

Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”

“#8 Know: Whom Do We *Really* Know?”

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Whom do you and I know? In times of crises, it is important to know the right people, isn't it? E.g., you may recall that earlier this year, in February, there was a cold snap for about a week that really hit Houston hard, as well as New Orleans. Elena and I have a rental property there, and I got a call from the tenant one day during that cold snap that a pipe broke and was gushing water in the kitchen, and he lost his power! Ouch! Ouch for them! Ouch also for me because I needed to solve this problem, and there was a large percentage of the population in the Houston area with major plumbing problems. I called several plumbers, and either could not get in touch with any or they could not set a time to help me because they were overwhelmed. And even if I had gotten a plumber the problems with the house would remain because there was great shortage of plumbing supplies! What to do? Then it hit me— Elena's cousins's husband in the Houston area, Louis— who is like a brother-in-law to us, knows how to do some plumbing. So I asked him for help, and he very kindly said yes. I brought the plumbing supplies from New Orleans and by God's grace there was only one pipe in the kitchen that had burst, and we got the tenant running water. You probably have had a similar situation where you happened to know someone when you were in need. In many ways, Christianity is about knowing the right person, as Jesus makes clear.

READ Matthew 7:21-23 (p. 7)

CONTEXT: Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and He has just mentioned the narrow gate that leads to life and the broad gate that leads to destruction. He also taught that we will know His followers by their fruit— just as a good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree produces bad fruit.

READ v 21. “Those who know the Lord and enter His Kingdom are known for at least two things. First, they actually do the will of God. What does that look like?” What is clear is that we are talking about the end times, the judgement day, as seen in Jesus’ words in v 21, “enter the kingdom of heaven”. Doing God’s will is essential to following the Lord. We see this in the text after ours, in vv 24-27, where those who act on His words are like those who built their house on the rock, and those who didn’t act on His words were like those who built their house on the sand. We recall Jesus’ words in John 14:15, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” Obedience is the essence of Lordship. Some people who want to follow Jesus get it, but others don’t. E.g., I recall in college I knew a guy who loved Christian music— especially the Rez Band— and was interested in following Jesus, but he had a habit of smoking pot; we talked about how that was not only against the law but also bad for him, both of which made it against the Lord’s will, and he acknowledged that, but would not give it up. Others who want to follow Jesus do get this. E.g., I recall a Christian who dealt with an addiction to pornography, and he wanted me to hold him accountable. E.g., I recall a Christian young man who was engaged and he wanted to be accountable for his physical relationship with his fiancée, and he asked an older Christian to hold him accountable regularly on this issue. Obedience is not only important for Christians, but also for non-believers on the outside of the church looking in at the church; they want to know, is it real? I believe that while apologetics is important and has its place in sharing the gospel, there is no stronger argument for the truth

of the gospel than a life that resembles Jesus. E.g., I recall talking to someone—a non-believer possibly, I am not sure—who knew Pete Maravich both before and after Maravich became a Christian, and he told me basically say whatever you want about Pete, but his conversion was real, and it made a deep impression on him. Obedience—doing the will of the Father—was seen as so important to Jesus that He said that no one could enter the Kingdom of Heaven without it. But that is not the end of the issue for Jesus, nor, as we’ll see, in the Old Testament.

READ vv 22-23. Who else are those who enter the Kingdom of God? “Second, they are *not* known for mere appearances in doing the will of God. Cf. 7:17-20.” In the verses prior to our passage, we may recall, Jesus says to watch out for prophets who look outwardly like sheep, but are inwardly ravenous wolves! How will we know the difference between the true prophets and false ones? Jesus said we will know by their fruits. Now, how do we reconcile that to our vv 22-23? Apparently those who are not let into the Kingdom are indeed bearing fruit. They are apparently doing everything in Jesus’ name—prophesying, casting out demons, doing miracles. In each of these three actions the phrase “in your name” appears, and for emphasis it appears before listing them, unlike the NRSV translation. So we should read, “did we not *in your name* we give prophesy, *in your name* cast out demons, *in your name* work many miracles?” So if they were bearing fruit, then what’s the problem? Apparently bearing fruit for Jesus does not just mean obedience, but also *knowing* Him. As I said last week, to know Jesus is to love Jesus. We recall again John 14:15, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” This attitude toward God is a great underlying theme throughout the Old Testament, and surfaces in different places. In Psalm 51:16-17 King David said, “For you [O Lord] have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God,

you will not despise.” Jeremiah wrote, “The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord? Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; they prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit’” (2:8). This is the great danger for the Christian, isn’t it—not *knowing* the Lord. This is not an intellectual pursuit. R.T. France in his smaller commentary (*Matthew*, p. 149) quotes from another writer that one could add to Jesus’ list of prophesy, casting out demons, and miracles: “‘Add also: we have written commentaries and exegetical notes on books and passages of the Old and New Testaments, we have preached fine sermons, *etc.*’” No, knowing Jesus is not an intellectual pursuit, but a personal pursuit. E.g., we have heard the phrase, “It’s not personal, it’s just business”; well, for Jesus everything is personal. The verb “to know” in Scripture is often used very personally, and can imply sexual relations, as in Matthew 1:25. Do you *really* know the Lord? Do I *really* know the Lord? E.g., I have often had to catch myself when preparing sermons— am I just checking off my list of things to do, or am I engaging the Lord in the text? Last Sunday’s text on the cost of discipleship was challenging to me— I felt in the business of my week the Holy Spirit gently nudging me, saying, “Woody, do you love me more than these?” E.g., in my quiet times I have struggled with being consistent in prayer— I read the Bible in a year, as I have done since 1991, but the Lord has been getting my attention that I need to engage Him in prayer, share my heart with Him, let His Holy Spirit minister to me. We may ask why Jesus is making such a big deal about knowing Him— isn’t the Christianity about helping and blessing others? Yes and no. We are to be obedient to the Lord and do good works and love our neighbor as ourselves. But we are to love God first. Once we start growing in our faith and start impacting our world for Christ, the temptation comes from Satan to be more focused on doing great things for God, instead of knowing the God of the great things. Once we forget about knowing God, we

become prideful and self-righteous; we no longer need God, we no longer need a Savior; we are independent and do good things, even have our quiet times or share the faith, out of our own strength. Thus the ministry we do becomes more human-centered and less Christ-centered; that ministry becomes a monument to humanity, where human good is the end, rather than ministry that is an arrow pointing to Jesus, where glorifying Christ is the end. Beloved, my concern for us this morning is that we can do great things for God, but do we know the God of the great things?

“Do we *really* know the Lord? If so, what evidence do we give of this?” Do we exhibit the fruits of the Spirit— love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control— in a supernatural way, in a miraculous way that can only be the work of the Lord? Beloved, before we do the great things for God, let us get to know the God of the great things this week and make that our first priority.