

DO YOU REALLY KNOW GOD? – 1 JOHN 2:3-11

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ JANUARY 26, 2014

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

It's all over the social and public media. It's something that happened last Sunday, it's something that gets you to think, how much you really know a person. Maybe some of you know what I'm talking about. It happened after the NFC championship football game between the San Francisco 49ers and the Seattle Seahawks. The game ended with a Seattle defender named Richard Sherman knocking away the game winning touchdown pass from the 49er wide receiver. A great play, but that wasn't what set off the twitter universe. After the game, a reporter interviewed Richard Sherman. The reporter recorded a very hyped up and emotional Richard Sherman. It was his comments about “being the best” and “shutting your mouth” that got a lot of people talking.

It was an interview that everyone was talking about, and not just in the sports world. People fell on different sides of the fence about Sherman – the one side making comparisons to him being a thug, the other side happy that a football player showed emotion and wasn't politically correct. All of it coming solely from that one interview. Without that interview, many people would not even know who Richard Sherman was. Now, you can make your own decision on how you feel about Richard Sherman based on one interview, or you could look a little deeper. His emotional interview last week is certainly part of who he is, a part I don't condone, but don't you think there would be more to him than that. You couldn't tell from that interview, but Richard Sherman went to Stanford University, he was a straight 'A' student in high school. Thanks to his mom, he didn't get involved in the gang scene that thrived in the LA neighborhoods he grew up in. Those are also what it takes to get to know Richard Sherman.

Now whether or not you choose to like Richard Sherman or not for his post-game interview is up to you, and is something that is probably not going to matter too much in how you conduct your day to day life. But that question of how well do you know someone goes to a different level when you are talking about God. When you are talking about God, it's imperative that you know who he is your eternity is at stake. It is this question that John is answering in our second lesson for this morning. And it is a question we all must be able to answer. How well DO YOU REALLY KNOW GOD?

1. Don't fool yourself
2. You can have that assurance

(1)

It was a question that was being asked among the Mediterranean world by a group of people called the Gnostics. The Gnostics taught an ancient heresy that denied who Jesus was, saying he only seemed to be God. They denied that God could be found in Scripture, but rather in whatever happened to please them. They claimed a secret knowledge that one had to know in order to really know and please God, without that nobody can know God.

It is against these heretics that John is writing his letter. In fact all four books of the New Testament that John wrote (the gospel of John and then 1, 2, & 3 John) he refutes what is false and condones what is true. He uses the simple pictures of light and darkness, truth and lies. John was warning his listeners, don't fool yourself! You think you know God? Let me tell you how you know you can know God.

"We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, I know him,' but does not do what he commands is liar." John gives a general sweeping overview for what it takes to know God. We know that we know him by how we live. Don't just live however you want, but live in the way God wants you to live by keeping his commands. John said this because plenty of those Gnostic heretics were doing whatever they wanted and not what God wanted, John calls them **"liars!"**

John gives a specific example of what he's talking about near the end of the lesson. He said, **"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness...they do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them."** Using the picture of light and darkness, light being good and darkness being bad, John says those who don't follow God's commands are still in the darkness. One simple example, hating a brother or a sister casts you into the darkness. And notice who John is talking about, he's not just talking about anyone, he's talking about someone who claims to be a believer, who claims to know Christ, who claims to be in the light. Right here, John is clear in saying there will be hypocrites in the church. And yet that doesn't give a reason to abandon church, but a reason to examine ourselves lest we fool ourselves into thinking we know God.

The fault John points out here directly is knowing what God says and not doing what God says. It's like the football player who knows the game plan, but doesn't execute it, it's like the student who knows they need to do homework and then not doing it. It's like the college religion professor knowing what the Bible says about Jesus but not believing it, the archeologist digs up ancient civilizations and ignores what he find. You know what God's Word says, good, now do it!

"Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." So you see, it's not just loving everybody blindly around you it's living how Jesus did. And I think a good review is to take a look at how Jesus lived. A common assumption is that Jesus was a good guy who was nice to everyone and didn't have a bad word to say. This comes from the time he spent with sinners and tax collectors, the miracles of healing he performed, and some of the sermons he preached. That was one way Jesus responded to people, but Jesus also had some strong angry words to say to those stubborn enough to refuse their sin, he overturned money changer's tables in the temple, he wept for stubborn Jerusalem, there was even a

time where he had to rebuke his own disciples. Oh yea, and then you have that whole “living perfect” thing that he did.

I wonder which group of people we would fall into if Jesus were around and talking to us today? Certainly we would like to be in the group of people whom Jesus had good words to say. Would he say kind words about our malicious gossiping, sexual immorality or filthy language? We would be foolish to think we could be Jesus’ disciples while continuing to hold on to our own desires. It’s a sad truth that many people believe they are Christians but are not. John warns us so that we will not be among those who are shocked to hear Jesus say on the last day, **“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** Don’t fool yourself by thinking these words could never be said to you, sin makes us blind.

DO YOU REALLY KNOW GOD? Then don’t be deceived by what the world tells you about him, don’t be deceived by what your heart tells you about him, instead see what he tells us about him in his Word. It is there that we REALLY DO KNOW GOD. We find a God who would not let the sinner wander around aimlessly in the darkness of his own sin. We find a God who brought light into the darkness, a light we heard about in our first lesson and gospel for this morning. Because of this light, you can have that assurance that YOU REALLY KNOW GOD.

(2)

A false notion we can get from this reading is that somehow it is our obeying of God’s commands that makes us a true believer. Nothing can be further from the truth. In his gospel, John compares us as branches to a vine. The vine is Jesus Christ, we are connected to him. It is the vine that allows us to obey God’s commands, without Christ we could not. But it is not the obeying of God’s commands which gets us to heaven, but we obey his word when we believe what it says.

We believe God made the earth and everything in it, believe God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to become man and live a perfect life we could not. We believe he was crucified as a substitute for our sins. We believe he rose from the dead to announce his victory. We believe he is reigning up in heaven until that day comes when he will ask us to join him. We believe the Holy Spirit creates life in our hearts to believe. We believe our baptism forgives our sins by connecting us to Christ’s sacrifice. This is a summary of what we confessed before our sermon this morning in the Nicene creed

If you believe this, you can have the assurance that YOU REALLY KNOW GOD. John says, **“I am not writing you a new command, but an old one,”** – to love God and to love your neighbor are nothing new to God’s people, this is something God’s people have been doing for generations, no secret knowledge or handshake gives you a leg up. And yet John also says, **“I am writing you a new command...because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.”** The new part of this old command is made clear in Jesus. He is the light that has shone in the dark world. This light is entering new hearts every day, making darkness flee. Believing Jesus has died for your sins is like believing the sun is shining outside.

Brothers and sisters, it is shining. And not just the sun here in Tucson, but God’s Son in your hearts and lives. When we live in the light, we can see everything around us. We know the direction we are going, we know that because we see it, we know it because we see God. What will you do now that

you are in the light? We do what he wants, because we want what he wants. We will love our brothers and sisters – love them enough to encourage them when they're down, and correct them when they're wrong. And when we do what he wants, he lives in us and we reflect that light in the world.

There are certain people in this world worth knowing. Your family and friends are two groups of people who would be good to know. Those are two groups of people you spend time with and so it should be fairly easy to get to know them. It can be a lot harder to really know people you don't spend any time with – whether that's professional athletes, artists, politicians. Think about how that applies to God's Word. TO REALLY KNOW GOD, you need to spend time with him, time in his word, the place he tells us about himself. You can fool yourself by thinking you know him outside of his Word, or you can be assured that you know him. He is the God who loves you, and takes away your sin. Amen.