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Knowing God Through The Life Of Abraham

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PART I

KNOWING GOD

—Through The Life Of Abraham

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THE GOD WHO CALLS

John 17:3—And this is the eternal life, that they shall know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

We thank the Lord for gathering us together. Every time we are privileged to gather together unto the name of our Lord Jesus, I always feel that it is a special grace of God because we are living in the end days. We do not know how many more times we will be able to gather together in this way. As a matter of fact, there are many places where God's people are not able to meet together in this way. Who are we that we are so privileged? I do feel that we should treasure such times, that we will not allow such times just to pass without God's purpose being realized. So may we gather in the spirit of prayer, looking to the Lord that He will really meet us and that we will meet Him, too. Then our gathering together will not be in vain.

The theme of our conference is: *Knowing God*. There is no knowledge more fundamental and basic than the knowledge of God. And there is no knowledge more sublime than the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is so essential to us. It means life or death to us. All the other knowledge in the world, whether you have it or whether you do not have it, does not decide your eternity. Only the knowledge of God determines your life or death and it is eternal life or eternal death.

So, as we consider together this matter of knowing God, it is something that is very important to each one of us. God is Spirit. How can we know Him in a living and real way?

Romans 1:19-20—Because what is known of God is manifest among them, for God has manifested it to them, — for from the world's creation the invisible things of him are perceived, being apprehended by the mind through the things that are made, both his eternal power and divinity, -- so as to render them inexcusable.

Even though God is invisible, yet He has manifested Himself to man. By observing the things that He created, we may know of His divinity and eternal power. We know that He is the Almighty God. Who but the Almighty God is able to create all the things in the universe? At the same time, we realize that God is divine. He is not

like us human beings. He is divine. That is His nature. So through the things that we have seen, through these visible, created things, we can know the invisible God.

THE UNKNOWN GOD

When the apostle Paul was in Athens, he noticed that the Athenians seemed to be a very religious people because he saw many shrines in Athens. And he saw an altar which was dedicated to the unknown God. The Athenians at that time were noted for their knowledge and wisdom. They spent their time just in telling and hearing news. They speculated and philosophized about everything, yet they knew that there must be a God that was unknown. In spite of the fact that they worshiped all kinds of gods, somehow, instinctively, they realized that there must be a God above all gods; yet this was a God unknown.

So the apostle Paul told them on Mars' Hill, that this unknown God is not unknowable. As a matter of fact, if you think about it, you will discover that it is this God who gives us life. He gives us everything. In one blood, he made the nations. He predetermined their times and their boundaries. By looking into human history, you will realize that there was Someone behind human history, Someone who is in control. And by observing history, you can sense God. As a matter of fact, we live and move and exist in Him. But in spite of the fact that God has manifested Himself both in created things and

also in human history, we could only know God in an external knowledge. By our human reasoning, by our thinking, by our human understanding, we could conclude that there must be a God, but this God was a distant God. This God was an objective one. There was no personal relationship. Therefore we can say that by all these things we may know something of God, but we do not really know God.

KNOWING GOD

Brothers and sisters, isn't that true with our past experience? Maybe with most of us, we believed that there must be a God, there must be a Creator, there must be Someone who is in control of human history. We often say, "What is history?" History is His story. It is the story of God. It is the story of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, we find that this is an unknown God because there is no contact with Him. So we cannot say that is the true knowledge of God.

How can we really know God? The only way to really know God Himself is to know Him in life. That is why it says in John 17:3: "To know Him, the only true God and to know the one whom Thou has sent: this is eternal life." We can put it in another way. How do we come to know God? We must know Him in life. It is life that gives us the knowledge of God. This is the only real living way of knowing the living God.

We thank God, because even though God is the greatest mystery in the universe, yet it pleases God to reveal Himself to us. The apostle Paul tells us: "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." That is Paul's personal experience. Before that time Paul, whose name was Saul, was a very religious young man. He was brought up in a religious Jewish family, an orthodox family, a Hebrew of Hebrews (see Philippians 3). Even though he was born in Tarsus, a Gentile city, yet his family still spoke Hebrew.

Many families, such as the Chinese, that have moved away from their native land today and migrated to different countries, even though the parents still speak their native tongue, the children begin to speak the language of the land. Many Chinese children do not speak Chinese. But there are some families who, even though they live in foreign countries, still speak Chinese.

This was the case with Saul. He was brought up in a very orthodox Jewish family. Probably, when he was twelve years old, he moved to Jerusalem and studied the Law under the greatest rabbi of that time. He was a student of Gamaliel, so he knew everything about the Law and all the traditions of the fathers. He had great knowledge about God. He told us himself that he was a Pharisee, a Pharisee of Pharisees. He was so zealous; and he was more advanced than his contemporaries.

