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A Heart to Know Him

I've been thinking this week about knowing the Lord. What it truly means to know the Lord. I suppose that most everybody that calls themselves a "person of faith", whatever faith that might be, would suggest that they know the Lord to some measure or another. But, as 1 John says, those who do not have the Son, do not have the Father...and so we can assuredly say that all of those outside of Christ have, in fact, zero knowledge of God. They do not know the Lord.

But, within the household of God, within the church, I would suggest to you that there are still many who, though they are known of God in Christ, truly do not know Him.

The question popped into my head this week – "is it hard to get to know the Lord?" And I would have to say that the answer is yes if getting to know Him is something you are trying to do through your study, your pursuits, and according to your thoughts, your mind, your understanding. In fact, I would have to say that getting to know Him is impossible under those circumstances...despite our imaginations to the contrary.

We've been talking about "vain imaginations" for some time now, and I would suppose that there are perhaps more vain imaginations surrounding the subject of knowing the Lord than any other in the world.

When I think about this subject, I cannot help but reflect on verses where Jesus says that many will say to me "did I not do this and that in your name...and I will have to say to them that I never knew them".

How do you know the Lord? Well, we'll say more about this later, but for now I can summarize it by saying that you know Him in His death, His burial, and His resurrection. I could say that another way – you only know the Lord to the measure that His life is formed in you. You know the Lord as you participate in and experience His resurrected life. I could say that negatively – you do not know the Lord to the extent that His life is seen, observed, sought outwardly. You know the Lord only in the sharing of His mind, the sharing of His nature, the sharing of Him. You know Him as you experience His life as your own.

And so, let me categorically proclaim to you that you do not come to know Him through prayer and fasting. That simply is not true. People of all religions pray and fast, and do so entirely apart from a knowing of God. I am not saying anything against prayer and fasting. I believe in those things whole heartedly – in their biblical context. I am

simply saying that all the prayer and fasting in the world will not make you know the Lord. (Don't ask me how I learned that.)

You do not know the Lord through watching His power. Though you can outwardly observe something of the nature of His power and goodness through seeing Him heal or speak, in observing such things you will not come to know Him.

You do not know the Lord through prophetic experiences and dreams. I believe in such things. I appreciate such things. I just know that such things happen to people with or without a true knowing of Him. And, so long as these are outward experiences (as all prophetic experiences, visions, and dreams are) they will not cause you to grow in the true knowing of Him.

Bunny Trail: Incidentally, all prophetic visions and dreams are what the Bible calls dark sayings, they are shadows and types. They are pictures and tastes...but they are not substance. They speak of substance...but unless that substance is apprehended in Christ you are often none the better for having those experiences. I am not saying that lightly. I spent years of my life seeking, and to a degree experiencing, such things. I do not disregard them. I am simply saying to you that in those things alone there is not a coming to know Him.

Many times people that have such experiences think that what they are seeing in those experiences is the spiritual substance, the reality...and that is generally not the case. In those experiences there is God using visions of natural objects, people, powers, stories, voices, angels, etc. to testify to the substantial and the eternal reality of salvation in Christ.

You do not come to know the Lord through reading books. You do not even come to know the Lord through reading the Bible...UNLESS those books, and unless that Bible is used of the Spirit of God to reveal Him of whom they speak where and as He is. Jesus says to the Pharisees "you diligently seek the Scriptures thinking that in them you have life...but I am that life, and frankly you don't know me".

So again...how do you know Him? You know Him where He is and as He is. You know Him as your life. You know Him as the resurrection. You know Him as that life begins to be formed in you. You know Him as that mind comes to be formed in you. You know Him as you begin to walk in His view, in His faith. You know Him as His very life overtakes your soul with spiritual wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. You know Him as His life overtakes your death. As His word grows up in your soul. As His seed grows up in your soil.

