

## The Knowledge of the Only True God and Jesus Christ

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford

(A Posthumous Sermon.)

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3

The day in which we live is a day of great knowledge and great research in all matters of science and learning. Not that the tide has much reached Stamford, for I scarcely know anyone who has any great pretence to anything of the sort. But there is a surprising influx of education and research in all matters of science and learning—a research spreading through the land. But of all the branches of science and learning there is one which is almost totally neglected, and that is self-knowledge. Men look at the stars, find out the tracks of comets, pry into every imaginable science, and occupy their mind with literature of every form, and yet they never look into themselves to find out of what the human heart consists, or the state in which they are sunk through the transgression of our first parent. Now this lies at the root of all true knowledge. If a man does not know himself what can he know of others? and if light has not come into his mind to discover what he is in himself what can it profit him to know a thousand things out of himself? But there is another branch of which man knows less than he does of himself, which is the knowledge spoken of by the lips of the blessed Jesus, whose words are now sounding in your ears—the knowledge *of the only true God, and the Lord Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*. And this knowledge is *eternal life*, implying thereby that those who are not possessed of this knowledge of the *only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent* will not attain unto eternal life. There is something

very remarkable in the connection of the passage with the context. The Lord is here addressing his heavenly Father, and in addressing him he says these words and the words preceding our text. There is not a single man or woman in this world, from the king in his mansion to the beggar who craves his bread from door to door, over whom the Lord of life and glory has not supreme authority, as is clearly opened up in the Lord's words, to bid him live or die: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Eternal life is the gift of Jesus Christ. God has stored eternal life in him, and put eternal life into his hands, and he has given him eternal life for an express purpose—that he should give it—to whom? To every one? Does the text say so? Neither dare I say it if Scripture contradict me. Must I not preach according to the proportion of faith given unto me, if I stand up for the majesty of heaven? The Scripture says that "he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Then the Lord Jesus Christ has power over all flesh, from the king to the beggar, to give eternal life, not to king and beggar, but *to as many as the Father gave unto him* in eternity before the foundations of the earth were laid. And of those which God the Father gave to his eternal Son, he says, "All mine are thine and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." Well, now the Lord in the words before us goes on in a most blessed manner to open up the meaning of this eternal life. It is for our benefit. It should be rendered, "This is *the* eternal life;" in other words, "This is *the* life eternal which he has to bestow." The Lord shows us here what this eternal life is. "*That they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*" How plain! how clear! how express the words! and how blind must be the eyes that do not see them! how deaf the ears that do not hear them! and how hard the heart that does not believe them! But happy are we if God has given us eyes to see, ears to hear, and

hearts to believe what the incarnate God has here spoken.

In opening up the words before us, with God's blessing, I shall show—

I.—First, What it is to know *the only true God*.

II.—Secondly, What it is to know *Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent*.

III.—Thirdly, How this is *life eternal*.

I hinted just now that there was one branch of knowledge which men did not and would not cultivate, which is self-knowledge, because there is a veil of unbelief on their heart. Suppose there was a noxious sewer underneath the road you walk upon, as no doubt there is, you may pass over it, ride over it, but what do you know of what is flowing beneath the arches? So in grace: man's heart is as bad or worse than a filthy sewer; but it is covered over with what is called "a veil." In Scripture we are told that when Moses read the law a *vail* was over his face; and this *vail* is over man's heart, hiding it entirely from his penetrating eye, and as you cannot see the contents of the sewer while the road is over it, and the thick brick work covers it in; but if three or four bricks are broken in or the sewer is opened and the light of the sun shines into it, then you may see that everything which is vile and filthy runs along in its course; so it is with self-knowledge. It is when the Holy Ghost breaks the arch and lets a divine ray in upon the heart that we see how true it is that out of the heart come "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." They all come out of the heart, and just as out of the sewer comes the noxious smell, so out of the mouth do these filthy contents proceed. And this self-knowledge is assistant to a

knowledge of the only true God, the one flowing from and following upon the other. When God is pleased to quicken our souls into spiritual life and give us a ray of his blessed light which shows us what we are and how deeply sunk in the Adam fall, then it is that we begin to learn the up-stroke of the great A—what we are as fallen sinners in our great progenitor, and we cannot have these views until he shines upon our souls. We cannot take a walk by night or day without seeing the handiwork of God, and when we look at what we are in providence we see that the same God has been our bountiful preserver in bestowing upon us innumerable favours; but we cannot know anything of the God of heaven and earth—the true God—except he is pleased to shine upon his holy word, and God has provided that word to give unto us some acquaintance with himself: we do not know God by any vision or ecstasy of enthusiastic rapture, but by what is revealed in the Scriptures. There he has made himself known to the sons of men, but we need a divine light and faith in our soul to believe the Scriptures, and we need that childlike temper and spirit given to us whereby we can receive the kingdom of God as a little child, so that though everything is opened up in the Scriptures, until the Holy Spirit, who wrote the Scriptures, is pleased to bring life and power into our soul, we may read them, but we read in vain; but when the Holy Ghost is pleased to put life and power into the Scripture, and to quicken our souls, thereby begetting us by the word of truth, then we believe what God has said in the Scriptures, and thus we come to a right knowledge of the *only true God*. You will find, if you search and examine, that your knowledge of God and your feelings are in harmony with God's word, having been formed from the Scriptures being opened up with a divine power in your conscience. You know from the Scriptures that there is a God—you could have known that from creation—but when he speaks in the Scriptures his voice is powerful, and he gives you an ear to