We would say that Paul was a person who knew much about God. Because he had such great knowledge, he was trying to serve God. But he served God according to the tradition of the fathers.

There was no personal, direct knowledge of God. Very few can compare with him as to his knowledge about God, yet he did not know God. And he persecuted those who believed in Jesus Christ. He thought that by doing this he was serving God. How blind he was! Until one day, the Lord Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Because God knew his heart, God knew that he was sincere, that He was seeking after God, therefore God met him. God appeared to him. The Lord Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

And Saul said, "Who are You, Lord?" In other words, he did not know God. He had much knowledge about God, yet he did not know who the Lord was. After the Lord appeared to him, then his whole life was transformed. He received a new life. He said, "It pleases God to reveal His Son in me."

After that revelation from above, he received a new life. He received the life of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and in that life he knew God. God became a personal God to him. God was no longer a distant God, a God in his mind. He became a God in his heart. God dwelt in him. There was a relationship between him and God. It was a relationship of life. And since this relationship was formed, his whole passion was to know Him.

In Philippians 3, he tells us that because of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ he considered everything as dross because the living, true knowledge of Jesus Christ is the treasure. To know Him was his life-long passion. Even when he wrote the letter to the Philippians, he had known the Lord Jesus for a number of years

already, yet he said, “My passion is to know Him, to know the power of His resurrection, to have fellowship with His sufferings, to be conformed to His death that I may arrive at the out-resurrection from among the dead.”

The more you know the Lord Jesus in life, the more you long to know Him. To know Him is life. The quality of our life depends on our knowledge of God. The more we know Him in life, the better, the higher is the quality of our life. So our prayer is that God will create within us a passion for the true knowledge of God, that we may hunger and thirst after Him, and that we will want to know Him more. The more we know Him, the more we want to know Him. So may the Lord give us such a desire, such a longing!

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

In the Old Testament we find that there is a compound name of God. Our God has many names, because by His names He reveals who He is. Among the Chinese, especially, when the parents give names to their children, usually the names are given with very good meanings. And our God has many names, and every name reveals something of Himself. But in the Bible, not only in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament too, God has a compound name: He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. In that compound name, God reveals something very important to us. It shows us that God is not a distant God. God is a

God who has a personal relationship with man, with individual persons.

Some people who believe in God have a concept that God created the universe and human beings, but after He created everything then He had nothing to do with what He had created. But God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. In other words, our God is one who has personal relationship with us as individuals. He is not a God who has nothing to do with us now, who created the world, who created mankind, and now says for us to do as well as we can. Now it is our business and He will have nothing to do with the universe or nothing to do with man. God is not like that because God is love. The very essence of God is love. And because of this, He wants to have a personal relationship with us, with each one of us as individuals. He loves to reveal Himself to us personally. He knows that every one of us is different.

If you read the story of Abraham, you cannot but acknowledge that Abraham is a great man. If you read the story of Isaac, you find that Isaac is just a common person. He does not seem to have anything spectacular in his life. There is also nothing too evil or wrong in him. He was just a common person. If you look at Jacob, you find that he was such a tricky person, very evil in a sense, but God can reach everyone. If you are a person like Abraham, He can reach you. If you are a common person like Isaac, He can touch you. And even if you are a person like Jacob, He can work in your life and transform you. There is no one that God cannot reach—no one

too good to be reached, no one too evil to be reached, and no one too common to be reached. Thank God, He is for everyone! He loves each one of us so much, and He wants to touch each one of us.

God is the God of Abraham, but not Abraham alone. In that compound name, He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. In other words, our God is so infinite, His grace is so abundant, and there are such unsearchable riches in Him, that He cannot be limited to one person. It takes all the people to show us what a God He is. He is not only the God of Abraham, He is also the God of Isaac, and He is also the God of Jacob. And by knowing Him as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, then we come to a fuller knowledge of God.

God touched the life of Abraham and He became the God of Abraham. God touched the life of Isaac and He became the God of Isaac. And God touched the life of Jacob and He became the God of Jacob. As the God of Abraham, He revealed through Abraham's life that God is the Father. Being the God of Isaac, He revealed through Isaac's life, God the Son. And being the God of Jacob, He revealed through Jacob's life, God the Holy Spirit.

Our God is a triune God. Therefore, in being called the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, He reveals that He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He wants us to know Him as Father, and know Him in life. Through life, we know that He is God the Father. Through life, we know He is God

the Son. Through life, we know Him as God the Holy Spirit. This is knowing God, and this is what we want to consider together.