That is how you come to know the Lord. I remember when I was about 20 years old I heard a riveting sermon one night at a conference where a man was teaching about the knowledge of God. Knowing Him. It cut me to the heart. All I wanted was to know Him. And yet, for the next 6 or 8 years of my life, I sought to do so in and through enumerable ways in which He will never be truly known.

My zeal was strong. My heart was passionate. My discipline was, I suppose, admirable to some. And still you grow no closer to knowing Him unless His mind, His heart, His life, is formed in you.

And, if I am completely honest, I sought Him in those days for what I would become by seeking Him. I sought Him to be great in His sight. I sought Him for what He would do with me, or to me, or for me, what He would make me, what authority I would walk in, what power I would manifest. I sought Him for my own ends. I would not see that...I could not see that until I started to see His cross. But it is true.

I sought Him to become something myself. I sought Him for and according to what I wanted Him to be for me. I sought Him so that I'd gain His approval of **my life**. I sought Him that I might fulfill MY destiny...which consisted in the accomplishing of so-called spiritual tasks. I sought Him so that He would set a table before me in the presence of my enemies. I sought Him hard and with time and tears...and I was ever learning and never coming to a knowing of the Truth.

And therefore all of my seeking produced virtually nothing of knowing Him. All of my seeking strengthened my own vain imaginations. My imaginations were like building blocks piled higher and higher as I pursued Him for my own ends. As I sought to know Him according apart from knowing His cross.

I called it zeal for God. Only now do I see that so much of it was spiritual selfishness. Spiritual pride. A lack of truly knowing Him.

What does it take to know Him? Well, it happens in being conformed to His death and being found in His life. I'm not going to talk about how that works today. I've talked about it before and will always continue to talk about it. I want to bring it back a step from there...because before that can even begin, there must be ground for Him to work in us.

It is true that spiritual growth is the increase of Christ inwardly in your soul. Not the increase of His quantity, (not getting more of Him) but the increase of the measure of His fullness working in and through you. And it is also true that that increase comes through the revealing of Him and His finished work unto growing in the knowledge of God, growing in faith, growing in the mind of Christ, having our minds renewed, etc. Yes, that is all true. But let me just back up from all of that this morning and say there must be ground in our hearts in which He can reveal His Son. God reveals His Son in you and I based totally upon the ground we present to Him. We have to present Him ground. We have to become ground in which any of this can take place.

There is such a thing as good ground. Ground in which His Seed can have increase. And there are multitudes of ways that you and I can be deceived into thinking that we are offering Him that kind of ground, when, in fact, the ground we present to Him is not fit for His increase.

And if you'll think back for a minute about the parable of the sower and the seed in Matthew and Mark, you'll see just this. You'll see that Jesus is talking about four different kinds of hearts that are looking to know Him. Four different kinds of hearts that are wanting to hear and receive the implanted Word. Four different kinds of ground – representing conditions of the heart.

Now you have to recognize that in all four of these situations there is absolutely nothing wrong with the seed. The seed is the same exact seed thrown onto all four soils. The farmer doesn't throw 4 different seeds. He throws one seed into four different grounds. The sun is the same sun. The water is never the issue. The seed is the same seed. So the ground can never blame the seed if there is no growth. The ground can ever blame the water or the sun. The ground, in this parable, is the only thing that determines whether there is going to be an increase of this seed. Three of these grounds produce nothing of that increase, and one brings about an increase – 30, 60, or 100 fold.

Now, of course, that increase is the increase of the Seed. It is the increase of the Word Himself who is the One being planted. But what I'm looking at right now is the fact that though it is His Seed, it is His growth, it is our soil **allows for** its increase.

Now make no mistake about this – it is not the soil that grows. And we cannot make the seed grow. We can not be growth, produce growth, increase life. But we, as the Seeds habitation, can **allow for growth**.

Please don't grab a religious monkey and throw it on your back while you listen to this. You are not able to or responsible for growing that seed. But the condition of your heart can be good or bad ground. The condition of your heart can be that in which His seed takes root and has its increase. That is what this parable is teaching.

