

He Knew What Was in Man

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon emphasizes the glory of Jesus' omniscience and its implications for our faith and relationship with Him.

Duration: 49:19

Scripture: John 2:23

Topics: "Divine Omniscience", "Genuine Faith"

Description

This sermon delves into the profound knowledge and omniscience of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the importance of genuine faith rooted in the glory of Christ rather than being swayed by signs and wonders. It highlights how Jesus knows everything about us, loves us, and willingly sacrificed Himself despite knowing the depths of human hearts. The sermon challenges listeners to examine the authenticity of their faith, warning against being mere sign chasers and false prophets, and encourages a deep, personal encounter with the self-authenticating glory of Christ.

Transcript

Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have ordained strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger.

Meaning, you magnify your glory by using the weakest of instruments. So do it now. We have beheld your glory, Lord Jesus.

Glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And from this fullness, we have all received grace upon grace. I ask that it happen again.

In your name we pray, Amen. Now you remember, because of the 10 sermons or so that have gone by on John or because you've read the gospel perhaps, or maybe you don't remember at all and you've never heard this before, that the gospel of John was written in order that we might believe. John chapter 20, verse 31.

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you might have life in his name. It's real clear why the gospel was written. It's written to awaken faith in Jesus and through faith, life would come forever into human hearts who are bound for eternal death.

That's why the gospel is there. And this has been underlined over and over again. For example, chapter 1, verse 12.

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God. Believe. Chapter 2, verse 11.

After the turning of the water into wine, this is the first of his signs that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed on him. Believed on him. Or third, John 2, verse 22.

After Jesus says, destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up again, John comments, his disciples remembered this and they believed the scripture that he spoke. He's on task in chapters 1 and 2. He knows what he's doing. He's telling these stories in a way that will enable us to see his glory and believe in him savingly.

Which means that this text that Phil just read here, this text, verses 23 to 25 of chapter 2, is very unsettling. Because it says Jesus knows what is in every heart and what he sees in some hearts of believers is that they don't believe. That's why it's unsettling.

They're not believing when they're believing. And he knows it because he knows what's in every person. So, there are two focuses that we are called to have when we read this.

One is the glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the way he knows all things about you. That's number one. Number two is the implication of that, that he knows in this room right now who those are who don't have saving faith.

Though they may say they do. This is unsettling. So, those are the two focuses of the sermon because those are the two focuses of the text.

Now, keep this in mind. We're going to take the first one first, namely the glory of the knowledge of Christ, especially in what he knows about you and me. This is a glorious knowledge.

We should be blown away by what he knows about us. Now, keep in mind that the reason I am asking that kind of question, is there glory here? Is because I'm letting chapter 1 verse 14 guide me through this book, alright? If there's anything I hope you get after the four or five or six years on this gospel, is that this gospel is written to help us spiritually see the compelling, self-authenticating glory of the Son of God. So, verse 14, chapter 1 says, We have seen his glory.

Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And the reason for focusing there for our sakes is that verse 16 says, And from this fullness, in other words, as the laser beam of beholding connects us with the glory of Christ mediated by the Scriptures, this laser beam of spiritual sight, what comes down this laser beam is grace and truth. We have from his fullness all received grace upon grace.

And I want that to happen to you in this service. And the way it happens is when you see his glory. And you will, if you have eyes to see, see the glory of his knowledge in verses 23 to 25 of chapter 2. So that's our first focus.

Let's read this. End of verse 24, chapter 2. But Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. Let that sink in.

And keep reading. And he needed no one to bear witness about man. Here it comes again.

For he himself knew what was in man. Now there are three statements there. And they're all massively significant.

Number one, the sweeping general statement at the end of verse 24. He knew all people. Number two, the application of that all at the end of verse 25.

Namely, he himself knew what was in man. He knows all men. He knows what's in man.

And then the third statement, the beginning of verse 25, is the implication of that. Namely, he doesn't need anybody to help him. No you.

We need witnesses. We try to find out if somebody's guilty or innocent of something. Gotta have a court.

Gotta have a jury. Gotta have some testimony. Gotta figure this out.

We don't know. He knows everything. So the doctrine that we--we wanted to be Puritans here and build our sermon that way, like Jonathan Edwards.

The doctrine we would draw out of this text would be, Jesus knows all about all people. That's the doctrine I would draw out. And then I would take two hours to unpack it.

But we're not completely Puritan. Almost. Not completely.

No, first of all, no person is excluded here. The all people, he knows all people. There's nobody left out.

