

A God You Can Know

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[0:00] Well, would you turn with me, please, in your Bibles back to Luke chapter 10. So we'll read from verse 17 again.

In that same hour, he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.

And said, Let us bow just briefly in prayer.

heavenly father as we've prayed examine our hearts so too we long for the fruit of that examination for your holy spirit just now to take us to the things of truth and to work in our hearts faith and assurance to stir up in us a renewed sense of obedience and a call to faithfulness in your service above all father we ask today simply that you would lead our hearts to a place of settled knowledge may we know our god and knowing you may we rejoice as jesus did in all things we ask this for christ's sake amen so luke chapter 10 is one of these passages that allows us to listen in to the prayers of jesus to his father that itself is really striking you know what we overhear is not technical language it's not ritual formality it's not the speech of a servant approaching a different a distant master or that of a diplomat approaching a foreign king he doesn't speak about god he speaks to god and it is the prayer of a son who knows his father and that matters because the christian faith teaches us to relate to god in the same way and one of the great blessings of the christian faith is that we are brought into the family and the household of god that we are adopted and brought into a new relationship we're therefore not invited to speak to god as an abstract a force that's out there that we somehow commune with but rather to see him as our father not a remote ruler to be approached but a father to be clung on to run towards not to be approached with special and carefully chosen words but to be approached in the rawness of our feeling the bible doesn't encourage us to soften this at all doesn't allow us any space to hide this but rather when scripture records prayer in fact it's always recorded showing us the intimacy and the closeness particularly of jesus to his father and that's something that we need to reflect as well this morning what i want to do is think about this prayer of jesus and think about really the knowability of god the fact that jesus prays to and presents to us a god who is knowable a god that we can relate to and know and trust a god who today wants to be known and who longs for us to know him not to keep him at arm's length therefore but to hold him close and to have him as our friend that's what jesus is rejoicing in here god who is lord of heaven and earth and yet a father who reveals himself to his children so as jesus prays first of all he addresses his father as lord of heaven and earth and it's really important that we grasp this particular point because this is the first place that we can get to know god paul talks about this in fact in romans uh in romans 1 verse 20 paul writes and says for his invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made and so people are without excuse when they say they do not know god in his ways it's quite a startling thought there are some things about god that are knowable and god himself is in some way knowable from the creation that he has made from everything around us because god has left his fingerprints all over that creation we want to see that in the way paul says his invisible attributes are there to be seen namely paul says his eternal power and the eternal power of god is the magnificence of god's power and creative influence and being in everything that we see you see it as you look out into the heavens as you look out into the depths of space and you see the vastness of space and you see the vastness of it and yet the fact that there are forces at work that almost defy our understanding and that at the very edges of human knowledge and science we see out in the universe structures in play clusters of galaxies that string together in cosmic superstructures and yet down at the smallest and most intricate levels that we can look at beyond even the most powerful microscopes that magnify light itself we can see down into the subatomic realm i'm often thought i always feel very sorry for murder mcphail who tried to teach me chemistry in school because when i went to

university first year in university was just spent deconstructing everything that they teach you in high school science because it's just not nearly complete enough and the truth of that realm of science is so intricate and marvelous and all of the structures that we see in all of the physical world that we see it all comes from simple equations of probability beyond the subatomic realm and in all of this complexity god has left his fingertips fingerprints he's left traces of his character for us to see because paul says it's not only his divine power that's on display but also his divine nature and i would take that to mean god's holiness and his justice that in the realm of nature what we see is forces at work that require responses in some ways that's just a simple fortune reaction equation but we see it in natural justice as well that when something wrong happens there is a crying out for justice there exists in creation a natural justice that needs to be served and god's fingerprints are there because god is a just god and so our sin cries out for punishment justice has to be served against wrongdoing we're seeing it just now with the epstein scandal as it just continues to rumble through public life everyone knows it's wrong but there's a difficulty to ascribe justice in this situation just how wrong is it and how do we get to the bottom of it well i can assure you and i would assure the rich and the powerful of the world if they were here today in fact of this that there is a god who sees there is a god who will one day exercise judgment we've sung of it this morning already [9:22] there is a god who sees and knows and who does not forget the injustice that has been perpetrated against individuals god can be known because the cosmos tells us there must be justice and paul tells us that it's the suppression of that knowledge that leads to human beings sinking into depravity and abuse and shame it's the suppression of god's knowability that actually leads people down these routes of depravity and wickedness and before we get carried away with pointing the finger at the rich and the powerful who seem to be above the power of the law to catch them we should also remember that we do the same ourselves the tiny little sins the tiny little abuses the tiny little moments of neglect of what we ought to have done cry out against us and they demand justice and so today i wonder which camp are you in?

