

Dangerous Knowledge

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 January 2021

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again for your word that you care enough about us to instruct us. And Father, we ask that you would do that this morning, that you would teach us in these verses about our need for you and also the way that you meet us in our need and that you have sent your son to redeem and to save us.

We ask these things grateful that we don't have to evaluate whether we've done enough for you to do them for us, but instead we ask them boldly in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

There are two kinds of people in this world. People say that about all kinds of things, but I'm gonna say about one thing in particular. There are people who want to know secrets and there are people who don't want to know secrets.

Now, I used to be in the latter camp. I used to be someone who wanted to know secrets. If there was something that only a few people knew, I was eager to be in on it.

It was shortly after, perhaps, I moved to Colorado Springs that I began to become someone who would rather not know secrets because secrets can have a double edge to them.

[1 : 2 0] And not only are there two kinds of people, people who want to know secrets and people who don't want to know secrets, there are two kinds of secrets. There are secrets that you can keep secret and secrets you can't keep secret.

Give you an example. Sometimes when I was a teacher, and of course, this is true as a pastor as well, you may have people come up to you and say, I wanna tell you something, but you have to promise not to tell anyone.

What's the response? Well, I had this happen one time. When I was a teacher, I had to say to this student, unfortunately, I can't promise you that. There are some things that you can share with me that I will keep secret.

There are other things that you share with me I actually can't keep secret. There are some things that if you tell me, I am obligated to act on them. I'm obligated to do something.

It would be irresponsible. It would be complicit for me to keep certain things to myself. The same thing, of course, is true when we hear about scandals that come up. One of the questions is this, who knew?

[2 : 2 5] You do not have to be involved in a crime to be guilty for that crime. There are people who, by their silence, are complicit. There are people who commit crimes, and then there are people who just cover them up.

Now, you might be wondering, what in the world does this have to do with 2 Peter 2? The point is this. Knowledge sometimes requires, it includes a responsibility to act.

Knowledge often includes a responsibility to act. Knowledge sometimes demands action. Knowledge increases responsibility and accountability.

Knowledge increases responsibility and accountability. That's exactly the principle, the concept we see here in verses 20 and 21. We are told, it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

In other words, Peter is saying something actually scandalous here. It would have been better for them not to know about God. This knowledge of God has proved to be incredibly dangerous.

[3 : 39] And so, this morning, we're going to turn to several ways in which knowledge is dangerous. I'm going to give you actually three of them. And we've already come to the first one, which is that we're accountable and responsible for the knowledge we have.

So, if you are here this morning, which you are, unless you're listening to a recording, you're in a dangerous place. If you were here last week, you were in a dangerous place.

You now have a greater responsibility. When it comes to the lies that this world tells us, offering freedom but presenting slavery, you are no longer able to say, no one ever told me.

You're no longer able to say, if only I knew. And so, this highlights for us, right, that knowledge, as we've talked about before, is meant to go somewhere. Loving theology is a dangerous hobby.

It is never merely an intellectual exercise. You are responsible for everything that you learn. And so, if you're loving theology, if you're growing in knowledge, but you're not growing in grace, it's sort of like this.

[4 : 47] You're the person who goes to the gym. You know all the machines that are there. You know all the names of the workers. You've sat on all the machines.

You've never lifted a single weight. It has not gone anywhere. Some of you might be this person. If you've been to a gym, you've probably seen this person. They are going to the gym to work out.

You're like someone who's invited to a workout with a bunch of other people, but all you do is sit on the sidelines and watch. You can describe the workouts in detail.

You know the names of all the equipment, but somehow it has not led to any growth for you. Your knowledge has done nothing. Jesus himself warns us about this problem in Luke chapter 12.

He tells us about a master who goes to a wedding feast and he leaves his servants. And he comes back, and there are servants who have not done what the master has told them. However, there's two kinds of servants who haven't done it.

[5 : 48] Servants who knew what they were supposed to do and didn't do it. Servants who didn't know what they were supposed to do and still didn't do it. So both of them didn't do what the master told. One, however, has greater responsibility than the other.

And we're told this in Luke chapter 12. And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.

But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.

And from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. In other words, to those who much knowledge is given, much is required. Those with little knowledge received a light beating.

