

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

August 4th, 2024

Sermon Title: God Only Knows

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:30-35

Matt. 26:30 ¶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Matt. 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

Matt. 26:32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

Matt. 26:33 Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”

Matt. 26:34 Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”

Matt. 26:35 Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

Main Point: Jesus Christ demonstrated knowledge of his disciples and of the future which only God Himself could have.

Outline:

1. God Knows Our Hearts
2. God Knows His Plans
3. God Knows the Future

Heavenly Father, we do ask that you would help us to understand your word. But even as you do that for us, would you set our gaze upon your Son, who is seen and revealed in your word. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

Think of all the things you don't know.

I'll speak for myself here for a moment.

I don't know how many asteroids there are in our solar system. I couldn't even ballpark it.

I don't know what will happen in the future. I have educated guesses, but I don't know.

I don't know how many people with the same name as me exist in the world. According to Google, there are many of them, and they are all more wealthy and good looking than me. Not that I google myself. Often, anyway.

My knowledge is incredibly limited. And I could just go on and on. But in some sense, those are things I shouldn't know, anyway. How could I know them? But even stuff that I should know I don't really know. Right?

I still don't have my children's birthdays memorized. I don't know everything I'm supposed to do next week (which is why I keep everything on my calendar). I still don't really know so many basic things in my life.

And when we talk about God, there are a few things that make him stand out dramatically from us as human beings.

Among those are the fact that God is in all places at all times: he's omnipresent.

God is all powerful and can do anything: he's omnipotent.

But as children perhaps one of the easiest realities for us to accept is that God knows everything: he is omniscient.

Unlike you and I, there is nothing in all of the universe that God doesn't know. He's so different from us. We forget things. We learn new things. We end up learning things and then being corrected later. Even the stuff we think we know we have to hold with some humility, right?

We are so different from God. God does not learn. He does not grow. He does not change. He can never gather new information. Whereas you and I learn information in a linear fashion from one moment to another, God just knows everything because he decreed everything.

And this fundamental difference between God and us is something that permeates today's passage.

At first, you look at this passage, and it just looks like a very dramatic moment, right? Three weeks ago, we saw that one of them would betray him. You could have heard a pin drop in that moment.

And then they sang a hymn and then went to a new location, the Mount of Olives. You can imagine that walk to the Mount of Olives, perhaps. And as they're going they think about what just happened: "one of us will betray Jesus." "But not me, right?"

But somewhere either on the way or at their destination Jesus decides to pop their bubble: "Yes, one of you will betray me, but please know something: all of you will fall away from me tonight." None of you are exempt from failing me.

What he is doing here is sharing the sort of knowledge that only God himself could possibly know.

While today's passage is rich in drama and is an incredibly gripping read, what I'd like us to see is the amazing contrast here between Jesus and the disciples.

Because we're going to notice this: the disciples here are ignorant of themselves, they are ignorant of the Scriptures, and they're ignorant of the future. And in Jesus' words we learn that God by contrast is the only one who truly knows what he is up to, what is in these men's hearts, and what truly lies ahead.

Today, then, this passage gives us a rich opportunity to compare not only the disciples, but ourselves to God. What we'll see today is that God Knows Our Hearts, God Knows His Plans, and God Knows the Future.

1. God Knows Our Hearts

First today, we see that God knows our hearts.

Think of what is happening here: Jesus knows that *none* of the disciples will make it through the night without "falling away." Every single man here; not just Judas, but even Peter – even John the beloved disciple – all of them will fall away.

God knows our hearts deeply and profoundly, and better than we do.

Think about this: We can hide our thoughts and feelings from each other, can't we? You have a conversation and the other person says something that displeases you, you might perhaps try to hide your grimace, right? Even if we try to hide our innermost thoughts from another person, we can never hide our hearts from God.

In 1 Chronicles 28:9 David is giving advice to his son, Solomon. And he says this: "the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought."

If someone were to say, "God can see everything there is to see," that would be impressive already, but none of us at all can see into the heart or mind. It's like David

tells Solomon, you may try to hide your thoughts, but you cannot. God knows your heart.

We find out that Solomon kept this lesson and took it to heart, because in 1 Kings 8:39 Solomon is dedicating the temple, and he offers a prayer where he acknowledges that God knows everything, even down to the innermost thoughts and intentions of the heart: “render to each whose heart you know...for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind.”

In 1 Samuel 16:7, God is speaking to Samuel about the man he wants for king and he says this about himself: “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature...For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

The Bible continues to teach this. Psalm 44:21: “[God] knows the secrets of the heart.”

