[Isa 47:7-10 NKJV] 7 And you said, 'I shall be a lady forever,' [So] that you did not take these [things] to heart, Nor remember the latter end of them. 8 "Therefore hear this now, [you who are] given to pleasures, Who dwell securely, Who say in your heart, 'I [am], and [there is] no one else besides me; I shall not sit [as] a widow, Nor shall I know the loss of children'; 9 But these two [things] shall come to you In a moment, in one day: The loss of children, and widowhood. They shall come upon you in their fullness Because of the multitude of your sorceries, For the great abundance of your enchantments. 10 "For you have trusted in your wickedness; You have said, 'No one sees me'; Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; And you have said in your heart, 'I [am], and [there is] no one else besides me.'

[Isa 47:11-15 NKJV] 11 Therefore evil shall come upon you; you shall not know from where it arises. And trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly, [which] you shall not know. 12 "Stand now with your enchantments and the multitude of your sorceries, in which you have labored from your youth--Perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you will prevail. 13 You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let now the astrologers, the stargazers, [and] the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from what shall come upon you. 14 Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; [it shall] not [be] a coal to be warmed by, [nor] a fire to sit before! 15 Thus shall they be to you with whom you have labored, your merchants from your youth; they shall wander each one to his quarter. No one shall save you.

As I studied to move ahead in our text I kept being pulled back to last week's text. I could not escape the sentence- And you have said in your heart,
'I *am,* and *there is* no one else besides me.
I have come to think of this as **the flesh's manifesto**. That would be the title for this sermon. **The flesh's manifesto**. 'I *am,* and *there is* no one else besides me. Last week we made application for ourselves based on arrogant assumptions contained in the phrase.
As I continued to work on this, this is the outline that formed.
I am and there is none besides is a statement of
1 Who one's God is
2 One's Autonomy

3 One's Innate goodness
4 One's Superior wisdom
5 One's Superior power
6 One's Superior importance

Last week we covered Lady Babylon's 2 Autonomy and 3 Innate Goodness.
We focused on the idea of being self sufficient, of being autonomous, of falsely assuming of ourselves good things, like when we expect and assume that when **we do something**, it **must be right**. Like anything we may have done must have been done with pure motives, since, after all, **we did them**.
We made the point that it isn't just the world that thinks like that. We as Christians can often fall into that same mentality. We just put it all in spiritual terms. Flesh tends toward **assuming autonomy** and regards itself with **Innate Goodness**. And those preconceived assumptions are very dangerous. They will keep us from seeing the truth about **why we do what we do** or **why we did what we did.**
Now let's look at the rest of the points.

Look at the words "I am."
I am is a statement of who God is.
Flesh always wants to replace the almighty "I am" with the human "I am". We want our identity to replace the position of God's identity. It is the difference between true worship and idolatry.
When God says "I am that I am". When He says "I am and there is none besides me", that is truth. That is security. That is safety. That is an anchor for our hearts.
But we feel inclined to replace that "I am".
When Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life, we want to replace that "I am". We want to say "**I am** the way the truth and the life". And no, we are not going to write that down or teach it in a Bible Study. We will just impulsively do it. When God reveals the truth about us from His position of creator, when He **commands us** to do something or **commands us not** to do something, we are going to pick an expert. We are going to pick an "I am". And we will either respond by picking the great and true "I am" and submit to the Lordship of Christ. Or we will pick the tried and false "I am" of our own wisdom and intuition and

passion. So who is the expert regarding all of life? Well, "I am" of course. But which "I am"? There is an "I am" that will give you life. And there is an "I am" that will take it away. There is an "I am" leading to eternal reward and one leading toward eternal punishment. We need to pick the right "I am". And it isn't the one in the mirror.

Look at this.

[Luk 18:9-14 NKJV] 9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that <u>I am</u> not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

Let's stop here. What does that sound like to you? This Pharisee could have just as easily prayed, I am and there is no one besides me. Really. Isn't that the essence of what he is saying?

Let's go on.

13 "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise [his] eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [rather] than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The first man here focused on the wrong "I am". He believed our fleshly manifesto. He said "I am and I am not like the others". I am superior. I am innately good. I am I am I am.

The second man saw that "I am not". I am not good. I am not worthy. I am not special. All I am is a sinner. And this drove him to call on the true **I am**, the correct **I am**. Repentance is the process of switching "I am's". Repentance is the road from pride to humility. Confession is the tool of repentance. We do well to work that tool hard.

Look at verse 14. Everyone who exalts his internal I am, is going to fall hard. But whoever humbles himself and picks the true I am, he will be exalted.

So choosing the right I am is the first point.

The second and third points we covered last week.