He knows everybody and everything about everybody. Listen to what he said in John 6, 64. He looked around at them and he said, There are some of you--he's looking at his disciples.

It would be like him standing here and he's looking out on all these church goers and saying, There are some of you who do not believe. That's what he says. Chapter 6, 64.

Verse 64. There are some of you who do not believe. Now, here is the important word that follows.

And this is added by John, the writer of the gospel. John says, For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him. Judas was not a surprise.

What you have to do, I have known you're going to do for three years. It's now time. Do it.

There were no surprises concerning Judas. We need to let all of that sink into us. Because we talk about the omniscience of God, the all-knowing reality of God, the all-knowing truth of Jesus, and we don't perhaps ponder it, meditate on it, and let it have an emotional effect or a worshipful effect.

Let me try to help you with that effect. This is what I do for myself. I'm just kind of doing out loud what I do with the Bible to help my soul feel the Bible.

If you've ever been impressed with any man's knowledge about people, wisdom about discerning motives, you've known somebody that just seemed to get it. They just knew. They were so good at discerning, seeing right through people.

Have you ever known anybody like that? Or anybody who could explain actions well? Or anybody who seemed to be pretty good at looking at somebody and then predicting their next behavior? If you've never

read anybody in fiction that somebody made up about amazing knowledge that they had of what other people were like or what other people did, or any person in history that you've read about who seemed to be remarkably knowledgeable, or any living counselor you've ever been to who seemed to just break right through and help you get at the nub of the issue where you seemed so stuck, or any scholar that impressed you with what he wrote or whatever. If you've ever been impressed, then you should be impressed with Jesus. And the difference should be something like the difference between being impressed with first grade math and quantum mechanics.

I have been impressed with human beings. It's not wrong to be impressed with what humans can do. Psalm 8 that we just read yesterday said, You have crowned him with glory and honor.

You've made him a little lower than the heavenly beings. You've given him dominion over the works of your hands. You've put all things under his feet.

They can go to the moon. Human beings are quite amazing creatures. And it's right to know that and give God praise for it.

It's not an accident that Psalm 8 begins and ends with, Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name! And then it celebrates man in the middle, and then it comes back and ends, Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name! That's not an accident. That's a message. So if you've ever been impressed, and I have, with some human beings who seem to have knowing, then let that impression just exponentially explode over Jesus Christ in worship.

Because the way Jesus Christ knows the world, what's inside the mind of the Son of God by way of understanding human beings, all of them, all six billion, is infinitely worthy of your worship. The glory of his omniscience, perhaps, will come to us more fully if we ponder its personal implications for us. It means there are no secrets in your life.

None. You may have succeeded in hiding something all your life from everyone that you know. I suspect that's true of every person in this room.

Certainly is for me. I know things about my life that nobody knows. I'm 63.

I know a thousand things about my life that nobody else knows, probably. Noel and I just haven't debriefed for 12 hours a day for the last 40 years, you know? We've got other things to do. I don't think there's anything I would be ashamed to tell her.

Well, yes, I would be ashamed, but I'm not scared to tell her. I'm a sinner. But if you have succeeded, as I have, in not telling everybody or anybody about everything, you haven't succeeded with Jesus.

He knows absolutely everything about you. There are no secrets. You are totally, completely known by Jesus.

That's amazing. The person who matters most knows most. The person whose judgment is all-important knows all.

Let that sink in. You are totally known, totally. It's not the slightest part of your heart.

You've never had a feeling. You've never had a thought. You've never done a deed.

There's not been a twitch in your brain or in your heart or in your body that he hasn't known fully and completely. Indeed, vastly more fully than you know it. Therefore, there is always one person you must relate to who knows everything about you.

Think about it. There's always one person you must relate to who knows everything about you. You may be able to look others right in the face and know that they don't know certain things about you and that will govern the relationship.

It will affect the relationship. I'm looking you in the face and I'm relating to you as a pastor and you don't know thousands of things about me. That shapes the relationship with Jesus.

When I look him in the face, he knows absolutely everything. And that shapes the relationship. Everything.

There can be no face. No mask. Can't.

He simply absolutely knows. This relationship is like no other relationship. It's breathtaking.

If you relate to him at all, you relate to him as utterly laid bare, utterly known. What an amazing relationship. What an amazing relationship.

There is one and only one who actually and totally knows you. Only one. Your spouse's knowledge of you, your best friend's knowledge of you is as nothing compared to this.

Therefore, you always have someone to go to for help in knowing who you are. You always have someone to go to for help in knowing who you are. You know, one of the great longings of the human soul is to understand ourselves.

