Knowing God

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[0:00] to turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 17. I'm going to read through the first three verses. So, John 17, verses 1 through to 3.

John chapter 17, the first three verses. Now hear God's Word. When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You. Since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given to Him. And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

Well, may God bless His Word. The prayer is much longer than that. It is the entirety of John 17, but in absolute fairness, so much is said per word almost, per sentence, that to read all of it and to cover all of it in one go would just be a little bit too much. So, this evening, we're just going to focus on the first three verses, important three verses that they are. Last week, we saw that Christianity exists because Jesus does. It's quite as simple as that. Christianity is Christ.

Christianity is Jesus. In other words, if there is no Jesus, there is no Christianity. By the very definition of what Christianity is, you couldn't make it up. You couldn't actually make it up because it requires God to send His Son to give a spiritual revelation or revelation complete in order for us to know any of these things. Now, that argument is both a little bit technical and difficult, but it can be made positively and, you know, with an absolute assurity. The issue here tonight is Christians' claim. And the claim is this. It's not just a made-up claim, but it's that Christianity is describing a people who know God. I want you to think about that for a moment because here God is mentioned as the true God. God is very aware that the world is full of idols, hence why He says, you know, you're to have no other gods before me. He's not, for a moment, you know, making the case that there are actually other gods in the sense of deity and divine. No, He's saying, look, there are people down here in the world that can make up gods, treat objects and images as though they were gods. And so when He says, you know, I am the Lord your God, you're to have no other gods before me, that's what God is referring to. I am the true God. You know, don't run after anything man-made. Don't go after anything that's made up. Now, when you understand that and you really believe that, listen to the claim.

Christians are a people who know God, the only God. Just let that sink in. Just let that sink into the point where now you find yourself in the rest of the world. You know the Creator. You belong to the Creator. And other people out there may have certain beliefs and certain ideas, but you know Him. [4:06] The issue here is, is what does it mean to actually know God? And that's what Jesus is getting to hear in His prayer in John 17. Christianity is not describing a group of people who have thoughts about God, though we do have thoughts about God. It's not describing a group of people who then decide their, decide to share their thoughts with other people. No, Jesus is getting right to the very heart of what it means to know God, and He gets right to God Himself. Do we get confused between knowing and knowing about? Do we get confused between knowing God and knowing what God actually did? And Jesus isn't mentioning any of those as such. You know, how do you learn about God? How do the children in this church learn about God? You know, the quick and easy answer would be, you know, you've got teachers teaching them. Yeah, that's absolutely true. What about what? How do those children get to know God? Well, you're in the same way. You have someone teaching them about God. You know, what about you or your friend who doesn't know God?

How do they get to know? You know, the quick and easy answer would be, well, because I tell them. Yeah. But is that the actual answer? No. The actual answer is, is that it has to be a work of God to actually know. Anything less than that, then you're simply letting the person know about God. And that's the distinction being made here in the first three verses. When you proclaim God to

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somebody else, you are introducing them to things about God. Hopefully, that God, through the power of His Word, will bring them to Himself. Then they know God. But there is a distinction to be made between people getting to know about God through listening to a teaching, through learning for a friend and all those things, and actually knowing God for themselves, which only God can do. God has to wake us up to that reality. Now, that's a simple answer. But what does it actually take to know God according to Jesus in His prayer? Verse 1. The first thing that it takes is the cross. You say, well, I've read it. The cross isn't mentioned. It is mentioned. When Jesus had spoken these words, verse 1, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.
It's a strange verse if you don't know what Jesus is referring to. The hour has come. What's come? Well, from a covenantal point of view, from a promise made between the Father and Son, the time has come to bring people who don't know you into a relationship with you. That's the time that's come. How do we know that to be the case? Well, go all the way back to John chapter 2, where you first hear this phrase, Jesus is at a wedding in Cana. They run out of wine. And the mother of Jesus comes over to Jesus and says, you know, that they've run out of wine. And He says, you know, woman, what has this got to do with me? Quite a blunt statement, isn't it? What has this got to do with me? And then He says this, because my hour has not yet come. What's Jesus thinking about? Well, what do you think about when you go to a wedding? You know, maybe your own wedding, or maybe a wedding that you're going to have, whatever it may be. Why do we know that Jesus is thinking about relationship when He says the hour has not yet come? Here's why. Because the hour always refers to the crucifixion. Always refers to the crucifixion. So when Jesus says here, my hour has come, and it's not come in John 2, what's He thinking about? He's thinking about the time when God will bring people into relationship with Him, which in Ephesians is described as a marriage.
There is your connection to John 2. So here you've got Jesus. It's somebody else's wedding. Thinking about His own wedding. We are the bride of Christ. Thinking about His own marriage. [8:34] The crucifixion, the hour that comes, is how God is going to bring people into relationship with Himself through the cross, through the hour that has come. And that's what Jesus is referring to here. He goes straight to the cross. The hour has come. The time has come for me to be crucified.

