

## Title: “The Great I AM”

Chris Ryan

Jeremiah 17:5-8

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**Service Readings:** Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Cor. 15:(1-11) 12-20; Luke 6:17-26

*When we are associated with the great I AM, he plants us by the water and sends out our roots to the stream. Our identity defined, associated with him, we are not in a wasteland fending for ourselves but are being nourished from the waters of our baptism, and fed from the body and blood of our savior.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Who are you? It is a question as old as time but *how* you answer it has changed over the centuries. Long ago, family identity was the most important factor. “I am a descendent of David,” or “I am from the family of Judah.” Where they came from formed the foundation, the bedrock of a person’s identity. You see, it wasn’t found in self but found in association with something else – something much larger than one’s own person. A person’s identity was unchangeable, undeniable, unshakable. And it formed that person, and gave him meaning, and gave him worth. It connected him to something, anchored and defined him. But it also limited him because he could not escape the identity he had been born into. That was unfathomable, considered impossible. And so he was left living in this identity, whether he liked it or not.

And as time went on, mankind did not like it. So he fought against those chains in search of freedom. He stepped off that foundation that was once undeniable, unchangeable in search of his own identity. It would be one of true independence, one that was not restricted or constrained by ancestry or even long-held truth claims. It would be one personalized to him, and only him. It would bring freedom and open doors to a life that was once impossible to imagine.

And this is where we find ourselves today; we are searching for that freedom from the constraints of the world. We have long abandoned associations that limit us and tie us down. Are we descendants of David? Who cares? It is not even important that we are descendants from our own parents! We have broken free from those restraints and are now free to construct our own foundation, our own identity. We are free to say who we say we are, not who the world or history or even our family says. We stand on our own bedrock that *we have built*, and we have declared who we are!

I am a male.

I am a female.

I am neither.

I am both.

I am a Republican.  
I am a Democrat.  
I am neither.  
I am both.

I am the definer of my own life.  
I am the definer of my own truth.  
I am the definer of my own "I am"

You see, we construct our identities from a smorgasbord of options, some existing and others defined by ourselves. Do we see a dish we like? No? Then we create it and add it to who we are.

I am in charge.  
I am free.

But am I? Really? Have I *really* defined myself independent from anyone, or anything else? Am I *really* free? Is that even possible? The answer, of course, is "no." Trying to do so is like a bush in the wastelands that Jeremiah talks about:

"Cursed is the one who trusts in man,  
who draws strength from mere flesh  
and whose heart turns away from the LORD.  
That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;  
they will not see prosperity when it comes.  
They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,  
in a salt land where no one lives.

When we reject the identity that has been given us and when we begin to construct one ourselves, we are like that bush – digging through sand in search of nutrients, in search of something that will keep us alive. Our roots will wander deeper, farther from our trunk in search of what we need. We think it is not water, for we believe that to not be necessary. We can sustain ourselves – we need no outside help. We are free, after all. We know who we are because we have *designed* who we are.. And as the designer, we believe that we can also be the sustainer. So, what are we searching for, then? If not water? What? We want to believe that we are *not searching* but that's a lie. We are. So what are we seeking? Relationships. It is that simple. God designed us to be in them and made it impossible to survive without them. And so, our roots are seeking connections with others, associations with others, relationships with others. We *need* them like a plant needs water.

And so, our search for freedom, for independence, and for identity doesn't come from within ourselves. It sounds counterintuitive but attempting to find it by creating our own identity bounds us even more, restricts our true freedom, and chains us to a life of searching; constant searching for association, for relationship with something outside ourselves. We end up like the bush in the wastelands, dwelling in the parched places of the desert where no one lives, always chasing after an identity that can be validated.

But when we discard these small "I am's" and replace them for the Great "I AM".... That's when we find true freedom. Jeremiah continues:

“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,  
whose confidence is in him.  
<sup>8</sup>They will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.  
It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.  
It has no worries in a year of drought  
and never fails to bear fruit.”

Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. The one who abandons the identities of self, of family, and ancestry, and instead embraces the identity given him through Jesus. “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...” This is the identity in Jesus, a relationship that changes everything. This is what gives us true freedom. But it doesn’t make sense to the world. How can a relationship with Christ make us free? Are we not then constrained to the laws and commandments of God? Are we no longer free to define our own truths, our own “I am’s”? How can we call this freedom?” This is what our world struggles with, today. They reject the idea that in Christ we can have true freedom because it doesn’t make sense. They want to be the ones to define who they are. And so, they abandon Jesus and continue to dwell in the wastelands. But we know that faith in Jesus associates us with his death and resurrection and therefore frees us from the punishments of our sins. We know that faith in Jesus gives us an identity that is attached not to man or nation but to God himself. We know that faith in Jesus gives us true freedom. Freedom from worrying if we are doing enough to be included in his kingdom.

We find freedom in Christ Jesus when we abandon our own small “I am’s” and replace them with the great I AM. We no longer define ourselves by ourselves but by God himself.

I AM is in me.  
I AM has adopted me.  
I AM has called me his child.  
I AM has made me an heir to his riches of grace and mercy.

And when we are associated with the great I AM, he plants us by the water and sends out our roots to the stream. Our identity defined, associated with him, we are not in a wasteland fending for ourselves but are being nourished from the waters of our baptism, and fed from the body and blood of our savior. We have no worries, no doubts, no fears for we know that these waters will sustain us and give us everlasting life. *This* is true freedom, and it is a freedom that can only be found in Christ.

And so, I leave you with this question: Where do you find your identity? Is it in the wastelands or is it by the water?

Please pray with me.  
I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I’m not enough

Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up  
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low  
Remind me once again just who I am, because I need to know  
You say I am loved  
When I can't feel a thing  
You say I am strong  
When I think I am weak  
When I don't belong  
You say I am Yours

I believe  
What You say of me

The only thing that matters now is everything You think of me  
In You I find my worth, in You I find my identity

Amen.