



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor  
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## JOHN 8:52-59

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Lord, we want to praise you for your holiness. The fact that you are like a white light so bright with that holiness providing just the inability for someone like Paul on the way to Damascus to look up and to just fall off his horse. Lord, I just pray that we would experience your holiness in our own lives by getting to know you better and seeing who you are. That we would have an experience like Isaiah, just looking at you and falling down and saying, "Oh God, I am a man of unclean lips." Lord, we know that you have sent Jesus Christ to die for us so that we could experience what that holiness is all about. Our sin gets in our way, it trips us up. It hinders our ability to live life effectively. So we just want to express our gratefulness now for that gift of salvation that we can enjoy. That we can stand confidently before you with that the righteousness of Christ. That you call us saints or holy ones and we can embrace that term. Lord, we don't feel worthy to be called saints. We know that you give us honor and we thank you so much for that. So Lord, we don't serve you out of duty as much as we serve you out of gratefulness. We're attracted to your holiness and your greatness in such a way that we are motivated to live our lives as saints in this world. Father, there's so much brokenness around us, so much sin that we see all the time. It makes it hard for us to shine as lights in this world. So Lord, give us the courage to take a stand for you. Give us the confidence that we're doing the right thing in following you. Heavenly Father, make us people of prayer more and more in our lives, that we're drawing our hearts closer to you. We ask today as we look at your word that you would speak to us. Lord, use this passage of scripture to help us understand more about who you are so that we can live the lives you've called us to live more effectively. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

I love children's stories, just like I love kids. There's a series of children's books that I'm sure you've seen, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the first book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis who creates this allegory, it's really an allegory of salvation and God and how we're to live in our world. So it's a great book for any of us to read, but especially kids love it because of the exciting nature of the fantasy that's developed in this kingdom.

At one point, the three children are introduced to Aslan, at least the idea of Aslan the lion. They're talking to Mr. and Mrs. Beaver as they're approaching this whole subject and Mr. and Mrs. Beaver are interacting with them. Lucy says (about Aslan), "Is he a man?" "Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion - the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

“That you will, dearie. And no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver, “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without his knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then is he safe?”

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver is telling you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

Today if I were titling this sermon, it would be called “I Want to Introduce You to God.” Because that’s what Jesus is doing in this passage today. He’s introducing Himself to the Jews. We’ve been reading through John 8 and looking at the dialogue between Jesus and the Jewish people for several weeks now. Today we come to this very important place where He kind of introduces Himself in a way that’s rather shocking to them.

I’d like to ask you to stand while I read our passage today from John 8 and then we’ll make some comments about it. John 8:52-59. The Jews are in the conversation saying: *At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”*

*Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”*

*“You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!”*

*“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

You may be seated.

In order to understand this statement *I am* that He’s making, we have to go back into the Old Testament and understand a little bit more about God as He introduces us to Himself in the Bible.

The purpose of God’s word is not just to be a wisdom book with good ideas for us to put into practice in our lives. It certainly is that, but it’s much more than that. The Bible is designed to help us get to know God better, to get to know ourselves better, and to understand how we can implement God’s plan in this world. That’s God’s design for His word.

So I want to take you back into the Old Testament into the Jewish mind. The Jews are listening to Him speak here. I want to take you back into what they were thinking about God and who God is and let’s go back to the very beginning of the Bible. The very first book of the Bible is Genesis and the very first word in the very first chapter introduces us to God when it says, as you know – *in the beginning God*. Now the word *God* there is the word *Elohim*. Sometimes shortened to *El*. It’s a term that refers to God as an entity as opposed to an animal, opposed to a man or an angel. He is God. He is different. I’m a man. He’s God. He’s a different kind of entity and that’s what

this name we refer to when we say God, we're actually referring to a specific person, as we talk about Him. But this name God is a general term referring to gods in general. So the term is used in the Bible to refer to any kind of god that a person might have.

For example, in the first commandment it says – *You shall have no other gods before me.* Elohim. Commandment number one. No other gods before me. So what is a god then? Well a god is anything that you worship, that you adore, that you put your time, energy, money into. It consumes your time. That becomes a god for you. And not just the idols they would have around in a neighboring countries. They had idols all around. Those were gods that they worshipped, but god could be anything in our lives. It could be a thing that we have – a car, a TV, a bank account. It could be a dream that we have about success. A god could even be family. That we invest so much in family that it takes the place of God Himself in our lives. Gods get worshiped in one way or another.

