

# Know the LORD (And Get Over Yourself)

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## Sermon Text

The title I have chosen for today's message is "**Know the LORD (and get over yourself)**". Our text is Jeremiah 9:23-24.

Hear now the word of the LORD:

Jeremiah 9:23–24 (ESV)

[23] Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,  
let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,  
[24] but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me,  
that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.  
For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

## Opening Prayer

### Introduction

A passenger was flying cross-country to a very important meeting.

- **Shortly after takeoff**, the captain announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, one of our engines has failed. But don't be alarmed, we still have three good engines, and will arrive at our destination safe and on time." The passenger was unconcerned, reassured everything was under control.
- **A bit later**, the captain announced: "Folks, the second engine has failed. Don't worry, we can fly just fine on two engines, but it will cause a one-hour delay in our arrival." The passenger was still unfazed, since he had three hours of margin after arrival before the start of his meeting.
- **Soon after**, the captain announced. "Folks, the third engine has failed. It may get bumpy, but don't worry, we still have one engine left. However, our arrival will be delayed another two hours." The passenger began to get very nervous, realizing three hours was cutting it close.
- **Not long after**, the captain, in a somber voice, announced: "Folks, I'm very sorry to inform you we just lost our final engine." At that point the passenger, impatient and overwhelmed with frustration, stood up and shouted: "**Seriously? That means we will be stuck up here all day and I will miss my meeting for sure!**"

Many of us are like the passenger on that plane. Caught up in our own concerns, blinded to the implications around us, self-confident, trusting and boasting in ourselves. We are profoundly oblivious to the fact of impending disaster. The plane is not merely delayed, it is going down but we are either unaware or unconcerned – merely annoyed at the inconvenience it poses to our lives.

Some of you face an eternity apart from Christ. Others belong to Christ, but have allowed your focus to shift from him and onto yourself, to your own detriment.

**It is my goal today to kick out from underneath each of us the three-legged stool of self-sufficiency – wisdom, might and riches – that blinds us to our need for Christ and gives us reason to boast in ourselves. Not as a moralistic lesson in how we can be less prideful, but with redemptive intent that we come to rest in the knowledge and hope and delight of God himself. I pray these words of Jeremiah will be a much-needed spiritual wake-up call and source of great encouragement to us all.**

### **Some Background**

The book of Jeremiah was written by the prophet Jeremiah. As a prophet, it was his job to speak God's word to the people, whether it be foretelling of future events, words of instruction and comfort, a call to repentance, or the declaration of divine judgment. Whatever God directed, he was to proclaim.

**Israel at this time was in a dark and terrible place.** Originally one united kingdom, the nation had split in two after the death of king Solomon – into the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah. In large measure the nation had forsaken God, from the kings and priests down to the people. They forgot both his instructions and his fatherly care, and turned instead to gods of their own making. Due to their persistent unfaithfulness, Israel was given over by God into captivity to the nation of Assyria. Still God raised up prophets to call Judah to repentance. But despite occasional periods of national revival, Judah ignored the voice of God and followed in the way of Israel.

**As with Israel, the judgment of God was soon to fall upon Judah.** She too would be taken into captivity, under the nation of Babylon. It is in this context that Jeremiah was called by God to proclaim his word to a people whose hearts were divided and whose ears had closed to the word of the LORD.

Jeremiah is known as “the weeping prophet”. It broke Jeremiah's heart to see the people he loved repeatedly turn their backs on the God he loved and instead choose judgment, oppression and death. Through many tears, Jeremiah faithfully warned Judah to repent, but more often than not she refused.

**As we turn to chapter 9, we see the grief of Jeremiah. And here we also see the ultimate spiritual condition that kept the nation in rebellion and unbelief.**

Jeremiah 9:1–6 (ESV)

[1-3] Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the desert a travelers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men. They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and **they do not know me, declares the LORD.**

[4-6] Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, **they refuse to know me, declares the LORD.**

The people were adulterers, treacherous, bending their tongues, full of falsehood, evil, without trust, deceivers, slanderers, liars, full of iniquity and oppression and deceit. Quite a damnable list on its own. But the ultimate charge against them ran far deeper and more profound – they do not know the LORD. Not merely out of ignorance, but they refused to know the LORD.

In verses 12-14 of chapter 9, we learn that **Judah's refusal to know the LORD was the culmination of a chain of behavior**: forsaking the law that God had set before them, emboldened to disobey God's voice, choosing to not walk in accord with God's law, stubbornly following their own hearts, and pursuing the gods of the nations around them, just as their fathers had taught them. **This had become a generational pattern of rebellion**, woven into the very fabric of their society. **This sound all too familiar. We too live in a society that breeds rebellion and hostility toward the LORD.** Those who follow the LORD are mocked, while those who follow their own ways are praised and exalted.

