

**\*READ Jeremiah 9:23,24\***

It feels as if all of us deserve a prize, a ribbon of some sort, or even an "I Survived 2020" t-shirt for having made it across the 2020 finish line and into 2021. It certainly is good to have this last year in the rearview mirror. Now, I realize as you all do that the simple turning of the calendar to a new year isn't going to magically alleviate the struggles we faced in 2020. In fact, many of the same struggles we endured during this last year still continue to plague us. Maybe no struggle presents more difficulties than that of uncertainty. When things really ran off the rails in 2020, I'm sure many of us were left with our heads spinning, not knowing which way was up or down and left or right.

We were originally uncertain as to whether or not this virus would even be a problem for us in America. We then were uncertain as to exactly how it spread. We didn't know what precautions needed to be taken. We weren't exactly sure how dangerous it was. We sometimes weren't even certain if we actually had the virus or not since some people went on completely asymptomatic. We now stand unsure as to how effective the available vaccines will be or at least how long before they allow us to go back to a greater semblance of normalcy. We're uncertain whether our old normal is even achievable again. We all just want to return to that which we can have some reasonable expectation and confidence in, but I'm not sure how long or if such a lifestyle will return.

This uncertain reality and future is not unique to our own day and time. In fact, the text we read just a few minutes ago from **Jeremiah 9** is set in a day and time when uncertainty would have also been the prevailing feeling of the day. Jeremiah prophesied that a kingdom from the north would come and take Judah away into captivity. The entire nation is mourning its impending doom, but the Lord continues to cry out through Jeremiah to turn their hearts back to God. He implores Judah to turn away from boasting in themselves and instead be the type of people who boast in understanding and knowing the Lord. He desires for them to know that He is a God of faithful love, justice, and righteousness. He delights in these things, and He desires for a people who would delight in the same. Unfortunately, Judah failed to know these key characteristics of God up to this point and they suffered for it. They failed to know that which God wanted them to know and it led to great uncertainty concerning their future. Will we do the same or will we learn from their failures.

In a time when uncertainty continues to plague us within our own lives, I want to help lead the charge of healing and restoration by focusing our minds upon that which we can know with certainty. Though life is ever changing, we were created by and are blessed to serve a God who is unchanging in His character and desires for mankind. We are going to spend our monthly focus lesson (and some additional lessons here and there) on seeking to know all the more God's established and unchanging character. We're going to begin these year long considerations by looking at Jesus's prayer that can be found in **John 17**.

However, before we get to that text and our closer look at it, I want to acknowledge a couple of truths. To begin with, I recognize that not even a year, 5 years, 10 years, or a lifetime of study can get us to a place where we know everything there is to know about God. It is simply impossible for finite created beings to understand and comprehend the infinite nature of the Source of all creation. As God states in **Isaiah 55:8,9**, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways. This is the Lord's declaration. For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways."* It is truly impossible for us to ever arrive at a place where God can be fully and wholly understood by the human mind. Therefore, it is my desire that we will simply grow in or refine our knowledge of God, His character, plan, and desires for mankind. It is my hope that our studies will lead us to desire even deeper, greater, and continued study, consideration, and meditation upon who God is and what He has done for us. Now, let's dive into the text and see where our growing knowledge of God should lead us in this life.

## The Lord's Prayer Of John 17

### A. To know God is to know what Jesus and His Apostles have taught.(vv.7,8,20-23)

#### 1. The Apostles knew God through Jesus's teachings.

- a) As Jesus is aware that His departure from this life is nearing, He expresses His greatest desires for those whom He has come to love and care for so dearly. His Apostles have been with Him nearly every step of the way during His ministry, and He knows that His leaving of them is going to be difficult for them. Yet, as He prays to His heavenly Father on their behalf, He makes it known to us that these men were aware of everything God had done for them through the teachings Jesus had delivered to them all along the way.
- b) Every parable Jesus taught was a breadcrumb for the Apostles that was meant to lead them to a great knowledge of God's influence in Jesus's ministry. Every miraculous event and teaching was not only done for the benefit of those directly affected, but it was also for the benefit of these men who were first hand witnesses. We have talked at length during our studies in Mark's Gospel concerning Jesus's deeds being for their benefit. Just following Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah in **Mark 8:29**, Jesus quickly goes on to describe what the Father intended for His Messiah to endure in that anointed position. However, Peter's hard heart rejects this knowledge given by God, and Jesus ends up rebuking him. Even though they were slow to pick up what Jesus was continually putting down, He was still making God known to these men through the continued teachings given to Him by God. Thankfully, even Jesus at this point acknowledges they were knowing for certain that God had sent Jesus as His Messiah.