So you remember the story on Mount Carmel where there were the 900 prophets, (450 prophets of Asherah and 450 prophets of Baal) and the people were confused about who is God? So Elijah says let's have a contest. So there was this big contest where they all danced around trying to bring fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice that they had put on an altar. They did this all day. Elijah taunts them and nothing happens. And then Elijah puts the sacrifice on the altar, had them pour water all over the altar. The water is consuming all over the altar. And then he prays that the God would come and make Himself known. That He would be the true God. None like Him. Of course God comes down and consumes not only the sacrifice, but the whole altar and all the water around, just demonstrating that He is the true God. Elohim.

Now the term Elohim can be shortened to El. And then we can add a compound name to it. So we have words like El-Elyon. God Most High. We sang a song about that, "God Most High," when we worshiped. In the psalms we see that often. God Most High. We worship Him because He is the God who is most high. Not like any of these other kinds of things around us that we tend to get distracted by. He is God more high. Or El-Shaddai, the warrior God who solves problems and tackles challenges. We all need to get to know God as El-Shaddai. That's a compound name for God. Elohim. That's the first understanding of God in the Bible. As the Bible is being opened up to us, we see God as Elohim.

But an interesting thing happens in Exodus 3 when Moses is talking to the bush. Because Moses, as he's talking to the bush (who is God, of course, speaking through the bush) and God is telling Moses to "Go, and let my people go. I want you to go to Pharaoh and tell him to release my people." Moses is quite unsure about this new task that he's been given. In fact he asks five questions of God. One of the questions is: God, if I go to the Israelites and I tell them you sent me, they're going to ask me what your name is. What should I say?

Let's pick up the story there. In Exodus 3 it says – *Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am."* Well that's very interesting words there. That means the all-existent one. The beginning, the end. Everything that holds everything all together.

*“I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”* That’s His name: *I am*. But He goes further to say it this way: *God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, 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 you shall call me from generation to generation.’”* What is that name? It’s hidden in this verse! You can’t see it. Why? Because it’s in capital letters, LORD, which represents something in the text.

If you’re looking at Hebrew, you would see four letters called the Tetragrammaton, four letters – YHWH. That’s what you would see. But you don’t see that there in your English Bible. What I’m about to tell you is written in the preface of your Bible. If you open your Bible to the preface of your Bible, there’s a question right in the beginning of your Bible about how we handle the name of God. Because we take down from the tradition, even of the Jewish people, not to actually say God’s name in the text. It’s hidden behind the word LORD when it’s all capitalized. Now there are times when it’s not capitalized, and that is not the name for God. But when it’s all capitalized like this then there is a word behind it that the Jews would never say. It’s the name Yahweh. It’s the name that means that God is the all-existent one.

Let’s go to Revelation 4. This is the last book of the Bible. We get a glimpse into heaven. As we do, *each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying* these words (and this is a quote from Isaiah 6): *Holy, holy, holy is* (again, capitalized you see because you can’t really tell what the word is, but we know that the word is Yahweh) *God Almighty who was, and is, and is to come.* He was, He is, and He is to come. He’s the all-existent one. He’s the one who’s everything. He holds everything together. That’s who this God is. That’s what His name is.

The history of this is really important for us because that name, LORD, has this rich history to it. The name Yahweh is used over 6,500 times. and every time the Jews would come to this word, they would not say it. They would say Adonai. Now Adonai is another name for God. It’s the name Lord. And so it means the one who owns everything. The one who gives us whatever we need. It’s the Lord. That’s what Lord means. It’s Adonai. That’s the name. Adonai is not used here. If it were used here, it would be in small letters. There are times in your Bible when you will see that Lord is in small letters and it is used that way. This is not. This is the capital letters, LORD, symbolizing this name YHWH, the personal name of God, the all-existent one, the *I am*.

The Jews had such reverence for this name Yahweh that they would never say it. And here’s why. I’m going to take you to the third commandment out of the ten. *You shall not misuse the name of the LORD, Yahweh, your God, for Yahweh will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

If you grew up in parochial school, Catholic school, Christian school, or you memorized this verse, it was *you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain*. Right? Yes. All of you know that. That’s the third commandment. So what does that mean? Well certainly we should not use it as a curse word. So we don’t want to be cursing and using God’s name in some way that’s a curse word. But it means much more than that. What it means is don’t take the name of God on you in a meaningless way, in a vain way. Don’t call yourself a God-follower if you’re not going to follow Him. There’s this don’t misuse this name.

Now the Jewish people had tremendous respect for God and the holiness of God and the sanctity of God, and so they never wanted to say this name Yahweh, so they didn't. They wouldn't say it. So in the Bible, as the Bible was even being transcribed from generation, from one copy to another, then the scribes had a job to do. They were to make an exact copy of what they had here and they were going to put it over here. Because of the possibility of human error, there were checks and systems put in place so they'd have to be extra careful to make sure this was an exact copy of this one. So they would start writing with their pen and when they got to the end of a line, they would stop, they would count the letters and find the middle letter here and find the middle letter there to make sure that the whole line was intact and it was correct. When they finished a whole page, they would find a middle letter on the page on the copy and the middle letter on the original to make sure they were intact.

