

KNOW JESUS

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[0 : 00] agricultural excursion for school, staying in a motel in a small country town. This motel, for some of you, this will be familiar. It's one of those motels many years ago where they had the cupboard near the front door where the motel owner or whoever it was could open the door from the outside, slide the breakfast in, and then you open the cupboard from the inside and get your breakfast. I had one of those little cupboards still in operation. And in the wee hours of one morning, a number of my fellow students decided it was a great idea to jump on me, to secure me in my sleeping bag, and to put me in that cupboard, and to lock the door of the cupboard with the cord from the kettle, all against my will and without my prior knowledge. It was in that moment, locked in that cupboard, small cupboard, completely dark, that I realized how much I enjoyed my freedom, and how little I wanted to be buried alive in a coffin. And it's fair to say that in that moment, I went nuts, and I kicked that little cupboard apart, totally apart, in my bid for freedom. Of course, their lack of planning meant that it was their breakfast cupboard, and not the one from my room that got destroyed.

They also had further explained to do when a sheep from the agricultural block of the neighboring high school ended up in their room painted green. And the green paint discovered in the main perpetrator of me being placed in that cupboard in his bag. There was a lot of explaining to do. Somehow, I managed to get out of that one scot-free. All of us, no sheep were harmed in the process, I might add.

All of us value our freedom. We value the freedom to choose to do what we want, behave how we want. And when that's threatened in any way, there is significant pushback. The importance in the Western world of individual freedom and personal choice is very high. And ironically, it grew out of Protestant theology, especially theology of salvation by faith alone through grace alone, and the call for every person to make a conscious decision to put their faith in Jesus. The culture that we now live in has gone way beyond what it was once the Bible's revolutionary concept of freedom. Freedom of choice is now freedom of choice without any form of limitations. And that has become sacred.

There is, in our culture, no concept of objective and absolute truth. In fact, that has been rejected. No concept of absolute or objective truth that must be understood and accepted. It is up to you, the individual, to make up your own truth. So absolute truth is rejected, and it's up to you to make up your own truth, which ironically is itself an absolute truth claim. Freedom from any constraints is the new moral absolute, absolute truth. So that the only sin which is not tolerated is intolerance.

[4 : 19] And so you have things like the Supreme Court in the United States declaring in a judgment case on abortion that at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence or meaning of the universe and of the mystery of human life.

At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, even if that concept of existence is to end the life of another.

In this worldview, religion is seen as the enemy. Religion is seen as stifling of autonomy and freedom because it seeks to impose a universal worldview.

In his recent book on preaching, American pastor and theologian Tim Keller writes, the late modern mind, which is the culture that we exist in, presents itself something like this.

We have come to realize that we don't need God to explain the world we see. Science does their job for us. We don't need God or religion to be moral, to love, and to work for a better world, or to have meaning and fulfillment in life.

[5 : 36] What we need is to be free, to live life as we see fit, and to work together to make the world a better and more just place to live.

If religion gets in the way of all of that, it constrains our freedom to live as we see fit, and it divides us so that we cannot work together.

So get God and religion out of the equation, and you won't have the external constraints placed on you, and so you're free to live as you see fit, and in that freedom, somehow, as we all live individualistically for our own freedom, we're going to make the world a better place.

We as a church exist in a culture that is drifting like a raft in a vast ocean of individual freedom and choice with very few solid anchor points to truth and reality.

It wants to exclude God. And freedom appears to be up there as the highest of orders.

[6 : 47] It appears that we've got freedom, and yet at the same time, purpose and meaning and hope are declining. And so rather than taking God out of the picture to find purpose and meaning and freedom, here at St. Paul's, we want to put God at the center.

It's in our mission statement. It's a purpose statement. It is a statement that describes the reason why we exist as a church. It says that we as a church exist to know Jesus, to treasure Jesus, to represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

And that's what we're going to look at in the next five weeks. And I want to spend the rest of my time here this morning exploring as to why we want to make that statement shape our corporate and personal lives here in this church.

And I want to focus on the first bit this morning, just the first bit, that we exist to know Jesus. If religion, and especially Christianity, is such a stench in our culture, why would we say amongst that culture that we exist to want to know the heart of Christianity, want to know Jesus?

