

Knowing God

Part 1:

The Profile of Those Who Know God

Scripture: *1 Kings 17:1 & 18:17-40.*

Exegetical Big Idea: Those who know God show this in the way they *rely* on God and His Word, the way they boldly *represent* God, and the way they *relate* to God in prayer.

Introduction

Today is the fifth Sunday in the Christian season of Lent. Lent is the seven-week period prior to Easter that is set-aside on the Church Calendar to help us to prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ at Easter. Because one of the main reasons for Christ's death and resurrection was so that we would come to know God, over the next two Sundays leading up to Easter, and on Easter Sunday, we are going to be reflecting on the theme of *Knowing God*.

In the OT the Hebrew word for *know* is *Yada*. In the NT the Greek word is *Ginosko*. Both of these words refer more to experiential knowledge than mere intellectual knowing about God. A good example of how this word is used in the OT is in **Gen. 4:1** where the **KJV** Bible reads as follows: *And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain*. The **NIV** Bible has translated this verse like this: *Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain*. When the **KJV** use the phrase *Adam knew his wife*, it is not doing so to disguise marital sexual intercourse with a euphemism. Rather, it seeks to let us know that marital intercourse expresses the deepest person-to-person union and intimacy that human beings are given to know of another person.

God created us with that kind of deep inner experiential knowledge of Him, not just knowing *about* Him. This is one of the reasons God uses marriage in both the OT and NT to describe His relationship with His people. We lost this experiential knowledge of God when our first parents disobeyed Him in the Garden, and they, with all of us inside them, were banished from God's presence in the Garden of Eden. God's overriding desire for us, therefore, is for us to recover, through what Christ did for us on the cross, that lost experiential knowledge that we had of Him before the Fall so that His redemptive and transformative purposes for our creation can be fulfilled. This is why, in **Jer. 9:24**, God said this through the Prophet Jeremiah: *Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me*.

So, over these next three Sundays, we shall reflect on this theme of *Knowing God* by first looking at a *profile* of those who know God. Second, we shall listen to the Apostle Paul explain to us from his letter to the Ephesians that God's primary *purpose* for us is to know God. Third, and finally, on Easter Sunday, we shall again turn to Paul, and this time, from his letter to the Philippians, discover the *process* of coming to know God.

So, the title of the first of our three sermons is: *The Profile of Those Who Know God*. Our primary text for this first sermon is **1 Kings 17:1** and **18:17-40**. These two OT chapters recount part of the story of the Prophet Elijah, a man who knew God.

As we study this part of Elijah's story we discover three important attributes of those who know God. First, we discover that those who know God completely *rely* on God and His Word. Second, that they boldly *represent* God. Third, we discover that they *relate* to God daily in prayer.

These **3R's** give us a profile of those who know God. They also help us to measure where we are in our own journey of coming to know God.

Read Passage.

I. Relying Completely on God and His Word (1 Kings 17:1-24)

- 1) In **1 Kings 17:1** Elijah strides onto the pages of the Bible for the first time. He appears out of nowhere, it seems, to boldly declare to King Ahab: *As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.* The **KJV** Bible translates the words, *whom I serve*, as *before whom I stand*. This is because in the original Hebrew this phrase is a technical phrase that means, *one who stands in the service of a king*. So, with these words, Elijah was declaring to King Ahab that he had come as one who stood in the service of the God of Israel to present to Ahab a message from God.
- 2) Elijah's name, by the way, means, *The Lord is my God*. With his message to Ahab, therefore, Elijah was declaring that there would be no rain because the Lord, his God, had decreed this.
- 3) Elijah based his message to Ahab on the word of God revealed in **Deut. 28:15 & 23-24** where God had decreed that one of the consequences that the Israelites would suffer from idolatry would be a lack of rain. Elijah made his declaration to King Ahab because at that time Ahab and his wife Jezebel had filled Israel with idols imported from their neighboring pagan nations. This is why, in **verse 18 of 1 Kings 18**, Elijah said this to Ahab: *You and your father's family have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals.* The Baals were the gods of Israel's neighboring pagan nations.
- 4) Elijah knew that because God had said in His Word that there would be no rain if the Israelites turned to idols, God would indeed do exactly what He had said if he, Elijah, stood on God's word and invoked it in that situation. This is a mark of a man who knows God and has come to have complete faith in God and His Word. It's like knowing another person, like your spouse, very intimately; you know what they're like, what they like and what they don't like, how they will respond to this situation and to that situation. *Esther example: Would you like to . . .* An outsider may mistakenly think she is asking me a question. But I know better!
- 5) Elijah had come to know that God always does exactly what He has said He will do or not do, as seen throughout the Bible. For example, in **Jer. 1:12** the Lord Himself made this declaration: *I watch my Word to fulfill it.* So, because Elijah so completely relied on God and His Word, he invoked God's word into that situation, and sure enough, God fully honored Elijah's reliance on His Word by preventing rain from falling in Israel for three years.

- 6) And in that time of drought, we read from **verses 2 to 24 of 1 Kings 17** that God protected Elijah from the effects of the drought by miraculously feeding him through ravens and a destitute widow. Think of the improbability of being fed by scavenging ravens, and a destitute widow! God used the least likely means possible to feed Elijah so that Elijah would know that God honored Elijah's reliance on His Word.
- 7) This is our **first R** from this passage about the attributes of those who know God: they demonstrate their faith in God by relying completely on God and His Word.