With this background, we move to our primary text, Jeremiah 9:23-24. As we do, we will explore these three points:

- The Folly of Boasting in man
- The Beauty of Boasting in God
- The Delight of the LORD

### **The Folly of Boasting in Man**

Jeremiah 9:23 (ESV)

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches"

**To boast is to glory in something**, to be taken up with pride and satisfaction in achievements, possessions, or abilities. We boast in that which gives us confidence and in which we find our great joy.

**What is it that you glory in? What do you boast about?** A quick look at Facebook and Instagram and recent Tweets would provide interesting insights into many of your boasts. As would a hidden camera capturing your conversations throughout the day. Or a look into your silent, most secret thoughts.

Pastor John MacArthur speaks to boasting in his book, "The Heart of the Bible":

We live in a world full of people who **glory in their wisdom**. They put a long string of degrees after their names. They want people to be impressed by their academic achievements, by how smart they are. The world is full of people who **glory in their strength**. Professional athletes today are constantly boasting about their own physical strength and skill. Business people boast about the strength of their leadership and entrepreneurial ability. And the world is certainly full of people who **glory in their riches**. They want everyone to know they are wealthy. They wear their riches on their bodies as expensive clothing and jewelry. They drive around in their riches in the form of a luxury car. They live in a house that says "riches" to everyone who passes by. That is the way fallen human beings are: we glory in our own wisdom, strength, and wealth. **But the prophet Jeremiah says that this is what the LORD says**: "If you're going to boast, boast about this: that you know me and understand me."

**The opening question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism** reflect the disposition of the person who has learned to find joy and purpose not in themselves, but in God. It reads:

- *What is the chief end of man?*
- Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

But in the passage before us the LORD warns of a much different disposition, one that looks no further than oneself to find assurance and hope. **Here is how such a disposition might alter the catechism**:

- *What is the chief end of man?*
- Man's chief end is to be wise, mighty and rich, and to delight in himself forever.

What presumption, what deception, what folly.

**It is instructive that the LORD chose to highlight these three areas:** wisdom, might and riches. Between them most aspects of achievement and pride are covered. I suspect every person here is tempted in at least one of these areas, if not them all. But let me be clear on this point – **I am not labeling these things as inherently bad and corrupt.** In proper context they are all good things that testify to the blessing and goodness and all-sufficiency of God. **Nor am I trying to discourage personal ambition and excellence.** We are told in Colossians 3:23 (ESV): “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.” **What I am highlighting is the danger introduced when we live for these things,** when we boast in them, when we use them to justify elevating ourselves and our efforts, allowing them to overshadow or take even the smallest bit of glory away from the one to whom all glory is due. As we have read, this is the disposition which led Judah down the path of forsaking the LORD and following after her own heart.

Let us briefly examine what the bible says about these three areas in which we must not boast.

### Wisdom

Wisdom includes knowledge, skillful living, the proper application of intelligence and experience, moral discernment and right judgment. False wisdom takes on an attitude of mental or academic superiority.

Proverbs 26:12 (ESV) Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

I Corinthians 3:18-21 (ESV) Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” So let no one boast in men.

Our wisdom is deceptive and limited. True wisdom is from God, founded on fear of God and reverence for his word. It is not subordinate to the wisdom of man. Man’s wisdom gives no cause for boasting.

### Might

Might includes physical strength, good health, positions of authority and influence, military or political strength, a sense of control and mastery over the sphere of one’s life. To some, might makes right.

Proverbs 21:1 (ESV) The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

James 4:13-17 (ESV) Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” — yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

We do not remain young forever, we are not invincible, beauty fades, athletes eventually retire. We do not control the future, not even tomorrow. God is not impressed with the might and power of man. Neither physical prowess nor political might nor any other measure of worldly stature can sway or deter the will of God. It is foolish to boast in our own strength.

## Riches

Riches includes not only financial wealth, but the status and prestige that accompany it. It is often not measured in absolute dollars, but in the comfort of possessions, the sense that the future is secure, and that I am in control of my own destiny.

Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

I Tim 6:9-10 (ESV) But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Luke 12:16-21 And he (Jesus) told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Riches can be a means of much good, but can quickly become a source of greed, pride and temptation – even causing some to wander away from the faith. And the security of riches is but an illusion – riches are transient, they come and go, they can be wiped out by a crash in the stock market or be squandered away by a reckless lifestyle. Stories abound of athletes and celebrities who come upon great wealth only to lose it or to see it destroy their lives. Riches gain no favor with God. Riches are not a reason to boast.

