

KNOWING JESUS

INTRODUCTION

The essential theme of this article is 'knowing Jesus' – not just knowing in the sense that we've heard about Him, read about Him, and know a bit about Him. This knowing that I want to speak about is the knowing in total intimacy. To emphasise this I want to draw upon the experiences of two Mary's – utterly different in their backgrounds and yet united in one thing.

The first Mary is the Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus. This Mary was the woman who came with the alabaster box of perfume, with which she had anointed Jesus' head as He sat in the house of Simon the leper, (Matthew 26:7). I'm not wanting to look at the miracle of Lazarus right now – however interesting that may be in terms of Messianic healing – nor to sister Martha, the anxious one, but just to Mary, the quiet one. The story unfolds in John 11, and I want to look at a few verses in that chapter to help our understanding.

In verse 20 Martha is rushing about, doing things, always busy, but Mary is sitting in the house, composed and quiet, following the death of her brother. Then, in verses 28 and 29 Martha comes to Mary with a message – 'The Master has come and is asking for you.' We have nothing to confirm that He was, but the important thing is that as soon as she received the call she got up and went to Him. And in verse 32, when she found Him she fell at His feet, and poured out Her heart before Him.

The other Mary is the one from Magdala, whom Jesus had delivered from demonic oppression, and we find her here, in John 20, also pouring her heart out in grief and loss. You probably know the story – but what is the common factor between these two? It was that they both **knew** Him – that was the bond.

I share about these two because, for us, there is a danger in having a knowledge based on doctrine, doctrine that may be as sound as a rock, but which has never, ever, brought us to the place of a personal, intimate, relationship with the risen Lord. To both of these women doctrine was no more than a word, it meant no more to them than the ground they stood on. Any Pharisee could have torn these women apart on any issue of doctrine, but one thing

they could never do was rob them of the blessings of knowing Jesus. As soon as they heard His voice they knew something, deep inside, that they had both a past and a future with Him. How is it with you?

This intimacy with Him is far more than just believing. Coming back to Bethany, and to Martha. She believed that Jesus had at His disposal all the power necessary to not only have healed her brother but now, after his death, to resurrect him. She knew that Jesus had some sort of indefinable relationship with God, and she had a belief system that said that everything would work out all right in the end. For Martha there needed to be a gentle leading until the belief was more than just intellectual understanding, but had moved on to become personal, until the dawning came – and she was able to say, ‘Yes, Lord, now I **know** that you are the Son of God.’ She had come to that place where no longer was she motivated by a sense of ‘duty,’ (‘duty,’ along with ‘unity,’ are words that have the ability to suffocate in the Church today), but she had realised that she could now bring to Him things that were of real value.

And Mary of Bethany knew one thing she must do, too, and when Jesus called she did it, she got up and went. In this there is an important principle in God’s dealings with us – that before any one of us can seek Him, He must first seek us. You see, man is sin-full by nature, he is born into sin – it’s part of the Adam nature that is in each and every one of us, a nature that would not of itself look to God and so, before any one of us can think a right thought about Him, God must first do a work of enlightenment within us.

John 13:18 Jesus speaking – *‘I do not speak of you all; I know whom I have chosen.*

John 15:16-19 And again – *‘You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you. These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.’*

If we have been chosen that makes us special, choice and called. We are not called into a place of idleness but to bring to God that of ourselves which will be of value to Him. Now, the fact that we have been chosen may not come to us as a totally new revelation, although it

may not bring a perfect understanding either, but the fact is that God has put His mark upon us which will cause us to begin our search, and will create within us a desire that will grow until it becomes a hunger. And when that search begins we shall find there is an answer to our quest, because it is promised, through the scriptures. It's in the word of God, the *logos*, all in hard print that we may read, consume and digest. It's all there, in prophecy, in poetry, in history, in allegory, mostly in plain English. Every thing that was, that is, and that will be, is there in the Bible. Don't discard it.

