

“NICENE CREED: ANCIENT WORDS EVER TRUE II.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

February 25, 2018, 6:00 PM

Scripture Texts: Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 17:1-5

Introduction.

Tonight’s sermon is a drawing together of two threads of thought, last week’s sermon on the Nicene Creed and this morning’s sermon on the importance of knowing God.

The purpose of creeds is to clarify doctrine and the purpose of doctrine is to know God. The word theology means the study of God.

Creeds and doctrine are gifts from God. The purpose of doctrine is to pull back the veil to reveal the splendor and majesty of God, to help us know God. The purpose of doctrine is to clear the fog, to help us see wonderful things in God’s Word, things no eye has seen nor ear heard nor heart imagined (I Corinthians 2:9).

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he *understands and knows me*.”

Through the prophet Jeremiah God lists three of the most common things in life that consume our earthly lives and interests. The pursuit of wisdom and knowledge through education, schooling, self-improvement, etc. Education is a huge priority in our culture and we devote many years to it. The pursuit of strength through our focus on our bodies, our looks, our appearance. The pursuit of wealth, the focus on our careers, our jobs, and accumulating for retirement.

But God says if those are your priorities, if that is what life is all about for you, you are short sighted, you are putting the emphasis on the wrong syllable. Why do you invest so much in the realm of time which is very short and fleeting, and not invest in eternity?

Mark 8:36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

The best thing, the most profitable thing is to understand and know God. I know people think doctrine is boring, and if all it does is lead them to information and facts about God, then that is true. That is unprofitable knowledge. But that’s not the purpose of creeds

and doctrine. The purpose of doctrine is not to kill our desires for God but to pour gas on them.

We know we are on the right path toward knowing God when we say things like:

Psalm 42:1-2 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.

When shall I come and appear before God? [Where can I go and meet with God?]

Psalm 63:1 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psalm 84:2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

This is what Paul was talking about when he wrote:

Philippians 3:7-8 Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of *the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

The surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. What does that mean? There is a phrase for this in Latin, it's called the summum bonum, which means "the highest good out of which all other good flows."

Is that us? Would we call everything else in our life rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus? Is knowing Jesus pure gold and everything else just bronze?

Matthew 13:45-46 The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

That's what good doctrine greatest in us, that kind of searching and finding.

Notice something else Paul says about knowing Jesus, it grows out of suffering. This deep knowledge of God most often comes through suffering, through some experience that exposes how little value everything else has compared to knowing and having God.

Israel could not truly know God without the wilderness and the exile. We can't know God without the cross.

Almost all of the great creeds of the church have blood on them. They are born out of great travail, struggle, conflict and suffering. The gates of hell have waged a fierce and relentless war against the Church of Jesus Christ.

Men and women through the centuries have given their lives for the truth, for the defense of the true faith. They laid down their lives for us. Why? So that we could know the truth about God and knowing that, could have eternal life.

What are you willing to die for? What are you living for? What matters most to you? How valuable is knowing our God and Savior? Is it worth your very blood?

What kind of knowing God?

God created us to know Him, to even know Him so intimately as to walk with Him in the garden in the cool of the evening (Genesis 3:8). We were made for that.

You know how the word “know” is sometimes used in the Bible for intimate knowledge, like the knowledge a husband and wife have in marriage. Knowledge of God in the Bible is never just factual knowledge, like information. It is meant to be intimate, personal, experiential, relational. This is the kind of knowledge we are to pursue. It is the kind of knowledge God has of us. And it is for this kind of knowledge that God has revealed Himself.

Our sin separated us from all that and blinded our eyes from seeing God and closed our ears to hearing Him. But God said:

Jeremiah 24:7 I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

This is the greatest thing, the best thing, the highest thing, the thing to be desired more than anything else. In this is our joy and peace. This is what we are made for. As Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they are at rest in God.”

To know God is the essence of what it means to be a Christian.

The whole purpose of the Bible is to hold up before us the revelation of the greatest knowledge known to man, the knowledge of God. The entire history of mankind is a steady revealing to us of who God is and what He is like.

And in order to make Himself fully known to us and in order for us to know Him He has gone to the greatest extreme and has come down to us in the person of the Son of God, the second person of the trinity.

Jesus, is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature (Hebrews 1:3), the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), in whom all the fullness of deity is pleased to dwell (Colossians 2:9), who upholds the universe by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3).

John 14:7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.

Jesus is God, Jesus is the way to God and the way to know God. Apart from Jesus you cannot know God and you cannot have eternal life with God. He has come from God to show us the way back to God.

This is what the great creeds take great pains to make as clear as possible.

the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;

Benefits of knowing God.

I said the summum bonum is the highest good out of which all good flows. What do we receive from knowing God? What are the benefits?

First, eternal life.

To know God is to have the greatest knowledge and the greatest reward. Jesus said,

John 17:3 This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John 10:10 I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.

This gift, this salvation, this eternal life, this promise is for you and for your children and grandchildren and all who are far off.

Second, knowing sin.

Isaiah's deeper knowledge of God led to a deeper knowledge of himself. "Woe is me." You can't know God without knowing sin.

Let me show what happens if we don't know ourselves and our sin.

Romans 1:28-31 Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Lack of knowledge of God is why our culture is getting darker and darker, and plunging deeper and deeper into immorality, violence, hatred and intolerance. Without a knowledge of God there is no way to judge sin, to call evil evil.

If there is no God then I am god and I decide what is right and wrong. Abortion becomes a good choice for me if there is no God saying the shedding of innocent blood is evil. Killing old people is mercy if there is no God telling us to choose life. Same sex unions are fine if there is no God defining marriage. Transgender is fine if there is no God who has created us in His image as male and female.

When we don't know God we lose all sense of dignity and value in mankind. Without a knowledge of God there is no respect for authority. Without a knowledge of God we have no eternal souls, that we will one day be accountable to our Creator.

This is the path of not knowing God. To not know God leads to futility and folly and finally darkness and death. When a culture denies God, it becomes unwise, loveless, foolish and hateful, not only doing what ought not to be done, giving approval to those who do it.

The hope for our country and our culture is not in Washington DC or Olympia, it's in the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. And the knowledge of God is our greatest need.

Third, knowledge of God leads to grace and peace and blessings upon blessings, the one from whom all blessings flow. You can hear it in Paul's prayers.

Colossians 1:9-12 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; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

To know God enables us to live a life worthy of living, worthy of the Lord who created and saved us. To know God leads to a fruitful life and to endurance, patience, joy, and gratitude.

In other words, to know God is the summum bonum, the highest good out of which flows every other good, every other blessing, every other benefit.

The knowledge of God is the greatest privilege given to man. As Jeremiah said, it is better than riches and strength and intelligence.

Claim the promises of Scripture:

Deuteronomy 4:29 ... seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Read the Scriptures. Study to know God. Use the creeds as summaries of what is in Scripture.

Pray for this kind of knowledge of God.

Pray for it for your kids and grandkids.

Pray for it for our nation, for our leaders, for the shapers of culture and media.

Prayer: Colossians 1:9-12 ... 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; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.