

God Speaks and Acts

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon us with might and power and deep conviction at this time. We ask, Father, that you would help us in the power of the Holy Spirit to know that we are in your presence, that Jesus is the Savior and that he is Lord.

And we ask, Father, that as you draw us into your presence that we will know that you desire to give us grace, to establish us and deepen us in your grace and your love.

And help us, Father, to be in your presence, to receive from you in a worthy manner, and to respond to you in a worthy manner. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. We're doing a sermon series entitled Knowing God. And I guess I'm just going to use this.

I forgot about the mic. I feel scattered this morning for some reason. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's the constant, unrelenting heat. By the way, kudos to you folks to leave your cool, air-conditioned domiciles and to enter the soup and come here.

[1 : 1 5] So way to go. So we're doing a series called Knowing God. And on one level, this is a very, very simple session. Once again, on one hand, it's the idea.

In fact, if you could put up the first point, Claire, that would be very helpful. That unless the triune God revealed himself, you could not know he exists. Unless the triune God revealed himself, you could not know he exists.

It's a very simple idea. But, well, as part of my sermon preparation this week, on Friday night, with some of my grandchildren, I watched Angry Birds 2.

I don't like to just study, you know, Calvin and Aquinas and stuff like that. Occasionally, you need to prepare for things like this topic by watching something like Angry Birds 2.

Actually, to be more honest, I was watching Angry Birds 2. And as I'm watching Angry Birds 2, I thought, wow, this actually sort of fits in with my sermon this week. It was more that way.

[2 : 1 8] Now, this isn't much of a spoiler alert. And I don't know how many of you have watched any of the Angry Birds movies. But Angry Birds 2, sort of, I guess, at the end of Angry Birds 1, the red bird is the hero of the movie.

And what happens in Angry Birds 2 is that everybody's praising him all the time. But it turns out that he has a very deep insecurity. And his deep insecurity goes right from the time he was a tiny, tiny, tiny little chick.

And as he grew up as a child and as a teenager, and his great insecurity is that nobody would, that he'd be all alone. And it's not so much that he'd be all alone, because all of us like being alone sometimes, is that he'd be all alone in the sense that nobody wanted to know him, and nobody wanted to have a relationship with him, that he would live, he'd been living his life, in a sense, unknown and not able to know anybody.

And so he was reveling in all of this praise, the fact that people, sort of, would notice him. He was reveling in it. But really, as I explain to my grandkids occasionally, I'm sure much, I'm sure they just completely and utterly ignored me.

The three-year-old has, far more interested in the cute little red birds and other birds up on the screen than anything her papa's going to say. But anyway, the movie goes around upon this particular theme.

[3 : 39] It's one of the themes of it. And in fact, the movie is touching on one of the deepest human needs that we have. Human beings have this profound need to know and to be known.

Not just to know other people, but to know and to be known. One of the, those of you who struggle with addictions or alcoholism, you might or might not realize this about yourself, but for those of us who've struggled with these types of things, one of the problems that alcoholics and addicts have, and in a sense, it's a human problem, but people who struggle with alcoholism or addictions, they have it at a deeper level, a more profound level, a more potentially life-destroying level.

which is they have this deep fear that if people actually got through the surface, the force field that they put out, and got to know them, that people wouldn't like them.

That in fact, often alcoholics and addicts have this belief that the more you know them, the less you'll like them. And yet, and so what often they do is, those of us who've struggled with those things, is you try to numb it in some particular way with the drugs or the alcoholism.

You're often still consumed with shame at a deep level about yourself, but even though you worry about this, and so you create fronts, and you do all this other type of stuff, at the end of the day, and you might try to numb it, but you have this deep, deep, deep desire to know and to be known that all human beings have.

[5 : 18] Just a couple of weeks ago, Louise and I had supper with somebody, and the woman's quite a remarkable woman. For the last 15 years, she's been one of the primary caregivers for a youngish woman who has severe cerebral palsy, and she's completely and utterly uncommunicative in terms of being able, she has no verbal skills whatsoever, and basically every single thing that has to be done for her has to be done, she can't do anything herself, everything has to be done for her.

