

Reading: John 17:1-5; Philippians 3:1-11

Theme: Knowing God and Jesus.

This morning we are returning again to the remarkable high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus. We will develop thoughts we've already begun in v1-2 as v3 is a natural follow on from them. Jesus has desired to be glorified by the Father and as this is done, He desired to glorify the Father in His own glorification - the completed work of salvation by Jesus going by the cross to the highest point of glory as the Son enthroned in heaven. On that basis, Jesus reveals in v2 He had been invested with authority, to give eternal life to all those given to Him by the Father.

Last time we considered briefly something of God's electing sovereign love in eternity before time. God has set His people apart in His eternal counsels and they will be given eternal life. Many people consider eternal life as living forever – a true part of eternal life, but is only an insignificant part of eternal life! That may seem a strange thing to say, but it is true, for the Bible's emphasis on eternal life is not centred on its duration, **but** on its quality, richness, fullness, delights and the company we will have!

The recognition of all that God has done in Jesus and to have this eternal life, glorifies God as nothing else can do. Here in v3 the Lord Jesus gives us a description, a definition of those who have eternal life and therefore have a true knowledge of God's glory. Let's just pause a moment and read **v3** again. Now question whether this is true of us. We may be very able, very well read even in Christian things or the Bible, we may be very moral and a nice person, but none of these things

count towards having eternal life according to this definition by the Lord Jesus. Use this verse to measure our basis of hope and confidence of eternal life. This is, more important than anything else in our lives. Sadly, we can fail to recognise and fail to see this and go on without this eternal life-giving knowledge of God. Let's note 3 things in v3:

1. What this knowledge presupposes.

We need the only true God and the Lord Jesus to have eternal life, then if we possess eternal life by knowing this God, then from what Jesus teaches in v2 and in v6 - and in other places in God's word - then we are assured God knew us before we ever came to know Him. We are told we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19) and we can say we know Him because He knew us (Romans 8:29) - God foreknew, predestined, then in the process of time effectively and savingly called us to Him, and we certainly will be glorified.

This golden chain begins with God foreknowing us as His people, knowing us as real individuals. We may be here thinking no one really knows us, but God does, He knows us better than we know ourselves - He knows all about our hang-ups, problems, dreams and hopes. He knows our weaknesses and strengths; our failures and successes. He knows our sin - every wrong thought, words, motives and deeds. He knows how and when we began to question about God and eternal life. He was in work in us to cause it to be so. For some He shocked us into such thoughts, others He led gently on throughout our upbringing, the teaching we have had over many years.

If you have eternal life, a saving knowledge of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is to His glory - for He foreknew you and chose you to be His child to have and receive eternal life. I know we covered this in more detail last time, but it is worth repeating. Moving on and we see:

2. What this knowledge involves.

JC Ryle wrote *“The secret of possessing eternal life - of being justified and sanctified now, and glorified hereafter, - consists simply in this: in having a right saving knowledge of the one true God, and of that Jesus Christ whom He has sent to save sinners.”* In short Jesus declares that He who rightly knows God and Christ is the man who possesses eternal life. This is not to be equated with knowing **about** God and Jesus. It is not a reciting of verses or creeds. It is not even having ability to preach and teach, or understanding many things of the Bible, of Jesus or what He has done, not even of deep doctrines. It is certainly more than knowing **about** Jesus and God.

Yes, an important part of eternal life is to know about Jesus and God – but we need more than a head knowledge. Before we come to know God and Jesus, there will, of necessity, be some level of knowledge about them. We may not like what we learn, may object to it, may find it too far-fetched, but a knowledge about God and the Lord Jesus is necessary. In decades past, we could assume people had a knowledge about God and Jesus, but now very few outsiders of church have any clear idea of who God or Jesus are or if either One of them exists - this means that part of the work of the church is to go and tell people about God and Jesus by our words and lives.

People need to know about, have a knowledge of God, but it is more than a head, an academic knowledge. They have to know it is possible to have a personal relationship, knowledge of and with God - the eternal God, the only true God. There are many “gods” worshipped by people the world over. The Bible declares there is only One true God and He must be known to have eternal life. God cannot be known by searching Him out, by investigation alone. Even if He could be found in that way, what would we really want to find? If we see, define God outside of and apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, He will be a consuming fire, as a terror to our lives, consciences and souls.

We need to have this personal, even intimate knowledge of God, but we can only safely do so by knowing Him in and through Jesus Christ whom He sent. This is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus uses the title “Jesus Christ” of Himself and He does so to draw our attention to the fact that He was the sent and the Anointed One (= Christ) from God.