And the word is powerful – Hebrews 4:12...

'For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.'

But then something else happened for, in John 1:14 we learn that the Word became flesh...

'And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth.'

Look also at 1 John 1:1-2...

'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life, (for the Life was revealed, and we have seen it and bear witness, and show to you the everlasting Life, who was with the Father and was revealed to us).'

...and then in Revelation 19:13.

'And He had been clothed in a garment dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.'

The 'Word' is personalised here. Not only is the Messiah the embodiment of the Word but He **is** the Word. 'The word of the Lord' was a common expression in the Old Testament, it appears many times in Ezekiel's book for instance, always identifying some revelation of Jehovah. To show its true meaning, and its application to the Messiah, was of great importance to John, for it was in his later years that certain errors as to the person of Jesus, borrowed from Eastern philosophy, had begun to creep into the Christian church. In these verses he is describing 'The Word' as a personal and divine Being, self-existent, and coexistent from eternity with the Father. Yet He was distinguished from God as being the Son, the creator of all created things, the source of all life and a light to all men and who, in the fullness of time, was incarnate among them. Putting it simply, then, what we can see is

that, as the Word is the Messiah, it is the Word that reveals Him to us. That's where we shall find Him, if we search for Him, and as He has called us, so we too shall hear His voice and respond to it, as Jesus said, in John 10:27...

'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.'

Take Luke 24:27 and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, for instance...

'And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.'

...and then, in verse 32...

'And they said to one another, Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'

Now, I'm well aware that I am not in the same league as Jesus when it comes to Biblical exposition, but in so far as I have been able to explain things would you say, on the basis of what you have read, that your hearts are burning within you? Do you get a bit excited, a bit incandescent, when you read or hear the word of God? We all should, for it contains life, and that's where you will find Him.

THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS.

In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus speaks some remarkable words...

'Come to Me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.'

For Mary of Bethany the word was 'come,' a specific word to her. In **these** verses the first word here is also 'come,' but here it's spoken in a more general sense, it is a word that echoes throughout all the ages, reaches into all eternity, but it's a word that only the listener will hear. It needs an answer, and our answer will condition our response, because it will cause us to ask a question of ourselves. It's a simple question, and we may not be very conscious of it, but it goes something like this: 'Do I really want to get to where He is asking me to go.' Well, if you do there is absolutely nothing stopping you. But to get there requires the use of your will, and if we **will** to come to Him our whole life is then brought into line and we begin to live as we actually desire.

Perhaps, when that happens, we can join with Paul, as he says, in Galatians 2:20...

'I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf.'

If we take these words for ourselves it means we willingly do away with our independence, surrendering all we are to the supremacy of the Lord Jesus. No one else can do this for us, no pastor, no counsellor, no teacher, we alone do it, I do it, you do it, on our own. This is personal. Jesus says, 'Come.' It's an invitation. He doesn't say, 'Do this,' or 'Don't do that,' just, 'Come.'

The disciples discovered something of this as they responded, to the extent we see recorded in John 15:15...

'No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.'

Do you want to be counted a friend of Jesus? Do you want to hear from the lips of Jesus the words that will revolutionise your life? We can all be in that place so long as we take note of the proviso that precedes this verse. The surrender we are speaking of here is more than just giving up the pleasures that go with the 'Adam' nature, the things that would divert our attention from the way of righteousness, it's more because it means the surrender of the will. This is where there is so often a crisis in our lives, and it can be a major one. For God never forces, never crushes a person's will, He never pleads, He just waits, but all the time the word is, 'come.'

As we move into that place of surrender so, more and more we come under the Lordship of Jesus. The disciples had already discovered something else about their Friend, for earlier, in John 13:13, He had said, *'You call Me Master and Lord, and you say well; for so I am.'* There is a difference between having a master and being mastered. Jesus never uses His position to enforce our obedience, He doesn't take steps to make us do as He wants. The simple fact is that He is the Master, and being the Master means that He is the one who knows everything about us, one who sits closer than a friend, and sees deep into our hearts, and satisfies our deepest longings.