Jeremiah 17:10: “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind.”

Psalm 139:2: “You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.”

And here Jesus speaks to these men: “I also know what is in your thoughts. You will all fall away because of me this night.” He knows their hearts. They are not as strong as they think they are. Their faith is not as strong as they believe it to be.

We often do not find out the true character of our faith until it is tested and tried. For so many of us, we have not experienced all that many trials or challenges or temptations, and we may talk a big game about ourselves as if we are strong or ready or as if we will be bold for the Lord when the time comes. And yet often there is only one way to really know: time and testing reveal those things.

That’s often how we learn these things. But God already knows; he always knew it, because he is the LORD who sees the heart. This means, of course, that he sees our sin.

Even our sins of thought are seen by God.

Our anger toward our brother that we think nobody sees: God sees it.

Our entertaining thoughts of lust when no one else can see inside our heart: God sees it.

Our plans and schemes: God sees.

Yes, God sees our sin.

But God also sees our love for others. It’s not all negative. God sees the sacrifice and love of his people, too.

There are people in this church, for example, who serve and do things none of you are aware of. Even if no one else sees, God sees.

I remember, when I was pastoring in Mississippi... there was a man who came to the church nearly every week, and he trimmed the bushes, and did work around the property. I saw it because I was at the church in my office, but no one else ever saw. And there were times, I am sure, when he served in this way, and even I didn't see. The lord saw.

People serve, and God sees.

There are others who are homebound, and who haven't been able to come to worship ever since I've been pastor here. They've told me, "I want to come. I want to be in church. But I just physically can't."

Even those who feel unseen by other congregants are still seen by our God.

The Lord knows. He sees the intentions of the heart. He sees even those things that no one else sees or knows.

Even when we do not know our own hearts God knows.

The disciples here don't know themselves. Look at Peter in verse 33: "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." Jesus tells him "no, you're wrong."

We overestimate ourselves. We don't know ourselves. We're deceived. We don't understand what we're really like. Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Our hearts are deceitful.

We lie to ourselves. We puff ourselves up. We vastly overestimate ourselves, not self-consciously but we still do it. We don't know ourselves. But God knows. It is a sweet comfort to know that God sees the heart. It is a powerful force of conviction that he sees our hearts, but it's also an incredible comfort.

We live our lives under the sight of God, and we cannot escape His gaze. It is a comfort to us when we live uprightly, and it's an incredible source of conviction when our ways are corrupt, isn't it?

God is so different from us. He knows our heart. Jesus knows the disciples' hearts here, doesn't he?

2. God Knows His Plans

Second, we can see from this passage that God knows his plans.

The confidence Jesus has is actually based on the revealed plan of God, which Jesus says can be found in the Scriptures.

Strictly speaking, look at what Jesus says is the reason why it is certain that the disciples will fall away. Look closely at verse 31 again: “You will all fall away because of me this night. *For it is written*, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” So in this moment Jesus quotes from Zechariah 13:7. Why does he quote from Zechariah?

Well think of what is happening in the context of Zechariah. This passage predicts a time when God’s people will be partially destroyed after their leader is struck down. It may be hard to believe, but there is meant to be a positive outcome to this prophecy. The passage says that this destruction and striking down of the leader will result in the refining of God’s people. But notice how *Jesus* reads Zechariah. Jesus identifies himself with this shepherd leader who gets struck down, and because of that he is certain of what is ahead: “These disciples are about to scatter. They’re going to run when the trouble comes.” Zechariah predicted this.

But the argument that Jesus makes here goes something like this: “God has planned for tonight’s events ahead of time. Because of that, the way he has planned and predicted it must take place.”

But the place that Jesus looks at here is not philosophy or some other argument. He doesn’t say, “You see, if God foreknows or decrees an event, then it must take place.” He doesn’t make a philosophical or metaphysical argument. Instead, he turns to the Scriptures and he says, “Because the word of God has revealed this plan, it will happen just as God has said.”

We should desire to have the confidence of Jesus when it comes to the Scriptures. God’s own word is trustworthy. And this includes not only the writings of the Old Testament, which Jesus staked his whole ministry on, of course, but we also know that the Apostles and early church writers also regarded the memoirs of the Apostles (which we call the gospels) and the letters of Paul as Scripture. Paul even at one point quotes from the gospel of Mark and calls it Scripture. Peter speaks of the writings of Paul as being Scripture as well.

So I want you to have this same confidence that they had in the New Testament writings: under the inspiration of God, just as the law and the prophets were the trustworthy word of God, they taught and believed that the New Testament writings were inspired word of God as well.

