

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of the most tragic verses in the Bible is Judges 2:10. It just said in verse 7, “So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.” The next verses tell us how Joshua died at a hundred and ten years old. Then verse 10 says, “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.” The result was drastic. We read on, “Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger.” Verses 11-12

How could that be, one generation serves the Lord and the next generation doesn't even know the Lord? Obviously they knew who the LORD was. Even the heathen nations knew that Jahweh was the God of Israel. The next generation knew about the Lord but they didn't really know Him. They didn't know Him personally. They didn't know His nature.

You've probably heard the old Mac Davis song, *“Oh Lord it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way.”* One line goes, *“To know me is to love me.”* That was a spoof on human pride, but that is absolutely true of God. To know Him is to love Him. He is truly perfect in every way. If you truly know God you would love Him with all your heart and cling to Him in everything and would never leave Him for anything else.

If you don't know the Lord, then you will always fight against Him. Pharaoh refused to let the people of Israel go, because as he said, “I do not know the Lord.” Ex. 5:2 He wasn't about to bow to a God he didn't know. Eli's sons the priests of Israel did horrible things because “they did not know the Lord.” 1Sam 2:12 That is the whole problem with our world today, the majority of people do not know the Lord. Most people probably think of the God of the Bible as being an unreasonable, harsh God who is against everything and is quick to punish those who go against His commands. Because of their false impression of God they conclude that He is not a loving God and therefore they don't want anything to do with Him and can't even believe that He could be real. People would rather put their trust in anything else.

We can see how important it is for us to Know the LORD, and how essential it is for us to teach our children and grandchildren not just some facts about the LORD, but to truly know Him. And we can see that the best thing we can do for our friends and neighbours is to give them a true picture of the LORD. That is our theme today:

KNOW the LORD!

1. We know Him from His Revelation of Himself.
2. We know Him from experiencing His love and mercy.

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There is only one way to know the LORD, that is through His revelation of Himself. We can know that there is a god by looking at the world He created. But we can only know the LORD through His revelation in the Bible. In our text for today God reveals His true nature in a magnificent way so that we can truly know Him. This comes after the golden calf incident. God had just told them not to have any other god's and not to make any graven

images, and while God was still speaking to Moses on Mt. Sinai, they made the golden calf to worship. God was going to destroy them, which is what they deserved, but when Moses prayed for them, the LORD relented and promised to still go with them to the Promised Land.

Moses was so overwhelmed with God's grace and forgiveness that He asked God, "Please, show me Your glory." God told him, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." But He said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. 22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen." Ex. 33:18-23 Our text now is when God showed Moses His glory. Moses describes that for us in **Exodus 34:5-9**.

"5 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

8 Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. 9 "O LORD, if I have found favor in your eyes," he said, "then let the LORD go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance."

God's true Glory is not revealed in His visible appearance. It is seen in His name which reveals God's nature. Let's think about what God tells us. The Lord God of the Bible is not an angry, vindictive God who is quick to punish people for disobeying Him. Just the opposite! He is the "Compassionate and Gracious God." He is "abounding in love and faithfulness." That is who He is. God is Love. He has compassion on the poor and needy. He wants nothing more than to wrap His arms around you and bless you. He is ever faithful to all His promises.

And what about those who sin against His commands? God is "Slow to anger" and He maintains His love to them by forgiving their "wickedness, rebellion and sin." He doesn't cast people off because of their sin or punish them right away but patiently, lovingly forgives us over and over even in our rebellion. He bore with Israel's rebellion for over 1000 years.

If God is so loving and forgiving, why does He go on to say, "He does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." There is actually a great deal of comfort in that. Who are the "guilty" that God punishes? He just said that He forgives those who commit "wickedness, rebellion and sin." So it is not the severity of the sin, or even the volume of sin. These were guilty but God does not consider them guilty any more. They have been forgiven. Their sin and their guilt is gone so that they will never be punished for their sins. The "guilty" can only be those who reject God's forgiveness or don't want or think they need His forgiveness.

It has been said that the only sin that will condemn anyone is the sin of unbelief. God is a Holy God who loves all people and wants desperately to save all people. He made the greatest sacrifice to save all people and He freely offers that forgiveness and salvation to everyone. There is no sin that is too great to be forgiven. He even forgives for crucifying His own Son. But if people reject God's love and forgiveness, then they remain in their sins as Jesus told the Pharisees. As a holy God, He has no other choice but to punish them for those sins.

