

Colossians 3:10

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Preacher: Basil Howlett

[0 : 00] Theapolis Rosnabar Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Now, the Apostle Paul was one of the greatest Christians there has ever been. And this evening, we're going to look at one of his greatest longings.

And you'll find it there in Philippians 3 verse 10 when he says, I want to know him. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

[3 : 26] In this passage, Paul is giving his own testimony. He tells us in verses 4 to 8 that once he was a proud, self-righteous Pharisee, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, zealous about the Jewish ritual, so zealous that he persecuted the Christian church.

He thought he was faultless, the way in which he observed all the rituals. But once he had met with the Lord Jesus Christ, he saw that all of that was sheer rubbish.

And now Christ was everything. As we saw last week, his aim in life was to live for Christ.

And now he says, my greatest longing in life is to know him better. Oh, that I might know him. So let's look at this.

It's so important. There's a lot of discussion, isn't there, about the most important thing for us as Christians at the present time. Some say that Christians in the 21st century should have a greater social concern.

[4 : 42] Others say that we should get more involved in the local community to meet people, go to the local gym and things like that to meet more people.

Others say we need a greater knowledge of doctrine. Others tell us that we need greater liberty and freedom in our worship services.

Others tell us that we need to know more about spiritual gifts. But without a doubt, there is some measure of truth in each of those things. But the most important thing of all is for us to know the Lord Jesus Christ in a better, deeper way.

We know him already. If we're Christians, thank God for that. There was a time when we were far away from him and he meant nothing to us.

But by the grace of God, we've come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and our Lord. But we need to know him better. We need to know him in a deeper way.

[5 : 51] You see, knowing Christ is not like knowing a telephone number. You memorize a telephone number and there it is in your head.

You know it. But it's a dead, static piece of knowledge, lifeless. Knowing Christ is not like that. Our knowledge of Christ can and should deepen as the years go by.

Paul says, I long to know Christ better. And Peter says something like that in 2 Peter 3 verse 18, when he says to Christians, grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So let's think about this crucial matter. About knowing Christ better. For the start, it means that Paul had a great concern to know more about Christ.

It means far more than that, as I'll show you in a moment. But we start with that. Paul's longing to know more about Christ. More about his characteristics and attributes.

[7 : 03] And that should be our concern as well. We know something about Christ. We know something about his deity. We know something about his humanity. We know something about his birth and life.

His miracles and teaching. His atoning death. His glorious resurrection. His second coming. We know something about him. We wouldn't be Christians without some measure of knowledge about

him.

But we should be anxious to know more about him. To have a deeper understanding of his characteristics. And a deeper understanding of his work and his attributes.

That's what happens, isn't it, on the human level? Here's a husband and a wife. When they first marry, they know something about each other.

The wife knows something about her new husband's nature. She knows something about his characteristics and abilities. How he thinks. And the work he does.

[8 : 08] But as the year goes by, she gets to know far more about him. When she first got married, she thought she knew all about him.

But she didn't know the half. On July the 21st, 1969, Beth and Lloyd-Jones said to Martin Lloyd-Jones, You never cease to amaze me.

She'd been married to him for about 40 years then. But on that day, she learned something about him which amazed her. The something was that he was in America with her on the day of the first moon landing.

One of our young people here this morning gave the name Neil Armstrong. I showed the picture of James Irwin. And she gave the name Neil Armstrong. Very good. He was the first person to walk on the moon. And that had been the day of the first moon landing.

And Lloyd-Jones preached under known to his wife a totally new sermon about the moon landing.

And that was when she said, You never cease to amaze me. Well, in a sense, that should be true of our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 22] We should be learning things all the while which amaze us. Something new which amazes us.

More about his power. More about his mercy. More about his holiness. More about his compassion. More about his atoning work. More about his glorious resurrection. More about his wonderful ascension.

More about his great work as a high priest. Those things should deepen. And we become more and more amazed. That's the first thing Paul meant when he said, I have a longing to know Christ better.

To know more about him. But it's sad to say, that is not the concern of many professing Christians. There are many professing Christians these days who have no such concern. They have little time for Bible study. Little time for Bible preaching.

[10 : 25] They just want dance and drama and music and mime. And if Bible teaching is included in the program, we'll keep that to a minimum.

Let it be as brief as possible. And so there are professing Christians who have no more knowledge of the truth about Christ today than they had five or ten or twenty years ago.

They have no greater understanding of his power and his person today than they did when they first made a profession all those years ago. We should all long to know more about Christ.