But we see this conviction of Jesus throughout the Gospels consistently: Whenever God speaks, his word is trustworthy. God’s word is accurate. God’s word never errs. This is a constant teaching from God: that words are given value by the one speaking. If a liar is speaking, then his words are worthless, right?

When I was a teenager, I had a friend who always sounded so confident. And because of it I believed everything he said. Only when I got older did I look back and realize, “Oh wow. Every time he opened his mouth I should have completely ignored it.” His words had no value because he was not an honest person.

But think of who God is. God is *the* truthful one. Not only does he know all things, but he never lies. Titus 1:2 calls him “God, who never lies.” In Isaiah 45:19 God declares, “I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right.” And so when someone who is *truthful* speaks, you can trust his words. It’s as trustworthy as he is. And even more when the one speaking knows *everything*.

God is not your friend who just makes things up when he doesn’t know. He is the almighty, all knowing creator who not only loves the truth but *is* the truth.

His word is dependable. It lasts. You can stake your soul on it.

Isaiah 40:8 reminds us, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” God’s word is not like fading and temporary things. His word is sure and stands and never falls. And we see that conviction of God in the Old Testament carry over into the New Testament. What did Jesus say in Matthew 5:18? “Truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

This was the bedrock conviction of Jesus in all of his preaching ministry. It’s why he had committed large portions and books of the Old Testament to memory. He constantly was pointing to the Scriptures and saying, “These things must take place.” Why must they take place? Because they were predicted by the one whose word never fails.

The word we use for this today is “inerrant.” It does not “err” because *God* does not err. God’s word contains no errors. We may not always understand everything in the Bible, but it is as trustworthy as God himself is. As Jesus says, not one part of God’s law will fail. All we are saying really is what Jesus says on this subject: “Not an iota. Not a dot. Nothing in God’s law will fail to be accomplished.”

First, God knows our hearts. Second, God Knows his plans, which is why Jesus says he knows what he knows here today.

3. God Knows the Future

Third, we see today that God knows the future.

This may seem like such a simple observation, but all of what Jesus says here is a prediction of the future. Right? He begins with this very clear statement: “You will all fall way.”

One of the defining aspects of God is his knowledge of the future. Think of Isaiah 46:10:

“I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times *things not yet done*, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

You see even in that passage how God says, “The thing that makes me not like you is that I can predict things that haven’t happened yet.” But look even more closely here: what is the basis in Isaiah 46:10 of God’s knowledge of the future? What does he tell us here?

It is not his ability to just sort of passively see through time: he says that it is his counsel, his purpose that is the foundation of his knowledge. Because God has actively decided something, he then *knows* with certainty that it will come to pass. And on the basis of what he has decided, he knows it. That’s what he’s saying. His counsel is the foundation of his knowledge.

So don’t just think of God as being like us, just with a longer range of vision, and just with the ability to see forward and backward in time. **God sees the past and the future the way an author knows all of his own story: because he wrote it.**

In Scripture we see that it’s not just that God passively knows things that will happen, but he knows them because he decides them.

For example, at one point Job says that death comes to all people, but then he says that we can’t control how long we will live. Why can’t we ultimately control the number of our days? Well, in Job 14:5, Job says this: “His days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass.” Job is saying that a man’s days aren’t just known. They are *determined*. Appointed. Decided. Declared. Purposed beforehand. By whom? By God. In fact, they are so set that Job says the number can’t be changed.

You have other passages which say similar things.

For example, Psalm 139:16, “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, *the days that were formed for me.*” Why does the Psalmist even have days at all? Because God previously formed them and wrote them in the book before they happened. Or you could say, they were determined or appointed. The New Testament word for this is “predestined,” decided beforehand. And because God formed the days, they happened. So God knows how long we will live before we are even born, and he knows them because he planned them before they took place. His knowledge and his power are intimately related.

Now, of course, human beings do naturally find this offensive. Sometimes people fight back against this idea in truly problematic ways.

I remember very clearly when I was in college, there was a theological position that was gaining interest in some evangelical circles, and it was called Open Theism. And the Open Theists claimed that God doesn't actually know the future free actions of any people, because if he does then they aren't free to do them. Because if God truly and perfectly knows them then they have to happen. Their argument was that God can't know what that you will eat oatmeal for breakfast, because if that's the case then you cannot help but eat oatmeal for breakfast, and so you're not free. It was a very philosophical position – they weren't driven to this belief by the words of Scripture at all. Nearly every argument I ever had with them was philosophical, not Scriptural.