Who are we? What is our nature? What sort of being am I? What is my deepest thought and feeling? What are my true and deepest motives? What are the relationships deep inside of me between my knowing and my feeling and my willing and my doing? If you think you know yourself, you are really deluded. You are so complex. You are so many-layered.

Why do you think the psalmist in Psalm 19 prays, clear me from hidden faults? It's because his brain, just a picture, is so convoluted and so layered that there are things tucked down in there that no matter how he claws with introspection at himself, he never knows himself. But we long to. Unless you're sick, we long to.

Therefore, there is one who does, which means the only way to complete self-knowledge is to go to him. And in time, over time, in proportion to what is good for you, he will begin to lay you bare and you will begin to gain some measure of self-understanding. And in heaven, it will be complete and you will be completely purified so you won't be as devastated as you would be if you knew yourself completely here.

He knows what we can handle. And it is glorious to know that we are known by one who can help us know ourselves. It also implies that there is one person who, knowing everything about us, loves us.

This may be the sweetest of all. Let me give you just a little snapshot into Peter. Do you think it mattered to Peter that Jesus knew him? Let me read you something that you may not have thought about in this regard.

You know he denied the Lord three times. This devastated Peter. He wept bitterly.

I don't think he ever quite recovered from this. And you can see Jesus trying to help him recover just like Jesus is willing to help you recover from horrible things that you've done. They're not easy, but he's willing.

So it was after the resurrection. They were sitting by the fire, you remember. It's the last chapter of the Gospel of John.

And Jesus looks at him and he says, Peter, do you love me? And Peter doesn't just say yes. He says, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And then Jesus, because he denied him three times, is going to give him a chance to affirm it three times.

He asks him again, Peter, do you love me? And Peter says the second time, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. The third time, the Lord asks him, do you love me? And he ups the ante. Peter says, Lord, you know everything.

You know that I love you. Jesus knows your heart, whether there's love there, faith there, or not. And so we move to this last implication of being loved by one who knows everything about us.

He is willing to love you, knowing everything about you. Now, the reason I say he's willing to love you, that may sound like an odd way to say it to you, is because Jesus doesn't love everybody the same way. And the way he loves his sheep and his disciples and his children is different from the way he loves those who reject him.

Listen to John 17.9. This is the way Jesus prays for his own people. John 17.9, I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world.

But for those whom you have given me out of the world and they are yours. So that's who he's praying for. That's a love that he doesn't have for the world.

You could call it intercessory love. Jesus today is in heaven interceding for you. He intercedes for you.

He bought this intercession on the cross and he applies his own blood before the Father, interceding for you to see to it that you will make it to the end, which is what he said he did for Peter just as Peter denied him. Do you remember that? I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned, not if you have turned, when you have turned, strengthen your brothers.

I know you're going down. I know you're coming up because I've prayed for you that your going down would not be a staying down. That's the authority of the prayer of Jesus for his own.

He did not pray that for Judas. If he had, Judas would be in heaven. And he isn't.

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God. If you receive him, you are a child of God and he loves you as one of his brethren, brothers and sisters, and he knows everything about you. If you will have it, in other words, if in this moment of preaching, God would open your eyes and grant you to fly to Jesus for the renouncing of all your self-reliance and all your sin and all your relativistic efforts to be everything to everybody and claim Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and treasure of your life, there would be one forever who knows everything about you and loves you infinitely.

And that's goodness. To be known to the bottom of your being. I mean, isn't it scary to you that you might wonder if all your relationships are contingent on whether people don't know certain things about you?

And so you tremblingly walk through life hiding yourself from one relationship to the other because if you do say certain things, this might ruin the relationship.

Isn't it sweet to know that if that happened to everybody in your life, it wouldn't happen to Jesus? That's a rock I live on. If everybody, if my wife unsinkably turned on me and the church turned on me and everybody said, if we knew that, you'd have never been the pastor of this church or blah, blah, blah, where would I go? I would go to Him. Where would you go? So we can say that here Jesus is troubling us in John 2.23 with His knowledge of our faith.

So I'm done with point one. Point one was to try to display the glory of Jesus as the knower of all things about all people and to bring it home and make it personal to you so that it would be sweet at least to those of you who are willing to have it as sweet and not be terrified by it. Now, there's one other point and it has to do with the implication of His knowledge of us, namely, He's looking into your heart right now and He's seeing absolute reality.

He knows exactly what He's seeing. And He knows far better than you what's there. So now you need to listen carefully to see whether or not what's revealed here is what might be revealed in you.

