

“I Know Whom I Have Believed”

INTRO

An old man sat in a cold Roman prison.

* He had just dictated a letter to a dear friend, and he knew that he would soon be executed for his faith.

The insane emperor Nero, after setting fire to Rome, had blamed it on the Christians, and now he was rounding up and killing as many of them as he could in order to turn attention away from himself. The old man who dictated this letter was later beheaded. But even though he knew he would soon die, he had had no fear at all. Instead, just before he was executed, he wrote these words of victory and hope in that letter.

* The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day. Who was this man, and why could he have such faith and hope for what awaited him after he died? To find the answers to these questions, we will look at his letter, which became the New Testament book of 2 Timothy. The answer to the first question is simple. The apostle Paul, who wrote or dictated most of the books in the New Testament, is the man who had this great faith and hope. The answer to the second question is found in the first chapter of this letter. Let's look at what he wrote to his disciple and fellow missionary, Timothy, in verses 11 and 12 to find the source of his faith and hope. (NIV)

* And of this Gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

There's a lot in this passage, but this morning, I want to focus on the concept of knowing Jesus Christ and what it can mean in our daily lives.

I. KNOWING JESUS CHRIST

A. THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE AND SALVATION

*A At Chapel, we often use the expression “knowing Christ” or something

similar in our messages. There are a number of other terms that are related to it.

*B For example, being forgiven, born again, or saved, or becoming a Christian or becoming God's child.

All of these expressions refer to what happens to us when we put our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. And all of these things happen the moment we come to know Jesus Christ personally by faith. Not know Jesus as a mere historical figure, such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi or Julius Caesar. We can all pick up a book and read about these men in order to know about them, but that's not what the apostle Paul was talking about in 2 Timothy. He was talking about knowing Jesus in the same way I know Katsuyuki or Keiko—they are people I have a personal relationship with.

* Jesus said that eternal life is knowing the one true God.

It's having a relationship with Jesus Christ, who is this God who came in the flesh in order to die for our sins on the cross. We say it often in our messages, but Christianity is not like other religions. It's not a system of ceremonies and rules that men have come up with in an attempt to get to God or the gods. It is fundamentally a relationship with the God who created us and loves us so much that He died in our place on the cross.

B. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD

If you think about Paul and who he was, his words to Timothy are even more amazing. The Bible tells us that before Paul became a Christian, he zealously and harshly persecuted Christians. He was highly educated, having studied under one of the most famous and respected teachers of his generation. He had a very bright future ahead of him in the leadership of the Jewish faith. But then, on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem, something totally unexpected happened to him.

* Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him, and, because of this encounter, his life was changed forever.

He soon realized that he'd been completely wrong about Jesus. Jesus was not dead but risen from the dead. And the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah made it clear that Jesus was, indeed, the long-awaited Savior of the world. And as a result of his coming to know Jesus Christ, Paul spent the rest of his life traveling throughout the Roman Empire telling people about Him. It cost him his social status, his financial security, his physical comfort, and all his former friends. But Paul

never denied Jesus.

* As he wrote in 2 Timothy 1:12, he was not at all ashamed to be in prison for preaching the Gospel.

Paul used the same word “ashamed” in his letter to the church in Rome many years before.

* In Romans 1:16 he wrote,
I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

The Gospel — in other words, the good news that our Creator loves us, the good news that He took on human form in order to come to this world and make it possible for us to begin a relationship with Him — the gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ. This is why Paul wrote this in his letter to the church in Philippi. (3:7-8)

* Everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

This is an amazing statement coming from a man like Paul. But we know that he meant every word of it because of what he endured because of his faith. In verse 8, he doesn't just say that knowing Christ is better than all his past accomplishments.

* He uses the expression “surpassing value of knowing Christ.”

Knowing Jesus Christ — in other words, becoming God's child, receiving forgiveness for our sins, and gaining eternal life —all of these are of “surpassing value” compared to the earthly status, fame, wealth and prosperity that most people are striving after today. Many people have a hard time understanding this until something happens that shakes their life's foundation ...the loss of their job, or a loved one's illness or death. But Paul knew that knowing Jesus was the most important thing in life.

C. THE BASIS OF OUR ASSURANCE

1. Knowing Jesus intimately

And as Paul lived his daily life based upon his faith in Jesus, he came to know Jesus more and more intimately.

Jesus wasn't a mythical figure or a distant, unconcerned Savior. He was Paul's Master and Creator, and also his Friend. And it was the personal aspect of his relationship with Jesus that gave Paul the assurance he had as he faced imminent death. Jesus had watched over him for 30 years, and Paul knew Jesus had not abandoned him now at the end of his life. Yes, he was facing death, but Paul knew that death comes to everyone someday. He knew that being a Christian doesn't mean that we have a problem-free life. He also knew that those who have a relationship with Jesus never face the problems of life alone. He knew that Jesus was a faithful Friend. And not just that — He was almighty God. He had no doubt whatsoever that Jesus was with him there in that prison cell. And he also had no doubt that his physical death would not be the end of his existence. It would be the beginning of a new existence that would be far more wonderful than anything he had experienced or could imagine. Paul had no doubt whatsoever that Jesus would welcome him into heaven when he died.

* Not because he was such a good person, but because he knew His Savior, and knew he could entrust the salvation of his soul to Him.

* Paul knew the foundational truth of the Gospel, that we can never be saved by our so-called "good works".