But whenever they came to the four letters, YHWH, they would stop. They would take their pen, the common pen they were using, and they would put it down. And then they would get out the special pen and they would write those four letters YHWH out of total respect for God, and they'd put them down and close and they would continue on with the common pen to write the rest of the passage. The name Yahweh was just so valuable and important, they would never want to say it. So in the Hebrew, if you're looking at these letters in Hebrew, then you're going to see that there are four of them. There they are on the right. YHWH. That's a *Yod, He, Waw, He*. Those are the four letters. And notice there's no vowels there. Because in the original Hebrew manuscripts, there are no vowels. You just have to figure it out. Okay?

So the Masoretes came long and because of the history and so on, they wanted to add vowels. So what are they going to do when they come to the name Yahweh? Well when they come to the name Yahweh, you're supposed to say Adonai. You don't want to say Yahweh. That would not be what you'd want to do. You want to say Adonai instead. So notice the three vowels in Adonai, they are A, O, and A. If you take the four letters from YHWH and you put together A-O-A, YHWH, you come out with this new word. This is unpronounceable word. This is something. This doesn't mean anything. This is a reminder, don't say Yahweh. Instead say Adonai. But over history people just started reading the way it looked in the text, so we come out with the name Jehovah. So we use the word Jehovah today to refer to God and His personal name. You can use Yahweh, Jehovah. Either one is going to refer to God in this very specific way, this very personal way. Because this is His name. My name is Scott. God's name is Yahweh or Jehovah, as we often say it today.

But it's one thing to know someone as an acquaintance. It's another thing to get to know that person in life. I know the people in our set-up team like Jack and Mike and Pete and so on. Why do I know them? Because we work together and I get to know them in a different way. In the same way, the characters in the Bible story get to know God in a very special way. And when they do, they often add another name to Jehovah, something to it to reveal how they got to know Him in a personal way. It's my prayer for you in this next day, week, year you'll get to know God in a more personal way and you'll understand what that looks like.

Let me give you an example. Let's look at Abraham. Abraham was characterized as a man who listened to God and followed His direction, obeyed Him even when it seemed strange. God told

Abraham at one point, “Take your son up to the mountain and sacrifice him to me.” But this was really hard for Abraham because his son was not only his son, it represented a whole dream, a whole purpose that God had promised him. Yet he obeyed God and went up to the mountain actually believing that God would raise him from the dead after he killed him. Wow.

When he raised the knife to kill his son, God said, “Stop,” and well we’ll pick up the story right there. *Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place Jehovah-jireh, The Lord Will Provide.* Because you see Abraham got to know God in this new special way. That God is the provider. He is the one who give us what we need. That he got to know God in a different way than just Yahweh, but it’s now Yahweh-jireh, God is provider.

Maybe you need to know God in that special way. Maybe you’re praying – God, will you provide for me. Provide the job or provide the mate or provide the solution to this problem. So maybe you’d like to know God more as Abraham did, Jehovah-jireh.

Let me tell you another story. The Israelites were wandering in the wilderness and they’d really run out of water. In fact for three days they hadn’t found any water. Now that’s a long time when you’re thirsty. Three days in the desert. They can’t live very long. They finally come along to some water and they’re very grateful that God had provided the water for them. Unfortunately they tasted the water and they couldn’t drink it, it was just so bitter. They needed water, they couldn’t drink it. It was bitter. And so what do we do? They came to Moses and Moses threw a piece of wood in under God’s direction into the water and the water turned sweet. I just have to point out that God often doesn’t take bitter and move it into neutral. It’s bitter to sweet. So He takes bitter water and turns it into something really sweet. God uses this illustration to tell Moses these words. He says if you listen carefully to Yahweh your God and do what’s right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all of His decrees I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am Jehovah-rapha, the God who heals.

I know some of you need personal healing in your life today and you want to get to know God as Jehovah-rapha, the God who heals. Notice in the story it wasn’t just He healed the people, what healed the situation. I know that some of you have situations today that seem really bitter and you want to know God as Jehovah-rapha, the God who heals. Because these people want to know God not just as the God they heard about, but the God they experience as the healer in their lives.

Let me tell you another story. There was a battle going down in the valley. Joshua was fighting with the enemy. Moses was their commander, but he was too old to really fight. But he was up on the mountain and it was obvious that whenever Moses put his hands up then Joshua and his armies would win. But as his hands were lowered, then they would be losing. “We’ve got to do something about this,” said Aaron and Hur, his associates up there on the mountain. They said, “Moses, sit down on the rock. We’re going to hold your hands up.” So they did. They held his hands up and as his hands were held up Joshua continued to fight the battle and they won the battle on that day. So Moses on that day set up an altar.