Those with great knowledge received a heavy beating. We are responsible for what we know. Knowledge is dangerous. And so the point for us is this. There's a call, just as there was, I mentioned this in 2 Peter chapter 1, verses 8 and 11, there's a call to self-examination.

[6 : 52] What has our knowledge done? Where has it taken us? Is the knowledge that we're gaining at work in our lives? Because scarily enough, dangerously enough, we are accountable and responsible for our knowledge.

The Bible teaches this principle of greater degrees of judgment. For example, we see in James chapter 3, verse 1, that teachers will be judged more harshly. The same thing is true here.

Those with great knowledge will be judged harshly as well. And so the question for self-examination is this. What is the knowledge that God has given you? What is the knowledge that God has given you?

Have you acted on it? God gave us knowledge last week, right? We now have great knowledge about the lies of our enemy and the ways he tempts us, offering freedom but delivering slavery.

If you were here with us last week, you can no longer, as I mentioned earlier, claim ignorance. You're responsible for that knowledge. You know that the body makes a promise whether you do or not.

[7 : 56] You are now held to a higher standard than you were before last week. Knowledge creates responsibility. You can't say, well, it's really not that big of a deal.

This is just going to be easier and more fun for me to ignore those rules. Maybe it's a different kind of knowledge. Maybe you know the knowledge that the book of Proverbs tells us that not every person who is poor is a sluggard.

The book of Proverbs has a category for poor people. Those who are poor through no fault of their own are called the poor. Those who are poor through their own fault are called sluggards. We have that knowledge, right?

What are we going to do with it? Are we going to continue to turn a blind eye to everyone that's poor despite knowing that's truth? What are we going to do with our knowledge?

Maybe it's knowledge that parents have. We know what our kids are up to, but we pretend not to notice because that's a lot easier than dealing with it. Maybe it's the knowledge that I have emphasized over and over that God calls us into community and we can't survive without it.

[9 : 00] And yet you are responsible if you embrace Proverbs chapter 18 verse 1 which tells us whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire. He breaks out against all sound judgment.

Another way of looking at it is this. When we get to the end of a Bible study, when we have grown in our theology, our question is this. What is this knowledge going to create in us in terms of growth and grace? What are we going to do with this knowledge?

Knowledge is dangerous. And it's dangerous because we're accountable, we're responsible for everything that we know.

Everyone to whom much was given of him, much will be required. And from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. Now I told you I was going to give you three ways that knowledge is incredibly dangerous.

That's only the first one. It's dangerous because it increases our accountability and our responsibility. Knowledge also is dangerous in another way and I want you to think about it in this illustration.

[10 : 07] Let's say, hypothetically, you're a single person and you go on a date with someone, you go on one date. And after that one date, they say, you know what, I actually don't really want to continue this.

Now I want you to imagine that you go on dates with someone for three months. And after three months, they say, you know what, I actually don't really want to continue this. Which rejection is greater?

The one date rejection or the three month rejection? Well, we know in most circumstances the three month rejection is greater. Why? I can give you a lot of reasons the three month rejection is greater.

One of them is this. The person has greater knowledge of you and so their rejection is more real. After one date, you could say to yourself, well, they didn't really give me a chance.

They didn't know the real me. They didn't give me a chance to warm up, you know. If they'd only gone on a second date, they would have known. They would have known what a mistake it was.

[11 : 15] You can't say that after three months. Right? Knowledge increases rejection. You can think about it in another way. Which is worse? An engagement breaking up or a divorce?

A marriage breaking up? Well, a divorce, right? This person has known you intimately. They know things about you that no one else knows. And they rejected you. Knowledge increases rejection.

And so knowledge is not just dangerous because of our responsibility. Knowledge means that when we walk away from Jesus Christ, if we walk away from Jesus Christ, the rejection of Him is even greater than it would have been had we not walked in His ways.

There is an increase in judgment, an increase in rejection when we walk away after we have known the goodness of the Lord and His community.

And so that's why we're told in verse 22 this is like a dog returning to its vomit. If you walk in the Christian community for a time, if you see the goodness of it and the richness of it, and then you go back to the world, then you go back to your sin, it is returning to something disgusting that you had left behind.