hear what he says in the Scriptures, and then you come to know God as he has made himself known—how just and holy he is. And you begin to know and see it in his banishing man from Paradise, in the flood, in the destruction of the cities of the plain, and in the destruction of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea, and this justice is reflected in our heart, so that we find what a holy God he is; for we see holiness in every line in the Scriptures, and we feel that we have to deal with a holy God, which makes the soul tremble before him; it sees how unholy it is before the omniscient God, who knows all hearts, and says, "I search the heart and try the reins." Again and again are we made to feel that God knows everything before it comes to pass. He has predicted man's thoughts again and again as the prophet predicted what lay so deep in the heart of Hazael. He reads our hearts. Everything is naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do. He is also omnipotent; his name is Almighty. All things are not only made and preserved by him, but he worketh all things. And we are made to feel that he is able to kill and heal. We stand before him as grass-hoppers, as the dust in the balance, as a drop in a bucket. We feel that he is God Almighty. But as the Lord is pleased to lead us more and more into his blessed truth we begin to see him in another character—we begin to see that he is not only just, holy, omnipotent, and omniscient, but we begin to see also that he is the Lord and Father of Jesus Christ, not merely the God of infinite justice and holiness, but of mercy, compassion, goodness and love. When he is pleased to drop a sense of his goodness and mercy into our heart and give us some intimation of his favour towards us we view him not merely as a God holy and just, but as a God gracious and merciful. We see the scheme of salvation originating in his love, we see him sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to die for us, and we begin to believe in him, to hope in his mercy and love his name with a pure heart fervently; for we see that he can rescue us

out of the lion's mouth. We have been tried perhaps in providence and God has appeared for us, and thus we see that he is not only a God of grace but of providence. Or if he has restored us again and again, we see that he is a God that healeth backslidings, and that his love endureth for ever, and as the Spirit gives us hope and love we see not only what God is in the Scriptures, but we come to a spiritual knowledge of the only true God. I lay this down with great positiveness and clearness, for it takes religion out of the reach of enthusiasm. Many people take me for an enthusiast, preaching without any consistency with the Scriptures of truth. We know that the mind is soon led astray by fanaticism and folly, but I trust that I have something more than this—that my faith and preaching stand upon the Bible. I never desire to say or believe anything but what is in the strictest accordance with the Bible, which God has given us to guide us into all truth, and I would have those who think me a fanatic compare my preaching with the Bible. If they would compare my sermons with the Bible—I speak not boastingly—they would see I bring forth nothing but what I can and do prove by the Scriptures of truth, and I should dread to bring forth anything else—to bring forth anything contrary to the Scriptures; nor can we know the only true God except by a divine light shining upon the Scriptures and enabling us to credit what God says. But I pass on

(2) To show that there is a knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, and these are the two branches of knowledge upon which eternal life depends. It must be given us to know Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, for power is given to him over all things in heaven and in earth, and he tells us what this eternal life is; therefore it is a gift to know the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. It is not given to all, but it is given to those whom the Father hath given him. Therefore we find the Lord offering up this

prayer—"I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes." Here were these things hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes, evidently showing that the wise and prudent could not look into the things of God, but that these things are revealed unto babes, so with life eternal. "That they might know thee, the only true God, and *Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*" Now, if Jesus Christ were a man like ourselves it would not be so difficult to know him; if he were like Socrates or Cicero it would not be so difficult to understand him. But when we find the Lord putting Jesus Christ on the same level with God, and that it requires the same divine teaching to know Jesus Christ that it requires to know God, does it not show that Jesus Christ is God? And because it requires the same teaching, therefore Jesus Christ is hidden from the eyes of men, his glory, beauty, and blessedness, his love, blood, and righteousness are concealed from their understanding; therefore the prophet said, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord made bare?" And speaking in the name of the Jewish Church he says, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground, he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him." The Jewish Church saw no beauty in him, but there were those who beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, and they received him as the Christ of God, and he gave unto them power or the privilege to become the sons of God, and the reason why, "Which were born not of man, but of God." It was because they were born of God that they knew Christ and received him. It is quite clear to my mind that no man can know Jesus Christ except by a manifestation of Christ to his soul. I am not contending for any enthusiastic vision, but such as Paul spoke of when it pleased God to reveal his Son in him—"to

