

Knowing God
Colossians 1: 15-20

Weatherly Heights Baptist Church
November 10, 2019
Rev. Patrick Streeter

Jack Bauer is a Special Agent for the Counter Terrorist Unit in Los Angeles, California. His work takes him on missions that push the human limits on understanding what it takes to prevent terrorist attacks. He often deals with suspects in which he has no leverage over them other than his word. Often, he will say “I give you my word” to those he wishes to leverage information from. Many question whether they can trust his word. He once responded to a suspect by saying, if you knew me, you would know that I am a man of my word. Another time he said this to the then acting President of the United States, if you want to know more about me, with all due respect, ask around. You see, Jack bases a lot of his ability to persuade others based on what they know about him. Jack plays this fictional role in the TV series, 24. The more you watch the series, the more you come to know who Jack is and what he’s willing to do in the name of National Security. His reputation is well-known and that works to his benefits more often than not.

What we know about someone will often dictate how we act or interact with that person. What we know about someone or what we think we know about someone will result in how we treat that person. What do you know about God? What do you know about who God is and how does that relate to your relationship with God? We have all heard the 1 Corinthians passage that talks about love. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not boast and is not proud. You have also heard the statement that God is love and you’ve probably done the exercise where you take that passage of scripture and replace the words love with God. There we find out more about who God is. We believe that God is all-knowing, all-loving and all-forgiving. There is much that we believe we know about who God is. But knowing about God is not the same as knowing God.

When I entered college, I faced my first theological crisis. In my home church my Youth minister wanted to be ordained to the gospel ministry. But, being in an SBC church there was a big problem. She was female. The church called meetings to discuss whether this should be allowed. Some were for this and some were against this. I sat through those meetings and listened to scripture quoted. My heart struggled with why anyone would not qualify someone’s calling to ministry because they were female. In that chapter of my life I had an encounter that moved me from knowing about God to knowing God. I grew up in the church and learned about who God was, but it was in that moment that what I knew about God transitioned into an experience of knowing God. God took what I knew about God and moved that into an experience to know God more fully. For me, knowing God was a feeling that came deep within my heart.

How have you come to know God? We learn and know about God through the scriptures we read and the lessons we have learned but our opportunities to really know God come through our personal experiences. Someone who has experienced great loss

might tell you that they felt alone and distant from God, but it was that chapter in their life that gave them new meaning and an opportunity for an intimate experience in knowing God. Maybe you have experienced a theological crisis and what you thought you knew about who God is was shattered. Maybe you left an experience hurt and broken. Sometimes our personal experiences can limit what we know about God. How could God let me experience this tragedy. Walking through the storm in my life didn't bring me closer to God but I felt like I was constantly drifting away. Just as we learn to love and to know, it is based on what we read and study and our experiences. And with that we must realize sometime those come with self-imposed limits.

I spoke recently to a young man. As he shared with me the past few years of his life, I could sense the hurt and despair he had felt. Within the last year he had struggled with depression. He had an issue with cutting himself and had attempted to take his own life once. When I asked him what he wanted in life and wanted to look forward to, it was difficult for him to answer. When he finally said what he wanted in life, his words were soaked in despair and pain. He continued to say that it didn't really matter what he wanted. Nothing ever went his way and he didn't ever expect to get what he wanted in life. This young man's self-imposed limits have prevented him from seeing hope and seeing a way forward. Because of the pain and hurt he has experienced in his life, he has formed a wall around himself. It is not impossible for him, but he must have the willingness to allow God to break through those barriers. When we have these moments in our lives where we hurt it can be turning points that turn us towards God or away from God. If we are to know God, we must turn to him even in these darkest moments of our lives.

To know God requires us to accept the call to go deeper. Knowing God is essential to our relationship with God. Going deeper requires us to strip away some of those self-imposed limits. The limits that say we are not good enough or not worthy enough. The limits that say we are beyond hope and beyond rescue. This is a process and one that constantly requires the work of reconciliation.

Our text this morning is a reminder that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Some scholars go so far as to say that the text this morning is a central passage in the New Testament as it relates to Christology. If we must give tangible form to the all-loving God, then Jesus is to be our image. What does God look like, how does God act, how does God love others? Jesus is the tangible explanation to knowing God. To know God through the image of Christ is to understand the power of the work of the cross.

At the end of this text Paul writes, *and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.* Let us stop here and focus on this work of reconciliation. Reconciliation and peace are found through the blood of the cross. During that time blood was viewed as a symbol of human weakness. Seeing blood meant seeing the life of someone spilled out. The cross was a symbol of degradation and shame in the Roman world. Paul's ensomatic Christology is reinforcing the idea that Jesus' body was not a hinderance in his divine and cosmic agency. In fact, it was central to it. This is important because true peace in the

world could not happen without God's embodied son shedding blood through the shame of the cross.

If we want to truly know God, it is through the work of reconciliation on the cross. God continues to work to put us back together to bring us closer to God. This is made possible through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Knowing God sometimes means allowing ourselves to be broken and shattered because what we have been built up to be is not who God intends for us. Knowing God means we allow ourselves to be vulnerable to the work of reconciliation.

Eugene Peterson once said in a sermon: *The message of the American church is, you can do it! But the message of the Bible is, He's done it. Jesus Christ is enough. He is a perfect Savior. All we need to do is to look to Him and embrace the work he accomplished on our behalf.* Are you allowing for opportunities in your life to know God? To know God is to have an experience with God. To know God is to be vulnerable and open. To know God is to allow yourself to be loved even when you may feel you don't deserve it. To know God is to allow yourself to be forgiven even when you don't deserve it. May we come to know God more deeply and more intimately. May God's love for us be enough. Amen.