

Knowledge of the Truth

Isaiah 49:1-6, 1 Timothy 2:1-15 (ESV)

May 14, 2006

“God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” Here is the heart of today’s reading. Not only is there a God, and not only is God Creator of all things and also Judge of all things, but also God is “our Savior.” It is precisely as “our Savior” that God “desires all people to be saved,” Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, rich and poor, young and old, north and south, westerners and easterners, black and white, Asian and Arab.

“God our Savior...desires all people to be saved.” This is one of the most sweeping statements of the gospel in all the Scriptures. Surely this statement describes the foundation of the ancient prophecy we have read from Isaiah: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Surely this statement was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ—more about that in just a moment. And surely, so that our salvation does not remain vague or ill-defined, Paul clarifies the meaning of this statement by the second half of the sentence: “God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” “God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” “God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” I submit to you that the second half of this sentence is not so much an addition as it is a definition, a specification, and an explication of the first half of the sentence.

What, then, does it mean “to be saved”? It means precisely “to come to the knowledge of the truth.” What does God desire for us? “God...desires all people...to come to the knowledge of the truth.” This is what he wants for us. This is what he provides for us. This is what he gives to us. This is why we are here today. This is what the Christian church is all about. “God...desires all people,” and that includes even us, “to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Thanks be to God!

Consider with me what this means. First, in that “God...desires all people...to come to the knowledge of the truth,” there is truth. This, in and of itself, is a remarkable gift of the grace of God. There is truth. If there were no truth, this

sentence we are considering would be senseless, and not only would Paul be a liar, but also, and more importantly, God who inspired him would be a liar. And we live in a world today eager to insist that there is no truth. It seems to be lost on most people that even that is a truth claim itself. But we live in a world today eager to insist that there is no truth but only opinion, perception, power, position, and privilege. Do not be deceived. That would be a cold and dark world, uninhabitable by human life, impenetrable to reason, full of chaos and disorder, meaning nothing to anyone. We are grateful that there is truth.

Second, in that “God...desires all people...to come to the knowledge of the truth,” not only is there truth, but also the truth is knowable. God’s desires are not in vain. His word shall not return to him empty, but it shall accomplish that which he purposes, and shall succeed in the thing for which he sent it (from Isaiah 55:11 (ESV)). So the truth does not exist only in abstraction or in splendid isolation. The truth is knowable. It is accessible. It is available to you and me. It is there for you to have and to hold as your very own. It is there for you to know. It is there for you to possess. It is there for you to cherish. It is there for you to live by. Are you interested?

Third, not only is there truth, and not only is truth knowable, but also “God...desires all people...to come to the knowledge of the truth.” We have covered that already. This knowledge is what he wants for us. This is what he provides for us. This is what he gives to us. This is why we are here today. This is what the Christian church is all about. God’s knowable truth is not a useless reality. God’s knowable truth is a treasure serving the desire of God Almighty.

Fourth, as indicated above, “to come to the knowledge of the truth” is not so much an addition to being saved as it is a definition, a specification, and an explication of being saved. To be saved is precisely “to come to the knowledge of the truth.” So this is not a routine truth, such as “two plus two equals four.” This is a saving truth, and it is our life to know this truth. As Jesus prayed in John 17:3 (ESV), “This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” To know God and his Christ is eternal life. To know this truth is salvation. So it is that “God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Fifth, all of this having been established, Paul moves ahead to set forth clearly and distinctly, in a five line, creed-like statement, perhaps an early profession of faith, maybe even used at adult baptisms, the very content of the knowable and saving truth: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” This is the truth. This is the treasure. This is a summary of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is summary of the Christian faith. This

is knowable, and to know it is salvation. We would do well to submit it to memory. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” Let us take up these lines one at a time.

“For there is one God.” This, of course, is the teaching of the single most important verse from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV): “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” It was the first verse Jesus quoted when he was asked about the great commandment: “Hear, O Israel: “The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Mark 12:29 (ESV)). In the world of ancient Israel, this was affirmed over and against the faith and the gods of Egypt, of Assyria, and of Babylon. In the world of Jesus and Paul, this was affirmed over and against the faith and the gods of Greece and of Rome. And in our world, this is affirmed over and against the faith and the gods of Hinduism and Islam, as well as over and against the faith and godlessness of communism and secularism. It cuts both ways. To say, “There is one God,” is to say both that God is and that God is singular. This is the starting point. This is the beginning of the knowable and saving truth. This is the basis of everything that follows.

“For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men.” The existence and unity of God, who is Creator, Redeemer, and Judge, means that there is also an underlying unity to all humanity, despite our obvious differences. Far more important than our differences of sex, race, color, nationality, language, culture, and even faith is the unity we share in God. In that we have one Creator, we are all his creatures. In that we have one Father, we are all one family. And in that there is one Father and one human family, “there is one mediator between God and men.” Again, this cuts two ways. It stands against the teaching of those who say that God is distant, unfeeling, and unknowable. It also stands against the teaching of those who say that God can be found and reached in a thousand or a million different ways: meditation, drugs, works, sex, politics, angels, demons, or money. That is to say, there is a mediator, and there is only one mediator. This one alone is sufficient, given by God, and this one allows of no other.

“For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This is his title and his name. The one mediator between God and humanity is the Christ, the anointed one of God, sent by and from God to carry out the will of God. And the one mediator between God and humanity, the Christ, the anointed one, is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary. This is what we sing about at Christmas. The mediator is both fully divine and fully human. He is not half-divine and half-human. The mediator is the only one who can represent God to us, because he is God, and the only one who can represent us to God, because he is one of us. That is who the mediator is and what the mediator does.

“For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.” He “gave himself as a ransom for all.” The only mediator, the only connection we creatures have with our Creator, the only human being without sin, gave his life on the cross for us, so that our sin might be forgiven. As fully divine, he paid the price which only God could pay, and as fully human, he paid the price which was owed by humanity, the price which none of the rest of us was good enough to pay. So Christ Jesus is our mediator not only in terms of providing a connection between God and humanity, and not only in terms of providing communication between God and humanity, but also and especially in terms of providing reconciliation between humanity and God, reconciling us to our Creator and Father from whom we had estranged ourselves. Christ Jesus is our mediator and he fulfills his office by providing for a wonderful exchange: he takes on our sin and gives us his righteousness, he takes on our death and gives us his life, and he takes on our sadness and gives us his joy. Thanks be to God!

“For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” In the fullness of time, in the providence of God, not only did Christ Jesus come to be with us and for us, as our mediator, and to give himself as a ransom for all, but also the good news of Jesus Christ went forth to be proclaimed to the ends of the world. It did not go forth in the days of Noah. It did not go forth in the days of Abraham or Moses. It did not go forth in the days of David or Isaiah. But it did go forth after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And Paul was one of its greatest proponents. “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” That is who he was. That is what he did. And at least the preaching part of that, if not the apostleship, is what he was handing on to his young associate, Timothy. We continue to be beneficiaries yet today not only of the knowable and saving truth, not only of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but also of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, especially the proclamation to the Gentiles, started with the apostle Paul, continuing with Timothy, carrying the gospel down through the centuries all the way to us.

“God our Savior... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Have you come to the knowledge of the truth? Has the desire of God our Savior been fulfilled in you? Do you know the one God? Do you know the one mediator between God and humanity? Do you know the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all? And are you and I ready to bring in our own young, associate pastor to Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, to entrust to him the proclamation of the gospel of Christ Jesus and to learn from him the truth of God, and so to receive from him the testimony given at the proper time?

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*To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God,
be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

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