I hope not. Verse 24, 23 says, Many believed in His name. See that in the middle? Chapter 2, verse 23.

Many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. Now, wouldn't Jesus be thrilled? I mean, that's the point of the book. That's the point of the life.

That's the point of everything. Faith! And He's not excited about what He sees in this faith. In fact, He doesn't like it at all.

Verse 24, But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them because He knew all people. So He must have known something that He didn't like. Otherwise, He would... You're mine! You're my sheep! You're my disciples! You're my brothers! I give myself to you! You give yourself to me! We're one, vine and branch! Not here.

What did He see? What's wrong? What's wrong with the faith in verse 23? This book is written that you may believe and believing have life in His name. And it says, they were believing when they saw the signs that He was doing and He wouldn't connect with them because He knew what was in them. So what's wrong with their faith? Are there any clues here? There are.

There are two. The first clue is the reference to the word signs. We'll come back to that one.

And the second clue is the context of Nicodemus. Now you all know, and if you don't, you will in 10 seconds, the chapter divisions in the Bible don't mean anything! Okay? That's not an overstatement. Well, maybe it is.

Depending on what mean means. They're not original. They're not inspired.

They were added a thousand years later. The chapter divisions are not that important. When Isaiah was writing and John was writing, they're just writing.

They're not sticking in verses and chapters. We do that to help us navigate, get around. So, ignore them when you're reading.

It helps here. So, what's the context? Nicodemus, I think, is one of those people in verse 23. And the reason for saying verse 23 to 25 is to set us up for Nicodemus.

So, if you want to see what's wrong with the belief in verse 23, when they saw his signs, then keep reading. Alright? So, let's do that. So, verse 25 ends, Jesus himself knew what was in man.

Now, there was a man. See the connection? He knew what was in man. Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, and no one can do these signs, back up to verse 23 of chapter 2, that you do unless God is with him. Now, that's amazing faith. It's not saving faith.

He's not even born again. We know you are a teacher from God. You're not any ordinary teacher.

You are from God. They don't go around saying that about everybody. And you do signs, and these are the kinds of signs nobody can do unless God is with him.

So, you're from God, God is with you, you're doing miracles, that's amazing faith. And useless, dead, unregenerate faith. That's what I think is going on in verse 23.

These are sign mongers. These are sign seekers. These are signs and wonders chasers.

Nicodemus and the rest. I don't think Nicodemus stays that way, by the way. I think one of the points of this Gospel, as he shows up at the end of the Gospel, is that Jesus did get through to him.

So, in John 3, 1-8, I think you have a picture of what's wrong with the people in verse 23 of chapter 2 who were believing on Him. Many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. They saw signs.

And they were excited for Him. You really do these? God is really with you. This is what all Jews believe.

This is what all Muslims believe about Jesus. Right? Real prophet, real sign worker, and hell bound. Just like Nicodemus.

There was no life. There was no spiritual life. Nicodemus, you must be born again, Jesus says.

This confidence about me is worthless. You will never see the kingdom of God unless there's life in you. Seeing me work signs and getting excited about my signs is not saving faith, Nicodemus.

Now let me show you this. This may be new to you. I don't know.

But let me show you in the Gospel of John other places where Jesus has to deal with this. I'll show you a really shocking one. You may want to turn to this.

Chapter 7. I can remember the time I first saw this. It was the spring of 1974. I read this and I said, What? I got out my Greek and said, That's not the word that belongs there.

Okay. So, if you've seen it before, this is John chapter 7. Jesus is dealing with his brothers, I mean his physical brothers, married children. She did have other children.

John 7, 3-5. So his brothers said to him, Leave here and go to Judea that your disciples also may see the works that you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly.

If you do these things, show yourself to the world. For not even his brothers believed in him. What? You mean, surely you meant to say they said it even though they didn't believe in it.

You meant there to be some adversity. You didn't mean to ground their enthusiasm about your miracle working power in their unbelief. You surely didn't mean to say that because they're unbelievers, they're excited about your miracle working power and want you to go to Jerusalem to show them to the world.

You didn't mean to say that, did you? He did. That's weird. And it's illuminating mega.

We're getting light here on what's wrong in chapter 2, verse 23. They believed on him because they saw the signs that he did. And here, the brothers are saying, Come on, we've seen your miracles.

Go to Jerusalem. Do this publicly. You want to be known openly, don't you? And John says, They're talking like that because they don't believe.