#### 2. The world has come to know God through the Apostle's teachings.

- a) However, the Apostles were not to simply sit on this knowledge. Instead, Jesus speaks of a time when the whole world would come to know that the Father had sent Jesus *"through their word"* (v.20). This clearly seems to indicate the Apostles would be leading the charge concerning the spreading of the Good News of Jesus being the prophesied Christ of God. In fact, after Jesus gives much heart-felt attention towards praying for the Apostles who had been given to Him by God for His ministry, the soon-to-be crucified King turns His attention towards all of those who would come to believe in Him through the message spoke by His Apostles.
- b) It wouldn't take too long for this to be fulfilled. In **Acts 2** on Pentecost, following the ascension of Jesus, Peter and the rest of the Apostles stand up and proclaim the reality of this Jesus whom they had put to death as being both the Lord and Messiah of God (**Acts 2:36**). From that day onward the Good News of Jesus has been spread throughout the whole entire earth and people from all backgrounds have been made aware that God sent His Son to this earth in human flesh to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

### B. To know God is to know God's plan through Jesus. (vv.8,23,25)

1. We can absolutely know this was a key point for the Apostles to know and grasp because Jesus states this as being something they came to know three times within this text. **Verses 8, 23, & 25** all speak to first the Apostles and then the entire world coming to the knowledge of Jesus being sent by God. As we just stated, Jesus emphasizes the fact that He had done everything just as His Father had led Him to do. In fact, this as a real big trouble spot for Jesus during His ministry when dealing with the Jewish leadership. They were not big fans of Jesus even closely associating Himself with Yahweh, and they certainly took great exception when Jesus responded to their question, *"How long are you going to keep us in suspense? IF you are the Messiah, tell us plainly"* (**John 10:24**) in **John 10:29,30** with, *"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."*

2. Here, Jesus is clearly teaching plainly concerning the Father's power and ability to preserve those who are His, and He even speaks to the unified nature of the Messiah with God. Yet, instead of taking this teaching to heart and seeking to be better by it, these Jews turn right around again and put up rocks to stone Jesus (**John 10:31**). These people were simply not willing to acknowledge that Jesus was the plan through which God was working for the redemption of mankind. If only they would have humbled themselves, listened to what was being said, and connected the dots...they could have known the plan of God for mankind to be saved through Jesus. Thankfully, the Apostles came to accurately know this, and we are blessed through their work of sharing this good knowledge with others.

### **C. To know God is to know God's character. (vv.23,26)**

1. Back in **John 17**, we find another important thing the Apostles and the world would come to know about God through Jesus...His love for His Son and His creation. We will more closely examine the love of God in a future monthly focus lesson, but sufficed to say at this moment, the love of God that is spoken of in this passage could stand for the whole of God's character. God wants us to know of His character, and He has revealed so much about it through His revelation within His inspired Word.
2. Yet again, to simply know that God loves the world and loves His Son isn't the be all and end all of the knowledge we ought to have. Instead, we even find within this text that we are to come to know and recognize God's love for us and Jesus and seek to develop that type of love within ourselves towards others and Jesus. When we consider the incredible character of God, there are simply some attributes He possesses that we have no chance of ourselves possessing. However, there are many characteristics of God revealed to us that He expects for us to emulate within our own lives. Hopefully we remember the recent lesson we did together on God's forgiving nature and how it must lead us to be a forgiving people ourselves. If we want to truly know God then we must come to know His character and His expectations for how we ought to respond to it.