Let's get to the story here. Moses built an altar and called it Jehovah-nissi. Nissi means banner. They got to know Him that day in a different way. That as they were fighting the battle of life down in the valley, they could look up and see the banner up there on the hill. This banner that says yes, go for it. God is supporting you. You're going to win. There's this banner.

I know sometimes today in our lives we need to get to know God as Jehovah-nissi, this powerful God that gives encouragement to us that we cannot just get looking down in our circumstances, but we can look up and see the banner. We can get to know God as the banner. He Himself is the banner that's directing us and encouraging us in life. Jehovah-nissi.

One more story. Gideon had a new job. He was kind of unsure about this job, so in the midst of the demonstrating to him that this is what I want you to do, don't be anxious about this, you can be peaceful inside, God does this. Now in this particular story what I've done is I have taken all the words for God and I have highlighted them so you can see what the actual words are in the text. Because when you get this, it makes the text much more rich.

Notice it says – *The Angel of God (Elohim) said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.' And Gideon did so. Then the Angel of the LORD (so we had the angel of God, now it's the angel of Yahweh) touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Alas, Sovereign LORD!"* But what the real text says is Adonai Yahweh. It's both words together. So they translate it sovereign Lord. *"I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!" But Yahweh said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die." So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it Jehovah-shalom.*

There's such a richness in this understanding of who God is that we come back to our text now of Jesus talking to the Jews. As He's trying to explain to them who He is, He makes this statement to them down in here in verse 58 – *"Very truly (that is truly amén, amén) I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"* And in that moment Jesus identified Himself as the one who is the Jehovah. He is the one who is the banner, the shalom, the Jehovah-jireh, the healer, the provider. He is that one. It was shocking. It was just so shocking to the Jews to think that this person standing here could actually be the *I am*. That this is God Himself.

Notice their reaction. It says – *At this, they picked up stones to stone him.* They just didn't know how to respond. They rejected Jesus Christ.

Each one of us has an opportunity today to respond to this great *I am*. To respond to this great revelation that God wants to do something in our lives. That God wants something bigger. That He's all around us. That He's our banner. That He wants to take us on this spiritual journey. God is there, He's here. There's nowhere we can go outside of His presence. He is right here around us now and He wants something bigger in our lives. And Jesus Christ is God. Don't let anybody tell you Jesus never said He was God. I'm telling you, He's telling everybody right now He is

God. The God. The God of the Old Testament. He is God Himself. And that's why they responded the way that they did.

We almost make a choice. It's a personal decision. We can get to know God by studying the Old Testament, but there's something that happened in each of those character's lives that I mentioned. They got to know God in such a personal way that He became part of what they knew He was doing in that situation. God wants to do that in your life. He wants to do that in my life. He wants to take us in a new situation or in the existing situation and He wants to reveal Himself to us in a new way.

I know God. Oh but I've got a lot to learn about God. I've accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and my Savior. Oh but I've got a lot to learn about God. I don't know what today is going to bring and I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring, but I do know this. I know the great *I am*. I know God Himself and I know that I'll get to know Him in a way I've never known Him before in the midst of the experiences I will experience this year. And I want to get to know Him. I want to make sure that wherever I'm at I'm acknowledging that God is there.

Sometimes we can find ourself in a new situation and we can feel like we're alone. Where's God in this? God is right there and He wants to reveal Himself in a new way than we've ever known Him before. Because you might know Him in this way, this way, and this way, but He wants to reveal Himself in a new way to us, all tied up into this personal relationship or who He is. God wants to do something great.

I want you to notice that Jesus is making a claim that's not just for our present world. Do you see in the first verse, in verse 52? The Jews are recounting Jesus' words and they're saying – *yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death*. Never taste death. Wow.

This is a dime. If I were to take this dime and put it on the ground there and that represents my life, it becomes rather small compared to all of eternity that exists beyond. And not just at the walls back there, but beyond the walls. If I can look at my life in perspective, I can see that I'm just living a very small piece of my life that God has for me. That when I trust Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I will never taste death. I will know God in that personal way and I will live forever. That's what He means when He talks about eternal life. I will live forever. It's not just about my earthly life. It's about something bigger that God wants to do. And He wants to do that big thing, not just now in our lives today and tomorrow, this week, this month. He wants to do something big for eternity. And that's what it means to get to know God in a very personal way.

Would you stand with me? Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we do want to know you more. It's a challenge sometimes when we face the issues of our lives. But it's so encouraging for us to see how you revealed yourself more and more to people in the Bible. We know that you want to do that in our lives too. So Lord, we accept that. We receive that from you today. We ask that you would continue to reveal yourself. Help us to understand more of what that looks like in each of our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.