

Text: Luke 13:22-30

Theme: The Difference Means Life

Date: September 11, 2022 (Pentecost 14C)

In the Name of Jesus, Dear Christian friends,

Do you remember your high school chemistry class? Maybe, maybe not! Maybe it's been a long time since high school or maybe chemistry wasn't your best class, and you don't remember much from high school chemistry. But maybe you remember enough to know that when using chemicals, it is very important to give attention to details. For example, the chemicals of methanal and ethanol sound similar and only differ in name by one letter. But if you were to use methanol instead of ethanol the results would be disastrous. The difference is subtle, only one letter, but the results could be a matter of life or death.

Today God's Word teaches us the difference between two very similar sounding phrases – knowing Jesus and knowing about Jesus. The difference may seem subtle to some, but in all reality, *the difference means life* or death, spiritual life or spiritual death.

1. Knowing about Jesus

Jesus sets the stage by teaching the only way to heaven

In the words of our text, we meet up with Jesus doing what Jesus does best. He is doing his heavenly Father's will by telling everyone what he came to earth to do. He never missed an opportunity to teach about his Father's will for saving sinners. He told people the facts about heaven. He explained how there is one way to get to heaven, that is, through faith in Jesus as the only Savior from sin. He encouraged his listeners with words that had power and punch to create faith in their hearts and keep it strong. As we again hear these words of Jesus for ourselves, we too are convinced by his Spirit that the only way to heaven is by knowing Jesus; truly knowing Jesus.

Know Jesus or Know About Jesus

In the world in which we live there are a lot of people who would claim to know about Jesus. Some would call him teacher; others would say he is a good example to follow. But knowing about Jesus isn't the same as knowing who Jesus is, why he came to earth and what it accomplished for sinners. There's a difference between knowing Jesus and just knowing about Jesus. Jesus himself makes that very point in his reply to a man who asked, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" Rather than give just a "yes" or "no" answer, Jesus gives us a picture of who will and who will not enter heaven. Jesus puts it this way, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' but he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'" The picture that comes to mind is that of a crowd of people storming the gates of heaven on Judgment Day, demanding to be let in just because they met Jesus, or knew something about him. They reason that because they knew some fact about Jesus, they have a right to get into heaven.

Knowing About Jesus Doesn't Save

Knowing about Jesus is not the same as having saving faith in Jesus. Judas Iscariot knew about Jesus as one of his disciples, but his soul perished in hell for all eternity. Many of the Pharisees and other people who knew Jesus while he walked in this world aren't going to be in heaven. That's because they knew about Jesus, but they didn't know Jesus. They didn't trust Jesus as their Savior.

Some Have Only a Passing Acquaintance with Jesus

Many people today, like the Pharisees, know about Jesus but have no relationship with Jesus. In a spiritual sense, Jesus is only a passing acquaintance to many. They may know his name, they may know a fact or two about him, but that's it; nothing more. Many people in the world have that kind of passing acquaintance relationship with Jesus. They seem to think, as did the people Jesus describes in our text, that if a person knows about Jesus that's good enough and they will go to heaven. Yet the Bible tells us that the door to heaven is narrow, meaning that just knowing about Jesus is not the same as trusting in Jesus as Savior. All the names of those written in the book of life, that is those who know Jesus, will be in heaven. Just knowing that there is a heaven, just knowing that there is a person called Jesus, will not get a person's name written in the book of life. No, a person's name is written in the book of life only because Jesus has a personal relationship with them through faith in their heart. Again, simply knowing about Jesus doesn't save a person's soul from hell. There will be a lot of people headed to hell who knew about Jesus. They'll know all the facts about Jesus, but they don't have a saving faith.

Our Relationship with Jesus

So how would Jesus describe our relationship with him?

- Is our relationship with Jesus a church holiday relationship? Do we find ourselves only worshiping in church on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter?
- Is our relationship with Jesus a relationship of convenience? *“I’ll go to church to hear the words of Jesus only when it’s convenient for me and fits into my schedule.”*
- It is a relationship of my youth? *“I was baptized and confirmed when I was a young person and that’s good enough for life. Why should I do anything more?”*
- Is our relationship with Jesus only a crisis-driven relationship? *“As long as things in my life are going along smoothly, I really don’t feel the need for spending time with Jesus and his Word. But it sure is nice to know that when life turns bad, he’s there to help.”*
- It is our relationship with Jesus a relationship based on association? Does my relationship with Jesus hinge on the fact that *“Well, my spouse or my parents or my friends go to church regularly and I’m pretty close with them so some of their religion must rub off on me and help when I need it.”*
- Is our relationship with Jesus a relationship of obligation? *“I only come to church because my parents or my spouse make me feel guilty when I don’t go.”*
- Is our relationship with Jesus one of apathy or procrastination? *“I know where my church is, I know it will be there when I need it, but right now I’m not ready and I don’t feel the need for it.”*

How would Jesus describe our relationship with him?

Whether we want to admit it or not, our sinful nature gravitates toward these wrong relationships with Jesus. These words don’t just speak about the other person, the person not here with us today. No, they speak about my sinful nature and yes, they speak about yours. Jesus speaks these words of warning to us about the narrow door that leads to heaven because he doesn’t want us to listen to our sinful nature. Jesus says, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.” The narrow door to heaven is Jesus and a faith-filled relationship with him as our only Savior from sin and hell. That kind of relationship comes from knowing Jesus, not just knowing about Jesus.

2. Knowing Jesus

On the surface it may seem like a small distinction – knowing about Jesus verses knowing Jesus, but there’s a huge difference between the two. So, the question God wants us to ask of ourselves is this, *“Do I just know about Jesus or do I know Jesus?”* If we let our earthly life be just knowing about Jesus instead of knowing Jesus, we will have missed the point of his words when he said of himself, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).*

What Does This Mean?

- Knowing Jesus means believing and trusting in what he did to remove sin, guilt, and condemnation. Knowing Jesus means that we believe and trust that he did all that for you and me; not just someone else.
- Knowing Jesus means trusting that his blood purifies us from every sin. It means believing that we cannot earn our way into heaven or pay for a single sin. Knowing Jesus means that we believe that even our righteous acts are in and of themselves nothing more than filthy rags in his sight.
- Knowing Jesus means that we trust him to lead our earthly life in the direction that is in our best spiritual interest according to his perfect will.
- Knowing Jesus means that we are content with the blessings he has provided us for our earthly life.
- Knowing Jesus means that we have a desire to use our time, talents, and treasures to bring him glory and honor and not just to make a name for ourselves here in this sinful world.
- Knowing Jesus means that when I am on my death bed, my greatest comfort will be hearing the eternally sweet words of my Good Shepherd Jesus, *“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

Jesus is the narrow door, and he knew it. When Jesus came into this world, he came to fulfill his heavenly Father’s plan of saving sinners. Jesus didn’t come to have a passing, infrequent or indifferent relationship with us. Yet he was killed and suffered hell because that’s how we sometimes like to treat him. No, Jesus came to earth to live for us, to personally know us, to love us and ultimately to give his life for us. This makes Jesus not just the narrow door, but the only door to heaven. Amen.