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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“Attributes of God: Where Did God Come From?, *or* the Self-Existence of God”

Tonight our subject is, “Where did God come from?, or The Self-Existence of God.” And for our Scripture reading, turn with me to the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus. And will you listen as I begin reading at the first verse of Exodus chapter 3? Exodus chapter 3 -- Mr. Scofield in his edition of the King James Version has entitled this chapter the call of Moses: the burning bush, and then the part that we want to look at the revelation of the name Jehovah. But let’s read beginning the first one,

“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt.

And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

Where did God come from or the self-existence of God? It would be helpful I think since perhaps some of you were not here last time to review our introductory lesson

in the attributes of God. And so I want to just briefly go over the things that we should have learned from our time together last Tuesday night. We learned, first of all, that the right way to determine the divine attributes is not by the scholastic ways: the *via negationis*, the *via imminetia*, or the *via casualitatis*, but by divine self-revelation through the Scriptures. In other words, the proper way to come to know God is not to reason about God for while we may learn many things about God in that way and as Christians, we may see the reasons for many things that have been given us by revelation, if we are really to understand an eternal infinite God, he must reveal himself to us.

And since he has given us the Scriptures, the way to come to know him with certainty is to come to his word. Then when we learned, second, that the study of the attributes is a valid thing providing we remember that our conceptions are only human conceptions. They are never totally adequate for God. And on the other hand, that what we see in the Scriptures is not elusive. It is real. And so it is proper for us to study the attributes and to think that we have come to understand something about God, something really, something definite, but we should remember that our knowledge of him is always limited by our finite creaturehood.

Now, God has stooped to reveal things to us in his word. And we can as we study the word have the assurance that we really know certain things about God, but we do not know them in the infinite degree and perhaps we shall never know them in that way. We also learned that anthropomorphisms; that is, speaking about God in the language of man is also a very valid and necessary thing, for actually we could not understand God if he were to speak to us in his own language. And so he has stooped to speak to us in the language of men. And when we read in the Bible that God has a nose or arms or feet or eyes, we are not to think of God as possessing these things physically but these are human ways of telling us, for example, that God can see, that God may feel, that God may sense anger and other emotions of men. So anthropomorphisms are both necessary and valid.

By the way, it is interesting that the Bible does also say that God is not a man. For example, we have texts that go like this, God is not a man that he should repent. So we must remember that these are our divine ways of stooping to our human fallibility and creaturehood. Then we learned also that the attributes were modes either of the relation of the operation of the divine essence. That is an attribute is on the one hand either an expression of the relationship of the essence of God to itself or the attributes are expressions of the actions of God toward others, expressions of his energy.

And therefore we noticed that there were therefore two kinds of attributes, those that pertain to the divine being as passively related to itself and those that were references to divine operations as actively relating to energizing.

And we classified these two types of attributes as incommunicable attributes and communicable attributes. The incommunicable attributes are attributes which have little analogy to human nature. And the others, the communicable ones, are ones have a great deal of analogy to human nature. For example, God's infinity is an attribute of his being, but it is an attribute of his being with reference to itself. It is a passive thing. His eternity is a passive thing. It is an attribute of his essential being with reference to itself. His immanency is left. His self-existence is left. And we're going to study self-existence tonight.

But when we talk about God's knowledge or God's mercy or God's grace or God's love we are speaking of that type of attribute that represents an action, an energizing which is not something that is in relationship within the essence of God but goes out beyond the essence of God. It goes out, for example, to us. And so that type of attribute is a communicable attribute. The others are incommunicable. In the case of God's eternity, his immanency, his self-existence, there is no great analogy to the attributes of humanity, but there are analogies to his love, his justice, his mercy, his goodness among men. So we have then two types of attributes, his incommunicable attributes: his eternity,

his immanency, his infinity, his self-existence, and then, on the other hand, we have his communicable attributes.