are you in the camp that suppresses the knowledge of god and says i don't want to know him or are you in the camp that says god is someone i want to know god is someone i need to know because my own sins demand that i need his help demand that i need his intervention in my life you see the next phrase that Jesus uses kind of confirms this he says father i thank you that these things have been hidden from the wise the wise of this world think themselves so smart so clever they think themselves so assured that they've got the world sussed out that they understand how things work that they understand what's going on in their own hearts a lot of the time that they know what's going on that the knowledge of god for them can be suppressed and yet god is knowable because he is a god who reveals himself this is the second thing that we should give thanks for today that we have a god who hides and reveals the truth now it's interesting the way Jesus speaks here he says i thank you father that these things have been hidden from the wise and understanding and revealed to little children and it's really important that we grasp just briefly what these things are that these things that have been revealed are things that Jesus speaks about in this context what he speaks about is actually this thing where the 72 return from their mission and they tell Jesus about how the demons are subject to them in his name so in the name of Jesus they've been casting out demons they've been healing the sick and so on all the things that Jesus sent them out to do and when they come back they're rejoicing they're saying Lord even the demons are subject to us in your name and it's that truth that triggers Jesus to say i saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven and this is the truth that is being revealed the demons are subject to the disciples in Jesus name Satan's power to blind Satan's power to enslave and deceive the nations has been broken the kingdom of Satan has been crippled by what Jesus has done and it's interesting that the Greek language itself supports this Jesus the way Jesus speaks here it's like i'm currently seeing Satan fall from heaven this isn't talking about something that happened at the fall thousands of years earlier it's not something that talks about what's going to happen someday in the future when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead it's talking about right here at this moment during the ministry of Jesus Satan's kingdom was falling Satan's power was crumbling it was being destroyed and you might think as the disciples they're hearing that and they're thinking wow we're part of this and Jesus cautions them against rejoicing in the wrong thing he says to them

just remember rejoice yes but rejoice more so in this not that you can cast out demons in my name and that they are subject to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven because that's where the real action is taking place the real victory is a victory that belongs entirely to Jesus because of where these people's names are written the disciples names and our names if we're believers are written in the Lamb's book of life it must be an enormous book it must be huge the number of pages for the millions upon millions of people whose names are in it but there is a book there it's repeatedly referred to in scripture

God has his list and this book the names of those who are saved by the Lamb whose names have been written there before the foundation of the world they're there because of the victory of Jesus when he finally came into the world ultimately climaxing in fact in his death at the cross because the book belongs to the Lamb who was slain their names have been written before the foundation of the world all the way back in history in time before even time itself but their place there hinges on the obedience of the Son to come at the cross and die for his people at that moment in time and Jesus says this God is knowable because of this victory God is knowable today in the victory of Jesus now I wonder if you would put yourself in the shoes of a child for just a moment and you think about what children boast of very often the things that a child will boast of is their father's prowess my dad's bigger than your dad and it's almost comical in some sense but the point is that a child rejoices in the victory of their father they know their father is strong they know their father is capable they know their father loves them and looks after them they know their father has done everything for them they know their father will fight for them they know their father is the one who secures them which that's what we ought to think of human fathers fail so that that model doesn't hold up sadly in every child's life but that's the ideal and it's the same for us we can think of our father as the victorious one in Jesus the father who sent the son the father who commissioned him to come and do this work and the father reveals himself to his children in the victory of Jesus and today you're invited to see that at the cross you're invited in fact next