[12 : 36] You are a dog returning to its vomit knowing that there was something better. And so your judgment is greater because of knowledge, right? Knowledge increases.

In some ways, this is a subset of the first one. Knowledge increases our accountability and our responsibility. The greater, the more we know about Jesus, the greater our rejection of Him when we walk away, if we walk away.

And so that's again why Peter is telling us here it would be better that these people had known nothing and that they would know that they would be a part of the community and then desert it, then abandon it.

Finally, knowledge is not something that just recreates responsibility. It's not just something that increases rejection. Knowledge is also something that can inoculate us.

It can make us numb to what's true. I want you to think about this in this way. The best illustration I've heard is this. Imagine you have a ruler or some piece of metal and you're rubbing it against your arm.

[13 : 41] You're rubbing it against your arm over and over and over again. Now there's two things that could happen, right? One thing that could happen is you could rub your arm raw. It could become more sensitive, more tender, more responsive to pain.

The other thing that could happen, depending on how you could do it, instead of becoming raw and tender and more responsive to pain, you could grow a callous on your arm. And so suddenly you don't feel the rubbing anymore.

You've grown this resistance to it. You've grown this immunity to it. Knowledge can be like that when it comes to our spiritual lives. People think, I'm just going to keep hearing this over and over again.

I don't have to make a decision. I don't have to decide. I can kind of hold on the side of the Christian community and just always have my toes in the water. And when I want, when I decide it's the right time, then maybe I'll jump in the pool.

The problem is is that as you're hearing the message over and over, it is not making you more tender. As you reject it time and time again, it is making you more callous.

[14 : 47] And so it's a lie to believe somehow that we can always just tiptoe around the edge of a Christian community. We can always just sort of think about it and consider it, but never make a decision, never commit.

That's one of the lies that the enemy tells us that somehow that's the choice of freedom. This is why in customer service, if you have a complaint, they work so hard to keep you as their customer if they're smart because they know once you've walked away, you're probably not coming back.

You've been inoculated, right? Sometimes it's worse that you've had experience with them. Some of you are dancing around the edges of our community.

Some of you are dancing around the edges of Christianity. And we're glad you're here. also, you need to commit because what's going to happen is you're going to develop a callous.

You're going to become less responsive, not more responsive. You are accountable for the knowledge you have received here in this room and this church. God will hold you responsible.

[16 : 07] And so, embrace that knowledge. don't tiptoe around the edge. It is time to embrace Jesus Christ and it's time to embrace his community.

The idea that you can always float around the edges is a lie. It's similar to the lies that we looked at last week that present freedom. Looks like freedom comes from having no commitments, right?

But it's actually no commitments that gives us slavery. So, our knowledge, it makes us responsible. Our knowledge increases our rejection if we walk away from Jesus and our knowledge also can inoculate us.

And so, there's only one solution and it's this, to take our knowledge and do with it what it was meant to do, to embrace Jesus Christ and his ways, to put it into action, to do what God has given us to do, to stick with him no matter what.

Peter is warning these people about returning to the vomit of the world. And so, the solution, of course, is to stay and to stick and to commit. Now, you may be feeling at this point that I've laid a heavy burden on you to do everything you have knowledge for.

[17 : 32] And for some of you, perhaps that's what you should feel. If someone who's tiptoeing around the edges, you think you have freedom by not making any commitments. For others of us, though, that's the wrong image, it's the wrong response.

Because if you think about knowledge in that way, you are thinking about it as an independent study. You've been given a reading list, no one's going to help you, you don't have a class to attend, you're supposed to go off and read it by yourself.

You're supposed to get the work done on your own schedule, and then when it's ready, you turn it back in. Now, for most of us, that's not going to work, right? There's a few of you, a few of us, who are disciplined enough to pull that off.

Most of us are not. Thankfully, when God tells us about his knowledge, he is not telling us about independent study knowledge. He is inviting us to something very different.

Not independent study knowledge, not knowledge where we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. No, he is inviting us onto a team with a coach and a reward.

[18 : 38] You know, I talked earlier about working out. You know, it's one thing to try to discipline yourself with your New Year's resolutions to get X amount of exercise, right? You have to fight against your will.

It's another thing to know that you have a group and a team that you're working with. It's another thing to know that you have support. You're not alone. The same is true for us and our knowledge.