Now, we’re beginning with this study consideration of the incommunicable attributes. And the first is the attribute of self-existence. To express this, Anselm, one of the great theologians of the Middle Ages, used the idea of aseity. Now, let me spell that A-S-E-I-T-Y. Now, I don’t know whether we have enough space on this to do any writing, but I’m going to try anyway. So I’ll put that on this for you. [Pause for writing]

This is the technical term for God’s self-existence, and it comes from a Latin expression. *Esse* remember is the verb to be, if you remember any of your Latin? *Sum esse que quotorous a um* remember that? Some of you are smiling. I don’t know whether you remember or not but it rings vaguely in your mind. So that *esse a se* is being from oneself. That is to be distinguished from *esse ab alia* being from another.

Now, God has being from himself. He has aseity. That is he is characterize by a being that is self-originated. He does not derive his essence from anyone else. His aseity.

Now, Anshelm is the one who is really responsible for the use of the term “aseity.” Reformed theologians have generally modified that and have used the term *indepentia* from which we get independence. So just right down independence. Independence. That is another way of expressing one’s self-existence. One is totally independent.

Now, the idea of self-existence is found in such passages as Isaiah chapter 44 in verse 6. So why don’t you get your Bibles out and look with me at Isaiah chapter 44 in verse 6 and notice how God speaks of himself as the self-existent one. Isaiah 44:6 reads, “Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. [Repeat] I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.” Now, that passage expresses the self-existence of God. It expresses some other things about God, too, but it expresses the fact that he does not derive from anything or anyone.

Philosophers like to speak about the absolute. And if you've taken any philosophy, you may remember that term. Well, now, this is the equivalent of the philosophical term the absolute, the self-existence of God.

Now, we cannot really say anything is *the* absolute as if it were a thing because if it were a thing it would derive from some other thing ultimately and thus would not be the absolute. So when we say the absolute we must necessarily speak about a person. Well, if you've had any children, you know that your children have come and have said to you, Now, where did God come from? Innovations said a long time ago God has no origin. The very fact that a little child says, where did God come from, indicates that they are already budding theologians because you see they have already come to a knowledge and a sense of the fact that they are a being resultant from some previous cause.

And so they are asking where did God come from. They already have within their conception the idea of source of origin of cause, and so they should be encouraged. They should be saying wonderful. You are learning theology already. Now, the answer to your question is God has no origin. And if you've ever said that to a kid, you know the look that comes over their face because it's a reflection of your own face when you try to think about someone who has no origin. It is a kind of thought that we cannot ever really enter into fully. The idea of a self-existent being is beyond us.

Well, let's say one other thing in our introduction. These incommunicable attributes are special applications of the idea of the infinite to the aspects to God. The basic thing we are saying about God is that he is infinite. I'm going to read a statement to you from a Southern Presbyterian theologian.

Now, this man died a long time ago but he is a very excellent theologian. And those of you in the audience who are Southern Presbyterians will recognize the name immediately because some of the benevolent works of the Southern Presbyterian denomination go by this name, and particularly in South Carolina. We have in South Carolina the Thornwill orphanage, for example. Well, now Dr. Thornwill was a leading

Southern Presbyterian theologian, and he has some excellent things to say about the incommunicable attributes. And this statement is a statement that he makes which I think is good. He says with reference to the incommunicable attributes, contemplated with reference to the grounds of his being the infinite gives rise to the notion of independence or self-existence.

In other words if we look at God from the standpoint of what is his essential being, well then we think of self-existence. With reference to the duration of his being, eternity. With reference to the extent of his being, immanency. With reference to the contents of his being, to all sufficiency. With reference to the identify of his being, to immutability; that is, that facility or that capacity for not changing.

Now, these are the things that utterly separate God from every work of his hands. The idea of infinity, the idea of immanency, the idea of eternity, the idea of self-sufficiency, the idea of self-existence, these are things that do not refer to men. These are the badges of God's divinity. And if we are to think of God, we must think of him in these ways. These, I say, are his badges. These are expressions of the glory which he will not and which he cannot give to anyone else. Without them, God would just be another Superman or perhaps a mightier angel than any angel we have known. But they are his characteristics that make him different from us. And we shall never really appreciate God if we do not understand that these things pertain to him. And we are to approach him in the light of these things that are true of him.

