

THE KNOWABILITY OF GOD

by Steve Hammond, Sunday, January 6, 2019

John 16:29-17:5 at NFBC

//His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! 30 Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." 31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? 32 Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. 33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

*//17:1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. **3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.** 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.//*

—John 16:29-17:5 ESV

I've started watching "Blue Planet" on Netflix. Years and years ago I was a fan of Jacques Cousteau. He and the aqualung were new on the horizon for discovering what was below the ocean depths. It was fun and fascinating to see his TV specials taking us into our own world as if it were an alien planet, or, as if we were the aliens invading another world.

Well, this "Blue Planet" program is even more advanced, by many decades of research and development for exploring our oceans. The pictures are amazing; the facts are amazing; the depths to which we can go in seeing the ocean floor is astoundingly amazing. On the shallow end we see the sunlit coral reefs. On the deepest end we discover the sunless canyons surrounding those life-abundant hydrothermal vents.

Yet for all the advancement, we hear this remark from David Attenborough: "We know more about the surface of Mars than we do about the deep oceans."

In this day of the "Information Age," Google, Wikipedia and David Attenborough on Netflix, it is tempting for us to think we know a lot about reality, about what's true and what's false. But that statement about how much we do *not* know about our oceans, I believe, can be repeated about virtually every field of knowledge going. For all we know of history, just think how much of it is underwater and still unmapped, unknown. For all we know of science, just think how much of it is still completely in the dark

(like dark matter itself). For all we know of politics . . . well, we know we're still in the stone age there. Are we not? We should be thinking of our world as a huge, huge, infinitely huge blue ocean of truth. This 'ocean' covers not merely our planet, but everything in reality – from the depths of Sheol to the heights of heaven.

I pity the materialists who think reality only consists of what's physical. That there is no heaven or hell or soul or God or anything spiritual. Such a denial is virtually a denial of truth itself. Their world can still be said to be big, big as the oceans and big as the planets, galaxies and universe. But their world of truth is like the dry, dusty surface of Mars compared to the spiritual realities of the Creator God, the angels and the complexities and mysteries of life filling the Blue Planet and everything around it. And I mean everything. The whole universe is just the surface of things. There's a depth of truth and height of truth that reaches all the way to God.

But how do you discover and explore God? What kind of ship do you build? What kind of aqualung do you strap on? How high or deep must your diving bell venture before the pressures of God's holiness crushes you to pieces?

All those are the wrong questions. Because when it comes to our knowing God, God has supplied us with everything we need – in Jesus Christ. Look at verse 3 in Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17.

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ---John 17:3

What a verse this is. What a statement of truth. You don't just add this to a growing pile of true things about God and life and then move on to other things. This truth right here points us to Jesus . . . like that parable Jesus himself spoke about the treasure in a field. That treasure was so valuable that the guy who saw it sold everything he had so he could buy the whole field just so he could own that treasure. Jesus is that treasure. Knowing him is everything. Knowing Jesus covers all the map of all the truths of who God is and how it is we can know him.

To go back to the image of exploring the ocean, it's as if you had two opportunities before you: 1) you could put on your face mask and fins and explore the ocean at Little Harbor on Bailey Island, or 2) you could go around the world with Jacque Cousteau with his ship the Calypso, his crew and his aqualungs.

Actually with Jesus it's way more drastic than that. The choice before us is 1) we can live out our lives here not even knowing God or what we're doing here paddling around in a puddle . . . and then you die; or 2) we can start living our lives here in the company of Jesus, the very Creator and Redeemer of our lives and of this Earth, and learn to see everything according to his true view of life, and then . . . and then, well . . . maybe you'll die, yes, but then you'll get a new body that won't die. And you'll have forever to continue to explore, not merely a world of stuff . . . but the world of God himself.

Salvation consists of knowing God. And God has given us the knowability of himself through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Thank God we don't have to try and map him out from Alpha to Omega or explore him like the oceans or Mars. God has given us Jesus. And all we need to do is focus on getting to know him. And the great news is: Jesus is very, very **knowable**. The world is lying to you when it tries to make out that Jesus is a lost figure in history; he's too remote; he's too controversial; he's too complicated. It's just the opposite. We have so many distinct advantages for coming to know Jesus. And therefore we have advantages for coming to know God. Here are three, well, maybe two.

1. We can know God through the Story of Jesus.

This is the Gospel. It is a story, a true story. It is filled with profound truths through deeds and sayings, but because it is a story it is interesting to follow and easy to remember. It is even filled with little mini-stories (parables) because Jesus himself loved stories. I believe this fact itself tells us something about God. We are already starting to get to know God by knowing about his love of stories. Knowing God gives life a framework where stories are not limited to just made up fantasies. Life itself can legitimately be seen as an unfolding story, because life has an Author. And because that Author has given it a plot and purpose which can be found in him and him alone.

But the best thing about the Story of Jesus is not that it is a story. It's what the Story is about. It's a love story. It's about God's love for Jesus and Jesus' love for God. And it's about God's love for sinners and Jesus' love for you and me so much that he was willing to die as the only way to save us from our sin and alienation from knowing God. And it's a true story. The most true story the world has ever encountered . . . in history.

2. We can know God through the Spirit of Jesus.

This is going to blow your mind. This takes the story aspect of Jesus' life and turns it into a blockbuster movie. It takes the story off the page, and even takes it off the limitations of your own imagination, and fills you with the music and movement and power of the truth at the core of that story. When you are immersed in the Spirit of Jesus it's like you get the whole story from beginning to end; you get the 'theme song,' which makes an understanding of everything else easier and more impactful.

Think of the difference some songs have made in the making of a great movie. I can still hear Doctor Zhivago's mandolin playing and bringing back the sense of that movie all the way back from the 60's. Hey, even the theme song to Gilligan's Island played a serious role as it introduced every character, told the whole backstory necessary to understand what was going on, and was extremely catchy. One of my favorite theme songs comes from a recent TV series called "Home Fires." The story was good. But the theme song was so good I still play it long after having watched the show.

Of course, the Holy Spirit isn't mere music. I'm just using that for an analogy to what he really does for us when we hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There was a spirit about Jesus when he walked the earth. He was filled with the Holy Spirit of God when he was baptized by John. And the people who met Jesus, and especially the people who followed him, met that Spirit as well. This was the very Spirit of the truth of Jesus and the Gospel.

That Spirit did not go away when Jesus went away, back to his Father. In fact, that's when the Holy Spirit became available to more than just Jesus. For Jesus sent him back as the promised Gift for everyone who would believe in Jesus' name and follow him. He guides believers into all the truth needed for a true relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Now we can know God from the inside, by his very Spirit of truth.

I have a third way in which we are advantaged for the knowing of God through Jesus Christ, but we don't have the time. So I may save it for next week.

For now, though, give thanks to God for making himself known to us through the knowability of Jesus Christ. This is our very salvation. And you can thank him by getting to know him better and better every day.