

## **“GROWING IN KNOWING GOD.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**June 7, 2015, 10:30AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 17:1-3; Colossians 1:9-11**

### **Introduction.**

In this season of graduations, why do we honor graduates for every new level of learning and achievement, whether it's eighth grade, high school, trade school, college or post-graduate?

We generally consider knowledge a good thing. We send our children to school because we place a high value on knowledge and we hope they get some there. Acquiring knowledge is a good and necessary and noble pursuit.

There is one thing supremely more important than everything else. It is of such importance you can't go to heaven without knowing it. Jesus Himself said, "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

I would like us to take the summer to get to know God better. I mean really get to know God, to drill as deeply as we can into His character and nature.

Our generation is losing touch with God, losing a sense of the awesome splendor and majesty of God, losing a sense of the true greatness of God. We are getting ho-hum, complacent, bored. Our God is getting smaller and smaller. Our God today is hardly worth thinking about or meditating on.

In our busy, activity filled, pleasure seeking, self-absorbed culture the words, "Be still and know that I am God" have no meaning or interest.

I want to stir us up this summer to grow in knowing God, to stir up our hearts to seek Him in deeper ways that we might love Him more and be filled with the peace and joy of knowing Him.

I believe that such knowledge is *relevant* for every aspect of our lives, for our marriages, for our parenting and grand parenting, for our careers and for our retirement, for our relationships, our fears, our questions about life.

All of us have problems in our lives. Graduate school issues are not helped with elementary school knowledge of God. If our God is too small or if we think wrongly about God our problems and issues just get worse. It matters that you know God and it matters what you think about God.

## **Knowing God.**

How we think about God is important, and what each of us thinks about Him says something about us. What comes to your mind when you think of God?

What each of us knows is clouded by what we have heard and seen, by what we picked up at school, Sunday school, various preachers, what we got from the media, movies and off the street. Our ideas may be blurred or buried under various traditions, or social norms.

If we start wrong, sooner or later our whole structure will be off, then pretty soon ten thousand other things will be wrong. "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love." But the person who gets this right will solve ten thousands problems.

To not know God as He truly is, is idolatry. Idolatry is thinking of God in any other way than He actually is. The essence of idolatry is thinking thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.

**Romans 1:21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Wrong ideas about God lead to wrong actions. What we think about God affects our practical daily lives.

For many of us the silver is tarnished and needs to be cleaned, the gold is full of dross and needs to be refined, the diamonds are dirty and clouded and need to be restored to their original luster.

The best thing we can do for ourselves and for our families and our church and our community is to think the highest and best thoughts about God, to lift our thoughts as high as we can until they are worthy of God Himself.

The best thing we can do for our next generation is to pass on to our children and grandchildren an undimmed, unblemished, unpolluted vision and understanding of God.

## **Where can God be known?**

What is God like? What kind of God is He? What can we know about Him? If we ask this in reverence and humility He is most pleased to answer. He delights when we truly want to know. He has revealed more than enough to satisfy every inquiring heart and mind, more than enough to fill our worship and praise and thanksgiving.

God reveals Himself to us in *three ways*, in nature and in Scripture and in His Son.

### *Nature.*

I concluded my sermon on the Trinity last week saying that having brought the Trinity more into focus, we should start seeing evidence of a Trinitarian God in creation, in the unity and diversity that is all around us; and in our relationships and how a civilized world functions.

Since God created our world we should expect it to bear the marks of its creator.

**Psalm 19:1-2** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

**Romans 1:19-20** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

The knowledge about God we learn from the school of nature is not perfect or complete but it is sufficient to hold us without excuse if we flunk the test at the end.

### *Scripture.*

Through the prophets of the OT and the Apostles of the NT God has given us an even clearer revelation of all He wants us to know about Him.

**Hebrews 1:1-2** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

### *Son.*

**Hebrews 1:2-3** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

**Colossians 1:15, 19** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ... 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

If you want to know God you have to know Jesus. Jesus reveals the Father to us. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. No other religion has God being human and coming to earth to reveal Himself to us.

The Word became flesh. Through Jesus we have the greatest access to the greatest knowledge of God. He is the supreme manifestation of God to us.

**How can God be known?**

God is known to us by His many attributes.