At the same time, they are like veils that hang over a mystery because no one of us can penetrate infinity. We cannot understand immanency in its totality. We cannot understand eternity fully. We surely cannot understand God's total self-existence. And so, in a sense, these things which are badges of his deity are veils that hang over the mystery of the person of God, but they are revealed in his word. And we can at least stand afar off and peer and squint at the ineffable glory. And that is what God wants us to do.

So now for a few moments we are going to look at self-existence. And first of all, just briefly, I want to say a word about the philosophical arguments for self-existence. Now, about two years ago when we were studying the attributes in the other opening introductory matters in theology, we devoted an hour to the arguments for the existence of God. We talked about the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the moral argument, and we did not touch the anthropological argument, but we did touch a fourth argument -- and I've forgotten -- the ontological argument, and I'm not going to go over that again. I do, however, just very briefly retrace the cosmological argument because it particularly pertains to the self-existence of God.

Now, this is an argument that argues from effect to cause. In other words, it is a rational process of reasoning from effects back to a cause. Now, it is not a demonstrative argument. It is only a probable argument. It is the kind of argument that corroborates other things that we may be able to say about God from his revelation. It does not completely convince us, but it is helpful to us, particularly if we aren't already Christians.

Here are the steps within it and they are simply these. Something now is. Therefore, something must always have been. Now, the reason for that is that nothing can be the cause of its own existence, for this is to suppose that it acts before its own existence which is, of course, a contradiction.

Nor can anything have been produced by nothing. In other words, we are then shut up to an effect being produced by a cause. By the way, most atheists will acknowledge that something has existed from eternity because they have to do that.

Now, the second step in the argument is that there is an infinite series of causes without an original cause at all if we are atheists, but here is manifestly a contradiction. Everything is caused by that which preceded it but that whole series is caused by nothing. And so it is obvious that we cannot really hold an argument like that. And that's the fundamental principle of atheism. So there must be a first cause, an eternal being who must exist from the necessity of his own nature uncaused by anything else.

Now, there is a leap of logic here, and if you’re a careful student of philosophy, you would recognize it because I am leaping from a thing to a person, and that is where it would have been necessary for us to expound the teleological, the moral, and the ontological arguments for a stronger case. But this is in general the philosophical argument for self-existence that an effect must have a cause. You cannot have an eternal series of effects and causes. You must ultimately have a self-existent cause and the best explanation this thing that fits the facts more than anything else is the positing of a personal god.

Let’s move on to what the Bible says because these arguments are not totally convincing. Second, the theological statements of self-existence, and here we’re turning to the divine self-revelation. In capital A in the outline, the biblical statements. And I want now to read some of the statements about the self-existence of God and the Bible. And will you turn first with me to Psalm 94, verses 8 through 10. Psalm 94, verses 8 through 10. Verse 8 the psalmist says, “Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?” Now, the essence of what the psalmist is trying to say is that God is independent of all things and that they exist only through him.

Let’s turn to Isaiah chapter 40. Isaiah chapter 40, verse 18 through verse 31. This is one of the great sections in the Book of Isaiah. Verse 18 Isaiah chapter 40, page 748 in my edition,

“To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. (He’s talking about the making of idols) He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known? have

ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: (This is Isaiah’s vivid picture God creating this universe) That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Again God expressing his independence of his creation.

Let’s turn to Psalm 115, verse 3. Psalm 115, verse 3. Here the psalmist speaks of God’s independence in his power. Psalm 115, verse 3, “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” And so he is utterly independent in his power.