Fourth "I am and there is none besides" is a statement of **superior wisdom**-

Notice the prior verses- **Because of the multitude of your sorceries, For the great abundance of your enchantments. 10 "For you have trusted in your wickedness;**

You have said, 'No one sees me'; Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you

These sorceries were not wickedness for the sake of wickedness. They were a wickedness that provided a benefit. The Babylonians relied upon their sorceries to keep them safe. They relied upon them for inside information. They believed the sorceries provided them wisdom and knowledge. And while they certainly provided some information, the whole process just warped the people. Their thinking was skewed. They could no longer think straight. They **thought** they had superior wisdom. They **thought** they exceeded all of those around them in wisdom. But living in their cities were a captured people with a truly superior wisdom. Because they knew the real **I AM**.

You and I should be very careful when we give credit to ourselves for positive life situations we find ourselves in. It is so much like us to want to give credit to ourselves for our **superior moral stance** or **spiritual discipline** or **human wisdom**. We think things like, my kids are Christians because I was such a good parent. Or I am in a good marriage because I simply would not have chosen someone inferior to marry. We might say that kind of thing or believe that kind of thing, but in reality it is up to God as to what circumstances we find ourselves in. We have proven with our lives that we would do any number of foolish sinful things. We would do well to be extremely careful about giving advice to believers based solely upon our experiences. If we cannot quote scriptural principles, it is just as likely that we arrived in a good spot **in spite of** how we lived and thought as **because of it**. It is a good idea to always preface human advice by saying- this is human advice. It may or may not be good advice. And likewise, we do well to quote God in such a way that no one gets the opinion that it may or may not be true. If we quote God, we quote a certainty.

Fifth "I am and there is none besides" is a statement of **Superior Power**.

Maybe you've noticed that these arrogant claims are actually characteristics of God. Superior power. Look in our text- **no one sees me. I will not be a widow or lose children. I shall be a lady forever**.

Have you even boasted about yourself saying I would never do such and such a thing… or I will always do such and such thing, and in a short period you find yourself doing the thing you in your pride never thought you would do?

Pride comes before a fall. Our friend Peter was the perfect example. Lord, it doesn't matter that all of these other wimps would fail you. I am superior to them. I will never fail you. I would never deny you.

It is not just the lady Babylon who makes such claims. We strangely take credit by default for good situations we find ourselves in, like we have put ourselves there by our strength or wonderful traits. And if we put ourselves there, we assume we can keep ourselves there. Because, after all, we are superior. Have you ever noticed how this comes out of us when we are squeezed. Pride always wants to prove superiority. We want to show the difference between me and someone else. We want to look down on others as if there is something about us that makes us special. I think of Caleb and Tom's taunts when they were little kids as to what each of them could do better than the other.

But what is the truth?

[Luk 12:16-21 NKJV] 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, [and] be merry." ' 20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So [is] he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Here is the power that we have over our futures. It is all in God's hands. We have no power that God does not give us. Lady Babylon had none of the power she assumed she had. She was widowed in one night. She was not going to be a lady forever. Nor was it true when she said that no one could see. No, there was a watcher. There was a watcher of Lady Babylon all the time. Remember the story in Daniel. This is not the story of Cyrus taking power. But it is similar.

[Dan 5:2-6 NKJV] 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which [had been] in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which [had been] in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. 5 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.

You gotta love this description. Here is the most powerful man in the world and look at what he is reduced to when God lifts a finger. Here is powerful lady Babylon with all her self confidence. The Belshazzar brought Daniel in and this is what God had to say about all of his self confidence. Belshazzar was probably taking credit in his head for being in charge of this mighty dynasty. But that was not the truth.

... 18 "O king, the Most High <u>God gave Nebuchadnezzar</u> your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 "And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. 20 "But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. 21 "Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling [was] with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that <u>the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses</u>.

That is power. God is the powerful one, not king **Nebuchadnezzar**, not Lady Babylon. But God almighty**.** Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that lesson. He got a second chance.

22 "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. 23 "And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who [holds] your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 "Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. 25 "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26 "This [is] the interpretation of [each] word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; 27 "TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; 28 "PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." ... 30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, [being] about sixty-two years old.

We see from all of this where the power truly lies. Oh it looks like the power is in our decisions. And we cannot make light of the effect of good faithful obedient

decisions. But they are not the deciding factor. And how things look is not how things are. Who appears to be in control and who really is are two different things. If we learn nothing else this morning, we should learn that. Ultimately we have precious little power in determining what happens next in our lives. But we have a great deal of power regarding how we are going to face it. And it was granted to us by Christ.

So sixth- "I am and there is none besides" is a statement of **Superior Importance**- Notice how lady Babylon is called "**The Lady of Kingdoms**." This is signifying her preeminence. She saw herself as being the most important of all beings. From the beginning of the Bible to the end we constantly see how we as human beings always elevate our importance. It is in us and it will take a resurrection to get it out of us.

