

As Well-Known And Yet Unknown

By: Keith Keyser

The title of this article intentionally reverses the word order of Paul's self-description in 2 Corinthians 6:9. Jesus Christ is well-known by name around the world, yet His true identity is unknown to many who assume they know all about Him. This was also the case when Jesus walked on the earth millennia ago. Even many in close physical proximity failed to perceive His true character and mission. Christianity is based on objective and subjective knowledge of Jesus Christ. If one does not know the truth about Him and know Him personally in one's own experience, than one cannot lay claim to being a Christian. A Christian knows the Lord Jesus, and seeks to increase his knowledge of Him by prayerful study of His Word.

A Case of Mistaken Identity

The Lord Jesus declared Himself to be the Bread of Life who came down from heaven (Jn. 6:35.) Rather than receive His claim, His listeners reasoned that since they knew His parentage, then all of this talk about coming from heaven was nonsense. They ignored the evidence of His supernatural origin – the dramatic sign of feeding multitudes by miraculously multiplying five loaves and two fishes – instead reasoning from only one piece of information about Jesus. Starting from a false assumption regarding Him, their conclusion was inevitably false. This is not surprising, for even the denizens of His hometown mistook Him based on acquaintance with His family, saying: “‘Where *did* this Man *get* these things? And what wisdom *is* this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him” (Mk. 6:2-3.) They could not fathom how a mere carpenter from an ordinary family could be a miracle-working teacher.

In each of these cases the people made no effort to further investigate Christ's claims. Later the people of Jerusalem discounted Him as a possible Messiah, for they knew that Micah 5:2 revealed Bethlehem as Messiah's birthplace. Had they bothered to ask, they would have discovered that Jesus was not born in Nazareth, but in the city that the Old Testament predicted (John 7:42.) The religious leaders made a similar error, assuming that He only had Galilean beginnings (v. 52.) Furthermore, if they had given due weight to the evidence of His miracles, as well as His unequalled teaching, it would have shown that He was more than a man. Instead, they continued in willing ignorance, uninterested in a Saviour who could radically change their lives and deliver them from eternal judgement.

Knowing God, The Core of Eternal Life

While it is tragic that so many lost people misunderstand the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ, it would be a greater tragedy if Christians likewise fail to learn more about their Lord. The essence of eternal life is personal knowledge of God through Christ (Jn. 17:3.) True believers cannot rest content with the basic facts about Christ, such as His deity and teachings. They must go on to know Him with greater intimacy in their every day lives. When he was lost, Paul "...thought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"; nonetheless, as a believer, his ambition was to "...know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Acts 26:9; Phil. 3:10.) His delight was to probe the depths of Christ's person, work, and especially His love. He prayed that his converts reflect this interest in learning more of the Lord Jesus. For the Ephesians he prayed: "...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 4:17-19.) In like manner, he interceded for the Colossians thus: "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10.)

Nor is such an emphasis on knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ restricted to Paul. Peter also exhorted the Christians to "...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18.) Likewise, John described the Christian life in terms of knowing God and Christ (1 Jn. 2:13-14.) Obviously Christianity's essence is to know Christ – an activity that is endless, for as God, His person is infinite.

Fellowship With The Friend Who Sticks Closer Than A Brother

In the fast-paced modern world, time alone with the Lord is often the first thing that is jettisoned from one's schedule. Careers, academic studies, entertainment, and social events all have their place. If one is not vigilant, however, these things may rob one of precious intimacy with the Almighty. Spending time with Him in prayer and study of the Scriptures is essential for believers. They must daily commune with the Bread of Life, who feeds their souls. To ignore Him, is to neglect our reason for being as redeemed creatures of God. Superficial knowledge of the Lord must be replaced by the deep, personal relationships that can only be forged by spending much time with Him.