And they were so committed to this idea that we must be free of God's knowledge of the future that they were willing to rewrite this basic aspect of biblical theology.

So what did they do? Well they argued that if it involves you or me making a decision, God cannot or at least somehow does not know what we will do. Well of course you won't find this in Scripture.

My best friend (who is still my best friend now 20 years later) was so frustrated by this strange and novel position that he actually engaged in a public debate with a proponent of open theism at my school, and in my opinion demonstrated the serious problems with what they were claiming, and shows that they weren't following Scripture at all.

But perhaps the biggest problem that they ran into was that all throughout the Bible God constantly claims to know the future, and *especially* what people will do.

Over and over again in Scripture we see, God knows the future free actions of people, and the outcome of all our lives because he has decided them.

He infallibly knows what will happen to Judas, for example. In fact, he knows not only that Judas will betray him, but he knows that he will do it before he even has agreed in the narrative to betray him for 30 pieces of silver. He also knows that he will not repent, and he says so.

He knows infallibly that Peter will choose to deny him.

He knows how many *times* Peter will deny him.

He knows the behavior of farm animals related to the timing of Peter's denial.

He knows that the disciples will all choose to scatter. And he knows all of these things perfectly.

But look at what the Scriptures have also been saying: God's knowledge of the future is not even based on us and God sort of sitting back and passively observing us.

Instead his knowledge is based on him and what we would call his “decree.” Because he wrote it, and declared it, he knows it. Because he determined it.

What does this mean for us? Well for starters, it means that God is different from us. Our God is not like us. He knows things we do not know for reasons that we cannot know them. He can see around the corner when we cannot. He knows what tomorrow will be for us before it ever happens. He knows the day of our death. He knows if we will have great grandchildren and what their names will be. He knows the day of Christ’s return. [To take us back a few weeks in our sermon series.]

James tells us that because we are so different from God in this respect, we should never presume to know anything that hasn’t happened yet. The world is not as predictable as we think, because God is in control instead of us. James says this:

“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.’”
(James 4:13-15)

You see, again, echoing what we already saw, God’s knowledge is based not on what he sees, but on what he wills.

So here’s part of the application: let’s not predict what will happen with the world. But let’s also not try to predict what will happen even in our own hearts.

The disciples make this bold claim when Jesus predicts that they will fall: no way! Instead of believing him, Peter says, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” “You’re wrong, Jesus.”

But it’s Peter who is wrong. Peter doesn’t know what tomorrow will bring. In fact, he doesn’t even know what tonight will bring.

But look what Jesus does: he doesn’t retreat from his claim. Instead, he gets even more specific: “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”

Jesus wants Peter to know that these are not just broad general claims: they are very specific and get as specific as to the crowing patterns of farm animals around his denial of Jesus. Not only that, but Jesus knows with specificity the number of times Peter will deny him.

Conclusion

This is a hard passage.

It's hard because Jesus is predicting something horrible: that he'll be abandoned.

It's hard because it forces his followers to see things about themselves that they don't want to see or believe.

It's hard because it tells us that even horrible things in this world are known to God.

But isn't that also the blessing of this passage?

That in spite of what Jesus knows is coming, he's still willing to face it. In spite of the rejection that's coming, he says that it's worth it.

And in spite of just how disappointing and weak and sinful his disciples are, he still lays his life down for them, and eventually restores them, too.

You see, the more we see that God knows, the greater we realize his love for us is. God will never learn something new about you that will make you unlovable so that he will take back his promises to you in Christ.

The law tells us that yes, we are sinners. Yes God knows it. No, we can't hide it from him. But the gospel tells us that we find peace with God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And we can bring out sin to him and set it before him, and repent, and he will grant us his peace.

As Geerhardus Vos used to say, there will never be a time in which he ceases to love you, because there was never a time when he began. As his child, he has eternally known you and eternally loved you.

I hope you see it here today: Jesus didn't suffer because of ignorance. He suffered because of love. Paul says in Ephesians 5, "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." 1 John 4 says "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins... we love because he first loved us."

How can you know this love? By believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. By repenting of your sins, turning to follow Christ, and by resting in and receiving what Jesus has done for us.

You see the knowledge of God. The planning of God. The intentionality of God: that no matter what, Christ would lay his life down. Why? Because he knew what was coming, and in that *knowledge* he loved us.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you that with the Son and Spirit you are at work saving sinners. Thank you that when you sent your Son into the world that he obeyed your will and laid his own life down for his people. Would you make all of us in this room – whether we are young saints, old saints, or those who are just curious – make all of us to see Christ and his death, and to live in the hope of his death and resurrection. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.