

The All-Knowing God

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You know, the Library of Congress is the largest library in the world and its website currently claims the following inventory which is very fascinating. The Library of Congress has more than 162 million items on approximately 838 miles of bookshelves. Their inventory includes more than 38 million books and other print materials, 3.6 million recordings, 14 million photographs, 5 1/2 million maps and 7.1 million pieces of sheet music together with 70 million manuscripts. The amount of knowledge in that place is incalculable.

Now, I want you to imagine with me something like this: imagine that you walked into that primary facility and in one great act of mental comprehension suddenly knew and comprehended everything in the Library of Congress, every book, every sheet of music perfectly, even though you had never seen them before. That would be impossible, wouldn't it? Do you realize that that impossible act and subsequent knowledge would not begin to compare to the grandeur of the omniscience of God. That's what we want to take a look at here. This is our theme for the next couple of weeks, the omniscience of God. I want to do a little bit of a theological study with you and this is in preparation for our upcoming Bible fellowship on the weekend of April 15-17. This is going to kind of lay some groundwork and start your mind and your heart moving in a direction that will prepare you for that weekend that we have together studying the topic of trusting God in trying times. You are able to trust God when you know God and to know God, you need to know something about his attributes and so we're going to start here with the omniscience of God.

Now, the doctrine of omniscience quite simply stated simply means that God knows everything. God knows absolutely everything and he knows it in this sense: God has never learned anything because he has always known everything, he always will know everything and he never forgets anything and he never will forget anything, and as soon as you tap your toe into this level of water, you realize that it quickly would overwhelm you. Somehow God who is an eternal being, who had no beginning whatsoever, from before time began, God had a perfect knowledge of absolutely everything. We're going to see that from Scripture.

I want to start our time tonight with a passage that is very devotional in one sense, very practical, it's very familiar as a way of kind of being our entrance way into this topic on the doctrine of God's omniscience. Turn, if you would, to the book of Matthew, the

Gospel of Matthew 6 and we'll go to verses 5 through 8, have two, maybe three messages that we are going to do on this topic and then when the month of May rolls around, we're going to return to our sequential study of the book of Psalms so there is just so much in Scripture you can't begin to exhaust it and we have a lot of good days ahead of us together studying God's word here at Truth Community Church. But the book of Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew 6 beginning in verse 5 where Jesus is teaching on the matter of prayer and what I want you to see is that this teaching is predicated on the omniscience of God, on the assumption of the omniscience of God and his perfect knowledge of all things. Matthew 6:5, Jesus teaching his disciples says, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."

Now, notice a couple of things about this passage. This is really just a launching point for us; it's kind of a diving board. We're going to jump off of this and not actually exposit this text, we'll save that for a future time, but I just want you to notice as Jesus is giving this basic teaching on prayer which is familiar to you that the cornerstone of it, the presupposition of it is the omniscience of God. He is not actually expounding the doctrine of omniscience here, he is assuming it and from that assumption says this is the way in which you are to pray. Notice that in verse 6 he instructs us to go into our inner room where no one sees us and to do our praying there; not to make a public show of prayer; not to call attention to our prayer and as the Pharisees and the hypocrites like to do. They would stand on the corners and make sure that everyone saw them praying. Jesus said, "Don't be like that." He says, "They want to be seen by men and when they are seen by men, they've got their full reward. They got what they were after." He said, "You aim for something different in your prayer life. You aim for something that is secret. You remember the omniscience of God and pray like this," he says there in verse 6, "go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret," and notice there at the end of verse 6, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." In other words, God knows when you are praying alone, praying in secret, praying where no one can see, no one knows what you're doing except him, and he says, "That kind of praying pleases God." You know, I mean, just to take the role of a skeptic here for a moment for just the sake of a teaching principle, you say, "Well, what good is that if no one sees it?" and the point is that God sees it and God sees it because God knows, because God is omniscient, because he sees and knows everything that happens and as you appeal to that and as you cater your praying in that direction to that kind of secrecy, Jesus says, "I promise you that your Father who is in heaven will reward you."

Now, we could go off on a big long tangent here and talk about praying but there are saints who find that there is a peculiar kind of power with God when they cultivate their praying in this direction; that there is a manifestation of the power of God upon their lives when they cultivate this kind of praying. Jesus says, "You pray like this and your Father

who sees what is done in secret will reward you. There will be a heavenly power that attends your prayer life," all because God is omniscient. So you see as we study this doctrine of omniscience, God knows everything, God knows when you pray in secret, Jesus says, "Therefore pray like that." You don't have to be seen by men in order to pray effectively. In fact, effective prayer comes when men aren't watching and so it purifies our motives even as we contemplate the omniscience of God.