Well, to answer that question, we need to go back to the beginning. And as Deb has read from Genesis chapter 1, Genesis 1 makes the very significant point that there was no reality before God.

[8 : 20] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Before creation, God was.

He stands outside of all things that are created. God is from everlasting to everlasting, no beginning, no end. He spoke the universe into existence.

He speaks. He's a God who speaks and who creates. He is the one who never had a beginning, but has always been, always is, always will be, and therefore he defines all things.

God himself, in himself, is ultimate reality. The absoluteness of God's existence is incredible for us to consider and ponder.

The fact that he never had a beginning, never will have an ending, never becoming, never improving, simply and absolutely there to be dealt with on his terms, or not at all.

[9 : 30] Reality is created, defined, determined by God, which means that when God speaks as he does, what he does is he reveals reality.

That is, when he speaks, he reveals truth. That's what truth is.

It's reality. It's the way things actually are. Listen to what Psalm 119, verse 160 says about God when he speaks. It says, All your words are true, all your righteous laws are eternal.

What that Psalm says, verse 160 says, is that the sum total of the word of God is truth, but it also says, All your righteous laws are eternal, which is not just the sum total is truth, but all the individual parts are truth as well.

The whole and the parts are all truth. They are true because when God, who is ultimate reality, speaks, he reveals things the way they actually are.

[10 : 49] And truth is when ultimate reality, the way things actually are, and the revealing of ultimate reality, align with each other.

A lie is the opposite. A lie is when this is reality, and what I say about reality, don't connect. So if you had a corpse here today, someone was dead, and I said the person's alive.

That's a lie. There's no beat there. There's no breath. The person's dead. And the astounding claim of the Bible is that the place where reality and the communication of reality come together most profoundly is in the person of Jesus Christ.

First, it's because Jesus communicates truth. Jesus says in John chapter 18, verse 37, For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.

Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. And so what Jesus is saying there is that he speaks truth. He speaks things the way they actually are.

[12 : 16] And if you want to know reality, you want to know the way things actually are, you listen to Jesus. He says something somewhat more profound a couple of chapters earlier in John.

In John 14, verse 6, he says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

That is, he doesn't just speak truth, but he says, I am the truth. Not just communicate the truth, I am the truth.

And the only reason that he could claim that he was the truth or that he is the truth, that is that I'm absolute and I'm universal in truth, is that he is in fact God.

Because that's what God is. He is truth. which is exactly what John 1 affirms, which was just read out to us. So if you've got John 1 there in front of you, let's just have a look at what it affirms.

[13:22] It says, in the beginning was the Word. That is, the Word existed before anything was made. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God.

And the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning, through Him, that is, the Word. All things were made.

Without Him, nothing was made that has been made. So the Word existed before anything was created. The Word made everything.

This Word is God. Therefore, this Word is ultimate reality. This Word is absolute truth. And then down in verse 14, we see something startling.

This Word became flesh and made His dwelling amongst us. And we have seen His glory.

[14:20] The glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. And so you're left with a question. Who is the Word?

Who is God? Who existed before creation? Who created everything? Who is full of grace and truth? Who's it talking about?

Verse 15. John testifies concerning Him. He cries out saying, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.

From the fullness of His grace, we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

See, Jesus doesn't just communicate the truth. He doesn't just communicate God's Word. He is the Word of God.

[15:27] He is the center of God's self-revelation to His created order. And that is why we here at church, at St. Paul's, say that we exist to know Jesus.

That's why we exist to know Jesus. And so if that's why we exist to know Jesus, the question is, how do we get to know Jesus?

And it turns out the answer to that question is exactly what we've just been doing. We've already seen briefly in Psalm 119, God speaks.

God reveals Himself to His created order. And 2 Timothy 3.16 is pretty explicit on God's revelation to His created order.

It says that all Scripture, that's referring there to the whole Bible, is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

[16:35] You see, the Bible is not just the record of God speaking, it is the means of God speaking, of what is real and absolute to His world, His created world.

Jesus made the claim that this Bible testifies to who He is. It says this in John 5, verse 39, you diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life.

These are the Scriptures that testify about me, and yet you refuse to come to me to have life. That assumption there in John 5 lies behind our core value of Christ-centered Bible saturation.