Let’s turn over to Daniel chapter 4, verse 35. Daniel chapter 4, verse 35. I don’t hear quite as many pages turning. Go ahead and look it up in the table of contents if necessary or just as case God is doing, just kind of let the Bible flip through the Old

Testament until finally you see Daniel. Daniel chapter 4 in verse 35 as you probably know it’s exactly where it is now. We’re all flustered now and she hasn’t found it yet. Daniel chapter 4, verse 35. This is one of the great texts of Daniel, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, nor say unto him, What doest thou?” He is independent in his will.

Turn to the New Testament. Romans chapter 11, verse 33 and 34. Romans 11, verse 33-34. This passage is at the climax of Paul’s great argument in Romans. Just before he launches into the practical section of the book. And he concludes with this wonderful hymn of praise. And in it are these words, verse 33, Romans 11, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?” He is utterly independent in his thought. He does not ever learn anything. Isn’t that an amazing thing to think about? God does not ever learn anything. I don’t want to go into that because we’re going to talk about God’s omniscience ultimately, but that is an amazing thing. and it’s something, to tell you the truth, I just cannot really enter into.

1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 16. God is independent in his thought. Now, 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 16 says concerning the one whom in the preceding verse is called the blessed and only Potentate. He’s the head of the only lodge that really counts. The blessed and only Potentate, the king of kings and lord of lords verse 16, “Who only hath immortality, who only hath deathlessness, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.” Deathlessness.

Now, by the way, this must not be confused with endless existence, for all creatures have endless existence. You have endless existence. I have endless existence. Even the non-Christian has endless existence in the lake of fire. We have endless

existence in the presence of the Lord, but when he says that God has immortality, deathlessness, he is talking about something far more exalted. He is saying, in a sense, that he is the never-failing fountain of light. He is the possessor of deathlessness, the fullness of light. As a matter of fact with him is the fountain of light.

And that brings me to the last passage that we want to look at, John chapter 5 in verse 26. Now, all of these statements are biblical statements that touch on the self-existence of God and its various aspects. John 5:26. The first clause, Jesus has just said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;” Now, that’s an amazing statement because you see no one else can really say that. I may say that now I have life in myself, but my life is a derived life. It is the life of God which has been implanted here. But God can say that he has life in himself. He is self-existent. He is totally independent. Life derives from him. It is his gift. He is the fountain of life as the psalmist says. He is self-existent. Goodspeed in his rendering of John chapter 5, verse 26, that first clause renders it, “For just as the Father is self-existent” Self-existent. Isn’t that an amazing thing when you think about it? Someone who possess within himself life and is the fountain of life underived from anyone else for eternity. Amazing. Amazing.

Now, let’s move to the biblical names and descriptive statements. And I’m just going to note two of them for the sake of time. The living God and Yahweh, the name of God in the Old Testament.

Let’s turn to Jeremiah chapter 10, verse 9 and 10 for a text from which to say a few words about the living God. Jeremiah chapter 10, verses 9 and 10. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel. Jeremiah chapter 10, verse 9 and 10, “ Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing: they are all the work of cunning men.

But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king” -- the living God.

Now in other passages in the Old Testament it is stated that God does not die. He is the living God. Habakkuk says that God is the eternal God we shall not die, but what he really means by that is we shall not die because he shall not die. And so it may be said of him that he shall not die. This is, of course, related to the fact that in the Old Testament we have these anthropomorphisms of God. And you can see, of course, that the anthropomorphisms, the speaking of God in human language, does not pertain when we come to something like this. And there are limits to the anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament because God is a person who does not die as men die. Have you ever noticed too about God and the Bible that the Old Testament is unaware of any feminine partner for God? It does not say anything about a mother. Which, of course, stresses again the uniqueness of God the Father.

Now, I know [indistinct] in expounding the things that God the Father does has broken out into the ejaculations of oh motherhood, fatherhood of God. And he was trying to express the fact that some of the things that we normally think of a mother doing are done by the father as well as the things that we would ordinarily think of a father doing. And I’m certainly in harmony with that, but I think it is a striking thing that the Bible does not know any figure of a wife for Jehovah in that sense.

