to conquer spirits, conquer Satan, conquer death.

Back in John chapter 2, Jesus said, verse 19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days....," what? "...I'll raise it up." And these blockheads, never understanding what He said, said, "It took 46 years to build this temple, and you're going to raise it up in three days? But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

"You kill it, it will come out of the grave because Satan can't hold Me. He has nothing on Me." There can be no punishment because there's been no crime. In John 10, verse 17, Jesus said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it from Me. I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it up again." I will die, and I will live again. It is because of His voluntary devotion to this great work of redemption that the Father loves Him, and we love Him.

So the I AM is the Redeemer God, and He came and said, "I AM." And as the I AM, He had to redeem His people from their sins to do that, conquer sin, spirits, Satan, sleep, or death. When Jesus said, "Before Abraham became I AM," they knew He was claiming to be the God of redemption. They should have also remembered He had shown them His power over sin to prove He was the God of redemption. He had shown them His power over spirits over and over, His power over Satan.

And if they hadn't seen that yet, they would soon see it on the cross and through the open tomb. They would see, also, His power over death. They should have made the right choice. They had enough evidence that this was the I AM. They all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes I AM."

You know what they did? They said, "What further need do we have of testimony? We heard it ourselves from His own mouth." What did they mean by that? "Well, there He goes again claiming to be the I AM, and He was."

You say, "Well what should be the proper response?" I'll give you an illustration, chapter 18. Theirs was the improper. At least this is a partial illustration of the proper response. In John's gospel, chapter 18, Jesus is in the garden. They all come to capture Him. Jesus takes the initiative in verse 4. Here comes the Roman cohort, the officers of the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they got their lanterns and torches and weapons. And they don't know whether there's going to be a riot or whatever is going to happen, so they're armed.

Jesus takes the initiative. He's not hiding. "He knows all things that were coming upon Him, went forth, and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' He said to them..." remove the word in italics. What did He say? "I AM." Well, this is rubbing it in. "I AM.' And also Judas, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. When, therefore, He said to them, 'I AM,' they drew back and fell to the ground." The whole entourage collapsed in a heap. That's power. Just saying His name, "I AM," crash goes the whole crowd into the dirt.

And then, in verse 7, "Who was it you were seeking?" "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus answered, "I told you that I AM." What is the proper response? To fall down. They did that. They were sheer terrorized. They were crushed by the force of His name. They should have stayed down. The proper response to the I AM is to fall down, perhaps in fear, perhaps in terror, but ultimately in worship. The tragedy is they got up, took Him prisoner, killed the I AM, failed to honor the awesome name, and were destroyed as a people.

How will you respond this Christmas to who it is that we remember and worship? You can cast stones at Him and call Him a blasphemer, or you can worship Him as God, the God who saves His people from their sins.

Our Father, thank You for this glimpse of deity. We are awed that we can speak now to You the great I AM. We are stunned that You, the I AM, the eternally existing ever-near redeeming blessing God lives in us. Oh, what mystery, what joy, and may we realize this Christmas that as we look back at the birth of a baby, He is the I AM. And may we never mistake who the child was lest we fail to fear this honored and awesome name. And may we, unlike the crowd that day in the garden, fall down in fear and remain fallen in worship. We pray in the mighty and glorious and saving name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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