Do we really know God the Father? Do we really know God the Son? Do we really know God the Spirit? And it is not something we know in our head. It is knowing Him in life that He has touched us, He has dealt with us, and there is such an experience of Him in a personal way. This is knowing God.

We would like to consider together how God became the God of Abraham, and how we can know God the Father. We would like to use the comment of the Holy Spirit that is in Hebrews 11. We know that the Holy Spirit made a comment about the life of Abraham, and He shows us three things. By faith, Abraham went out when called, not knowing whither he was going. By faith, Abraham sojourned in the Promised Land as a stranger and sojourner. And by faith, Abraham, when tested, offered up Isaac.

GOD CALLED ABRAHAM

Hebrews 11:8—"By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out into the place which he was to receive as an inheritance, and went out, not knowing where he was going."

If you go back to the book of Genesis you find in Genesis 11 that Terah begot Abram. Now, the name *Abram* means "high father." When a child was born, the father had some thought about the child. He might have some expectations concerning that child, so he called

his child, Abram, high father. What does it mean? It means that probably Terah's expectation was for this child to have many sons and many daughters. But strangely, the Bible tells us that he married Sarai, and Sarai was barren. It must have been a great disappointment. He was supposed to be a high father and yet he had no child. We might think it was a tragedy. And yet God had a higher thought for Abram.

God's thoughts are always higher than our thoughts. God's ways are always higher than our ways. Here is a man who was expected to be a high father, but what a tragedy! He did not even have one son, and it was God who shut up the womb of Sarai. For what reason? God had a higher thought for Abram. You remember that later on God changed his name to Abraham. At that time, he still had no son, and yet God said he would be called Abraham, "father of a multitude"; not only "high father," but "father of a multitude." That is God's thought for this person.

EVERYTHING MUST BEGIN WITH GOD

Brothers and sisters, here is the first meaning of fatherhood, the first indication of the revelation of God the Father. *Father* means "the beginning." God was to be the beginning of the life of Abraham. What was natural had to come to an end so that God could be his beginning.

When you open the Bible, the first word is: “In the beginning God.” This is the first spiritual principle in the word of God. Who is God? What kind of God is He? He is the beginning. He is the first. He is the Alpha. He is the originator of life. Everything must begin with Him. Whatever does not begin with Him does not count. Anything that does not have its beginning in God will be brought into death so that God can be the beginning. And this is what you find in the life of Abraham. God will not allow man to be the beginning. God Himself is the beginning. That is the reason why God shut up the womb of Sarai. At that time it was a tragedy to Abraham, but actually, God meant to bless him.

So I think for us to know God the Father, the first spiritual principle is to realize that everything must begin with God. That is the beginning of our spiritual life. Before God begins in our life, that natural life does not count. Even after we believe in the Lord Jesus and He is the beginning of our life, yet how often we still live in the old life. We still have expectation in our flesh, and this is the lesson we need to learn—all flesh has to go into death. It is a very tragic experience, and yet it is necessary because God Himself wants to be the beginning. This is knowing God the Father in life.

Before we believed in the Lord Jesus, we tried to achieve salvation by ourselves, by that old life. We tried to accumulate enough merit to be saved. We thought of righteousness according to the Law. But God has to bring us to the end. We discover that there is no good in us. No one can save himself by his efforts. Only after

we are brought to that end can we begin to see that it has to begin with God. "But God, rich in mercy and love." He has to be our beginning. But remember, this is not only true in the beginning of our Christian life, it must be true throughout our Christian life. This explains to us why He has to bring us to death in order that He can begin with us. And this is the first meaning of fatherhood.

THE GOD OF GLORY APPEARED TO ABRAHAM

When Abraham was in Ur of Chaldea, the God of glory appeared to him (see Acts 7:1). When you read Genesis 12, it seems as if God spoke to Abraham in Haran. But actually, if you go to Acts 7, you find that even when Abraham was in Ur of Chaldea, the God of glory appeared to him and called him.

Today, Ur of Chaldea has already been excavated. They discovered that Ur of Chaldea was a city of idols. According to tradition, Terah, Abraham's father was a maker of idols. Abraham was born in such a city and in such a family, yet the God of glory appeared to him. Again you find God had to take the initiative. It was not man who took the initiative. God always takes the initiative. So it was God who appeared to Abraham and called him to leave his native land and his kindred and to go where God would lead him. And the Bible tells us that Abraham obeyed; by faith, he obeyed. But when he went out, he did not know where he was going.