But Paul means more than that. More than just knowing about Christ. He does mean that, as I've made clear. But he means more than that. If I may be allowed to make an observation, I think the sad thing about some evangelical people of a reformed persuasion over recent years is that they have stopped there.

Knowing about Christ. They have said Philippians 3.10 that I may know him. That just means getting to know the doctrine. Full stop.

[11 : 46] And I've got a good knowledge of doctrine. Therefore, I'm okay. They've been content with just knowing more about Christ in the head.

And that leads to a big head and a cold heart. When Paul says that his great concern is to know Christ better, he means that he desires to have a deeper personal relationship with Christ.

You see, when the Bible talks about knowing a person, it means not only knowing about them, but also having a deeper and closer personal relationship with them.

there's a fascinating statement in Amos 3.2 where God says to the people of Israel, Amos 3.2, you only have I known of all the families of the earth.

Now, that cannot possibly mean that God only knew about the Israelites and no one else. God is all-knowing. He not only knew all about the Israelites, He knew all about the Amorites and the Moabites and everybody else.

[13:04] What the Lord means in Amos 3.2 is that He knew only the Israelites in the sense of having a personal relationship with them.

He had a special relationship with them. The word know in Scripture, knowing a person, means having a close relationship with them.

Not just knowing about them, that's vital, but also knowing them in a personal way. So when Paul says, Oh, that I might know Him, he means that He longs for a deeper, richer, closer relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we use the word know like that in ordinary language, everyday language. Here's a couple. we say they're getting to know each other.

We mean not only are they learning more about each other, but the friendship and the relationship is deepening. And we're glad about that.

[14:08] You know, we see a wedding on the horizon because this relationship is deepening. Well, here's a married couple. When they got married 20 or 30 years ago, they knew each other.

They were aware of each other's love. The husband knew that his wife loved him and she knew that he loved her. And it threw them. But now, 20, 30, or 40 years later, they're even more aware of this love that they have for each other.

they have an even deeper realization and appreciation of each other's love. The relationship has deepened. Over the years, I've had the privilege of going to see two couples on their 70th wedding anniversaries and one couple on their 75th wedding anniversary.

One couple had been missionaries in China with the old China Inland Mission. Well, each of those couples avowed that they were still deeply in love and that they loved each other more now than they did when they were married 70 or 75 years previously.

And that should be the case with every marriage, a deepening of the relationship. And that is what Paul is longing for here with the Lord Jesus Christ, that I might know him, not only just know about him, but that the relationship may deepen and that the relationship may become more wonderful.

[15:55] That was Paul's longing. And Paul had this desire, not only for himself, but for other Christians too. You remember how he puts it in the third chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 3 verse 17.

Paul says there, this is my prayer for you, Christians, this is my prayer for you, that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

That's Paul's longing for himself and for every Christian, that we might know more of the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

Why did Paul have this longing? longing? Why should we long to know the Lord better? Not only know about him in our heads but have a deeper relationship with him in our hearts.

Why did Paul have this longing? First of all because this is true Christianity, knowing the Lord and getting to know him better. true Christianity is not just a matter of believing facts in the head.

[17:24] It's not just a matter of coming to church. It's not just a matter of living a decent life. It's not just a matter of having your name on the church roll.

The essence of true Christianity is to know and have fellowship with the Lord. is put so clearly in John 17 verse 3 where Jesus says, this is eternal life that they may go to church with long faces and look miserable all the week.

No. This is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. It's true Christianity. Then, on another occasion, Jesus said, John 10 verse 10, I have come that they may have life, this life of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly, that this relationship may deepen.

[18:37] That is the heart and center of the Christian faith, knowing the Lord and knowing him better as the years go by. Paul writing to the Colossians, in Colossians 1 verses 9 and 10 says this, I do not cease to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

That is what is held before us in the Bible, knowing the Lord and knowing him better as the days go by. Secondly, we should long for this deeper knowledge of the Lord, this deeper relationship with

him, because what we have now is rather feeble and shallow, isn't it?
I'm not being judgmental. If the Apostle Paul longed to know the Lord better, surely we should too, because we're not on the same spiritual level that he was.
You say he was special, he was an apostle. Well, let's compare ourselves with somebody else. Think of a man like Augustus' top lady who rode that him, rock of ages.
Listen to top lady. He is suffering from TB. He's dying, age 37. But listen to him speaking.
[20 : 20] He says this, Oh, what a day of sunshine this has been to me. I have not words to express it. It is unutterable. Oh, my friend, how good is the Lord, almost without interruption, his presence has been with me.