Okay, why? Why? Because the time has come to bring people into relationship with God just as promised. The second thing, verse 1. The hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.
What does that mean? Well, think about it this way. Does God give His glory to anybody else? No, God never gives His glory away. You know, you only have to do a cursory reading of the Old Testament.
Go read Isaiah 42, chapter 48. You'll understand quite clearly that God never gives His glory away. But here we have the Son saying to the Father, glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.
In other words, you're having this exchange of glory between the Father and the Son and the Son and the Father. What does that tell you? What are you supposed to learn? Well, Jesus is both claiming deity. He's claiming that He Himself is God and that God is God, of course.
[10:01] That's the claim. Glorify your Son. God doesn't give His glory to another. He only keeps it within Himself. That's the point here. So, God is agreeing with God that they are going to bring you into relationship.

The Father is agreeing with the Son. The Son is agreeing with the Father that before time began, you were going to be His people. Okay? Anything else is knowing about God.
Here is the very mechanics, the theological framework, as it were, of how God is going to make sure you know Him. Back in Psalm 89, which was the psalm that we read this morning, on purpose, you see the promise.
The Father is speaking to the Son. The Son is speaking to the Father. What are they talking about? We're going to bring these people into relationship with us. That's a promise. We're going to make that covenant.
The hour has come to fulfill on that promise, to make good on that promise. So, here's the picture. Even before the world was created, God is deciding that you're going to be His.
[11:11] I know that that's a big thing to get your head around. But just think about it for a moment. That God had you in mind, belonging to Him, while He had everything else to think about and to do.

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Not that it's going to be difficult for God. And they make an agreement between themselves, or themselves, that they are going to save you. That's the agreement between the Father and the Son. And then the Son says this in verse 5, which we haven't read, but it's worth just looking down to. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.
There it is. So, there's the idea that we get, or that's how we get to this truth. That the Father and the Son are in complete agreement, even before the world existed.
That this exchange of glory, and the Father glorifying the Son, and the Son glorifying the Father, would happen in time. And the hour has come.
[12:15] Jesus says, glorify your Son, that your Son might glorify you. Now, the other thing to notice here is what's missing. When Jesus says, the hour has come, no one belongs to God as such.

You know, in the Old Testament, did people belong to God? Yeah, kind of. Yeah, did they really belong to God? Well, yeah, they really did belong to God. They walked with God. They had fellowship with God. But what is actually going on there?
What is actually happening? Well, the only reason why anybody can have fellowship with God is on the promise that God will keep his promise. It's on the fact that Jesus will actually go to the cross. So you've got all these people in the Old Testament walking with God, in relationship with God, by faith, because God was never going to not fulfill his promise. The hour had to come.
The hour hadn't come in the beginning of John 2. And now it begins to unfold. So you take everything before the cross. Is it possible for people to walk with God?
[13:19] Yeah. But it's only possible because of this hour that will come of Christ actually bringing people into relationship with him. And that takes you to the idea that God, by his very nature, has to be compassionate.