The Bible is the way that God, the ultimate and all-important reality, reveals Jesus to us with clarity and authority today.

If God is more important than anything, then the Bible is more important than anything but God. And so we desire here at St. Paul's to be saturated in it, to be shaped by it, to be corrected by it, trained by it, rebuked by it, instructed by it.

[18:00] Everything that we face in this world is touched by the Bible. It is either directly touched because it's in the Bible or it's indirectly touched because the Bible shapes the attitude and the criteria in which we deal with it.

It gives light, it gives perspective and meaning, its truth needs to permeate everything, all things in this world will find meaning in the worldview that's built by the Scriptures.

And so the Bible has a dominant place in the corporate life of St. Paul's. Dominant place in our corporate worship. We have community groups that gather to study the Bible and apply it and we

want to encourage every single person to pursue regular habits of Bible reading and meditation. As you look forward into 2016, how are you going to grow in that area? Notice, however, the warning that Jesus gives in John 5.

It is possible to search the Bible for God and miss God. If we pursue knowledge of Jesus for its own sake, it is bound to go bad for us.

[19 : 33] It will make us proud and it will make us conceited. As the great theologian J.I. Packer has written, to be preoccupied with getting biblical knowledge as an end in itself, to approach Bible study with no higher motive than a desire to know the answers is the direct route to a state of self-satisfied self-deception.

That's a warning for high-value Bible people Bible. What is the ultimate aim in wanting to know Jesus through the Bible?

The supreme desire of the writer of Psalm 119 was to know and enjoy God himself. And he valued knowledge about God simply as a means to that end.

He wanted to know about God in order to know God. He wanted to know the truth about God so that his heart might respond to it and his life be conformed to it.

And so friends, it's not good enough to simply know your Bible. Our aim is to seek to know Jesus through the Bible to be led to Jesus and in being led to Jesus have life in Jesus.

[21 : 01] Our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance with the God who defines all things. And so one quick tip on how to turn that knowledge about God into knowledge of God.

It is both demanding and simple at the same time. it's just simply this. Turn every truth that we learn about God into a matter of meditation before God which leads to prayer and praise to God.

I'll say it again. Turn every truth that we learn about God into a matter of meditation before God leading to prayer and praise to God.

Meditation is the activity of calling to mind lingering over dwelling on and applying to yourself what you've learned from the Bible about the works and the ways and the purposes and the promises and the character of God.

And the effect will be humility. That will be the impact. It will humble us as we contemplate God's greatness and his glory and our own littleness and our sinfulness.

[22 : 40] It will encourage and comfort us and reassure us as we contemplate the unsearchable riches of the Lord Jesus' mercy to us. So how do you know if you're making progress in knowing Jesus?

Those who are making progress in knowing Jesus have great energy for Jesus. Those who are making progress in knowing Jesus have great thoughts of Jesus.

Those who are making progress in knowing Jesus have great boldness for Jesus. Those who are making progress in Jesus have great contentment and joy in Jesus, no matter what the circumstances of life.

so maybe you're sitting there now and you're thinking well why would i be bothered finding out about jesus and becoming acquainted with jesus what's the take home for me what's the take home for our world jesus said another astounding thing a little later in john's gospel john chapter 8 he says if you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free know jesus and you know freedom jesus promises promises us the very thing that we are all striving for in this secular individualistic culture true freedom freedom indeed he says and i take it that every single person in this room wants to be free free in the in the deepest and fullest sense i once spoke to a man in hospital many many years ago on a hospital visit uh he was dying of emphysema hooked up to the tanks i shared jesus with him he said no thanks not for me and i asked him don't mean to be rude but looks like there's only one way out of here for you uh why why reject jesus he said to me i don't want to lose my freedom he's hooked up to oxygen tanks i want to suggest to him that freedom was an illusion i'm assuming that every single person here wants freedom in the deepest and fullest sense and that is if the opposite of freedom is bondage and slavery no one here wants that now i also acknowledge that it's possible that you are enslaved to some habits that are very pleasurable and in that sense you might enjoy your slavery even so all of us here would rather be happy in freedom rather than enslaved to pleasant addictions we all want to be truly free and so jesus makes this walloping statement if you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free and the people gathered around said to jesus something that we might say to jesus in that moment what are you talking about jesus i'm not a slave to anyone they answered him we are abraham's descendants