It is impossible to describe how good God is to me. Since I've been sitting in this chair this afternoon, glory be to his name, I have enjoyed such a season, such sweet communion with the Lord, such delightful manifestations of his presence and love, that it is impossible for words to express them.

I have peace and joy unutterable. Augustus Toplady. To another friend, he said this, It will not be long before God takes me to glory, for no mortal man can live after the glories which God has manifested to my soul.

Well, I ask you, I ask myself, do we know the Lord like that? Toplady wasn't some religious freak, you know.

I once quoted these words of Toplady and someone was very annoyed and dismissed them as charismatic Arminian claptrap.

[21 : 49] But God have mercy upon anyone who can speak like that. Augustus Toplady was as reformed as they come. He'd actually translated from the Latin into English a book called Absolute Predestination by Jerome Zankeus.

You can't get more reformed than that, can you, translating a book like that from Latin into English. But it wasn't all in the head, you see. It wasn't just knowing facts in the head.

It was knowing the Lord personally, enjoying wonderful fellowship, with him. How often have we been left speechless for sheer joy because of what the Lord has done for us?

Answer someone, Toplady, he was someone special. He lived in those halcyon days of the 18th century, but I'm just an ordinary Christian living in the 21st century.

it's much tougher for me. All right, let me quote some words of Florence Bradshaw. You say, I've never heard of her.

[23 : 03] That's why I'm quoting her words to you, because she was nobody really. She lived in my native city of Norwich, and you can't get any more backwater than that, can you?

But she gave a wonderful testimony. Dr. Lord Jones got to hear of her testimony and urged her husband to write it down.

Here she is dying of cancer and her husband writes, she lay in bed all through the lovely summer of 1970 and into the autumn with a cheerfulness and serenity which astonished us all and all who came to see her.

It is true, she wept many times during the last four months of her life, but they were not once tears of sorrow or sadness, but rather because she so often felt overwhelmed with a sense of the Lord's presence and goodness.

One night, writes her husband, I was awake in the early hours. She didn't know I was awake. I didn't know she was awake, but suddenly I heard her exclaim in a loud voice, bless the Lord, oh my soul.

[24 : 16] Then I heard weeping, then of course I asked her what was the matter. She replied, oh it's only the Lord's presence, it's only the Lord's goodness to me.

I used to be able to keep it in, but now I cannot. She seemed enveloped in the love of Christ. She told me that she'd been thinking of Beulah Land, that place so graphically described in pilgrim's progress, where the sun shines and the birds sing day and night.

That, she said, is where I am, in Beulah Land, waiting to be called into heaven. I asked her if she'd like me to read the passage again, and she said she would, so I did.

And before I'd finished, she was in tears again, radiant with the lovingness of it all. The room was filled with a sense of the presence of Christ. We were overwhelmed, our souls were ravished, it was holy ground.

Now that's a lady who really knew the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we know him like that? Have we increased in our knowledge of Christ as the years have gone by?

[25 : 32] Are we more aware of his amazing holiness and his sovereign power and the and this is not just for old people.

Some young people here might think that this talk about knowing Christ better is a bit old fashioned, a bit quaint. But listen to another testimony, this of a 12 year old boy named James Lang from Dundee.

He was converted in the great revival that took place during the ministry of Robert Murray Machine in Dundee. He was one of the young people in the church. He too had TB.

And his sister asked him how he coped with the sleepless nights and the intense pain. Do you get weary? She asked. No, he replied.

His left hand is under my head and his right hand doth embrace me. Jesus is so real to me that the nights pass so quickly.

[26 : 55] I long to be with Jesus. I long to see Jesus who died for me. I feel him to be so sweet and so close. Five minutes in glory with Jesus will make up for all of the suffering.

A 12-year-old boy. Compared with that, don't we have to agree that for many fellowship with the Lord is not what it should be. And I'm speaking to myself.

And it shows why are so many Christians so unhappy? and miserable, always complaining and moaning and groaning. It's because they don't know Christ as well as they should.

If only they knew him better, their hearts would be filled with joy. Why are many Christians these days forever arguing and bickering and bickering about little things, finding fault, straining at a gnat, looking for every speck of dust in a brother's eye and ignoring the great plank of self-righteousness in their own eye?

sin, or the bitterness which plagues so many? Why are some Christians so bitter, so horrible to each other?

[28 : 25] Why do they say things about fellow believers? I speak with some feeling about that. You folks here in Whitby, some of you, are interested in Poland.