Because of God's amazing love and grace, we can be saved by faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin. If it depended on our needing to earn forgiveness and salvation, no one could be saved. But, as Paul sat there in prison awaiting his death, he had peace because He knew Jesus, and he knew that Jesus is faithful. Paul's heart was filled with praise to Jesus for His mercy, goodness, faithfulness, and grace. Because he knew Jesus Christ intimately, Paul was not at all afraid of what awaited him. For him, death would simply be the door through which he entered into eternity with his precious Lord.

2. Peter denied Jesus because he did not truly know Him

This is where Peter went wrong the night Jesus was arrested. Peter had spent 3 years with Jesus, but he didn't really know Him.

* The story of his denial of Jesus that night is well known, how he boasted he would die for Jesus rather than deny Him

* A Yet, when he was challenged that night by a servant girl about being one of Jesus' disciples, do you remember what he said?

*B “I don’t know the man!”

Peter was obviously lying in order to save his skin. But if you stop to consider his denials, it’s obvious that what he said was true in the deepest sense. If he had, he would never have denied Him. Knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus.

II. HOW TO KNOW JESUS

So, how do we come to know Jesus in this way?

A. BEGIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

It starts by beginning a relationship with Jesus by repenting of our sins and putting our faith in Him as our Savior and Lord. All we need to know about our Creator’s love for us, His desire to become our heavenly Father, and all He has done to make such a relationship possible is found in the Bible. The Bible alone is the source of the truth need to know about Jesus before we put our trust in Him.

* 2 Timothy 3:15 says that

The holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

And we can seek Jesus with confidence because we have this promise in 1 Timothy 2:4.

* God desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

If you seek to know your Creator and Savior with all your heart, you can be sure you will find Him. God has given us the following promise in Jeremiah 29, which, coupled with 1 Timothy 2:4, makes it very clear that we will come to know Him if it is the desire of our heart.

* You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.

B. NURTURE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

But beginning a relationship with Jesus is just the start. We need to nurture that relationship if we are going to be able to have the same degree of assurance that the apostle Paul had. We do this by taking time to read God’s Word daily, and spend time in prayer talking with Jesus.

And also by gathering regularly like this with others who know and love Jesus.

C. MAKE HIM OUR LORD

Also, if we truly want to know the Lord intimately, He must be our Lord. Or we must at least truly desire Him to be. Remember what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:8?

*** I ... consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (HCSB)**

When it is our desire to know His will and walk in it, we will come to know Jesus better.

*** When we let Him live His life in us and through us as Paul wrote about in Galatians 2:20,**

Paul had made Jesus Christ his Lord. He was allowing Jesus to live in him and through him by faith every day of his life. And he allowed Jesus to do this because he knew something about Jesus. He knew that Jesus loved him unconditionally and that it was Jesus' love for him that motivated Him to give His life on the cross for Paul. And because Paul was assured of Jesus' love for him, he could entrust his whole life and the salvation of his soul to Jesus. And because he did that, Jesus became more and more real and intimate to Paul.

D. LONG TO KNOW HIM BETTER

One last thing. We will come to know Jesus more intimately when we long to know Him intimately. This is where many of us struggle, I think. I know it's where I struggle.

I am, by nature, a doer.

If I see a task that needs to be done, or a challenge that needs to be met, my natural reaction is to analyze the situation, jump right in and get to work! It's much easier for me to do something for the Lord than it is for me to slow down and take the time to worship Him and seek His face. Can anyone else relate to this struggle? The sons of Korah wrote in Psalm 42:1-2,

*** As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. (ESV)**

And David wrote in 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. (ESV)**

When I compare my relationship with Jesus to the attitude that the sons of Korah and David had, I have to admit that Jesus has not yet become the ultimate desire of my heart. But I want him to be, and I think most of you do, too. Hosea's words in Hosea 6:3 are appropriate here for all of us who know Jesus.

* Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt in my mind that this is the key to living the Christian life as God wants us to live it. It's the key to our church becoming all that God wants it to be. It's the key to becoming more like Jesus.

* Knowing Jesus Christ ... this is eternal life!

Friends, do you know Jesus Christ? First of all, as your Savior and Lord? And then as your faithful Friend who will never leave you, forsake you, or betray you? He wants each of us to know Him. May knowing Jesus intimately be the passion of our hearts just as it was for the apostle Paul. As Paul daily fought the good fight, finished the course God had prepared for his life, and kept the faith, he came to know Jesus ... really know Him.

* And he could say, while sitting in that prison cell, "I am not afraid to die.

I know the One in whom I believe, and He is faithful. He will take me to heaven when I die and reward me for the life I have lived here by faith with His help." We can have the same assurance that Paul had ... if we want to and are willing to seek the Lord as he did. And we can have the assurance that no matter what we encounter in life, we can face it because we know the One in whom we believe! Before we close, let's take a minute or so to quiet our hearts and think about what we've just seen from God's Word. And then, before we pray, I'd like us to sing "Lord, I Want to Know You More" as our heartfelt prayer to the Lord.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the love and grace You showed to us by sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. And Jesus, thank You for dying for us even though You knew that most people would reject Your love and sacrifice. Lord, we want to know You ... really know You. We can't do it without Your help. Lord, grant us the grace we need to make You the all-consuming passion of our hearts and lives. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.