Now, just for a seminar, explain how does unbelief account for enthusiasm about signs and the desire for them to go public? Or, turn it around, how does the fact that they're all fired up about the works that he's doing and their desire is that he go public and get a following, how does that shed light on the nature of faith when it's called unbelief? Here's my answer. It's down in chapter 5, verse 44. And I can tell by the swish of the pages some of you are interested.

How can you believe? It's a rhetorical question. The answer is they can't. How can you believe? It's chapter 5, verse 44.

How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? What is that telling us about the nature of true faith? It's saying, if you are driven by a desire for human praise and human admiration and human notoriety, you can't be a believer. Belief is the opposite of that. Belief is when that is shattered in the human soul.

It's broken. The craving for human praise and human approval and human admiration is snapped and broken. And we go down and he goes up.

We must decrease. He must increase. And the brothers hadn't been born again.

They hadn't been broken. They were still being driven by what? Jesus, you've got miracle working power. Go be public and inside and we will ride on your coattails into the limelight of human admiration in Jerusalem.

We're the brothers of the miracle work. That's what I think is going on. And I think it's going on with a lot of sign chasers in our day.

Oh, how precarious it is to be a sign seeker. So many people today run from one set of signs and wonders to another set of signs and wonders until the sign worker leaves his wife or flies away in his jet with everybody's money. Jesus is warning against sign seeking as a ground of your faith.

Listen to this. This is relevant for your next years. Jesus could come back before you're dead.

You know that, don't you? I hope you tremble about that and I hope you're thrilled about it. I hope you think about it a lot. I hope it guides your life that the Lord could split the heavens and with all the angels in heaven and there are at least 200 million of them if I calculate the numbers in Revelation, right? Could be symbolic.

Maybe there are billions and trillions and zillions of them and that's just such a big number. It's big. So He's coming back.

What's going to happen first? I'll read you one sentence from Matthew 24. Matthew 24, verse 24. False Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

It isn't possible to lead astray the elect but boy, it's close because they're doing them. They're really doing them. False prophets, false Christs arrive and they're really doing them.

They're not doing them with microphones. They're doing them with Satan. He's a miracle worker and if you are wowed mainly by signs, you're a goner.

You'll leave Bethlehem Baptist Church where none of the miracles are happening and you will go follow the new prophet. Pied Piper. Out of town, off a cliff.

Listen, let Paul have the last word from Scripture here by way of warning. 2 Thessalonians 2, verses 9-10. He learned this from Jesus and he said this, the coming of the lawless one.

Now, no time to unpack that. At the end of the age, some kind of figure rises up full of lawlessness, full of anti-Christian commitments, making himself out to be some kind of divinity. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and lying signs and wonders.

And with all wicked deception for those who are perishing because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. So where are you? Is your faith rooted in the spiritual light, glory, beauty of the Son of God apprehended in the inspired Word as it narrates the historical work that He performed on your behalf? Do you see the glory of God in the face of Christ? Do you see the glory of Christ who is the image of God? This is what Nicodemus could not yet do. The folks in verse 23 of chapter 2 had not yet experienced.

They were just wowed by external magic as far as they could tell. It was God. Jesus was doing authentic signs and wonders and they were staring at the finger.

That's an impressive finger. And they didn't see Him and His glory. Do you? Is your faith based on spiritual sight of the beauty and the glory of Christ? Or are you a sign chaser? Will you just be swept away when some false revival comes through the Twin Cities and tens of thousands of people are going to the Metrodome while gold shows up in people's teeth? Let me close like this.

You would think that a person who knew everything about everybody would navigate his life so as to avoid dangers that he saw emerging in human hearts. Like if I knew that somebody had a plan to stab me walking out of here tonight and I knew it was... one of you people over there. Mark, Mark, you went berserk.

And I could see it. I'd go out that door. And then I'd call.

But Jesus didn't. He walked right up to Mark and let the knife plunge right into his chest. That's what... He not only knew Judas.

He called him to be His disciple. He not only knew the hour. He said, do it quickly.

He took His infinite knowledge of what was in human hearts and died for intentionally. So I just want to leave you with the wonder of the omniscience of Christ. It's not only amazing because He knows you and He knows everything about you and He loves you, but He actually used His omniscience to get Himself killed so that you wouldn't have to be destroyed.

You are an amazing Savior and we praise You and thank You. Draw near and take out false faith. Cause hearts to be born again.

Cause spiritual eyes to be illumined and grant that Jesus Christ would shine with self-evidencing, self-authenticating, divine glory because of His omniscience and His love and His crucifixion and His resurrection so that we might be saved and have eternal life and display His glory to the world. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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