Now, I could have just recorded this sermon today, right? And we could just email it out to everyone on MP3, which is already outdated, I guess. Why are we not doing that? Because we're not pull ourselves up by our bootstraps kind of knowledge, people.

We're to hear together as a community. There's a reason for that. God knows we are not able to do these things by ourselves. He's given us many things. He's given us his presence and his spirit, which he promises when his people gather.

He's given us each other to work alongside, to cheer each other on, to coach and encourage and help. And so we're joining here, not an independent study in the Christian life, but a group and a team filled by God and his spirit and his resources that we would be able to grow and walk in his ways, taking responsibility for the knowledge that he's given us in this community.

[19 : 51] And so rather than being a daunting and intimidating task, this is a team, where there's no tryouts and there's no cuts.

All you have to do is show up. And all you have to do is to keep showing up week after week after week, knowing that if you follow with your teammates after your coach, God and his work and his spirit will be with you, changing you and growing you.

Now, some of you know I dabble in being a runner. By dabble, I mean that my mileage is pretty low per week. If you know much about the running community, you know it can be pretty brutal.

It's so bad, it's almost as bad as the cycling community. Yes, I said that. One of the things you need to be afraid of if you join a running group is that you'll get dropped. Getting dropped just means you're not fast enough, you can't keep up.

Everyone else is running a 715, you're running a 930, so you're just alone by yourself at the very end. However, there's something very rare in the running world called a no-drop group.

[21 : 02] Now, if you can find a no-drop group, it means that no one will leave you behind. Someone will stay at the back with you. You know that no matter your pace, you will have someone.

Jesus invites us as we grow in knowledge to a no-drop group. the requirement is not that we meet a certain standard, that we hit a certain speed.

What is required is that we follow Jesus' command, that we obey him when he says, follow me. And no matter our speed or our strength, all we have to focus on is that.

I had a professor in seminary who said this, that Jesus' disciples got many things wrong. They made many mistakes, they failed in many ways. There's one thing they got right.

They always kept following Jesus. And so the same is true for us as we see the danger of knowledge, as we see the accountability of knowledge, as we see the inoculation of knowledge.

[22 : 04] All we need to do to protect ourselves from that is to do what the disciples did, and that is to follow Jesus. But we have to follow him.

you show up right for the team, maybe show up to the gym. You can't lift as much as everyone else can lift. You don't have perfect form all the time. You can't do everything that everyone else is able to do.

And you still show up. Remember, back in 2 Peter 1, verses 8-11, we talked about fruit and this idea of obedience, our work and God's work.

work. And I told you the story of the gardener. And I read to you from John chapter 15, where Jesus says this, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

For apart from me, you can do nothing. The tree doesn't water and feed itself, but it responds to the water and nutrients it's given.

[23 : 07] one of those nutrients is knowledge. Is the tree working? Yes. Because of the nutrients and care and feeding and pruning of the Father.

And so knowledge is dangerous. It's dangerous because we're accountable and we're responsible for it. It's dangerous because if we have it and we reject Christ, it increases the severity of our rejection and our judgment.

And it's dangerous because if we don't embrace it, if we play around the edges, it inoculates us. It makes us immune to the truth. And so as Christians, we know knowledge is the nutrients that God gives us that we might grow and so we embrace it and we love it because we know that we're held accountable for it.

we know that Jesus is the one who is with us, using it to grow us and to change us. And so we're going to pray to him now, asking him to do that very thing.

I invite you to pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you've given us knowledge in your word and we thank you that you've warned us of the dangers of knowledge.

[24 : 28] We ask that you would use those warnings as your instrument in our lives to stir us up. For those of us who are complacent, believing our knowledge is enough, we ask that you'd stir us up to grow in holiness.

Father, for those of us tempted to reject you, remind us of what we know from our time in this community, of your goodness and your love. And for those of us who are at risk of becoming immune and inoculated against the truth, stir us up that we would embrace it, knowing that freedom comes from commitment to you, from embracing you rather than avoiding you.

We thank you that you're the one at work, that we don't stir these things up or pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, but instead we do one thing, and we follow after you. We ask that you'd help us to do that now by your spirit, and we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.