And this is what coming under His Lordship means. There are many who would not choose to use terms such as Master and Lord, preferring something a little bit more comfortable,

like Saviour, or perhaps Redeemer. We feel safer with terms like that, maybe, rather than the thought of yielding everything. But if we are serious, even passionate in our desire for reality in life, which is inseparable from the things of God, we have no alternative but to sign away our rights, and become a bond-slave of Jesus the Messiah. Until we do that we can never be saints. Now, a bond-slave is not like an ordinary slave. A bond slave is one who has been given his or her freedom but has chosen to remain with their master. Jesus said, *'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it produces much fruit.'* (John 12:24).

REPENTANCE.

Before we can start speaking of repentance, leave alone being repentant, there are a couple of con's that need to be introduced here. The first con is **'conviction,'** the second is **'confession.'** Lets start with **conviction,** by that I mean the 'conviction of sin' through the activity of the Holy Spirit, as in John 16:8...

'And when that One comes, He will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment.'

We have earlier spoken about 'calling.' I want to say this clearly for if there has been a calling upon our lives there must inevitably have been conviction. We can, if we want, ignore the conviction and concentrate on the calling, but in so doing we move on in our own strength and at some peril to ourselves. There may be some fruit from our ministering, because God is gracious, but it won't be the abundant fruit that can be possible when we are fully sold out to God.

Conviction is a very rare experience if the outside world is anything to go by. We do have consciences, of course, and there are many who get a bit stirred up in that area because of past events and a sense of guilt, but our conscience is not a very reliable barometer of our spiritual health.

But true conviction of sin is not just a bit of remorse, or just feeling sorry – it's not, because when conviction comes it overwhelms all our relationships, all our experiences, and all our

failures, leaving us with nothing other than the knowledge, the intense awareness, of the holiness of God and, with it, the sense of our own utter unworthiness. It's no use saying things like, 'Well, I've not been all that bad,' or 'It's all down to the way I was brought up.'

Oswald Chambers had something very prudent to say about that:

'The old Puritan idea that the devil tempts men had this remarkable effect, it produced the man of iron who fought; the modern idea of blaming his heredity or his circumstances produces the man who succumbs at once.'

He wrote that about ninety years ago so the principle of blame shifting existed then. It's obviously not a modern phenomenon, although it's common enough these days. But perhaps that's not too surprising since it was Adam who introduced it. Isaiah said, 'Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips.' (Isaiah 6:5). David said, 'Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done evil in Your sight.' (Psalm 51:4) For these two men, and any one else who comes into the presence of God, there is no vague or woolly sense of being a sinner. You know you're a sinner! - for at that moment there comes a realisation of the concentration of sin within our lives. And we can't get away with a flippant, 'Oh yes, I know I'm a sinner,' when we get into the presence of God. For then it will be a very clear acknowledgement of, 'Lord, I am all that You say I am, and I deserve the penalty of your judgement.' It's then, when God begins by convicting us of sin in some particular area of our lives, and we yield to that conviction as it comes to mind, that something begins to happen. He will then lead us beyond the conviction into the revelation of the depth of the sin, and of His verdict of it.

And so, as the result of that, and having been convicted we come to **confession**. Confession comes when we understand God's verdict on our sin, **and we agree with it**. I want here to say that the experience of the revelation of their sin has affected the greatest of saints, as well as the least, like you and me. If you imagine the Wesley's and the Spurgeon's, the Havergal's and the Chamber's didn't know it, or that David, Isaiah, Peter and Paul didn't know it, you would be wrong. Perhaps we do understand that, at the same time wondering why there sometimes seems to be a blockage, an obstacle to our maturing as believers, but if we humbly seek a way to overcome it, it's then that the conviction will come. Maybe we need to forgive someone, perhaps we need to forgive ourselves, perhaps it's a sin within our lives that we battle with that's become habitual, whatever it is the first step is to put it right.