### **D. To know God is to know eternal life. (v.3)**

1. As we know is true with all good stories, it is important to not bury the lead, and Jesus certainly doesn't do such a thing in this prayer. In fact, the very first few lines of this prayer get to the very heart of the matter when it comes to knowing God...eternal life depends on it! Jesus is preparing to be betrayed, but He realizes that such a miserable experience on His part would actually lead to the glorification of His Father's plan coming to fruition and His own exaltation as the King of God's kingdom and people. Jesus knows that this horrible event is going to lead to His ability to give eternal life to everyone who comes believing in Him, but what is it exactly which leads to eternal life?
2. Jesus states plainly that eternal life is going to be found by knowing the one true God and what He sent Jesus to this earth to accomplish. He sent Jesus because of His faithful love in fulfilling His promises for recreation through the One who would bring renewal to this earth. He would come to bring justice and righteousness in a way that hadn't been seen in so long. In fact, Jesus came to do exactly what Jeremiah said we should boast in God for doing **Jeremiah 9:23,24**. When we come to know who God is, what He has planned to take place, and what He desires for us to do with all of it...we are led to a place where eternal life is ready to be received from His gracious and merciful hand. We simply cannot underestimate the value of putting in the time and effort to know of God what He has revealed for us to know.

## D. Concluding Thoughts

### 1. Knowing **about** God is good.

- a) I always seem to get a little jolt of excitement when I run across those quizzes that occasionally pop up on Facebook that tests your Bible IQ. I get a kick out of seeing just how difficult they want to make the questions whether it is something super simple like “Who is the mother of Jesus?” Or “Who killed Goliath with nothing but a sling and smooth stone?” Or whether they really spice things up by asking something obscure like “What is the largest army assembled in the Bible?” (BTW, the answer would be the Ethiopian army of 1,000,000 that was brought against King Asa in **II Chronicles 14:9**). All of these questions might be cool to know for Bible trivia, but they are hardly the most important things to know that can be found in the Bible.
- b) What stands as much more important would be things such as why blood sacrifices were necessary under the Law of Moses. It is much more important to know the structure and organization God designed for the local church. Surely we would all recognize the superior importance of knowing the answer to the question of, “What must I do to be saved?” The trivia questions are fine, but knowing these and other important details about God’s character, plan, and will for mankind are truly good things to know.

### 2. Knowing God **personally** is the goal.

- a) However, we must recognize that even simply knowing these more important details about God will only take us so far. We aren’t going to be given a test on the judgment day that consist of how many facts we can get write about what is found within the Bible. Instead, we will all be judged on how well we sought in this life to live up to the instruction of **Romans 12:1,2** where Paul informs us all of God’s expectations for us. *“Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”*
- b) It is incredibly important to recognize the mental portion of this text and the active portion of this text. The admonition is for us to make sure our minds are where they need to be. We need to raise our minds above the corrupt nature of this world and focus instead on that which is good, pleasing, and perfect in God’s sight. Yet, it is that knowledge that is exemplified by the way we live this life. Yes we are to mentally know what God would have us to know, but He also expects for us to behave differently so that we might be drawn back into fellowship with Him. Our knowing of God on a personal relational level will wholly depend on how our minds move us to conduct ourselves in this life. Lest we think this is asking too much...just ask a husband how much his wife would appreciate it if he simply knew facts about her without actually taking the time to get to know who she is as a person. No marriage will prosper in that way, and no relationship with God will be bettered if we only ever simply put in time to know about God without using that knowledge to draw us closer to Him.

**Main Point/Conclusion: *Our growth in knowledge of God’s character, plan, and will only truly benefits us when it leads to growth in our relationship with Him.***

It can be easy for us to fall back into the comfortable position of thinking that just so long as we know all the right things about God then we'll be just fine when standing before Him in judgment in the last day. However, we would do well to recognize that simply knowing all of the right facts about God as revealed to us within Scripture will do nothing for us by themselves. We must recognize this life isn't a test to see if we can get all of the right answers. Instead, it is an opportunity for us to show God just how much we love and revere Him through striving in every way to be conformed to the image of His Son through the knowledge we have gained concerning His character, plan, and will.

It is my fervent hope and prayer that each of us will take full advantage of the opportunities that lie before us in our focus studies and our daily Bible reading through the Psalms. If we leave this life without a firm knowledge of God, we cannot fall back upon the excuse that opportunities to grow never presented themselves to us. What better time to grow in our knowledge of the unchanging God than following a year when we grew so tired of the uncertainties that surrounded us. May God bless each and every one of us as we all seek to grow in our knowledge of God so that we might grow closer to Him day by day.