Do you remember how many times the disciples argued about who was the greatest. And how many times Jesus had to put them in their places. **The last shall be first** He would say. **Take the seat of lowest honor** He would say. **Love your neighbor as yourself** He would say. **You must receive the Kingdom like a little child** He would say. **Whatever you have done to the least of these is what you have done to Me** He would say. **The greatest among you will be your servant** He would say.

Look what Paul tells us in Philippians.

[Phl 2:3-11 NKJV] 3 [Let] nothing [be done] through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, [and] coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to [the point of] death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Look at the model we have. It is the exact opposite of what our flesh tempts us to do and be. Here is Christ, who is the greatest of the greatest. He is, by far, the most important human being ever born. And look at what He chose to do. His love reached out to meet our need at the expense of His life. He clung to no

rights, although **He had rights** He could have clung to. He had less housing than foxes have. He gave up His privacy. He gave up the enjoyment of what the world had to offer. He gave up everything to meet our need.

We have an inborn desire to be preeminent. We want our contributions recognized and appreciated. We want our motives unquestioned. We want our sacrifices admired. We want people to think the best of us. We want people to be considerate of our needs and preferences. Ultimately we want to be served, and if it could be, we want to be worshipped. That is in us. That is why we cannot trust our hearts. They are inclined in this direction. Our flesh wants to replace the **true** I am with the **me** I am.

If God were to leave us to ourselves, we would all be saying in one way or another, I am and there is none besides me. So while we can be aghast at Lady Babylon here, we had better be careful. It is easy to be just like her. Just follow your heart.

But she does not have a very good end coming to her.

[Isa 47:11-15 NKJV] 11 Therefore evil shall come upon you; you shall not know from where it arises. And trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly, [which] you shall not know.

Lady Babylon cannot believe this, she won't believe it. She is so full of her own lies of omnipotence and importance that she cannot believe her fast fall. It is not even a possibility in her arrogant mind. But it will happen nonetheless.

And we see God taunting her.

12 "Stand now with your enchantments and the multitude of your sorceries, in which you have labored from your youth--Perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you will prevail. 13 You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let now the astrologers, the stargazers, [and] the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from what shall come upon you.

We see that the problem with the wrong **I am** is that **I can't**. While its self image is **positive**, it is completely **fictional**. Here is where Babylon's wisdom came from. It was the Devil's arena. It was his text books. It was his influence.

Do you know what is ironic here? With all Babylon's witchcraft, the Devil was not allowed to tell the Babylonian sorcerers about Darius's attack, or later Cyrus's. Look how God taunts lady Babylon. Go ahead He says, stick with your gods and your beliefs. Who knows, maybe you are right. Maybe you will win. Even though they have already worn you out with their bad and constant advice, maybe they

will pull through this time. Maybe they can stop you from experiencing what I, God, promise you will happen. Go ahead. Give it a shot.
I think God sometimes taunts us the same way. It is the same way a parent might taunt a child who is acting rebellious. It is as if He is saying, are you having fun yet? How is that sin working out for you? How is running from me doing? You getting happier by the moment? Like to Jonah, after being swallowed by the fish, He might ask, are you enjoying your free housing? Are you ready to do it my way yet?
Well God was not acting with love toward Lady Babylon. No. This is the end she will face.
14 Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; [it shall] not [be] a coal to be warmed by, [nor] a fire to sit before! 15 Thus shall they be to you with whom you have labored, your merchants from your youth; they shall wander each one to his quarter. No one shall save you.
What we see here is the failure of the wrong I AM. Our I AM will never save us. Flesh will never save us. All flesh will do is seduce us into thinking our way is self contained. Our way is innately good. Our way is a superior wisdom. Our way is the most powerful way. Our way is the way of most importance. And we will miss the fact that our way, the way the fleshly "I am" will lead us, is just a road of destruction.
Do you want to see a contrast this morning? The fleshly I am promises to keep one in a position of power and comfort, but fails. Here is what the real I AM can do.
[Exo 3:14-17 NKJV] 14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " 15 Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD 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, and this [is] My memorial to all generations.' 16 "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and [seen] what is done to you in Egypt; 17 "and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey." '

The real I AM sees our plight and moves to meet our need. He comes with true autonomy, true innate goodness, true omniscient wisdom, true omnipotent power, and true importance, true glory. And He promises to deliver us by His hand. He delivers us from **what we don't want** and delivers us **to what we do want**. That is the I AM that is worth having faith in.

Did you discover anything about your "I am" this last week? Did God reveal to you in your reactions to others what you really think of yourself? Have you asked others for help in discerning areas that you trust your own innate goodness? They can probably see it better than you can. Trust in ourselves will destroy both our relationships and ourselves. It makes anything good much harder and anything bad much easier. It is one of the major things that holds us back in our fellowship with each other and with God. I am convinced that it is God's will to reveal it to us if we will simply submit to Him can call upon Him to do so. Will we?