She's completely helpless and completely and utterly non-verbal. And this woman has been caring for her, one of the primary caregivers for this woman for 15 years.

And I think the young woman's in her early 20s. But one of the things that came out very powerfully as we were talking is that even though this very, very, very, very handicapped woman with severe cerebral palsy is completely non-verbal, she can still communicate, and she still knows, and in fact, actually, she really knows this woman, we'll just call her Sue, that there's in fact a deep relationship between the two of them, even though she has no words.

Because, you see, there is this fundamental human desire to know and to be known. And so this woman, her face lights up with a huge smile when she sees Sue, and Sue's face lights up with a big smile, and there's obvious ways, even without having to use words, that they can have a relationship.

Obviously not the same as they can with somebody who can speak and all of that type of stuff, but there is this profound relationship that happens between them, and for this woman with the cerebral palsy, she, like all human beings, has this desire to know and to be known.

[7 : 03] It's a very, very profound human need. So when you hear this idea that unless the triune God revealed himself, you could not know he exists, often what happens is we immediately want to go into all sorts of types of arguments about this.

There's obviously some problems with the Christian idea that what Christians would say is that the way that God reveals himself is primarily in four different ways. That on one hand, he reveals himself through nature, and by nature, it's the creation.

That on one hand, the conscience in human beings is a bit of an indicator that God exists. The fact that we have minds is a bit of an indicator that God exists. That just the beauty and the grandeur of nature, there are all these different things in the world outside and the world inside of us that in some ways point to the fact that there is a triune God that does actually exist.

And then, of course, Christians say it's not just general revelation. There's what's called special revelation. There's the Bible, the Word of God, that God has actually communicated to us with words, that every word ultimately in the Bible, at least in the original manuscript, is the exact word that God wanted to be there and that God communicates through his Word.

And then, of course, it's not just a matter of general revelation, the special revelation of his Word, that the preeminent way that he reveals himself is in the person of his Son, in Jesus, in what Jesus did during his life and the words that he said and especially his death upon the cross and his resurrection, that that's the pinnacle of God's revealing himself to human beings.

[8 : 38] And that it's not just a matter of us knowing some stories and things about Jesus in the past, that what happens is that when God knows us, when God comes into a knowledge of us and we come into a knowledge of him, it's mediated not just by the Word and by knowing Jesus, but the Holy Spirit literally comes and moves in our lives and brings, in a sense, Jesus home to us, the Father home to us, the Holy Spirit comes into us and that we know God.

And these are sort of the basic Christian ideas. But at the heart of it all is this fundamental idea that God wants, not just fundamental idea, however we want to talk or think about this doctrine of God revealing himself, it has to always be understood in the context of God, of human beings having this profound desire, this profound need to know and to be known.

You see, there's an extra mystery to this, which we all know, and it comes up actually in some of the ways that people respond to the idea of Christian revelation.

I remember one of my summer jobs, I had to work as a painter in a bell building, a bell telephone building, and for the summer we were working in repainting those parts of the building that most people don't see.

It's where the heating and the whole pile of the behind-the-scene guts of the buildings were and I was with this professional painter and I had to be his assistant and we would paint every day.

[10 : 24] And he loved to talk about the Bible and loved to talk about theology and one of his big complaints about the Christian faith is that why doesn't God just, if God wants to know me and he wants me to know him, why doesn't it make it more obvious?

Like, why doesn't he just show up and appear to me if that's what God actually wants to know? Well, there's different versions of it and as I would talk to him, he'd have different ways of doing it. But here's the thing and I'll tell you some of the things that he would say and they're things which I've heard from many other people over the years.

Actually, every criticism of God, in a sense, reveals something about us and it reveals something about us, not just in our relationship with God, but actually the fears and the longings that we have and the problems and idiosyncrasies we have even if we want to know another person.

