

## **The Only Thing Worth Knowing**

1 Corinthians 2:1-7

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There was a time when Greece was the cultural and intellectual center of the world. During the days of Aristotle and Plato and Socrates, new ideas and philosophies were constantly springing up. Various philosophies, like stoicism and asceticism and Epicureanism and deism and polytheism and lots of other “-isms”, were attempts to explain the mysteries of life, to help people understand how the world operates and why things happen the way they do.

By the first century AD and the time of the early Christian church, you would have to say that some of the luster had worn off the golden age of Greek philosophy. But still there were many people who took great pride in their intellectualism and their great wisdom.

When Paul visited Corinth, he encountered many people like that who considered themselves great intellectuals and wise. To them Paul said, “I am not wise; I’m not skilled like you are. In fact, I know only one thing.” (I’m sure that when those intellectuals of Corinth heard Paul say that, they sniggered—“One thing; you know only one thing. Boy, you aren’t very wise are you.”)

Paul said, “I have resolved to know only one thing: Jesus Christ crucified.” For Paul there was really only one thing that was worth knowing: Jesus Christ crucified. For Paul there was really only one way to cope with life’s mysteries: Jesus Christ crucified.

I’ve been wondering: what do you think it would be like if we, like Paul, said that there is really only one thing worth knowing—Jesus Christ crucified? If all we know is Jesus Christ crucified, what do we know?

### Jesus

Well, the one thing we know is the man Jesus. As we read the gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, we come to know this man—how he lived.

Try to put yourself in the place of those followers of Jesus. When they met Jesus, they met a man, a human being—a special human being, but still a man like other men. As they traveled around with this man Jesus, they observed how he lived, how he loved others, how he served others.

Let me give you a couple of examples of what they saw. They saw Jesus touch a man with leprosy. It was a shocking encounter. Lepers were considered unclean, and were not allowed to have any contact with “normal” people. If anyone touched an unclean leper, that person then became unclean. Most people avoided

lepers like the plague. That's why lepers had to walk around with the mouths covered and calling out, "Unclean, unclean." So that others could get out of the way. No one wanted to have anything to do with a leper.

The disciples were with Jesus when one day a leper approached Jesus and said, "If you want to, you can make me clean." And Jesus replied, "I do want to, be clean." And with that Jesus touched the leper. Surely everyone watching this exchange—including the disciples—gasped. Think about it: before this encounter, there was one who was clean (Jesus) and one who was unclean (the leper). After the encounter there was still one who was clean—but now it was the leper, and one who was unclean—Jesus. It was like Jesus willingly took on himself the suffering and shame and burden of this leper, and in the process set him free. (Read Mark 1:40-45.)

The disciples with Jesus saw all this and were amazed.

Or there was the time that Jesus was there when an adulterous woman was brought before the council for trial. Adultery was a capital offense, and this woman was about to be found guilty and stoned her to death for her crime. That was when Jesus turned to the members of the council and said, "Let the one who is without sin, cast the first stone." And with that, one by one the members of the council dropped their stones, with which they intended to kill this sinful woman, and they left. Finally, Jesus turned to the woman and said, "Is there no one left to condemn you?" She answered, "No one, sir." Jesus said, "Then neither do I condemn you."

The disciples observed this and were amazed.

As they traveled with Jesus the disciples saw the kinds of people he chose to befriend; they saw the kind of relationship he had with the Father in heaven; they saw how he prayed; they saw how he lived simply; they saw his concern for others, his compassion. They heard the words of forgiveness and love that were always on his lips.

When we read about Jesus in the gospels, we see these things too. So when we say that we have resolved to know nothing but Jesus Christ crucified, we are saying that this man Jesus has become for us a model for us to follow in our living. As his followers, we befriend the kind of people he befriended—the poor, the needy, those who have no one else to stand on their side.

So that is one thing that we know: we know the man Jesus. But there's more.

## Christ

When we say we know Jesus Christ crucified, we are saying that this human being named Jesus, whom we meet on the pages of the Gospel, is also the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. This man Jesus is not just a role model who shows us how to live, he is the unique, once-for-all-time, Word of God made flesh. As it says in Philippians, Jesus was at the right hand of God, but did not think that

equality with God was something to be held on to, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, being born in human likeness (Philippians 2:5-11). When we look at Jesus, we see not only a good man who shows us how to live, we also see God. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” (John 12:45) Jesus said.

For many years people saw God as mysterious, distant, unknowable, even to be feared. But when God’s word became flesh in Christ, we finally understood who God truly is.

If you want to know about the character of God, look at the character of Jesus. The love that Jesus shows for the world is God’s love for the world. The word of forgiveness and salvation that Jesus speaks is God’s word of forgiveness and salvation.

There is also something else that happens when we come to know Jesus Christ. Not only do we gain a true understanding of who God is; we also come to a true understanding of who we ourselves are.

John Calvin, the father of our Reformed (Presbyterian) tradition, said that we cannot truly know ourselves without a knowledge of God. Left to ourselves, it’s easy for us to think of ourselves as “righteous and upright and wise and holy.” Only when we see the perfection and holiness of God in Christ are we convinced of our own sinfulness and need of God’s grace (Calvin, *Institutes*, Book I, Chapter 1, section 2).

In Jesus Christ we see who God is...and we also see who we are—that we are sinners, without hope except in God’s sovereign mercy.

Which brings us to the third thing we are saying when we resolve to know nothing but Jesus Christ crucified.

### Crucified

When we say that we know Jesus Christ crucified, we are aware of the great price that Jesus, the Son of God, paid in order to give us the gift of salvation. It cost him his life on the cross. He paid that awful price in order that we might be forgiven and have eternal life. “Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed” (I Peter 2:24).

In Graham Greene’s novel, *The Power and the Glory* (which incidentally our Spirituality Book Group discussed last week), there is a description of the sinful world—a world of selfishness and pride and anger and lust and all kinds of wrongdoing. And looking at this world he says, “It was for this world that Christ died; the more evil you saw and heard about you, the greater the glory that lay around Christ’s death. It was too easy to die for what was good and beautiful, for

home or children or a civilization—it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt” (p. 97).

When Jesus hung on the cross and died, it was for us.

As we gather around this Table today, there is really only one thing worth knowing: Jesus Christ crucified. We come to this Table in remembrance of the man Jesus, a man of faith, a man of compassion, a model for our living. We come to this table in remembrance of the Christ, whose great love showed God’s great love for the world. We come to this table in remembrance of the one who died for us and who opened for us the gates of heaven and gave us the gift of salvation.

As we take communion today, let us focus our thoughts on the only thing worth knowing: Jesus Christ crucified.✠