Well, I was in Poland last June for a conference entitled Standing Together for the Gospel and I was asked to preach at this conference about why believe the Bible in bad days and I had to give reasons why we should go on believing the Bible in bad days.

I was totally amazed. to read in a magazine which claims to be interested in the Bible, I was amazed to read that I was there in Poland encouraging ecumenism.

I had never, can't even be aware of the man I met, I was supposed to have met, I can't even remember meeting him, I may have met him, but I can't ever remember meeting him and I certainly didn't encourage anyone in ecumenism.

Why do people say such things? Why do Christians get bitter like that? And front fault. It is so incredibly sad. It's because they don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as well as they should.

[29 : 37] If they really knew Christ and were enjoying his presence, they would want to encourage other Christians that attack them.

Why are so many Christians taken up with the things of the world? Why do they prefer the pop concert to the prayer meeting? people? Why do they prefer BBC television to Bible teaching? Why do they prefer football on satellite TV to fellowship with the saints? Why? It's because they don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as well as they should.

If they really knew the Lord Jesus Christ and had a deeper relationship with him, they'd just be eager to meet with him as often as possible. the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Why is the witness and the preaching of so many Christians rather weak and powerless, ineffectual? Is it because we don't know Christ too well?

[30 : 44] The better we know Christ, the more powerful will be our witnessing and our preaching. Did you notice in this verse, there's a link between knowing the Lord better and knowing more of his power in our lives?

Paul says that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. The two things go together. As we know Christ better, as our relationship with him deepens, so we'll know more of his power in our lives.

Daniel makes the same point, the same link, in Daniel 11, verse 32. The people who know their God shall be strong under exploits.

It's this matter of knowing God, knowing the Lord, knowing him personally. I speak for myself, knowing Christ better is my greatest need. This is New Testament Christianity.

This is our great need. And thirdly, knowing Christ better is the greatest privilege imaginable.

Remember what we're told about the Lord Jesus in chapter 2 of Philippians?

[31 : 52] He's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He has been given a name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

What a great person. Yet he invites us to get to know him better and to have a deeper, closer relationship with him.

If men and women of the world were given the opportunity of getting to know the Queen better, or their favourite pop star, they'd leave at the opportunity. The Queen has invited me to spend the weekend with her at Windsor in order to get to know her better.

well, they would be with the moon about that. David Beckham has invited me to his country mansion to get to know him better.

Some young fellows would leap at that opportunity. We are invited as Christians to get to know better the Lord of Glory, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords.

[33 : 12] there is no greater privilege imaginable. Then, fourthly, knowing Christ better is a wonderful experience. To have this closer, deeper fellowship with him is like a foretaste of heaven.

What fools we are to be content with a nominal, academic, theoretical Christianity when it's possible to know Christ as your best friend and dearest companion.

listen to a woman by the name of Sarah Edwards. Now, she was the wife of Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest theologians of all time.

She was the remarkable wife of a remarkable man. She had amazing experiences of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to what she says.

the presence of the Lord was so near and so real, I seemed scarcely conscious of anything else. All night I continued in a constant, clear, and lively sense of the heavenly sweetness of Christ's excellent love, of his nearness to me, and of my dearness to him.

[34 : 33] the spiritual beauty of the Father and the Saviour seemed to engross my whole mind. The glory of God seemed to be all in all, and to swallow up every wish and desire of my heart.

You can read those words in Volume 1 of the works of Jonathan Edwards, published by the Banner of Truth Trust. Now, some people criticized her for saying that.

They felt that she was a bit wild and wacky and way out to say such things. Or to use the language of that time, they said that she had a distracted and distempered mind.

A distracted and distempered mind. The old way of saying a bit wild and wacky. But her husband, or credit to him, came to a defense.

He said this, if such things are the result of a distempered brain, let my brain be possessed forever by that holy distemper.

[35 : 42] If this be distraction, I pray God that the whole world of mankind may be seized with this glorious distraction. Then he added, what notion have they of true religion who reject what has been described.

Knowing Christ better is New Testament Christianity, it's our great need, it's our immense privilege, it's a momentous experience.

How then can we get to know him better? I hurry along with us, how can we get to know better?

Well, how do you get to know anyone better? first of all, you listen to them.

A lot of human relationships have gone wrong, a lot of marriages have gone wrong, simply because husband hasn't got time to listen to his wife.

They don't bother to listen to each other. Well, to know the Lord better, and to have closer fellowship with him, we must listen to his word. Have you noticed these days that there's a tendency among Christians to listen to his word as little as possible?