So, for instance, why couldn't God just make some display every night? If he really wanted to be known, if he really wanted you to know him and if he really wanted you to know him and he wanted to know you, why couldn't he make his existence more obvious?

So, one of the obvious ways that he could make it more obvious is that, I don't know, every night at five minutes before midnight and he would do it in every time zone from five minutes before midnight to midnight, every night there'd be a big thing in the sky that everybody could see, the appropriate language, all of the appropriate languages, I exist and I want to know you.

[11 : 55] Like, why wouldn't God do something very, very obvious like that that every human being every night if they wanted to know whether God existed, they just had to be up at five minutes to minute or set their camera or whatever and they could see this sign every night.

Why wouldn't God do something like that? If he really wanted to know you and to be known by you, why wouldn't he make his existence far more obvious than general revelation and the Bible and Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

But if you think about it for a second, for many, many, many people in the world, if God did something like that, maybe for many of us even here, how would we respond to it? The fact of the matter is that we wouldn't respond to it by saying, good grief, God really does exist.

I better allow him to know me and I'm going to allow him to speak his word into my life and I'm going to love him and I'm going to adore him. No. How would most of us react? Why is God so showy?

Is he needy? Like, why does God have to do such a big thing like that every night? Like, he's too showy, he's too pushy, he's too needy. Like, you know, God shouldn't reveal himself in that way.

[13 : 02] That's how we'd respond. If, instead, God was to try to be very present in your consciousness, in your emotions, if he decided to reveal himself in such a way that you could never just evade him, that you always immediately felt him as a very, very, very present power in us, it probably wouldn't lead us to want to worship him.

In fact, what we would say is that he's too intrusive, too intimidating, and we would take him to be more like a stalker than a lover.

if God was to provide a human being with a knocked-down, dragged-down, unrefutable, logical argument and set of logical arguments for his existence, we would say, why all this cold logic?

Why no creativity? Why no love? If God was to only, if God was to give you less evidence for his existence, if he was to give you less evidence than the Bible or Jesus, we'd say, why doesn't he give us more?

If we were, if he had only created one religion so that we had absolutely no choice, we'd either have to follow the one religion that he created and he would stop all other religions from existing, our response would always be, I think I could do something a little bit better.

[14 : 30] And if he forced you to believe in him, well, it would be like when I was a kid and you'd get wrestling with a bully or a bigger kid and they'd get on top of you, they'd finally wrestle you down and they'd say, I'm not going to let you up until you say that I'm better than you.

Well, you'd fight against him and fight against him and fight against him and eventually you'd say, okay, you're better than me to get him off of you. But inwardly, you'd say, no, you're not. you're worse than me.

But you wouldn't say it out loud because you want to get up. And that's what would happen if God was to do something, was to, in a sense, force us to believe in him, that the fact of the matter is, is that if he forced us to try to believe in him, we'd end up saying, I don't believe in you.

In fact, we actually would say that we hate him. You see, here's part of the thing, is that not only human beings have this profound and deep need to know and to be known.

The fact is that when I described how addicts and alcoholics often have this deep fear within them that if you really got to know me, you wouldn't like me, you wouldn't love me, you'd like me less, that all of us can resonate with that to some extent.

[15 : 52] that even for the most narcissistic amongst us, there would still probably be a tiny bit of a awkwardness and embarrassment about some of the things that are about us.

But at the same time, there's something ornery about us. There's something about us that in terms of, not only we have this deep desire to know and to be known, but we also have this, in fact, sometimes we have just this profound frustration that we can't know and that we can't be known and sometimes we just have this profound frustration that when we try to make a good friend or something like that, we put our foot in our mouth, we trip over what we want to do, that we come on too strong and force them and then they think we're like a stalker or where we come across as too needy.