That's pretty obvious, but equally, or perhaps even more so, it is to accept more fully our true identity, in other words, to understand exactly who we are, in Jesus.

But there will be times when we are unable to understand what it is that is the obstacle, leave alone how to remove it. It is then we need the ministry of others in order to walk in the maturity we were created for. God's love is often blocked off from us and is unable to flow because of the depth of pain within us, the brokenness of rejection, or of abuse. The purpose of articles such as this one is to bring help through discernment and healing prayer. We'll look at this issue a little later on.

However, **with** the conviction will come the overwhelming desire to be right with God. I must say that a Church full of people doesn't cause Satan many moments of apprehension, but one man or one woman seeking to get right with God terrifies him. It's when conviction comes to us that there comes with it an awful self-realisation as we at last see ourselves as God sees us. And what we see fills us with shock and horror as we recognise not only the depth of the sin in our lives but also the awful dark pride in our hearts that has excluded the Light of the World for so long.

Confession, therefore, is an admission of guilt. Yes, I know I'm guilty - but what do I do with the guilt? Do I wear it like a medal of self-righteousness, telling everyone how guilty I am and this is how I offended God, and never going beyond the penitential stage? That's not the way to freedom. Do I stuff it in a rucksack and drag it around on my back in an attitude of self-pity? That's not the way to freedom, either. Or do we say that God demonstrated His verdict upon my sin through the cross of Jesus the Messiah? That through the cross a way was made possible for me to experience total and absolute freedom from guilt and shame, because the price paid for my sin was total and absolute? See what Paul says, in Ephesians 1:4...

'...according as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.'

Holy? Blameless? How on earth can that be? Not when you consider what we have done or where we've been, and certainly not through anything that we can do, that's for sure, for

we can do nothing. We are like the prisoner on death row, all rights removed, awaiting only the carrying out of the sentence. But Paul also said, in Romans 7:24-25 to 8:1...

'O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.'

Here's the choice for us, is it the flesh or the Spirit. Which way?

Two aspects of repentance are revealed in 2 Corinthians 7:10, both described as sorrow...

'For the grief according to God works repentance to salvation, not to be regretted, but the grief of the world works out death.'

We said earlier that being sorry for all that we have been and done that offends God is not enough. Sorrow, as it appears in this verse, goes well beyond that. Probably one word that covers it, two actually, is deep remorse but, if we mean business with God, it must go even further than that. Sorrow is really only subjective, an expression of the emotions, whereas the route to be taken, having got thus far, needs to be objective. By that I mean that we must now bring the will into the equation. Godly sorrow, therefore, requires the deepest remorse, but then goes beyond that yet again to demand the objective exercise of our will to determine not to go down the sin road again. It doesn't mean that we won't, but at least we now know the way back now. Worldly sorrow simply says 'I'm sorry' in words that do not come from the heart and so do not have any roots, accepting that it could easily happen all over again - after all, I'm only human.

Look at what Paul says, in Galatians 6:14...

'But may it never be for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.'

What an amazing statement! But this is the crux, isn't it? You see, it is the Gospel of Jesus that bears the good news of salvation, and it's that which forces us into decision making. And these are the questions that we have to face: Am I prepared to accept God's verdict on my sin, or do I try to justify myself? Do I have any interest at all in the death of Jesus? What's it to me? Or do I so want to be identified with His death that I am willing to choose the death of self so that I may be identified with His resurrection life? Good questions, aren't they? Again, which way?

The greatest privilege for us, who long to be effective disciples for Him, is that we may simply sign on the dotted line in order to enter into covenant with Him. Immediately we do that an exchange takes place **through** the cross, the direct result of the other exchange that took place **on** the cross, when another person paid the price for our sin. A supernatural identity change takes place at that time because, through our confession, God no longer sees us as we were but as we now are **in** Jesus. And if we are **in** Jesus that's a special place to be, because Jesus said He is in the Father so, by applying a bit of logic, we are in the Father, too. How about that?