[37 : 07] Once a Sunday is more than enough. And if you happen to make any comment about that, they get quite uptight and say, there's nothing in the Bible about going to church on Sunday, twice on Sunday.

Nothing in the Bible about that. But there is something in the Bible in Acts 2, isn't there, about the early Christians who are so on fire for the Lord Jesus Christ that they met together every day.

Nothing about twice on Sunday, but meeting together every day. But to be honest, there's nothing in the Bible which says husbands should speak to their wives more than once a day, or listen to their wives once a day.

You know? If you love someone, you want to hear their voice. You want to hear them speaking to you. And if we love the Savior and want our relationship with him to be deepened, we'll listen to him as often as we can.

Secondly, we get to know him better by speaking with him. That again is true on the human level, isn't it? Here's a fellow, and he goes to a youth conference and he sees a girl and he's attracted to her and wants to get to know her better and he'd like a relationship to develop with this girl, maybe marry her.

[38 : 34] Well, he'd better start speaking to her, hadn't he? In that way, the relationship might start to develop. He'd better start speaking to her. And if we want our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ to deepen, we should speak to him.

That's what prayer is, speaking to the Lord, opening our hearts to him. At any time of the day, if some critical moment occurs, speak to him briefly.

Speaking to the Lord. Thirdly, to get to know the Lord better and to have a deeper relationship with him. We must get rid of those things which grieve him and offend him. Once again, that's true, isn't it, on the human level?

Have you ever been a kind of agony aunt to a young fellow in love? It's one of the privileges of being a pastor. Here's this young fellow, and he comes and tells you that things are not working out too well with the girl he loves.

The relationship is not developing, as he would like it to. She seems to be getting more distant. And because you want to help him, you gently tell him about certain things in his life and conduct which you've noticed, which are perhaps turning her off.

[40 : 02] His bragging, his boasting, his know-it-all attitude. Oh, yes. And he needs to change his shirt a bit more often, you know, or get it washed or something.

You gently tell him about things which might be annoying this girl because you want to help him to deepen the relationship. Well, if we want our relationship with the Lord to deepen, we must deal with those things which grieve him and offend him and concern him.

It may be pride, it may be selfishness, whatever grieves him, we must seek to deal with those things. And then, if we want to know Christ better and for the relationship to deepen, we must live for him, put him first, come what may.

Again, that is true, isn't it, on the human level? This person you want to know better, with whom you want a closer relationship, you must give your time to him or her. If you put yourself first, the relationship won't go anywhere.

If you put this other person first, the relationship may develop. Apply that to the Lord Jesus Christ. He must come first, come what may, whatever the cost, he must come first.

[41 : 32] As John the Baptist put it, he must increase, I must decrease. Even to the point of suffering. If you have a close relationship with someone, you fellowship in their suffering, you share in it.

Here's a wife, her husband is having a tough time at work, she shares in that, heart, and she's willing to do all she can to share in that suffering.

And if we want to know Christ better, we must put him first, even to the point of sharing in his suffering. Paul says, I'm willing for that.

He says, I want to know him and the part of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

Paul says, if getting to know Christ better means suffering with him, I'm willing for that.

If it means putting myself out and personal suffering, I'm willing for that, just to know Christ better. Well, that's how to get to know him better.

[42 : 47] That, says Paul, is my great longing. I've been a Christian for many years, he says, I know the Lord Jesus Christ, he's my wonderful glorious savior, but oh, to know him better, to know more about him, and to know more of a deeper relationship with him.

So I would close with the prayer that was found in the Bible of Hudson Taylor. Hudson Taylor had this prayer written out on the front of his Bible.

And this was his prayer. Oh, Jesus, make thyself to me a living, bright reality, more present to faith's vision keen than any outward object seen, more dear, more intimately nigh than even the sweetest

earthly time.

That was his prayer. Lord Jesus, make thyself to me a living, bright reality, more present to faith's vision keen than any outward object seen, more dear, more intimately nigh than even the sweetest earthly time.

God's prayer. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that we know something about him.

[44 : 22] There was a time when we were totally ignorant of him, when he meant nothing to us. And even though people spoke to us about him, we passed him by.

But, Father, we thank you that we do know him as our Lord and our Savior. Savior. But we long to know him better. We long to know more about him and his greatness.

But we long to know him more personally. We long that this relationship we have with him may be deepened and enriched as the years go by.

In our Savior's name we pray. Amen.