Has to be compassionate. He has to do it out of complete love for you. There's no other reason for doing it. And we get that idea from Matthew 9. You have Jesus in Matthew 9 walking through the towns and the villages.
He is healing the sick. He's healing the people who are physically unwell, disabilities. He's proclaiming the kingdom of God. And then it says he had compassion on them.
He saw the crowds and he had compassion on them. Why? Why? Why? Why? Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. In other words, something's missing.
Something's missing. What's missing? There's no relationship. You've got all these people wandering around aimlessly through life, like sheep without a shepherd. And God looks down.
[14:24] Jesus looks at them and says he had compassion on them. For why? Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. At the very heart of God wanting to know us is compassion for us.

What does Jesus do? Well, he says to the Father, the hour has come. Glorify your son that your son might glorify you. How's that going to happen? Make me the shepherd of those sheep.
I am the good shepherd, Jesus said. How does God bring anybody to himself? Through lifting Jesus high on the cross. Make me the shepherd.
He is the good shepherd. But the people need to know it. Why? Because they're aimlessly walking through this world like lost sheep. And that's just not the people back then. You know, that's the people in your family.
That's the people that you live next door. You know, have they got a purpose in life? Kind of. Kind of. But from God's point of view, it's aimless. It has to be one thing or the other thing.
[15:27] Something, you know, the novelty of one will wear off, and then the novelty of the other will wear on. And there's an aimlessness to it. They're like everybody without Christ is like sheep without a shepherd.

You know, do they know where they're going in life? Of course they do. Have they got a purpose in life? Yeah. Do some of them fulfill it to the absolute fullest potential? Yeah, of course. But in the eyes of God, they're still like sheep without a shepherd.
There is no one to lead them into the place and the position where they really should be. We can tell them, but they only get to know about God. We tell them in order that God reveals himself to them through his word, which he does.
That's the point here. The other issue here is the glorification. It's absolutely central to knowing God, you'll notice. God is glorified and known by everybody because of what the Son does.

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God glorifies the Son the moment he gives authority to the Son to give eternal life to all. Verse 2. Just look at it again. Since you have given him authority over all flesh, why is God given his Son all authority?
[16:43] To give eternal life to all you have given him. You know, how is the Son glorified by the Father? He's given authority.

And what is that authority? To give away eternal life? Or to give eternal life to men and women, boys and girls throughout the generations? The question is, do we actually get to see this exchange of glory?
And the answer is, yeah, you bet we do. We get to see the Son being given authority. Where do we see it? At the cross. Why? John 3.
When Christ is lifted high, he will draw all men unto himself. That's how God brings us to it. The cross is absolutely central to knowing God. Anything less than that, simply knowing about.
So Christians are people who know God because the cross is central. Because of what Jesus has done. There's no other way of getting to know God. Jesus has the authority to give that eternal life out.
[17:43] And he does it because of the cross. The second thing that we notice is verse 3. That eternal life is to know God.

You know, what do you think about when you think about eternal life? It's probably something along the lines of, it lasts forever. But notice that's not what Jesus focuses on here. No, Jesus focuses on relationship.
Eternal life is bringing you into relationship. When he gives eternal life, it is a marriage proposal. In fact, it's better than a marriage proposal. It is absolutely bringing you into marriage with him.
An arranged marriage. Okay. But it's an arranged marriage we're all happy with. Okay. None of us are going to complain about Jesus doing this.
You know, we want God to treat us this way. Why? Because God is compassionate. We're like sheep without a shepherd. We want to know God, but we can't know God unless Jesus gives this eternal life.
[18:47] And what is that eternal life? Well, verse 3, the eternal life is to know God. What does that mean? Well, think about it this way. The only way that you can look at God as a loving God, the only way you can even look at God and consider him to be gracious, the only way that you can look at God this evening and sing praises that contain the words that God is a compassionate God, the only reason you can do any of that is because Jesus died on the cross for you.

