

ON KNOWING THE LORD, Watchman Nee

Scripture Reading:

2 Corinthians 5:16 - ¹⁶Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

Galatians 1:15 - ¹⁵But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

John 20:11-18 - ¹¹But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, ¹²And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. ¹³And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. ¹⁴And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. ¹⁶Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. ¹⁷Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. ¹⁸Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

Luke 24:13-35 - ¹³And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. ¹⁴And they talked together of all these things which had happened. ¹⁵And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. ¹⁶But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. ¹⁷And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? ¹⁸And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? ¹⁹And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people ²⁰And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. ²¹But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. ²²Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; ²³And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. ²⁴And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. ²⁵Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken ²⁶Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? ²⁷And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. ²⁸And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. ²⁹But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. ³⁰And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. ³²And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? ³³And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, ³⁴Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. ³⁵And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

John 21:1-14 - ¹After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself. ²There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. ³Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. ⁴But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. ⁵Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. ⁶And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. ⁷Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. ⁸And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. ⁹As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. ¹¹Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. ¹²Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. ¹³Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. ¹⁴This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

From the time of the Lord's resurrection right up to the present day there are two different ways in which people know Him. Some know Him after the flesh; some know Him in the spirit. Paul clearly makes this distinction. In his second letter to the Corinthians he says: "We henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more." And writing to the Galatians he says: "It was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal his Son in me." Let us take several concrete illustrations from God's Word to demonstrate this distinction and to indicate how we should seek to know the Lord.

MARY MAGDALENE

When Mary Magdalene stood weeping beside the tomb where her Lord had been buried, she stopped and glanced inside, and there she saw two angels who asked why she was weeping, to which she replied: "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." No sooner had she said these words that she turned around and stood face to face with her Lord. The Word reads: "She turned herself, and beheld Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus." Incredible? Yes, but true. Mary Magdalene, who had known Jesus for years and had been one of His close followers, actually stood face to face with the One she knew and loved supremely, yet she failed to recognize Him. How had it come about that she, who had before known Him so intimately, did not now know Him at all? Because the One she had known so closely had passed through death into resurrection. The natural body, which she had learned to recognize with her natural faculties, had died and was buried, and the One Who now stood before her, though the same Jesus, was the risen Lord Who could not be known by any natural means. She must now get to know Him some other way. The historic Jesus, Whom she had recognized by seeing and hearing and touching, had died on the Cross of Calvary, and the risen Lord could not be recognized that way. He could not now be known after the flesh; He could only be known in the spirit.

As Mary Magdalene stood looking at Jesus in unrelieved sorrow, He asked: "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" Mary's eyes had seen Him and failed to discern Him; now her ears hear His voice, but nothing registers in heart or mind. She actually mistakes His voice for that of the gardener and says: "Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him and I will take him away." Hitherto Mary had used her eyes to differentiate between the appearance of Jesus and that of other men. Have her eyes lost their quickness of sense? And formerly she had used her ears to detect His voice from the multitude of other

voices. Is her hearing less acute than it was? No, nothing has happened to her eyes or to her ears; but something has happened to her Lord. She needs spiritual faculties to recognize Him now.

Jesus then addressed her by name, and when He said "Mary", there was immediate recognition, and a glad "Rabboni" burst from her lips. What had happened? The Lord had revealed Himself to Mary in the calling of her name. He did not tell her who He was, but spiritual perception came to her when He called her by name. He offered her no explanations that might have enabled her mind to discover His identity; but in a way that was intellectually indefinable He conveyed to her spirit the knowledge that He was the same Jesus she had known so well. Instantly her sorrow gave place to joy and she hastened to break the good news to the disciples.