When we talk about ourselves we talk about our traits, character, qualities, temperament, gifts, talents, abilities. All of these things make up who we are. We have all of these things to varying degrees and they vary with time, age, experience and circumstances.

But we can't use these words in the same way about God. God is perfect, whole, complete and everything in Him is in complete harmony. There is a total unity in His being. God's attributes aren't qualities about Him, they are Him. They are what God is and how God is.

His attributes never grow or increase, they never diminish or decrease or cease to exist. Love and mercy are not something God has, they are what God is. When God loves or when God is wise or when God is powerful, God is being who God is.

An attributes of God is simply something He has revealed to us to be true about Himself.

How many attributes of God are there? We might be closer to the truth to say since God is infinite His attributes are infinite. God certainly must possess attributes that our minds and imaginations cannot know.

Westminster Confession of Faith lists some of them this way:

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory, most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty.

God is all of those and more. We will explore some of these over the summer.

### **Growing in Knowing God.**

Jesus once asked a man, "Do you want to be healed?" Some people are complacent and content in their complacency. So it is appropriate for me to ask, "Do you desire to know God?" Or are you satisfied with where you are?

Listen again to Paul's prayer for growing in the knowledge of God.

**Colossians 1:9-10** We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner

worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Do you ever pray like this? Praying that God would give us better health or a better job or help us do better in school or that He would send rain or that He would give us a spouse or a child or that He would give us more patience or love or that He would help us through some crisis, these are all good prayers and God is pleased to hear and answer them.

But such prayers miss the deepest needs of our souls, they are shallow compared to what is supremely important and will matter most in all eternity.

Paul is not praying that we know more about God, that we know facts and details. Paul is not praying for more academic knowledge of God. He is pleading for personal, experiential, intimate, real knowledge of God Himself through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This knowledge is personal, it comes from God Himself. I can preach about it all day long but you won't grow in it unless you ask God to open the eyes of your heart. Only those who ask will receive and only those who seek will find.

I plead with you to make this your greatest desire for the sake of your own joy, for the sake of your own satisfaction with life, for the sake of your own peace of mind, for the sake of your own sanity in the midst of a crazy life and world. Let's pray this prayer before coming to worship each Sunday morning this summer.

### ***Pillars of Spiritual Knowledge.***

As we seek to grow in our knowledge of God, our worship planning team will be planning our worship services with an extra element included, what we are calling Pillars of Spiritual Knowledge. You have a booklet like this in your mail boxes. Each week somewhere in the service will be one of these pillars. We encourage you parents and grandparents to make sure we are passing on to the next generation some of the essential pillars in our Christian faith, things every child of God should know and even have memorized. Use this at meals or devotions.

### **Application and conclusion.**

When God divided up the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel, who got the best part? Did Benjamin get the best part because they got Jerusalem? Was it Manasseh because they got the most? I suggest to you that the tribe of Levi got the best part. God said to them:

**Numbers 18:20** "You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel."

The person who has God for his treasure and inheritance has the first and the best. He can have everything else taken away, he can lose it all, but he who has God as his supreme desire and possession has all he needs and cannot have his joy taken from him.

**Matthew 6:33** Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Pray for me that God will use and guide me, that God will enable me to speak as much to our hearts as to our heads, that God by His Spirit will make His Word applicable to all our lives and our needs. Come ready to hear what the Spirit will say to you and come hungry for true knowledge of God.

Let's pursue God this summer. Let's hunger and thirst for Him. Let's sing with David:

**Psalm 42:1-2, 5-6** As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation 6 and my God.

My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you.

Let's pray like Moses, "God, grant us a glimpse of your glory" (Exodus 33:18).

Let's wrestle like Jacob and say, "We won't let you go until you give us a blessing" (Genesis 32:26).

Let's declare like Paul, "I count everything else as loss and worthless, compared to knowing Jesus Christ my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

Let's make our closing hymn our prayer for increasing in our knowledge of God.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, we have tasted your goodness but are ashamed at our lack of desire for more of you. Make us thirsty for more of you. Fill us with a holy longing. Grant us a glimpse of your glory and then make us want to see more. We have wandered in the lowlands long enough; make us desire the heights you have created us for. Give us grace to ask and seek and knock, to press further up and further in this summer for your glory and our greater joy and peace, in the name of Jesus.