There is no “division of labor” when it comes to spiritual growth. Think about it – how much is the dirt doing to grow a plant? No, **there is no division of labor, but there is such a thing as good and bad soil**. And my personal problem for years is that soil that thinks it can make the seed grow, or worse, soil that thinks it is suppose to imitate the seed, is one kind of bad soil. That is bad ground – I don't care how zealous that soil is.

Somebody told me recently that if took a seed and put it into 5 pounds of potting soil in a pot and let it grow for a year or two, you might have a 35 pound (or whatever) plant. But then if you took the plant out of the dirt, carefully removing all of the dirt from the roots so that it drops down into the pot, and weighed the dirt – you would still have 5 pounds of dirt.

What's my point? My point is that the dirt does not turn into the plant. The dirt is only the environment in which that seed can increase.

And that brings us back to the parable. What kind of soil are you? Somebody asked me once “what in the world does God want from me?”. And hearing that, it just came to me

to say “what in the world do you want from God?”. The same seed is thrown towards every heart. His expectation is for its increase, 30, 60, 100 fold. **That is His expectation. What is your expectation?** What is it that you want? Every soil gets hit with the exact same seed. What kind of soil do you wish to be?

Brothers and sisters, how much do you want to know Him? And here’s my question - **do you have a plan B in your heart if knowing Him never really works out?** Is there something else that will do, that will suffice, in this life if knowing God doesn’t ever seem to happen. Are there other things that are, well maybe not as good...but will at least be a decent life. If there is, that is probably what you’ll settle for.

I’m not saying that you actually plan out a plan B in your head...but if there is something else for you to turn to if you never really come to know Him, then that is generally what you’ll end up with. How much do you want to know Him? How much do you need Him?

It has happened to me a number of times in my life where I come to a tremendous spiritual crisis of the heart. I can’t really describe it to you very well...but I suppose with many of you I don’t have to. These crisis’ are different with everyone. They are different every time. For me, maybe it’s a time when I can’t see truth. Where is God? What is God doing? Or maybe things aren’t going forward. Or my mind stumbles over irrational doubts or fears...and I lose my joy and rest and peace in the Lord. Or spiritual hurdles seem impossible to overcome. Struggles, offenses, deadness, confusion, fear, doubt, anger, whatever...its too much. Its just too much...and in your heart it is like you’re stuck. And there is a pain in it that is hard to describe. Its like going forward with God suddenly becomes impossible.

Such things have happened to me on a number of occasions. And inevitably it brings me to a place where its almost like the Lord takes me up against a gigantic brick wall and leaves me just staring at the this impassible, insurmountable wall...and then says “now what?”. “Now what do you say? Now what are you going to do?” And it always brings me to the place where all I can do is cry out to the Lord **“God this appears absolutely impossible, going forward with You seems entirely hopeless, having you change this, heal this, fix this, change this, teach this, reveal this, seems utterly unattainablethe only problem is I just don’t have a plan B. I got all my chips in on this one bet, I got all my eggs in this basket”** “Going forward with you, growing up into the knowing of you is not one of life’s options for me. It is all that life has become. I have nowhere else to go...I guess I’ll just stay right here and stare at this wall. And every time its almost like the Lord says “well then son, now we can move on”.

In the Saturday morning group we were reading out of John 6, and I was seeing this very thing. Here is Jesus trying to figure out who had a plan B. He has this huge crowd around him and He very straightforwardly tells them “I am the bread of God that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”. And it says “then the Jews grumbled about Him saying”...how can He say that, etc.

So Jesus knowing that they were offended at this says “well, guys...let me try to explain this to you in a way that wont offend you.” Nope. He doesn’t say that. What he really goes on to say is “Ok...I’ll clarify...the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world”.

And then it says “The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves saying “how can this Man give us His flesh to eat?”

And then does Jesus say “well, what I mean is that....well, first of all, I’m the Messiah, and when I say eat my flesh, what I really mean is....” ? Nope.