TWO DISCIPLES JOURNEYING TO EMMAUS

Two of the disciples who had heard the amazing news of the Lord's resurrection set out the same day for the village of Emmaus, and on the way they conversed about the recent happenings in Jerusalem. As they were talking about the Lord, He Himself drew near; but they did not know Him. They had known Him after the flesh; but all their past knowledge of Him provided no clue to His identity now that He was risen from the dead. They actually took Him to be a stranger who was unacquainted with recent events in Jerusalem. He then opened the Scriptures to them. "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." Still no light dawned. Is it not amazing that when He interpreted from the Word of God the things relating to Himself, they still failed to recognize Him? They heard the words He spoke and they understood them and were moved by them -- so moved that their hearts burned within them -- yet they did not know who He was that was talking to them. Oh, there is a vast difference between an intellectual understanding of the Word of God regarding His Son and a spiritual revelation of Him?

The day was drawing to a close by the time the disciples reached their destination. As they were reluctant to part from their Companion, they invited Him into the house to join in the evening meal. He took the loaf into His hands and blessed it, then broke it and passed it to them. As He broke the loaf, light broke on their spirits and they recognized their Lord.

Do you not see that there are two ways of knowing the Lord? You can acquire an outward knowledge of Him through reading about Him in the Scriptures; but you can know Him with an inward knowledge when He grants you a revelation of Himself. Many people have read God's Word till they are so familiar with the truths concerning Christ that they can preach Him to others; yet they still lack the knowledge of Him that comes through inner enlightenment. Happily there are those who know Him not just intellectually, but spiritually, because He has opened the eyes of their heart.

THE SEVEN DISCIPLES

Some time after Jesus rose from the dead seven of His disciples were gathered at the sea of Tiberius -- Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John, and two other disciples not named in the narrative recorded by John, Peter turned to the other six and said: "I go a fishing." The others immediately suggested accompanying him; so off they went together, and an amazing thing happened. These men, who were experienced fishers before they knew the Lord, had no success now. They spent the whole night fishing and caught nothing. A still more amazing thing happened -- at dawn Jesus appeared on the beach and they did not know Him. Oh! their unaided natural faculties were unavailing when it was a question of discerning the risen Lord. Just think of it -- Peter, James and John had been His constant companions. How could that specially privileged trio, so intimately related to Him, fail to recognize Him? And what about Nathaniel? In the early days, when the disciples first began to follow Jesus, he was one of the foremost to confess that Jesus was the Son of God. And as for Thomas, because he doubted the reality of Christ's resurrection when the other disciples bore

witness to the fact, the Lord had dispelled his doubts by inviting him to reach out his hand and feel the wound in His side; but now Thomas does not recognize Him.

Every one of these disciples had known Jesus both before and after His resurrection; now not one of them knows Him. So He comes to their aid and reveals Himself afresh to them. "Children, have ye aught to eat?" He asks. When they tell Him they have nothing, He says: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and ye shall find." They do so and they catch more fish than they can draw in. At that point recognition breaks on John, the beloved disciple, and turning to Peter he says: "It is the Lord"; and Peter, with the other five, all recognize Him anew. A very little while before this they had seen Him with their eyes and heard Him with their ears, yet they did not know who He was: now suddenly, unaccountably, they know Him. Knowledge of the Lord after this kind is irrefutable and brings a new strength into the life of the believer.

When the disciples reached the shore they saw a fire burning, and on the fire there was fish and bread. Jesus invited them to break their fast and they responded; but, the Word adds: "None of the disciples durst inquire of him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord." Do these words now strike you as paradoxical? If the disciples really knew that He was the Lord, why should they think of asking Him who He was? Note that the Word does not say they did not ask, but that they dared not ask. Have you ever had a paradoxical experience like that? Have you ever at one and the same time wondered if it was really the Lord Who had met you, and yet been so sure it was He that you dared not entertain any question? Yes, there are times when, with our eyes and our ears and all our reasoning powers we may be unable to substantiate the fact that it is the Lord; yet somehow in our innermost being we know that it can be no other than He. With our head we may question the fact, so that we want to ask: "Who art thou?" But because our heart reassures us, the question is never asked. True revelation is like that. It is paradoxical. Outward evidence is unconvincing and leaves us questioning; but inward assurance makes questioning irrelevant. Happy are they who know the Lord, not after the flesh, but in the spirit! They possess an inward strength that nothing can daunt. May God grant us an opening of the eyes that we may know His son after this fashion.