The fact of the matter is that we both want to know and to be known, but there's part of us that doesn't really want to know and to be known and there's part of us that worry that we'll do it in such a way that it overwhelms our freedom and there's part of us in such a way that makes us worry that we don't want to give up, we don't want to surrender all of ourselves, we're afraid of being fully revealing and that we human beings are very, very complicated and the only solution to most of that stuff is a love, a love that is deep and that is real and that is unchanging is, that's actually connected to wanting to know and to be known is a desire for love because it's, for those of us who've experienced it, one of the great mysteries about great love is that when we are most in love we are both, we feel both most free and most bound to the other person at the same time.

And so we human beings are a riddle and a mystery and it's, if we think about that a bit more deeply, it's hard, actually, we start to realize it's actually hard to think that if God wants to know us and to be known by us, that part of the problem with that ever happening is in us.

Probably the best text in the Bible to help you understand what it means for God to want to know you and to be known by you is seen in Matthew chapter 11 verses 25 to 30, which is what we'll look at just very briefly right now.

[18 : 41] It was the gospel text which I read and it goes like this. At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Father, no one knows, sorry, all things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Now just sort of, you know, pause there for a second. Here's this very interesting little thing just up a bit before that God has hidden these strings from the wise and understanding but revealed them to little children.

You see, the type of knowledge that we ultimately desire to know and to be known is, it's not something that depends upon our IQ.

Like, to know, to try to figure out quantum mechanics, to try to figure out some very, very complicated mathematic things requires a particular type of mind, a very, very high IQ.

[20 : 01] People who can figure out a lot of complicated engineering things or accounting things or are very, very good at amassing a lot of knowledge about history or strategy or technique.

It requires high IQs and it requires lots of disciplines and it's a very, very small number of people and the harder the knowledge is, the smaller the number of people are. but we know that that's actually not the type of knowledge.

I mean, that's a good knowledge if you have those, that type of mind. Good for you. Use it wisely and well to the glory of God. But that's, that the amazing thing is, is that that type of personal knowledge is something that a person with severe cerebral palsy is capable of.

A Down syndrome child is capable of. a street person terribly broken by their drug addiction or their alcoholism or their mental illness has the potential to have this type of personal knowing and to know.

And so when Jesus says here that it's been hidden from the wise and the learned but made available to children, it's not just talking about a type of humility to receive from Jesus to start to realize that maybe if the problem of knowing and knowing God isn't so much and how God does it but the problem is in me.

[21 : 17] The problem is that somehow or another there's something broken and angular and both very, very desirous but very, very fearful and very, very confused and the problem is in me that that message about the little child is giving us a bit of a clue that maybe we need to be the, to understand that we need to be the ones to sort of stop for a second and let God be God and for him to do something to reveal himself to us but it's also letting us know that the type of knowing, this type of personal knowing, this type of love that is ultimately what God wants to communicate to us is something that in fact even children are capable of, that all human beings are capable of.

It's not just something for the intellectual or the IQ elite. It's something which is just deeply human and is available from everything from the tiniest little baby to the most handicapped individual to the most broken by illness or addictions to the most brilliant in theory all are capable of having this type of knowing and known and be known and which is all characterized by love.

And then it's further when Jesus said in verse 27 all things have been handed over to be my, my father and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him.

This is just this doctrine which I said at the beginning that unless the triune God wants to reveal himself we could never possibly know him. And Jesus is saying that, you know, at the end of the day all of the Bible all of general revelation all of the Bible and by general revelation that includes the fact that if you start to actually analyze and look at your heart and if you realize that there's this desire to know this fear of being known this desire for love this fear of being loved this, this, these false starts these successes and all of this complication and that that's pointing to that there's some type of a riddle about you that unless God comes in in a way that respects your freedom and respects your integrity and your dignity and comes in and offers himself in a way that you can receive and does what you cannot do for yourself that you cannot even possibly know him but that all, all of the general revelation and special revelation of the Bible all of it culminates in the person of Jesus.

in his life and his death and his resurrection that he is going to be the one that makes it possible for human beings like you and me to know God and to be known by him for him to reveal himself.

[23 : 57] And it's very, very interesting because it says all things have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows the father and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him and then we sort of have this pause.