Yes, this knowledge begins in the mind, with some understanding, but it is realised, recognised and applied in our hearts – not our physical hearts, but the real us, the centres of our being, emotions, that which makes us, us! We come to realise there is a God who can be personally known in and through Jesus Christ. We realise that Jesus Himself is God and was sent on a mission to save people like us. We also recognise that we really do need to be rescued, saved, else we will go to the hell we truly deserve.

Such things and more are recognised, known and we feel as if it applies to us and us alone. People have said to me and many other preachers *“It was as if you were preaching to me and me alone!”* This God makes Himself known to a person, causing them to see that all they are or appear to be, is not enough, for they need to know the Lord, His love and His forgiveness. This knowledge is based on what the Bible says - Bible facts, but facts that are personally applied by God to an individual’s life in different ways and times and people come to know of and to know this God and Saviour as their own. There is this knowledge that brings a joyful acknowledgement from our hearts that this God is our God - *“Now I belong to Jesus; Jesus belongs to me!”* The apostle Paul owned that he had to let go of all he held dear and precious and he joyfully owned the Lord Jesus as his (Philippians 3:1-8).

To know God in this way is not a small thing, for it is to affect our lives as we will go on to see. Yet this is the basis of eternal life - to know the only true God and Jesus Christ who He has sent. We cannot say we know God the Father and yet not acknowledge the Son; nor can we say we love Jesus, but not the Father - in John 14:7 & 9, the Lord Jesus shows us that we know the Father in Him and apart from Him no one knows the Father (John 1:18).

We come to know the Eternal God by the Saviour He sent. We know not only His life giving and changing power, but we know of His holiness, love, forgiveness and many other things about this God. The things known in our head, goes to our heart and affects our hands i.e. our lives in practical ways.

Joseph Hart wrote *“True religion is more than a notion, something must be known and felt.”* It means God affects our lives - our desires, thoughts, words and actions, for the knowledge of God must be felt and shown in the whole of our life. There will be consequences of this knowledge and so we see:

3. What this knowledge results in.

This eternal life-giving knowledge doesn't stay put, but like a seed, it grows and develops over time. It doesn't grow evenly, nor does it grow and make us more secure in eternal life as it grows in us. Our eternal life is secure from the very moment we first come to know this God in Jesus, but as it grows, it gives within us a greater confidence, assurance that we have eternal life.

This knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ that He sent, is to grow, develop and mature in us. It is to be seen as an experiential knowledge - we are to learn of God and His ways as revealed in the Bible and prove them true in our lives. This will involve prayer, seeing promises fulfilled and the like, but all will all be part of that growing process - not just experiences for others, but for us as individuals as they are to be our own experiences and so it is experiential, the experience of our own lives. In doing so we come to know the Lord Jesus and God much better and more personally.

There's never a point where we are to feel that we can stop growing in our knowledge and experience of God in our life. There's a danger we can play down the true experiential aspect of the Christian life and have a cold, cerebral,

intellectual faith, but *“True religion is more than a notion, something must be known and felt.”* We need both knowledge and experience of that knowledge working out in our lives - not an either/or, but both in a healthy balance. This should result in a deepening trust, reliance on and faith in God, a greater desire for Him as we learn of Him e.g. 2 young people falling in love... to be together more and delight in one another’s company.

The apostle Paul said he knew Jesus and counted everything as dung, or rubbish, but then goes on to say in Philippians 3:10 *“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death”*. He knew Christ, but there was still so much more to learn and know of Him.

God and the Lord Jesus Christ are infinite, so how then can we limited finite creatures imagine we can know all there is to know about Him! Heaven and eternity will be taken up with marvelling at the infinite things we will see in God - as before our gaze, to our perfected senses, we will have wave after wave of infinitely wondrous truths and revelations sweep over us and we in an ecstasy gaze upon and praise our God. Yet incredibly, here in our lives, we can know more of the results of this knowledge brings to us as we know more of the sweetness of His forgiveness, of the greatness of His love, care, protection, wisdom, provision, restoring and refreshing us even when pressurised and low. We can know His grace and mercy in our trials and testing times, as well as in our successes and triumphs.

We can know Him as Jehovah Jireh, as the Lord our Banner, our Shepherd - knowing His Shepherd care and provision; having Him with us even in the dark times. We can know, with a growing anticipation, we have a place prepared for us in heaven and all the fullness of eternal life ahead. All these things are to affect the way we live, speak think and serve. I guess in many ways, we are in the suburbs of eternal life now. But if we have been led by grace to know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, then the things I've mentioned and much more beside - justified, adopted and glorified are just a few glorious themes to chew over! Yet all these are ours when we know the only true God and Jesus Christ He sent. Perhaps the question may still need to be answered in your own life as to whether or not you **really** know God and the eternal life He gives through Jesus. It is a serious question that deserves a serious answer from us all. I pray we would think on these things and that the things we have heard would be a help to someone here - to either bring you to know God as your Saviour in Jesus, or to establish you in your faith.