II. Representing God Boldly (1 Kings 18:16-39)

- 1) The second mark we see in this Elijah story of those who know God is their boldness in representing God. Elijah could not stand idly by and watch his God being dishonored through the syncretism of the Israelites who were hedging their bets by mixing their worship of God with the worship of Baal at the same time.
- 2) This is why Elijah challenged them by saying this to them in **1 Kings 18:21**: *How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.* The Baal religion promised fertility and material prosperity. For this reason part of its worship involved exotic sexual rituals which were thought to symbolize fertility. Of course, as you can imagine, this made Baal worship very popular in the pagan nations around Israel.
- 3) To prove to the Israelites the error of their waffling and syncretistic ways, Elijah boldly challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to that remarkable contest on Mt. Carmel that we have just read about in **1 Kings 18**. What a story! See how God came through to honor Elijah's bold representation of God!
- 4) This shows us that the action taken by those who know God is their *reaction* to the anti-God trends that they see operating around them. While their God is being defied or disregarded, they cannot rest; they feel they must do something; the dishonor done to God's name goads them into action such as we see Elijah doing in this story; he refused to stand idly by and watch the Israelites break the first of the ten commandment in their Bible: *Thou shall have no other gods besides me.*
- 5) **Daniel 11:32** reads like this in the **KJV**: *The people who know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.* The **RSV** put it like this: *The people who know their God will stand firm and take action.* Elijah knew his God, so he stood firm and he took action. He did exploits for the God whom he had come to know. In **Acts 4**, we read of how at the birth of the NT church the Jewish leaders, who were feeling that their authority was being threatened by the miracles the Apostles were performing in Jerusalem, arrested the Apostles, had them beaten, and then warned them to stop preaching about Jesus Christ. In **verses 19 and 20 of Acts 4**, this is how the Apostles responded to the threats of the Jewish leaders: *Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to God? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

- 6) This is the spirit of those who know their God. They may find their determination to boldly represent God to be fraught with danger, but once they are clear about how to represent God in a given situation they do so boldly without hesitation. It does not worry them at all if other Christians see things differently, and do not stand with them.
- 7) This is our **second R** from this passage about the attributes of those who know God; they boldly represent their God.

III. Relating to God Daily in Prayer (1 Kings 18:36-40)

- 1) The third mark we see in this Elijah story as an attribute of those who know God is how they relate to God in prayer. As a matter of fact, you can tell they know their God by how they pray.
- 2) **James 5:17-18** tells us this about Elijah's prayer life: *Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.* Elijah related to God in prayer by praying in exact accordance with God's revealed will in His Word, as we have already noted. This is why although he was an ordinary man like us his prayer was so effective.
- 3) Listen to his prayer in **1 Kings 18:36-37** during his contest with the prophets of Baal: *Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant who has done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so that these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back to you.* What a prayer! It addresses God, first in the way in which God has revealed Himself to the Israelites as the God who entered into covenant with their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Second, it asks God to reveal who He really is to the Israelites. Third, it says, let them know that my authority comes not from myself but from you. Fourth, it asks that God would answer Elijah and thereby return the people to God. This is the prayer of a man who knows his God!
- 4) **Verses 38 and 39** tell us the result of Elijah's prayer in these words: *Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!"* And this was after the prophets of Baal had pleaded loudly with Baal in vain the whole day, and even shed their blood by cutting themselves. Elijah steps forward, prays this simple faith-filled prayer to his God, and look at the amazing results!
- 5) Unlike Elijah, you and I may not always be in a position to take public action against the ungodliness, syncretism, and apostasy we see all around us, but we can pray. We can pray to advance God's cause in our world, as Elijah did. After all, to get to know another person, you have to commit yourself to his company and his interests, and be ready to identify yourself with his concerns. Without this, your relationship with that person can only be a superficial one. If we find that we have no real interest in praying about God's cause in the world, this could be a sure sign to us that as yet we hardly know our God.

- 6) Getting to *know* anyone intimately requires spending time talking and listening to them. It goes without saying that a person with whom I never speak will never be my friend. I will never know him or her. This is also true of our relationship with God. When we commit ourselves to daily spending time in prayer, talking and listening to God on a regular basis, ideally in the early morning hours, this nurtures our relationship of coming to know God.
- 7) So, this is our **third R** from the passage as a mark of those who know God; they relate daily to God in prayer.

Conclusion

So, these **3R's** from Elijah's story, as you can see, present us with a brief profile of those who know God.

In **Matthew 11:27** Jesus expressed His intimate knowledge of the Father by saying this: *No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.*

On the day of His crucifixion, as Jesus hung painfully on the cross, He cried out these words: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* With these words, Jesus was letting it be known that the Father was forsaking Him, so that you and I might be accepted by the Father. On the cross, Christ lost His intimate knowledge of the Father, so that you and I, when we place our faith in what He accomplished for us on the cross, would be enabled to begin our journey of coming to know God.

This is why on the night before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed to the Father by saying, in **John 17:3**: *This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.* Because He rose from the dead, Jesus is still alive today. He calls and invites us to come to know Him and the Father. When we accept His invitation this initiates in our lives the life-long process of our coming to know God, so that with time, we too, like Elijah, can live up to the profile of those who know God because we *rely* completely on God and His Word, we boldly *represent* God, and we *relate* to God daily in prayer.

Next Sunday, which is Palm Sunday, as I have already noted, we shall turn to the Apostle Paul as he explains to us from his letter to the Ephesians that God's primary *purpose* for us is to know God.

Let us pray!

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7th April, 2019.*