FORGIVENESS

There are several facets to the meaning of forgiveness. Forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of ourselves are two, which we shall deal with more fully in a moment. First of all I want to look at this aspect as it may be employing our thoughts right now, and that is our forgiveness by God. Look with me at Ephesians 1:7...

'In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.'

The general meaning of the word redemption here is this: We have been bought back fully from the market place of sin. We now have a new owner, we are no longer slaves to the world's systems and to sin, but now we are willing bond-slaves of Jesus. Not only that but, at the moment of purchase the stain of past sin was wiped clean. But look at the price that was paid to make this possible. This was no normal market-place transaction, no money changed hands, because the deal that took place was beyond price. It involved the death the Son of God, as the propitiation for our sin. Wow!

It's because of this we need to tread very carefully indeed. You see, it is far too easy, and very prevalent within the Church, to preach an agreeable, easily acceptable, view of God the Father, that He loves you because He is kind and therefore of course He will forgive you. You don't have to do anything, some say – just relax and let it happen. There is a grave danger in this view because, although He does love us all unconditionally, He forgives us **only on the basis of the sacrificial offering of His Son upon the cross**. We cannot afford to take that fact lightly. This wasn't some bright and breezy, spur of the moment decision

either. This once, and once only, act of redemption, which was for all mankind, was meticulously planned from the beginning of time, for us. And there was no other way. You see, there is a Biblical basis for the atonement, where atonement is a word that has within its meaning other words, such as redemption, reconciliation, justification, etc., and the only basis for that atonement is the shedding of blood. God Himself said, in Leviticus 17:11...

'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.'

And also in Leviticus 16:30...

'For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.'

Not only had God determined the price of our redemption but, something like 3700 years ago He established His own law, and He always keeps it. Our atonement therefore could only be achieved through blood, not of an animal ritually slaughtered every year, but through the blood of the God/Man, Jesus of Nazareth, our great high priest, once and for all. Look at Hebrews 10:14...

'For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.'

We cannot, and must not, take our forgiveness for granted. You see, the only way we can be reconciled with God is through the atonement, through that supernatural exchange that took place at Calvary. God's forgiveness of our sins is one of the greatest acts of divine grace, because it was only through the price of His own Son's life upon the cross that there was any way in which He could forgive us, and yet still remain faithful to His word and to His holiness.

It is, therefore, only through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, followed by the heartfelt confession of our sins, the resultant reconciliation to God through the redemptive price of the cross, that our forgiveness comes, and through our forgiveness we are then set apart by God for His service. Sounds simple, but is it? (That's a rhetorical question).

But let's see. Take a look at Matthew 6:14-15...

'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'

That seems fairly straightforward, doesn't it – that our forgiveness is conditioned upon our willingness to forgive those who have hurt us. But we don't often want to know that, do

we? You may be thinking that it is impossible to forgive what so and so did – the pain of abuse, verbal, physical, sexual, or rejection through parental separation, or you own divorce, what about abandonment and being given up for adoption, the child of illicit love, a one-night stand, or even rape. The hurt and pain of these things may be so, so deep, that you may, first of all, think that no one else can understand – I want you to know that they can, that you are not alone, and that many have worked through similar pain. You may also think it was so awful that you cannot possibly forgive, and nor do you want to.

Equally you may be so burdened down with guilt attached to things of your own past so that you don't feel able to forgive yourself. You've possibly made an inner vow that you cannot, or will not forgive yourself and you are bound into it. If any of you are in that place and want to go on with God the answer is having a willingness to face the pain and, with the help of someone alongside, to walk through it to the light on the other side. And when you have and are willing, by an act of will, to forgive the offenders, you too will know the freedom that the atoning gift of Calvary won for you. It's worth it. Are you willing?

Edward Thomas