[17:09] Sunday to come and taste in fact of it to literally remember the death of Jesus in your place to savor that victory in its fullness will you not know him would you not come and trust in him he is thirdly Jesus tells us a God who therefore also delights in gifts and who is known in being a joyful giver of gifts you see the way the argument follows Jesus in that very hour rejoices in the Holy Spirit and says I thank you father lord of heaven and earth that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to little children yes father for such was your gracious will it's a wonderful little phrase your gracious will the word that's actually used in Greek there is the word goodwill and it's the same word that's used at the beginning of Luke's gospel when the angelic host appear to the shepherds and they say these wonderful words glory to

God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom God is pleased the pleasure of God in revealing and sending the son the messiah is the same pleasure that Jesus is speaking of here that God delights not only in sending his son to be a savior and who brings glory to the father through that work of salvation and his work of obedience but God delights in now making that story making that good news making that gospel known to us he delights today in you and I hearing this good news and saying Jesus has been victorious and now it is a gift held out to you it is a free offer today made to you a free opportunity to receive good things from

God and this is the God we can know this is the God who is knowable because of his gracious character there's a way of thinking about this in terms of mercy and grace justice we know we deserve we deserve punishment for the wrong things that we have done mercy is when that punishment is held back grace is when we receive something we do not deserve grace is when we receive life everlasting instead of the death we deserve grace is the gift of God and so I wonder if you would reflect for a moment on this today and think about all of the times where you have experienced that grace just pause for a minute and think about all of the times you have received grace you know grace for when prayer has been answered and I think in my own life about the times where prayer has been answered and it's remarkable the times where I've been so aware of a crushing sense of sins defeat in my life and I've been overwhelmed and overpowered and left helpless because of my sin and I've cried out to God and his mercy has come in like a flood and his

grace has revived and brought about redemption and salvation where there ought only to be death and destruction that's not just praying about the times where you've lost your passport and you can't find it at the last minute and you need it it's praying about the times where your life has been spared and where new hope has been brought to you where light has shone in the darkness where things have been fixed that were irreparable where relationships have been restored where the most basic foul ups in your life have been overcome by a gracious

God who is pleased to help his children that is the God that we can know a God who reaches into our despair and who brings us hope and today we have that same God held out before us that same God who is available to us that God who reaches into the fires and the destruction of our lives and will take us out of it and set us on a place of sure footing and sure ground the truth is all of these moments that you can look back on God is in them God is working already in the lives of his people and he is making himself known through his grace there's a wonderful expression in Hosea Hosea chapter 1 verse 10 it says in the place where it was said to them you are not my people it shall be said of them you are children of the living God and this is how our God is known he takes people who actually deserve to be left lost and abandoned cast out utterly and he takes them and he brings them in as his children and says I will be to you a father and you will be my son what a privilege that is to us today to know that there is a God who wants to adopt us into his family who wants to welcome us out of his mere good pleasure out of his grace peace there is fourthly a God who is known in this thing that Jesus talks about the father has handed over to me authority you see it in verse 21 for in verse 22 all things

[23:57] Jesus says have been handed over to me by my father and no one knows who the son is except the father or who the father is except the son and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal him all things have been handed over to me Jesus says and this is the truth God is known in the way he has handed over power and authority to Jesus this is a bit tricky so let me just try and explain this and get the logic of this right the 72 have returned and they're rejoicing and they're saying we are so delighted to report that even the demons are subject to us not because we're great but they are subject to us in your name so at the name of Jesus miracles are being performed at the name of Jesus demons are being thrown out of blighted lives at the name of Jesus freedom has come into the experience of these people and we see that today still

I think about the work of road to recovery for example we see their very tangible evidence real evidence of the victory of Jesus that in Christ's name people are set free released from slavery and addiction we see it in the gospel we see it in the stories of repentance in people's lives we still see this it still happens and it's at the name of Jesus and so Jesus then rejoices in the Holy Spirit thanking the Father for the revelation of this for the revelation that this has been to these humble little children those who have come with that childlike humility to the Father those who have come with that childlike faith trusting in Jesus and then he acknowledges all things have been handed over to him by the Father so the all things that I think he's referring to there has to do with salvation it has to do with this work of