Now, we do have the wife in the sense of Israel to be married to him or the bride of Christ, things like that, but there is no evidence whatsoever of any anthropomorphism of a feminine partner. As a matter of fact, there is no Old Testament term for a Goddess which stresses, too, the absolute uniqueness, the self-existence of God.

Now, the other term is the one I want to spend five or ten minutes on, and it’s the term “Yahweh.” Now, that is spelled Y-A-H-W-E-H, and I don’t want to move my outline. Yahweh, Y-A-H-W-E-H.

Now, I want you to turn with me back to Exodus chapter 3 for this is the fundamental passage. Exodus chapter 3, verse 13 through verse 15. Now, remember Moses is being called to his task of leading the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. And he is asking God, well, now if the children of Israel say to me who has sent me? What is the name of this God? What shall I say unto that? And Moses is given this great self-revelation of God. And remember the chapter began with the experience of the burning bush. Moses saw the bush and lo the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed. Now, isn’t that striking? You see that is kind of an illustration of the self-existence of God. He is the holy one, the absolutely holy one.

Not only does he range himself in antipathy to that which is sinful, but he is positively angry at sin and goes out after it to burn it up as does fire a bush but the fire is not consumed. The bush is not consumed. And then at the place of this great miracle of the burning bush which is not consumed, expressive of the fire of divine holiness which is operative but nevertheless continues, Moses is given the great word that the God who is sending him is, “...I AM THAT I AM” I am who I am.

Now, that’s a strange thing to say, isn’t it? Moses says to God who are you? What’s your name? He said, I am who I am. Now, if you came up to me and said Lewis, uh, I understand your first name is Lewis. What is your name? I’d say, I am who I am. You’d think I was awfully odd, wouldn’t you? I would say to you, I am Lewis Johnson. S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. But is Moses is told by God that his name is I am who I am.

Now, looking at that in the Hebrew text, you’re startled by the fact that this term I am who I am is a combination of the verb to be. I am who I am. Then you read on and, “and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” *Ehyeh* from *hiyeh*, the verb to be. I AM has sent me unto you.

And then we read verse 15, “And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers.” Now, that term “Lord” you can see is capitalized and that is the name for God that is derived from the word to

be. It is what we would call Yahweh. Just as the other’s *ehyeh*, this is Yahweh. So in other words, the I AM WHO I AM is the root significance of the verb “Jehovah” in the Old Testament. You know it as Jehovah. Scholars call it Yahweh. It’s the same thing. I don’t have time to go through the steps to prove that they are the same. Yahweh is the name in most scholarly literature. Jehovah is the name in our American Standard Version. But the name Jehovah, the name Yahweh is derived from the verb to be. It really means he is. That’s his name. He is. Or he exists. Perhaps he is present. But the name of God is a name that suggest his self-existence.

What God do you worship? I worship he is. I worship the I am. I worship the one who says I am. That’s his name. In other words, the characteristic expression of God, the most significant name for God is simply I AM.

Now, a name is a definition. Tells you something about the person, but you cannot define God. You cannot limit him. He is totally unlimited. He is an infinite God and so he can only say I am. It’s not surprising really when you think about it, but that’s what Moses received. So this archaic imperfect form Yahweh means he is.

Now, that’s beautifully expounded in this text, “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM” and the septigen is I am the one who is, the Greek translation of the Old Testament I am the one who is exists. That’s his name. He said, “...Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM (or Jehovah) hath sent me unto you.”

Now, this idea of the self-existent God is developed and expanded throughout the Old Testament. Let’s turn to a couple of more passages now. Turn over to the book of Isaiah because he’s the theologian of the name “Yahweh.” Isaiah chapter 41. Isaiah chapter 41 in verse 4 we read this, “Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I Jehovah, the first, and with the last; I am he.”