## Two Foolish Kings

To sum up the folly of boasting in man, **consider the stories of two foolish kings: King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon**, who boasted in his greatness and refused to give glory to God, and his successor **King Belshazzar**, who boasted in himself and would not honor God.

Excerpts from Daniel 5:18-28 (ESV) O king (Belshazzar), **the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty ...** But when his heart was lifted up and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was brought down from his kingly throne, and his glory was taken from him. He was driven from among the children of mankind, and his mind was made like that of a beast ... until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of mankind and sets over it whom he will. **And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.** And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored ... This is the interpretation of the matter: **MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom** and brought it to an end; **TEKEL, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting**; **PERES, your kingdom is divided** and given to the Medes and Persians.”

## Summary

We must heed these words of the LORD in Jeremiah, echoed throughout the scriptures, as a solemn warning against boasting in ourselves. **It's time to get over ourselves.**

So where does this leave us? If I were to end the sermon here, you might go away challenged to be less prideful, more thankful and more appreciative of all the good that you possess, even giving glory to God for all that you have attained in this life. But if that is all you hear, I will have failed. For such a message amounts to little more than a lesson in moralism and legalism – how you can work harder to feel better about yourself and appear more acceptable to God. Ironically, the result would be to give you a new cause to boast, in your own humility and self-awareness.

## **The Beauty of Boasting in God**

Jeremiah 9:24a (ESV)

“but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.”

This short verse contains a wealth of truth

- God is knowable
- We are to boast that we know and understand God
- God reveals specific aspects of his character we are to know and understand

## God is knowable

**As Christians, we do not glory in being the wisest or strongest or richest people in the world, but we seek a better glory, a treasure far more valuable, a possession of infinite worth – we can know and understand God.** What an amazing statement! We are to glory, not in things, but in the LORD himself.

**We know God through his self-revelation.** He has revealed himself to us by the prophets and ultimately in his son Jesus Christ, all recorded in the bible.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (ESV)

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

When Paul was in Athens (Acts 17), he observed an alter with the inscription, “To the unknown god”. In response he declared to the people that what they worship as unknown, this he proclaimed to them. He shattered the intellectual safe space of the agnostic, who finds comfort in believing God is unknowable.

**We come to know God by listening to him communicate to us in the bible.**

As Kevin DeYoung states, “The doctrine of Scripture is rooted in a triune God who wants to be known and knows how to be known” (<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/the-doctrine-of-scripture-10/18/2012>). We don't have time this morning to delve into a discussion of the origin and authority and reliability of the bible. Suffice it to say that while the fool says in his heart, “there is no God” (Psalm 14:1), **we embrace the bible as the word of God on the authority of God himself.** If you are interested in exploring this topic further, we can discuss it during Question and Answer.

### Boasting that we know and understand God

**We now come to the answer for the question “in what can I rightly boast”,** and the reason that such boasting is good. We boast not in ourselves, not in our own accomplishment or innate worth. Rather **we boast – we glory and value and find our joy – in knowing and understanding God himself.** Stop and think about that for a minute. We can know and understand the LORD. Certainly not comprehensively, not exhaustively, yet sufficiently. We boast not in our knowledge, but in the LORD who we come to know.

2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV)

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 2:2-3 (ESV) – Paul’s desire for the Colossian believers was ...

that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

**All those things in which we are not to boast – wisdom, might, riches – these are all found in Christ.** We are to boast in the supremacy and glory of Christ.

### The character of God I am to know and understand

**The LORD does not allow us to define our own concept of who he is.** That was one of the great sins of Israel and Judah – they crafted idols to represent a god of their own liking, with a mouth that did not speak and ears that did not hear. They sought to own God and keep him tame and confined. And James tells us that even the demons believe in God, but their knowledge without understanding is useless. No, we must know and understand God as he has revealed himself to us. **For this reason, the LORD goes on to list specific things he wanted Judah in that day, and us today, to know about him.**

- **I am to know and understand He is the LORD, the great I AM**

Calvin suggests that in the declaration, “I am the LORD”, God separated himself from all the false gods which Judah sought after, and from all manner of corrupt and false worship. For to them, the name of the only true God was unknown.

When Moses encountered God at the burning bush, he asked to know his name. It was there God revealed himself as “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14), the LORD, the eternal, self-existent one, the mighty one, the deliverer, the giver and sustainer of life, the absolute sovereign, the supreme and ruling monarch, the one before whom all the earth owe their allegiance.

Later, on Mount Sinai, when Moses asked the LORD to show him his glory ...

Exodus 34:6-8 (ESV)

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “**The LORD, the LORD,** a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **steadfast love** and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

- **I am to know and understand the LORD practices steadfast love**

God abounds in steadfast love (hesed), lovingkindness, compassion toward his people. He is inclined to show grace and mercy. He is ready and willing and able to save.