Okay, now he's going to say that only people who are same-sex attracted he's going to reveal himself to or only those who are other-sex attracted he's going to reveal himself to or only people who are from Africa or only people from a wealthy neighborhood or only people from Asia or he's only going to talk about good people or he's only going to reveal himself to special people he's only going to reveal himself to people who have positive self-regard or a good sense a good control in their life and are successful or he's only going to reveal himself to those who are broken in particular ways in whatever ways that we try to spin it as if all of a sudden there's going to be some type of a criteria by which Jesus is going to reveal the father to us this all comes out but in the very same breath that he says that no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him his very next words are come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest are you same-sex attracted come to me all who labor and are heavy laden are you heterosexual come to me all who labor and are heavy laden are you watching this in Africa or in Singapore or in South America or in Rockcliffe Park or in Ledbury come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke and my burden is light come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light see the triune God reveals himself to be known and to know you in a covenant of love that's the second point the triune God reveals himself to be known and to know you in a covenant of love not in a one night stand not in a fling not in an affair but in a covenant of love that he desires to reveal himself to you so that you will know him and he will know you and then that knowing of you and knowing of him can be something that will continue and deepen there obviously at your end there can be step backs and stepping away and confusion and all of those types of things but that he wants to do this to know you and to be known by you in a covenant of deep love that respects your freedom and who you are

I mean actually if here we'll just say one more thing maybe one more story and then we'll bring this to a close if you could put up the third point the person words and works a work of Jesus reveals the triune God and redeems all who receive him it's a very simple point but here's the story that shows the depth the depth of his love if you turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23 verses 35 to 43 Luke 23 verses 35 to 43 we have this very wonderful story only recorded by Luke obviously based on eyewitness testimony of one of the things that happens when Jesus is hanging on the cross and here's how the story goes and the people stood by watching but the ruler scoffed at him saying he saved others let him save himself if he is the Christ of God his chosen one in other words and then the soldiers also mocked him coming up and offering him sour wine and saying if you are the king of the Jews save yourself and there was also an inscription over him this is the king of the Jews and one of the criminals who were hanged railed at him saying are you not the Christ save yourself and us you see in other words what they wanted was they wanted

Jesus to reveal himself in a type of way of power that if he had done it it would be like knowing your bank statements it would be that type of knowledge it would be like seeing the sign in the sky that even after you saw the sign in the sky of God revealing himself like that every day you'd still just say well that's just an interesting fact of nature it's not a personal type of knowing you see at the heart of all love all love is always going to have to involve sacrifice after sacrifice a giving of yourself and a giving of yourself and even a type of sacrifice to receive love a sacrifice of setting aside your pride that you can do this for yourself to receive the gift of love from the other person to not think that when a young child tells you a joke that you could tell the joke better but to sacrifice those desires of pride and arrogance and to just take great delight that that young child would like to have a conversation with you and that they would share no matter how poorly told that joke you see it's the proud and the arrogant and the desire for power the opposite of what Jesus was talking about in Matthew chapter 11 that keeps us from knowing and being known it's yet another reason why he said that unless you're like a little child that it's little children that he reveals it to it's that type of humility it's that type of childlike love that both to know another person you're going to have to make sacrifices for the other person and that even in receiving love you need to make sacrifices that put to death your pride to be able to receive that love and that affection from the other person and so here we see that even as Jesus is dying upon the cross the demands of people who are crucifying him and even sharing his death is for him to reveal himself in a way which is merely of power which would merely be that we know something about him but given that God wants to reveal himself in such a way that you can know him and be known by him in a covenant of love and given that you're worried and should be that he's going to do something to overwhelm your freedom and also just worried about your own inability to really love that even your best relationships of love on this side of the grave are often filled with things that constantly need forgiveness and other types of intervention of grace to make up for your mistakes and your inabilities and your weak and your lacks and your brokenness and the things that you do that are just wrong and that what we really need is on one hand within the context of a covenant of love is by respecting our freedom and knowing us as we really are with nothing left out every single wart every single bad thing every shame every excellence to have that type of perfect knowledge which is shown to us in a sacrificial love and God doing what we cannot do but not overwhelming our freedom but respecting who we are and still an act of love that's what we need from God and we can only receive it if we put down our weapons and just say