Satan's kingdom being broken and cast down and destroyed of Satan's power itself of Satan himself falling collapsing in fact it goes all the way back to the very beginning of the Bible to the first proclamation of good news that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent would deliver a fatal blow to the serpent and that is what Jesus achieves and he achieves it because of a functional reality within the Trinity and this is a deep theology it's a difficult theology for us to grasp in its fullness but it is that within the Trinity there is what we could call a functional subordination we know the Trinity the Godhead is the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit and these three are one God same substance and glory and power same entitlement to the praise of the nations they are equal in every way but within the function of the Trinity and the function of our salvation there is a subordination enters in the Father sends the

Son and the Son although he is equal with the Father agrees to be sent and then the Son as part of his victory sends the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit now comes and dwells within his people there is that subordination of function and the Father in order to achieve all of this Jesus rejoices in this truth the Father has handed all things over to the Son that today every aspect of our salvation is rooted in and secured by Jesus himself because he has been given that role in its fullness by the Father the

Father has said it's yours to do and now Jesus has come and he's obeyed and he's gone to the cross and he has done what is necessary for your salvation and mine so much so that at the end of the cross he can say it is finished there's nothing more needed no more work to do and all of this is for our security because there is just one person just the perfect one tool that is needed to complete our salvation and one practical example of this will be next

Sunday as we come to the Lord's table when Jesus instructed us to say and said do this in remembrance of me he's inviting us to a means of grace he's inviting us to a means by which our faith in God can be strengthened by which we can receive encouragement because in the Lord's Supper we remember everything about our salvation rests on the work of Jesus it rests on what he has done now I know that there is a tradition in our island in our culture in our congregation where some of you think that I need to be strong enough to go to the Lord's table that I need to go to the [30:15] Lord's table having already attained a measure of strength and I want to say to you simply this Jesus has done it all the father didn't say I'm going to give some of the authority to Jesus but I'm going to hold back a little bit to give to you know Ian Murdoch or to Gordon Matheson to say they have to get themselves to a point where they can receive our salvation doesn't work like that it's all of Jesus and so when we come to the Lord's table what we come to is a proclamation of our whole dependence on Christ and you're not going to find strength for anything else what you'll actually find instead is when you come in that obedience when you come in humble childlike obedience to the

Lord's table you will receive the strength you long for you will receive the strength there that you're craving that you need because it's a means of the grace of God flowing into our lives as we take part of that bread and that wine by faith because it's all of Jesus it's not of us and that's the God that's knowable today a father in God who has given all of that responsibility and all of that authority and all of that power everything that is necessary for the salvation of his people it rests with Jesus today and so we come to the Lord's Supper to remember what Jesus has done Paul says in Romans 8 this is how we know

God this is what we know of God he he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things!

God as the one who offers you the full security of knowing God as your friend as the one who is the victor over sin and over Satan and over death itself and who says now will you not come and so I would ask you today to follow after Jesus pray to him ask him to give you faith ask him to give you that gift of hope and trust in Christ alone that you may know him as your saviour let's pray 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 lord may you today reveal these things to people here may you make yourself known through

Jesus the saviour and may we be given the faith of little children who will trust in their father's power in their father's might that we would rely on him and know him in that victory we ask all of this in Christ's name amen we shall sing in conclusion in psalm 147 in sing psalms page 192 I think although I've said we'll sing verses 1 to 7 we'll just sing verses 1 and 2 because the time is definitely gone so we'll sing the first two stanzas oh praise the lord how good it is to sing him songs of praise how pleasant to give thanks to him for all his gracious ways

[35:29] I will stand and sing these two stanzas to his praise oh oh praise oh praise the lord how good it is to sing him songs of praise how blessed to give hands to him!

for all his gracious way the lord builds up Jerusalem and he it is alone who reaches to Israel to bring the exiled soul now the grace of the lord Jesus Christ the love of God the father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and always amen as