A commentator (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible) notes here that “God’s mercy (steadfast love) is put in the first and highest place, because without it we should flee from God in fear and despair.” Or as Calvin says, “the true and right knowledge of God begins here, that is, when we know him to be merciful towards us. For what would it avail us to know that God is just, except we had a previous knowledge of his mercy and gratuitous goodness?”

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

The **steadfast love** of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

In his commentary (Exposition of the Whole Bible), John Gill writes that **the LORD exercises steadfast love “in such various instances**; in election, redemption, effectual calling, the pardon of sin, justification, adoption, and eternal life; **and towards persons so very undeserving of any favour**; and **to have an interest (i.e. portion) in this exceeds all things else; it is better than life, and all the enjoyments of it”**

- **I am to know and understand the LORD practices justice**

God is just in all his ways. God cannot overlook sin and rebellion. Judah deserved God’s judgment for having broken his law, for having spurned his love, and for offending and dishonoring him. The LORD will by no means clear the guilty. All wicked men, apart from Christ, deserve to be consumed by his justice.

Jeremiah 9:9 (ESV)

Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the Lord, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?

- **I am to know and understand the LORD practices righteousness**

God is righteous. All his dealings with man are right. The steadfast love and justice of God join with his righteousness. His attributes are not in conflict; they fit together in complete harmony. Here we see “loving-kindness towards the godly; judgment towards the ungodly; righteousness the most perfect fairness in all cases” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown). Man stands condemned before the holy God as the consequence of his sin and rebellion. Yet those whose iniquity and transgression and sin are covered by Christ are no longer objects of his wrath but of his forgiveness and grace.

John 3:16-17 (ESV)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Romans 1:16-18 (ESV)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

In his high-priestly prayer (John 17:3), Jesus defined eternal life as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. **It is this God who we know, and who is the foundation for all delight.**

### **The Delight of the LORD**

Jeremiah 9:24b (ESV)

“For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

God delights in the exercise of His righteousness and mercy on this earth. God’s happiness is in the exercise of His moral perfections. (see Joseph Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator*).

God also delights in those who understand and know him.

Psalms 147:10-11

His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

And God invites us to share in his delight as we find our greatest joy in him.

Psalms 37:4 – “Delight yourself in the LORD”

On this subject of delight, John Piper writes:

God’s pursuit of praise from us and our pursuit of pleasure in him are one and the same pursuit. God’s quest to be glorified and our quest to be satisfied reach their goal in this one experience: our delight in God, which overflows in praise. For God, praise is the sweet echo of his own excellence in the hearts of his people. For us, praise is the summit of satisfaction that comes from living in fellowship with God.

God does not delight when we boast in ourselves. It is folly. It is misplaced glory. He delights in the praise and worship of his saints.

### **Conclusion**

#### So What?

So why did I choose this passage to speak on today? For several reasons. **I am concerned for the salvation of family, friends, coworkers**, for those who are convinced they don’t need a savior. **I am also concerned for the health of our church and for Christian friends elsewhere**, who seem to have forgotten who they are and who Christ is. This is exposed in conversation and in manner of life, choices that are made, priorities selected, the pursuits and passions of one’s life. **Finally, this is a message to myself** to pursue those things that bring the light and glory to God, and not to rest in my own frail accomplishments or forget the Lord.

Judah was in a national crisis. **It’s easy to get skeptical and preoccupied** with politics, to blame our foolish or unrighteous leaders, **to turn to myself and say look at me, how good I am**. Judah was full of hypocrites and self-proclaimed leaders and people who only cared for themselves. The condemnation of God was severe; the people forgot him and refused to know him and despised his laws. These are all concerns we must hear and must confront.

**All manner of pride and self-sufficiency must be shattered** in the light of the scriptures as we recognize that all we possess is from the hand of God and not of our own doing. Nothing is worthy of comparison to the abundant wisdom and might and riches of God, all perfectly manifest in the person of Jesus.

- **To the Unbelievers: Do not harden your heart and persist in your unbelief.** Do not refuse to know the LORD. Today is the day of salvation. Repent and call upon the name of the LORD. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.
- **To my Brothers and Sisters in Christ: Turn from your self-absorbed ways and the boasting in yourself** and all that you have achieved. Know the LORD, delight in him, rejoice in his steadfast love and justice and righteousness. Be preoccupied not with your own glory but with the glory of Christ.

As former Branch elder Christopher Neiswonger recently wrote (Facebook, 5/15/2019), "It's very easy to 'believe in God'. Almost everyone does. But it's very hard to be saved; impossible really. Thank God that we have a God that specializes in the impossible."

### **Ephesians 2:8-9**

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

### **Closing Prayer**