Now, you see. There is the I am he. And there is Jehovah the I am. I am the one who has wrought it. I am the first. I am the last. I am he.

Look at chapter 43, verse 10, “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he” In the Hebrew, this is simply [indistinct], I am he. And obviously it is an attempt to put in other language the same thing as I am. We’d say what’s his name? Well, his name is I am or his name is from our standpoint he is. And so when we say I am he or I am, we’re saying essentially the same thing. So verse 10, verse 11, “I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no Savior. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God. Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?”

And we could turn to chapter 44, verse 6 again or chapter 48, verse 12, and we would find the same thing. We find God is the I am or he is the I am he. You do not have any other name then simply the name he exists.

Now, then when we turn to the New Testament we discover an amazing thing. We discover that there comes a person into human existence born of a virgin in the manger in Bethlehem who grows up in Nazareth and then when he reaches his maturity begins to minister the Scriptures. And surprisingly this man is characterized by statements in which he says I am. Have you ever noticed them? Why you can only take the Gospel of John, I am bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the good Shepherd. I am the door. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the true vine. I am the way, the truth, and the light. No man cometh under the Father but by me. Over and over again he uses the language of the Old Testament concerning himself.

He adds these descriptive figures to express certain aspects of his work, but he uses the Old Testament language of deity, I am. I am. I am. I am he. And occasionally when he says I am as when they came to take him in the Garden of Gethsemane when they said who are you? Or are you Jesus of Nazareth? He said I am. They went back and

fell to the ground because at the very mention of the name “I am they are confronted with his essential deity.

You may remember, too, that when our Lord was in the storm on the Sea of Galilee, as it is described in the Book of John the 6th chapter. We read these things. John chapter 6, “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.” And in verse 16, “And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.” But in the Greek text, it is “I am. Be not afraid.” I am. Be not afraid.

So just as Moses was told I am has sent you and I am will be with you and he shall deliver Israel, so I am did come and he came in the person of Our Lord. And he ministered in the midst of men the great I am the great self-existent God in the person of the second person of the trinity, the blessed Son the I am. And when saw him they say God.

Now, this is of the most tremendous significance for us. I think it is one of the striking things of the Bible that when Moses asks for the name of God he was simply told I am who I am. Moses, there is no way in which I can express myself to you because I am the absolute God. I am absolutely self-sufficient and self-existent and totally unique and there is no way by which you can describe me, for if you did you would make me subservient to a human standard. I am he. That’s all you can say about me.

Now, he can also give himself a relational name. And in a moment in Exodus 3 remember he says I am the God twice. He says I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. And so in the absolute sense he is I am. In the relational sense, he may be the God of Israel, for, you see, that’s the term of the covenant-keeping God. It

is in the sense of I am that he covenanted with Israel to bring them out of the land of Egypt and to bring them into the Promise Land. He has, in a sense, pledged his name his eternal self-existent being to the fulfillment of the promises to Israel. That is why they shall be fulfilled.

Have you a look around you in the twentieth century and look at some of the cars that our young people are driving you will occasionally see a sign, Jesus is. Have you seen that? There some of them on the cars over at the seminary. Jesus is.

Now, I don't think that those young people were trying to express some great theological doctrine, the self-existence of the second trinity when they said Jesus is but they have stumbled onto a truth. I think they were probably trying to say he's relevant. He's living. He's alive. He's vital. He is present with us who believed in him. And that, of course, is an expression of his self-existence. Jesus is. The Father is. The Son is. And Where I am is there is God in all of his power, all of his activity toward us.

Now, the practical significance of God's self-existence. This is a difficult doctrine to understand, but there are some very practical things in connection with it. You ever tried to look at the sun? Well, it's a very dangerous thing to do. Do you know how you usually look at the sun? The way I do is I kind of look at the side of it and sort of kind of catch it out of the side of my eyes. Never look at it directly, but you cannot look directly at God. You can only understand some things about him.