God appeared to Abraham. The God of glory appeared to Abraham. Now, what is glory? Glory is a term that is impossible to define. When God appeared, there was glory. In the Bible the word *glory* is a synonym of God. God is glory. You cannot define it. It is indescribable because our God is the self-existing God. He is the God of eternity. He is the omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient God. He is love. He is holiness. He is purity. He is beauty itself. The Bible tries different ways to express the glory of God. Sometimes it uses the symbol of fire. When they see the appearance of God, it is like the burning fire. Sometimes it is an indescribable light. Sometimes it is symbolized by brilliant gold. And sometimes it is even described as a dark cloud, yet there is glory within it, the Shekinah glory of God.

Glory describes God as unique, that He is different. He is above all. He is indescribable. There is satisfaction, pleasure in Him. He is perfection. And this God of glory appeared to Abraham. When Abraham saw the glory of God, immediately all those idols became shameful. The glory of God was such that it blinded the eyes of Abraham to his surroundings. Ur of Chaldea was nothing compared to the glory of God. All his relationship with his kindred became nothing. He was called to leave everything of the old behind and just go where God was leading him.

GOD CALLS US BY HIS GLORY

Dear brothers and sisters, do you know that God calls us by His glory? II Peter 1:3—“As his divine power has given to us all things which relate to life and godliness through the knowledge of him that has called us by glory and virtue.”

His calling is a glorious calling. His calling is not something cheap, something small. God called Abraham by His glory. That is to say, God was going to lead Abraham into glory. And the same thing is true with us today. God called each one of us by His glory. He reveals to us how glorious He is. He reveals to us His unsearchable riches. And He is leading us into glory.

Oftentimes, we think of God's calling as just calling us out of death into heaven. But we need to remember that He calls us by His glory. That is why you find Romans 8:30 tells us that whom God has foreknown, He has predestinated. He called them and He justified them. Whom He justified, He glorified. His calling is that we may be conformed to the image of His beloved Son. Our Lord Jesus is to lead many sons into glory. Our calling is an on-high calling. And because Abraham saw the glory of God, he was able to leave everything behind and follow the Lord.

We need to see that we are called according to His glory. If only the glory of the Lord will appear to us, if only we can see His beauty, if we can see His loveliness, if we can see His holiness, we will be so

attracted by Him. Then naturally, we will be able to leave everything that is old behind us and follow Him.

When the God of glory appeared to Abraham, do not think that what God called him to do was irrational. When you see the glory of God, that is the only way you can go because glory puts everything else in shadow.

ABRAHAM'S RESPONSE

How did Abraham respond? He responded by faith. Oftentimes we say, "Faith is blind." Sometimes we say, "It is a leap of faith." This is only half-true. It is true that when faith is being exercised, you are no longer being led by feeling. You are no longer led by the visible. You no longer depend upon what you can see and hear. So far as these external things are concerned it is true. Yet, faith is not blind. Faith may be blind to these external things, may be blind to your own feeling, but spiritually, faith is sight.

Abraham went out by faith, not knowing where he was going. He was blind; he did not know where he was going. But Abraham knew God. He did not know where he was going, but He knew God was leading him.

What is faith? Faith is looking away from everything and looking steadfastly unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Without seeing God, you cannot have faith. Faith cannot be manufactured. Faith is seeing God, seeing the glory of God. And

because of that, faith rises within your heart. You can trust the One whom you have seen. Glory is a reality.

So brothers and sisters, how we also need to respond by faith! May the Lord Himself reveal to us His glory and then we will respond by faith.

In the life of Abraham we see how God revealed Himself to him as God the Father, that He is the beginning, that in every step of his life, God had to take the initiative. Then also, He shows that He is Father because the Father loves. And because He loves so much, He wants to share His glory with us.

I often feel this way: When we talk about God the Son, it seems as if He is more tangible. We seem to be able to understand God the Son. But when we talk about God the Father, oftentimes it is a little bit vague. We know that He is our Father, but in what ways? How much do we know Him as the Father? How much do we really know Him in life? I feel that this is a most necessary knowledge that we must have.

So may the Lord reveal Himself to us as Father. If we really know God the Father, something will happen. That father character will in turn be incorporated into us. That is the reason Abraham is called the father of faith because he knew God the Father. That father character began to characterize him. If we really know God the Father, then the same thing will happen to us. The father character will begin to be manifested in our life. May the Lord help us!

Let's have a word of prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, we do want to praise and thank Thee because Thou art not the unknown God. Thou hast manifested Thyself as the God of Abraham. And in the life of Abraham, we can know Thee as our Father. We do pray that Thou wilt always be the beginning. Do not allow us to initiate anything. Bring us to our end that Thou mayest be always our beginning. We do pray, Lord, that Thou wilt continue to draw us with Thy glory, that we may enter into Thy glory. We praise and worship Thee in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.