But why does He punish the children and grandchildren for the sins of their parents? That doesn't seem fair and it certainly doesn't seem very loving. But that's not God's desire or will and it's not His fault, it is the sad reality of unbelief. Cain didn't seek or want God's forgiveness for killing his brother Abel. He "went out from the presence of the Lord." He didn't want anything to do with the LORD, so he certainly didn't teach his children or grandchildren about the Lord. As a result of Cain's sin of unbelief and rejection, many generations of people grew up without knowing the Lord and therefore they were doomed by the sin of their parents. Even when those children were confronted with the Gospel through their contact with believers, they continued to reject God. God had no choice but to punish them.

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We can only know the true God through His revelation of Himself in His word. But we can only truly Know Him closely and dearly when we experience God's Grace and Forgiveness for ourselves.

Moses and the children of Israel experienced God's love and forgiveness for themselves first hand. They had disobeyed God's very first commandment. God had showed His mighty power and His presence in so many dramatic ways. And they made a statue of a cow to worship and said this is your God! What a slap in God's face! Yet God forgave them and went with them to the Promised Land. That was proof that He is "The LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

In our Gospel reading today we can see that God hadn't changed a bit in over 1500 years. Just think about Zacchaeus for a minute. He was a "chief tax collector and was wealthy."

As you know, the tax collectors were hated more than anyone in Israel. They were seen as traitors because they were working for the Romans. And they were cold hearted thieves, getting rich by making their neighbours and countrymen even more poor. Why would anyone want to become a Tax Collector? Can you imagine boys thinking to themselves, "I want to be the person that everyone hates when I grow up?" The only reason I can imagine would be that they were drawn by the money. This was a way to get rich. Zacchaeus must not have cared what other people thought of him. He obviously didn't know God and was under the false notion that being rich would make his life full. He didn't even care about what God thought of him. All he cared about was getting rich. That was his goal in life. Notice Zacchaeus was the "**Chief** tax collector." He no doubt worked his way up by being ruthless in his tactics. He had no compassion whatsoever on the poor whose lives were made even more desperate by him.

Then Zacchaeus came into contact with Jesus. He had heard about Him. He no doubt heard of Jesus' power and compassion to heal the sick, and His grace to forgive the sinners. Now Jesus was coming to his town. He desperately wanted to see Jesus. But he knew he wasn't worthy to just go up to Jesus and invite Him to come to his house? Instead he climbed a tree just to get a glimpse of Jesus. What Jesus did was truly amazing. He showed the true nature of God as it was revealed to Moses. He went up to Zacchaeus, called him by name and said, "I must stay at your house today."

The people were shocked that Jesus would go to the house of such a sinner. That was proof that they really did not know God either. The whole reason Jesus came to this world was to seek and save lost sinners. We are not told what Jesus said to Zacchaeus and his household, but you can be sure that He talked to them about God's grace and forgiveness. What we do see is the result of what Jesus said. It completely changed Zacchaeus' life.

Money was no longer his greatest love, his god. Now he genuinely cared about the poor and was determined to give to the poor to help them rather than stealing from them. He also was genuinely sorry for his sins and wanted to make up for them by giving back fourfold what he had wrongfully taken from anyone. Zacchaeus truly knew God now and it changed his whole life. He no longer cared about being rich, for he had received the much greater riches of God's grace and peace.

Do you truly know God? Have you experienced His overwhelming grace and mercy in Christ? When we know the just punishment of God against sin, and understand our own great sinfulness, then we marvel all the more at God's grace that would forgive me and save me from the punishment I rightfully deserve. When you see God's love in action, how the Son of God willingly suffered the most cruel death in your place, then you truly begin to know God and rejoice in His grace and forgiveness. And knowing God in this way does truly change our lives. We don't want to keep fighting against God but we want to love Him and serve Him. We want to do His will. We begin to love like God, loving our fellow Christians the way He loved us, with full forgiveness and compassion. There is no knowledge better than knowing God. And Jesus reminds us, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent." John 17:3. To know God is eternal life.

Therefore, don't make the mistake of Zacchaeus, making money or anything else the goal of your life. Let us make knowing God more intimately our goal in life. Rely on His grace and forgiveness. Teach our children to truly know Him. And be ready to show your friends and neighbours the true nature of God as a gracious and compassionate God who wants all people to be saved.

Then your life will truly be full.

Amen.