How is the Father glorified? The Father is glorified the moment a sinner loves God. And how does he love God? Because Jesus died for him, for her.
So the Son is glorified by the Father, by the Son being given authority to give away eternal life or to give eternal life. And the Father is glorified by the Son because the Son awakens dead people to spiritual life so that they're able to see that God is both gracious and loving and compassionate. Both of them are glorified. And at the very center of that glorification is what the Son did for the Father and what the Father did for the Son. That exchange of glory. And what's bang in the middle of all of that?
Relationship. The relationship between Father and Son and the very idea that we are brought into that relationship because the Father and Son thought it was a good idea. The Son went to the cross, interestingly.
[20:22] Because he loved you? Maybe. Well, definitely. But when you read the end of John 14, what do you hear Jesus saying? One of my favorite verses in the entire Bible.

You know, I do what the Father says so that the world may know I love him. Not you. Yeah, you're included.
Christ really does love you. But Jesus goes to the cross to demonstrate his love for the Father. Why? Because that's what glorifies him. And God gives the authority to the Son to give eternal life because that is what glorifies him.
Now we see how it's done. Now we begin to see how you have actually got to know God. It's not because you've heard a message. It's because of this arrangement between the Father and Son. Deep, meaningful, beautiful, slightly complex, very complex in parts. But this is what the Father has done so that you can know him. Well, we move on then.

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[21:26] What does it mean to know God? You think, well, I've covered that. I haven't. Not really. I've covered what it takes to know God. But what does it mean to know God?

Okay, I've covered what it takes, the cross, the exchange of glory, the divine agreement and covenant. I've taken what it, I've told you what it takes for you to know God.
What does it mean for you to know God? Well, it means that Jesus died on the cross. No, that's what it takes. Well, it means prayer life. No, that's the benefit of knowing God. What does it actually mean to know God?
Well, the Father decided to give his Son. No, that's what it takes. That's what it takes to know God. What does it mean to know God? Get to the very heart of what it means to know God.
Jesus says eternal life is what? It is to know God and the true God and his Son, Jesus Christ. The issue here is one of fellowship, the one of commitment, the one of devotion, the one of being brought in to a relationship between two other people.
[22:38] God is bringing you in. This is what we read in 1 John 5, 20. We read that Christ has given us understanding that we might know him who is true.

But here's the next thing that it says. Number one, Jesus wants us to understand the true God. He has to enlighten our minds, enlighten our hearts, you know, in order for us to know.
But then it says this. This is what John says. Little children, keep yourself from idols. Why? I don't know how hard you find it to keep yourself from idolatry.
You know, idolatry turns up in all kinds of ways, so it's never quite as easy to spot as you might think. But keeping yourself from idols, you know, can be difficult. It's the first thing that God says when he redeems his people out of Egypt.
He gives them all this grace long before he gives them the law. You know, grace comes first, then the law. Don't ever get those two mixed up. The Old Testament is about the law of God and the New Testament is about the grace of God.
[23:40] No. God brought them out of Egypt by grace and mercy and then gave them the law. And what does he say? I am the Lord your God.

You're to have no other gods before me. In other words, little children, now that I've brought you into a relationship with me, keep yourself from idols. Why?
Because this is a relationship. This isn't about knowing about. This isn't about having your head full of information about who I am. This is about relationship. Little children, keep yourself from idols.
So when the Bible speaks about knowing God, it speaks about relationship. And when the Bible speaks about knowing God, it speaks about commitment and fellowship and even devotion. Little children, keep yourself from idols.
This is why I think that phrase is absolutely crucial to knowing what it means to know God. Here's why. Just think about it this way for a moment. A person can know about marriage without ever being married.
[24:46] He may not know what it feels like to be married, or she may not know what it feels like to be married, but you still know about marriage. You still know what it is, what goes on, and what shouldn't go on, and all of those kinds of things.

You can know about marriage without actually having to be married yourself. Secondly, a person can know that God exists, Romans 1, without ever knowing God.
You know, you can know that God exists. You have a general idea. That's what Romans 1 says, the reason why people are without excuse. Yeah, they have a general idea of who I am.
But it's just not enough, is it? You know, you imagine someone saying, you know, I know God. Yeah, great. But it's not enough to describe a relationship.
Well, I believe in God. Wonderful. But it's still not enough to describe a relationship. Why? Because the New Testament is full of examples of people who know God generally, and who believe in God generally, but have no relationship with Him.
[25:50] Those things can exist outside of relationship. And that's the point. What are the things that cannot exist outside of relationship? And it's this.