That's why philosophers and scientists don't like to be told that God is self-existent and that we cannot know him. They like to say there are many things we don't know. Philosophers are very humble about that. And scientists are very humble about that. They will say there are lots of things that we do not know but when you say there are some things you cannot know. Well, that's a little different because men like to save face by bringing God down to their level so that they can manage him. They like to manage God. They like to use God. So what's is the practical significance of the self-existence of

God? Heidelberg Catechism says but what duth it help thee that thou belivest all this.

What's the point of self-existence? What's the practical effect of it?

Well, in the first place, self-existence or independence is the ground of his immutability. If he is self-existent and he is not dependent on anyone else, then there is no possibility of him ever changing. If he has pledged himself to a certain thing, he will accomplish it.

Now, I may pledge myself to do something but I cannot guarantee that I will fulfill it. I am very desirous of writing a theology, but I may not be with you tomorrow. My life may be snuffed out, may be taken from me. I may have a heart attack tonight and be gone. I cannot guarantee the fulfillment of anything, but he is the I am who is. I am who I am. And because he is self-existent he is immutable. We want to talk about that, too. And his promises he is able to fulfill. I am so glad that the God who makes promises to me is a self-existent God.

Second, self-existence is the ground of self-sufficiency. He doesn't have a necessary relationship to anything outside of himself. He is not dependent on anyone. If he were really dependent on someone he would be incomplete. As Tozer says, "The river grows larger by its tributaries, but where is the tributary that can enlarge the one out of whom came everything and to whose infinite fullness all creation owes its being?" Frederick Faber wrote, "Unfathomable Sea. All life is out of thee and thy life is thy blissful unity." God does not need our help.

Now, what does that do to missionary appeals? I heard a missionary message in the human it would have been a very moving message a few months back by a very learned man. And the essence of his appeal was who will take it upon his heart to have a burden for the scattered people of God? And as he kept saying this over and over again in his message, I began to get the idea that God was going to be totally frustrated in his work because we were not responding to the appeals that were addressed to us. My dear

friend, God does not need us. He will accomplish purposes, for he is the self-existent God. He doesn't need our help.

Now, the Christ of popular Christianity has a kind of sickly smile and a halo. And he is become someone up there who likes people, at least some people. And these are grateful that he likes them but they're not too impressed by him. If they need him, he needs them, and that's the kind of God he is. He is not that kind of God. He is absolutely self-existent, and he does not need us. If he has stooped out of his wisdom and grace and mercy to accomplish his purposes through us, then wonderful. And I'm grateful that he accomplishes his purpose through me, but he doesn't need me. He will accomplish his purpose without me, if necessary. He is that kind of God. So he does not need us. He is self-existent.

Finally, if he is self-existent, if he is the only independent one then, of course, that throws on a sharp relief our dependence. The trouble with man is that he is not happy with God being I am. He wants to be the I am. But in our dependence rests the possibility of sin. If we are not dependent, we sin but in our dependence also rests the possibility of holiness. And if we do recognize who he is, this self-existent, totally and completely all-sufficient God who does not need us but whom we need, then there is possibility for holiness in the Christian life.

I am glad that the God that I worship is one who says that his name is I am who I am. And through Jesus Christ he has made promises to me. He has entered into a covenant with me. He shed his blood on Calvary's cross, the basis of the new covenant. And he has invited those that know that they are sinners to believe in this great savior. And I have believed. And I have the forgiveness of sin. And I have eternal life. And I have all of the other promises of God. And those promises are guaranteed by the self-existent eternal God and so they shall come to pass. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the greatness of our God, I am who I am. We thank Thee that when Jesus stood in the presence of Caiaphas and he was asked if he was the Messiah the Son of God, he replied, “I am.” And all of the scribes were bursting when the Son of God declared himself the self-existent Son. We thank Thee, Lord, that in Thy greatness is our assurance.

And we thank Thee that in thine independence is the call to our dependence. O God, deliver us from any attempts to be I am's for Thou art the true God to worship Thee through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.