God I don't know what on earth you could do with a mess a person like me and that's where the next part of the story is so powerful verse 40 but the other rebuked him saying do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation and we indeed justly for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds but this man has done nothing wrong and then he turns to Jesus now Jesus knows that this guy is not a good guy his this guy has already just publicly confessed that he deserves to die whatever he did that was wrong it has led him to this point in his life that he deserves to die and there is nothing he can do to fix that he can't all of a sudden say I'm going to learn how to do the Hail Marys

[33 : 13] I'm going to learn how to use the book of Common Prayer I'm going to have a charismatic experience I'm going to start to clean up my act I'm going to stop drinking I'm going to stop doing drugs I'm going to stop doing all these you know all the affairs I had I'm going to start making some money I'm going to get my life in control I'm going to go he can do nothing he's hanging up there on a cross and he's doomed and he turns to Jesus and says Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom he's like this other famous story in the gospel where Jesus says you know the the proud religious person says look at me I do this I do this I do this boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom alpha male and then there's other person who's lived a completely disreputable life and all he does is stand at the back and says have mercy upon me a sinner doesn't even look his eyes to heaven and Jesus says the man who was at the back he's the one who wants home forgiven not the guy who just parades all of his things and so this guy says Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom

I mean he sees with the eyes of faith that Jesus actually is the king of kings the king of love the king of beauty the king of peace that his kingdom is the one that is characterized as what I call the covenant of love that's what the bible calls it he literally can say to Jesus nothing in my hands I bring simply to you I cling and Jesus' response to him is truly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise today you will be with me in paradise you see the triune God reveals himself to be known and to know you in a covenant of love Jesus knows every single thing about you when he dies for you and still he dies for you out of love and he doesn't expect you to fix yourself to be with him and to know him he has to do it all and he just asks for you to stand and come into his presence and humbly say

Jesus take me as your as your own be my savior and be my lord hard for me to believe that your desire is to know me in a covenant of love and to have me know you in a covenant of love that begins on this side of the grave and will go to all eternity but just as you said to the thief on the cross today I say to you today you will be with me in paradise I claim that prayer promise is my own that I trust that what you did on the cross is good enough to make me your own and your covenant of love for all eternity that you can do what I cannot do you can come into me and make your home in me and fit me for heaven and be my hope for glory reveal yourself to me and start to so free me up as I think upon your death upon the cross and your great love for me that I can start to reveal myself to you knowing that you will not be ashamed or turn your face away in disgust at anything

I share with you but that your response will always be to me child child child let me know you more please come higher into me and know me more invite you all to stand let's bow our heads in prayer father we give you thanks and praise that you desire to know us in a covenant of love and we give you thanks and praise that when we put our faith and trust in Jesus we enter into that covenant of love with you that we are in Jesus and he is in us that the Holy Spirit brings us into that covenant of love and that you will never let us go and we give you thanks and praise father that you who are infinite

Lord Jesus Christ you who are infinite Holy Spirit you who are infinite that your love is infinite your goodness and your beauty is infinite and that our small beginning steps of knowing you and being known by you on this side of the grave can continue on and on and on into the depths of eternity and never be exhausted because you are the infinite beauty and infinite goodness and infinite love and we give you thanks and praise that you have made us for yourself as Augustine said and that it is only in you that our hearts begin to know the rest the rest the wholeness and completeness that you desire for your children for all eternity so father we give you thanks and praise that you are god that Jesus is our savior that the holy spirit brings us to Jesus and brings us to you and we ask that you would do your work more and more in us today to the end and all this we ask in the name of Jesus your son and our savior amen for your family one one one one two three one one one