

“Now that we have the back story out of the way, we want to get to the deepest purpose of this day. Indeed, it is the deepest purpose of our lives, both now and in eternity. We want to be thankful for what God has done for us, of course, but even more, we want to thank God because HE IS!”

If Rachel Wolfe had entertained any doubts about her father, they fled as he talked. This was not the same man she’d walked away from six years ago, the clueless man who’d let her go even as her heart screamed for him to care, to cry, to ask her to stay.

“At the burning bush, Moses asked God, ‘The people are going to want to know who sent me. What do I tell them?’ God said, ‘I AM who I AM,’” Joshua looked at Ed. “Yes, I paraphrased that. That’s okay with you, isn’t it? Because I can look it up if you want. It’s in Exodus 3.”

“No, no, that’s fine,” Ed waved for him to continue.

“You two behave,” Joshua frowned at Beth and Gloria who were whispering to each other. They collapsed against each other with smothered giggles. Greg gave them a suspicious frown then looked back at Joshua and rolled his eyes.

“So anyway,” Joshua grinned at Greg and continued. “God told Moses to tell the people ‘I AM who I AM’ sent him. Now I don’t know about you, but when I first started really reading the bible, I found that to be a little weird. In fact it seems to avoid the question. It kind of sounded a little like ‘none of your business’ or ‘I would tell you, but then I’d have to kill you.’ I have come to believe,” Joshua smiled at his family. “That it was more like, ‘I’m going to tell you in time, but right now it’ll take too long to explain the back story. Just

trust me that I AM who I AM!”

Joshua looked at Greg and saw the dawn of understanding, the approving, encouraging smile even as tears began to trickle down Greg’s cheeks. He felt wetness on his own.

“Mankind had lost their memory of their Creator, their God. They had forgotten the love with which he had fashioned the world and created them in his image. They had forgotten their betrayal of his love. They had forgotten his justice, his love, his power, his glory.

“God was initiating a plan that would bring them back to him. It was going to take a long time and there were a lot of things that were going to have to take place. Some of them still haven’t taken place today, but the end of the journey will fully restore mankind’s memory of who God is, what he’s done and why he’s worthy of praise. However, when God first spoke to Moses on that first step of the journey, all the people could really understand was, ‘I AM, trust me.’

“I AM is worthy of our praise, not just because of what he has done, but first and foremost because he is who he is, I AM who I AM. Even if he never did anything for us, he would still be worthy of our praise. Even if Greg had died this weekend, I AM would still be worthy of our praise. Even if Kara had no donor, I AM would still be worthy of our praise.

“Many of us here have had very bad things happen in our past, times of great suffering. Some of you allowed God to immediately use that suffering to build proven character. Others of us, like me, turned our backs on God or gave him half-hearted attention because we couldn’t accept the idea of I AM. We wanted some temporal benefit to knowing God rather than letting the knowing be enough. Please, don’t you see that if the Son of God could suffer for us, we shouldn’t want to be given preferential treatment by the Father? Do we think more highly of ourselves than we think of our Savior? After all that Jesus suffered, from leaving his heavenly home and all the way to the tomb, can’t we love him enough to suffer for him? Can’t we be satisfied knowing that I AM is leading us on this journey?

“Please, open your heart to him this day. Tell him that you are thankful to him for being I AM, for being the one who can be trusted to bring us to the end of the journey, not just for the journey itself.

“Through drought and plague and famine and flood, I AM is still worthy of praise. Beset by trials, mocked, whipped, stoned, beheaded, burned at the stake, torn by animals, starved and homeless, men and women of faith have still gladly praised I AM. Peter and John *rejoiced* to have been allowed to share in the suffering of their Savior who is I AM. Let us do no less. Let us know that simply belonging to I AM is all that we ever really need! Today, let us worship him just because I AM is worthy of all the honor, all the glory, *all* the praise.”

Joshua dropped to his knees, not because he had planned to, but because he could no longer stand. He leaned back and raised his arms to the Lord.

“Oh God, our I AM, I know you are with us today as you always are. Even when we don’t feel you with us, you still are. You are worthy of praise. You were worthy of praise before anything was created to praise you. We don’t hesitate to praise you for all you have done for us, and you have done so much, but let us praise you today, just because I AM who I AM.”