



“Knowing Jesus”

As a minister, as a pastor, you will expect me to say this: Our greatest quest in life should be to know Jesus. But what if it was true? Christianity is about putting God first in a person's heart. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. (Mat 22:37-38).

So often for people looking at Christianity from the outside it seems to be simply a collection of rules; but its not, it's a relationship. Through Philippians chapter 3 we have been reminded that the Jews of old were rule keepers, but their hearts were far from God.

(Mat 15:8) *'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men'.*

We read this morning that Paul's greatest desire to know Jesus (Phil 3:7-11). What Paul didn't say is worth noting.

Paul didn't say, "I want to know all the issues concerning this man called Jesus."

Paul didn't say, "I want to know all the answers to selected questions I have about Him."

Paul didn't say, "I want to know what every Christian believes."

Paul did say, "I want to know Christ."

Paul also wanted others to know Jesus.

Paul preached so others would know Jesus. (1 Cor 2:2) *'For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified'.*

Paul in his prayers desired greatly that others would know Jesus too (Eph 1:16-21).

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Paul lived in front of others Christ so that they could know Jesus (Gal 2:20). If we want to call ourselves Christians and know ourselves to be co-heirs with Christ then we must be Christ-like people. (2 Cor 3:18) *'And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit'.*

That sounds like a reasonable suggestion doesn't it? To be a Christian we must be Christ-like, however I think it logically and theologically follows that to be Christ-like, we must actually know Jesus. As someone has said, "When the church is living as Christ's body, all that the world will be able to see is Jesus." Christ is the one who should be receiving the glory, not man or the church. A church should never be spoken more highly of or with greater favour or passion than the Lord of the church. (Eph 3:21) *'...to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen'.*

So this morning I want to look simply at this recurring phrase of Paul's that we read of in Phil 3: 8-11

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to **the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. **I want to know Christ** and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

There are at least 3 things involved in knowing Jesus.

I. KNOWING JESUS HAS TO BE PARTLY INTELLECTUAL.

We are tempted to jump in with both feet here and exclaim that knowing Jesus has nothing to do with intellectual knowledge. But that would be doing our faith a massive injustice.

Christianity is a revealed religion.

Jesus said in John 6:45: *'It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God. 'Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me'. Some say it doesn't matter what you know, say or do - not true. (1 Th 5:21) 'Test all things; hold fast to what is good'.*

We need to read and study the gospel accounts of Jesus especially if we are really to get to know Jesus more. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John show us more of Jesus than any other book in the Bible. I think it is fair to say that we cannot really know Jesus without really knowing about Him. But did you realise that what we don't know about Jesus can condemn us. Every year at Christmas we remind ourselves of Jesus coming into the world and what happened?

John 1:10: *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him'. What an awful situation to be in. What a terrifying thought to imagine ourselves in. It reminds me of Geoffrey Kennedy's poem:*

When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet, and made a
Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and
human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed Him by,
They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give Him pain,
They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do,"
And still it rained the wintry rain that drenched Him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.

If Jesus were to walk among us today as he did during those early days would we recognised Him from the gospels or would He go un-noticed?

Christianity as a religion is real.

For each one of us, Christianity doesn't begin with a dream, a vision, a better felt than told experience. Christianity begins only through a knowledge of Jesus Christ has done for us. (John 8:24) *"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."* Christianity is the historical fact that God was in Christ reconciling man back to Himself. It was God of all eternity, incarnate, in the flesh, among men, saving men. It wasn't a group of theologians meeting in Jerusalem or Bethlehem deciding what to do to save humankind. Is it wrong of me to then say that since Jesus loved us so much shouldn't we want to know Him.

II. KNOWING JESUS ISN'T JUST AN INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE BUT A PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE.

We say, "We have no creed but Christ" and rightly so (believe/trust). But our creed is surely more than words in a book; He is a person. You can mount a human creed in a picture frame, but you can't confine a person to a picture frame. Jesus' incarnation is a testimony to the fact that God cannot be bound within a book. (John 1:1) *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'.* (John 1:14) *'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'.* (John 1:18) *'No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known'.*

It was once said to me that, "It takes a person to reveal a person". Jesus came that we might have a personal knowledge of Him and His Father. Jesus must be in our hearts and be allowed to work in our lives on a day to day basis. I think it is fair for me to say that in this world, even in Ulster, a lot of people have Bibles, but very few have Jesus. Paul wanted a personal knowledge of Jesus. (John 14:23 NKJV) Jesus answered and said to him, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him"*.

The word "know" means "to have a personal intimate relationship." This is the ultimate privilege of New Testament Christianity. We must know Jesus and not just know about Him. Christianity is more than just accumulating facts. This morning, if that is all that you holding onto, then I need to tell you that it's not enough.

III. KNOWING JESUS IS A KNOWLEDGE THAT COMES THROUGH A RELATIONSHIP.

As a people, we have not done so well in relationships. We can't always get along with others, family, neighbours or even our brothers and sisters in Christ. We can see why people have trouble with a relationship with Jesus. Relationship without commitment is like a house without a foundation. (John 15:13-14) *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you"*.

We must have a personal faith in Jesus. Rom 10:17: *'Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ'*. We cannot have faith for someone else, in the same way we can not be saved by someone doing it for us. Each person is responsible for their own faith. As some of you know sadly sometimes faithful Christians' children leave the faith or never embrace it. And it's not always the parents' fault. Knowing Jesus is more than information; it is an encounter. Definition of an encounter is, "A direct, often momentary meeting." Preaching Jesus is an encounter where Jesus demands a response. Paul wanted to know Jesus intellectually, personally and relationally.

What is your response this morning?

Do you like Paul want to know Jesus?

Our choice isn't an overly complicated one.

It's either yes or no.

If we say no then we have to be prepared for Jesus to say of us on the day of judgement, I never knew him, I never knew her. Depart from me.

How could he say other than this since we made a conscious decision NOT to know Him?

Can you honestly say that this is what you want to hear?

Or on that awful day, can you imagine your eyes meeting the eyes of your Saviour, as a big smile forms on His beautiful face, and he says your name in a way no one has ever said it before, then,

"Welcome....My friend."