No. What does He say. “Most assuredly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you”

Well, now they’re mad and disappointed. No doubt many of them, having just watched his miracles and seen the multiplication of food were hoping He was the Messiah. It says that nearly all of them left Him at that time, and I’m sure many of them left saying things like “well, I thought he was a good guy...but apparently He’s a cannibal.” Or “well, he could do some pretty neat tricks, but he can’t preach a good sermon”. Or “this guy is just nuts, I should have listened to Pharisee Joe”.

And verse 60 says “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said “this is a difficult saying; who can understand it?” “And from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more”

And Jesus just watches them walk away. And right then Jesus turns to His twelve...never explaining anything, never defending anything...and simply says “Do you also want to go away?”. What about you guys? Do you have a plan B? Do you have something else if this Jesus thing doesn’t work out for you?

And I so appreciate Peter’s response. There is no way on earth at this point that Peter had any idea what Jesus was talking about with the bread from heaven or the eating of His flesh and drinking His blood. There is no way that his mind wasn’t completely offended and confused at these statements. And yet, he replies to Jesus “Lord...I have no idea what you’re talking about, I have no idea where you’re leading this thing, I have no idea why things aren’t going the way I think, I have no idea why you’re letting all of these people turn and walk away if you’re the Messiah.....AND YET....I simply don’t have a plan B. I have all my chips on you Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, it pleases God the Father to reveal His Son in you. He greatly desires to give you the kingdom...to make you into the kingdom of His dear Son.etc. It is truly the very purpose for your birth and new birth.

And yet all of that is contingent upon the ground that we present to Him. And I can guarantee you that you will be offended, confused, doubtful, and stumped hundreds of times along the way. There will hundreds of stops along the way where you can get off

this train. There will be all kinds of exit ramps where you can find a perfectly “legitimate” reason for not growing up in the knowledge of Him.

“Well, I was all about Jesus until he started making strange cannibalism comments – eat my flesh, drink my blood Well, I was seeking to know Him, but the church I go to just doesn’t want to listen to me. Well, I was asking Him to reveal Himself in me but it never happened like I thought so I figured there must be something wrong with me and I gave up. I was desiring to grow up in Him, but I got confused about this or that, and I didn’t see how this or that fit in...so I’m just backing off for a while. etc”

Well, there we come up against that wall and we back away and follow no further. And, in reality, **WE** are always that wall. In all reality, that wall consists of something of the fabric of our own will, our own imaginations, our own concepts, our own desires that stands between us and the knowing of Truth. That is what that wall always is.

For some, we are growing up until something offends our carnal mind, and we back away. For some it is expectations of what it was “supposed to look like” that don’t line up with our thoughts...and so we look for another path. For some it is feeling sorry for ourselves – why doesn’t God deal with me like He does with so-and-so? And we turn our hearts to something more familiar.

And all I’m trying to say this morning is that there must be a heart to know Him. To know Him in all that that means. Because that will mean a conforming to His death. And don’t kid yourself in thinking that that will not remove everything of your thought, your religion, your strength, your comprehension, your very LIFE, along the way. Don’t kid yourself in thinking that there won’t be confrontation with YOU every step of the way. Because you and I are the veil that keeps us from seeing. You and I are the wall that prevents His conquest of our soul. You and I are the reason for His confrontation. Of course you will be confronted.

You will be confronted with your own inability to see anything. You will be confronted with your inability to be anything. You will be confronted with the fact that only in your absence is He present, and in your presence He is absent. You will be shown that this death must be working in you. **And that will first confuse, then confront, and then cut. Yes....that’s how it is...confuse, then confront, then cut.** And every step of the way you will have your opportunity to jump down from that altar and try to find another way into Him.

But only those who lose their life find it. And only those who hate their life gain His. And even though that confuses, confronts, and then cuts...will our hearts continually say “where else could I go, Lord, you have the word’s of eternal life”