You can't be married without being married. It's obvious. Right, now you've got the point. You can't be in relationship with God unless you're in relationship with God.
You can know about Him without being in relationship with Him. You can even believe in Him. The devils believe in each other. Those things can happen outside of relationship. But you can't be in relationship without being in a relationship.

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That's at the heart of eternal life. Here's the exhortation. Here's the exhortation. Christianity, then, is a people who know God. Not know about God.
They don't have a head full of knowledge, though. They should have a head full of knowledge. They don't just believe. But they actually know. They actually know the personal walk with God.
[26:51] They know God's interfering nature. They know that God can disrupt things. They know that God can take our life off into a direction that we should have found years earlier.

And then we, you know, we go, right, got it. Now I'm here where you want me. Eternal life, is it describing something that lasts forever?
Yeah, of course it is. But it's really describing the type of relationship you have. And what is that? It's a relationship with a true God. And a relationship where you ought to keep yourself from idols. Why? Because it's a relationship.
Because you're one with him. Now I addressed the issue last week. Could there be a growing separation between being a Christian and the rest of Christianity?
The answer is, yeah. It's sad, isn't it? But is there a growing separation between being a Christian and the rest of Christianity? Sadly, yes.
[27:50] Christianity has become more of a pick and mix menu. With an opt-in and an opt-out. It's sad. But it is a reality. And it's a reality that we have to face and break.

And get back to the truth of orthodox Christianity, as it were. What might be the issue here? Well, the issue here might be slightly more complicated. But it could be the fact that, are you dividing your relationship with God?
Between knowing about and fellowship. You know, I've met several Christians that have got a great knowledge about God.
But sometimes you wonder whether or not if they actually walk with him. You know, it's a challenge, isn't it? You know, do I read my Bible simply to prepare a sermon?
You know, or do I read my Bible in order to have communication and fellowship with God? That's a challenge that I have. Every day, what do I do? You know, can I read my Bible without a notepad?
[28:51] Well, I don't think you should, actually. I think you need to get these things down. But it is a challenge, isn't it? To what am I doing this for? Am I actually relating to a living and true God?

Or am I going through the motions? So is there a growing separation between, yeah, I know God, yeah, I believe in God, but actual fellowship and communion with him?
A deep commitment. And that's a challenge that we all have to face. I can't answer it for you, and no doubt you can't answer it for me. You know, when God created you, he wanted you to share in everything that was true about him.
You know, God created you so that you could share in his goodness. He wanted to give you everything, right? Because he doesn't need us. You know, but he wanted to give everything over to you. That's fellowship.
That's communion. So, you know, as you leave the service this evening, you know, don't leave the service, you know, make sure you're not saying to God, you know, same time, same place next week.
[29:51] You know, how's your Christianity fallen into that? You know, same time, same place next week. You know, check your own heart. You know, I wonder. You know, I'm not, it's just an observation that we can make about all of us.

Check it, same time, same place next week. You know, what about tomorrow? And the next day, and the next, you know, what about every day in between? You know, as you go out the doors, you know, what is it to know God?
Here's the final thought. God has brought you into a perfect relationship with him through his son, through the cross. That's eternal life.
It's deep, it's meaning, it's personal. And in order for that to happen, Jesus had to be forsaken by his father.
That's hard to take. And you hear it from the very words of Jesus himself upon the cross, My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me? And the answer is, so that he doesn't forsake you.
[30:54] That's the answer. My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me? The answer is, so that I don't forsake you. That's the point.

That's why the cross is so crucial to understanding your eternal life and what it is to actually know God. So Jesus says, Father, the hour has come.

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It's time to make good on the promise. So Christianity, it describes the people who know God. Not know about God, not have a head full of knowledge, but people who know God in relationship, in fellowship, who keep themselves from idols.
And most importantly, it's personal. Okay? It's personal. That's your relationship with him.
Amen. Now before we...

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