reveal his Son in me,"—which is by the light shining upon the sacred Scriptures; and thus we see light in God's light, and thus we know him as Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. We have to know him first as God, for he is God. We read of him "being in the form of God, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God." We read of him, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." We read of him that he is "the brightness of his Father's glory" and the "express image of his person." Each discovery of him is a discovery of his eternal deity, coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Now, this we must know and believe. Many seem to believe it who have no real spiritual faith in it—no divine knowledge or acquaintance with it. Christ is also to be known as a man—as pure humanity—and we have to see by the eyes of faith his pure humanity as well as his holy deity, and these in union with each other. Thus we come to know Jesus Christ, and in knowing him we know what he is, as made suitable unto our heart, that God has made him unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. We have to know him in all these different phases. We have to know him as a God of wisdom to us who are so foolish. We have to know him as a God made unto us wisdom and righteousness. How foolish! how needy! how naked we are of all suitable clothing to appear in before the true majesty of heaven. All our righteousness is as filthy rags. We need a righteousness in which we can stand before God. We see this in Christ and in Christ alone. His pure obedience to God we see as a meritorious obedience, and feeling how needy we are, we are glad to take shelter in this robe! perceiving day by day how filthy we are, we are glad to find that he is made sanctification to us, and that his holiness is imputed to us! He is the fountain of all our holiness by communicating holy desires and affections to our souls. Seeing how doubly we are sunk in sin we are glad to receive him as our redemption,



he having paid the ransom price. Thus we honor him in his covenant offices as our prophet, priest and king. As our priest in that he has made intercession and offered a sacrifice, our prophet to write his laws upon our hearts, his precepts upon our consciences, and to be our guide to the end; and as our King to sit upon the throne of our heart, and bring every thought into obedience to his will. When the Lord is pleased to lead the soul further on, it submits to him as an affectionate king, it has the blood applied with every thing holy, and to him, as our great covenant head, from whom we receive every covenant grace, we look as our guide and very faithful friend, who never leaves nor forsakes those to whom he has manifested himself; as our surety who is set responsible for us in the courts of heaven. He has paid the debt. So as we come to know Christ we learn to honor him more and more as a shepherd to feed his sheep, as a door whereby we find access unto the Father, and as a life to revive our soul. So we come to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and we find that

(3) This is *eternal life*. What dreamy views and enthusiastic notions people have about heaven! How they speak of the joys of heaven just as children speak of the wonders of a city they have never seen. But heaven must begin below; there must be a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Eternal life is given on earth to the soul; we have not to wait for eternity for eternal life, for this *is* eternal life, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. When does this knowledge begin—in time or in eternity, on earth or in heaven? In this present lifetime, for as this knowledge is eternal life it follows from it that eternal life is given here below. But some people live in all manner of foolishness and carnality, and when they come to die the minister gives them the sacrament, and they think they are going to heaven without ever having had a broken heart,

repentance for sin, or faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus ministers are deceiving and being deceived, dosing poor dying souls with their poisonous draughts, and sending them to hell with laudanum. But no—if we are to go to heaven we must know something of spiritual things upon earth—something of the only true God here below and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; we must revere the great name of God, repent of our sins, have a hope in his mercy and love towards his name, and a testimony in our heart of the Holy Ghost that we are being made meet for heaven before we can enter into these beauties. What does the soul go to heaven for? To view him as he is, to see and know more of this blessed Jesus whom it knows so feebly on earth, to see him without a vail between, in the full blaze of his meridian glory in his love, in the full enjoyment of him brought into the soul by the blessed beams of his glorious Majesty ever shining through the Son of his love. Just as a child begins by the infant school and advances from one school to another and as in my case at last to the University—so in the school of Christ, the lessons learnt on earth are to be completed in heaven. We, are in the infant school here, and after learning what we have to learn here we shall go to the grand university above. Now, do you hope that the seeds of eternal life have been sown in your soul? If you have these seeds you have eternal life that can never die, and death will have been robbed of all its terrors; because when your body dies angels will receive your spirit—you will enter heaven with a shout and be in eternal glory. But as to going to heaven with no knowledge of God, no repentance of sin, it is a most delusive and soul-destructive doctrine to drag souls down to hell to be with devils. What a mercy then it is to know anything of divine teaching, to have any beginning of the work of grace; for where the Lord has begun a work of grace upon a man's soul he will never leave it till he has perfected it in eternal glory.