and have never been slaves of anyone how can you say that we shall be set free you see they're thinking about one aspect of freedom but Jesus something think about something completely different and he immediately clarifies I tell you the truth everyone who sins is a slave to sin that is a walloping statement right there and it would take ages to unpack all the implications of it and to put it briefly Jesus is saying that everyone sins and therefore everyone is enslaved to sin and that means that sin is not just some bad act that I do here and there occasionally but it is a power that controls my heart and rules my life and it makes us do bad acts and sets us up against God and sets us up against other people

that's the reason why we cannot work together for a better world there are many kinds of freedoms that we can make for ourselves in this world but not this one this slavery is too deep and all of us are entangled by it sin enslaves by making anything in this world look more desirable than knowing Jesus just dig a bit deeper and find out what the real treasures are in your heart that's the real issue for sin I value this more than Jesus and it also enslaves us by eventually damning us it enslaves us unless something intervenes and that's why Jesus says in verse 36 of John 8 if the son sets you free you will be free indeed because Jesus truth reality is the only one who can set us free he frees us from the damnation of slavery by becoming damned for us on his death on the cross as our substitute and he frees us from the dominion of sin over our hearts by changing our hearts in such a way that we see him as infinitely valuable and desirable and he frees us to truly love him and love other people it may be here you're still here and you're still saying Steve I am already free you know it's you Christians who all get tied up in moral knots you know I just do what I like I do what I feel all I like and I'm thankful a country where I can do that you know I can go to Coles and I can have eight different peanut butters it's my choice it makes the shopping long and that's all the freedom I care about so let me just give you a fuller definition of freedom you are fully free and what it means to be totally and fully free you are fully free when you have the desire the ability the opportunity to do what you want and it leaves you no regrets forever that's total freedom if you don't have the desire to actually do something you're not fully free to do it that is you've been coerced or forced to do something that you don't want to do so desire is essential for freedom and if you have the desire to do something but you have no ability to do it then you're not free to do it I want to travel the world but I'm hooked up to a machine that doesn't get on planes might want to do it but you can't do it so if you have the desire and the ability to do something but no opportunity to do it so I'm not hooked up to a machine I want to travel the world I'm free to do it but I've got no money in my pockets I'm a backpacker maybe you're not free to do it and so if you have the desire to do something the ability to do something the opportunity to do something but it destroys you in the end then you're no longer free so let me just expand that with an illustration if you like let's take parachuting you make it to the airport without having an accident in the car okay tick that box you've got the freedom of opportunity you've done the classes and you know how to parachute tick that box

[31 : 32] you have the freedom of opportunity and the freedom of ability you're up there in the plane a couple of kilometers up you're hovering along you look out the door tiny clusters of houses and sheds and dams and you can't wait to jump out of the plane tick that box you have the freedom of desire you're not frozen by fear in that moment and so you jump and as you free fall every second of it you're loving it loving it unknown to you your parachute is defective and it's not going to open no matter how hard you try even though you don't know it yet you are in fact enslaved to destruction and it will be a regret it feels like freedom but very soon the whole thing all the exhilaration will prove to be an illusion

I was not truly free in 30 seconds you will be dead it baffles me every time on the news some bloke is interviewed because his mate has just been killed he's just been eaten by a shark out surfing and his mate says well at least he's died doing what he loved like that was on his mind as the great white was gnawing on him tick the box at everything else except that one it cost him his life as a predecessor of mine said in this pulpit over 20 years ago self-preoccupation is a terminal illness it will kill you in the end you're not truly free to be fully free we must have the desire the ability the opportunity to do what will make us happy forever no regrets it will never come back and bite us and only Jesus the son of God who died and rose for us can make that possible if Jesus sets you free you are free indeed to be happy forever our sins must be forgiven and God's wrath removed and Christ must become our supreme treasure only Jesus can do that for us in fact he has already done it for us he died on the cross he absorbed

God's wrath he rose from the dead and today therefore is supremely precious and he offers us life forever as a free gift that's why we exist to know Jesus by Brother I deinemond how you are the shark under us is you can ■ nas ■ I ever what you you can ■ yeah ban going this rockí and going I can ■ beat you you can ■