Now, going on in verses 7 and 8, he gives a negative and a positive. He says, "Don't pray like the Gentiles. They babble meaninglessly. They say the same things over and over again." Those of you that sadly come out of Catholicism, well happily that have come out of Catholic backgrounds know what that meaningless repetition is and the Hail Marys and all of just the vain repetition of the same words over and over. I remember going to a Catholic funeral for the first time and just hearing them mindlessly repeat the same thing in a singsong voice and there was obviously no earnestness to it at all. They were just going through the motions. It reminded me of this passage. Jesus says, "Don't pray that way." Why? Because God knows. The Gentiles suppose that that's how you get God's attention is with many, many words repeated over and over again and Jesus says, "Don't be like that. There is no need to be like that." Why? Because God is omniscient. Look at verse 8 there, God knows what you need before you ask him. For some of us it's helpful to understand and is a greatly liberating fact in prayer to realize that we don't pray in order to give God information that he doesn't already have. God already knows what you need before you begin to speak so divest yourself of that false view of God that thinks that you need to provide him with information so he'll know how to respond to your prayers. There is no need for that because God is omniscient. He knows what you need even before you say the first word.

Now, when I was a very young Christian, a brand-new Christian and I was not yet grounded in any kind of doctrine at all and I had heard words like this, "God knows what you need before you ask him. Before there is a word on my tongue, O God, you know it all." I used to think, "Well, maybe if I talked really fast I could get something out before he caught on to what I was saying." It doesn't work that way. You can't accelerate it that fast, and sometimes it's those kinds of humorous funny things and, you know, our minds are being transformed from one image of glory to another as God sanctifies us, that starts to help these kinds of doctrines sink in. It doesn't matter how fast you talk, God already knows. His omniscience is complete. It is perfect and there is no way to accelerate ahead of it because he already knows and he has known all things for all time. God knows what is done in secret. He knows what you need before you ask and, beloved, what this does for us here this evening is it sets the stage for us to see the high reality of God's omniscience.

You know, one of the things that we want in this church is that we want you to have a high view of God; not to view him as a cosmic genie, not to view him as somebody that's a weak grandfatherly type, but to view him in a high and lofty way that is fitting with the way he has revealed himself in Scripture. Isaiah talks in Isaiah 6, "I saw the Lord high and exalted in the temple." Well, that's what we need to have in our minds and in our thoughts is this high view of God and where does a high view of God come from except

from having a good biblical doctrine of God and here we're just happening to be focusing on the doctrine of God's omniscience.

Now, a discourse transition there word. How important is the doctrine of omniscience? Well, the great biblical scholar from the last century, J. Gresham Machen, said this and I quote, he said, "If one thing lies at the basis of the whole biblical teaching about God, it is that God knows all things." He says that the biblical doctrine of God, the biblical teaching about God has as its cornerstone that God knows all things. And what we're going to do tonight is we're just going to do a really quick survey of a number of different passages and just lay out four aspects of the doctrine of God's omniscience to just let you see very clearly from Scripture four different things, for lack of a better word, a severe lack of a better word, four different aspects of God's knowledge that shows you the fullness and the breadth of his omniscience, and this is really a marvelous way to approach it, I think, because the power of biblical doctrine and especially on the attributes of God, is when you start to consider things detail by detail by detail. It is one thing to say God knows everything, that's true and you'd say, "Yeah, that's a nice doctrine. That's cool," and it just kind of glazes over you. It's a much different thing to say God knows this and God knows this and God also knows this and this and this and this. And when you start to go through it in detail, all of a sudden the different waves of the ocean just start rolling over you and coming in, splashing on you. "Wow, that was powerful!" Then a bigger wave comes and, "Oh, wow, that was powerful!" And all of this just has a cumulative impact on you that shapes your doctrine, deepens your understanding of the knowledge of God, and therefore drives you to a deeper sense of worship, and when it comes to trusting God, a more settled kind of trust that is based not on circumstances, not based on what you can see or guess or understand, but is rooted on God alone and that's ultimately where we're going over the next month together here at Truth Community Church.

So, first aspect of the deep knowledge of God, point 1: God knows himself. God knows himself. Now, that sounds kind of odd, I know, but think about it this way: who is God? Well, God is an eternal being with no beginning and no end. He has always existed. He always will exist outside the bounds of time. He is an immutable spirit. He is never changing. He is omnipotent. He has all power. You know, God can do and accomplish anything that he wants to do and nothing hinders the hand of God. He is omnipotent. How can he be that way? Scripture teaches us that he is an omnipresent being who has no limits. And when we remember those broad doctrines of God and who he is in his very essence, to say nothing about the fact that he is a Triune God of one essence who eternally exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a magnificent biblical doctrine that transcends human understanding, when you pull all of those things together, all of a sudden and you say God knows himself, you are struck with the immensity of the omniscience of God.

Look at 1 Corinthians 2:10 says this, it says, "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit," the Spirit of God, that is, the Holy Spirit, "searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." What is that saying except that the Holy Spirit understand the unsearchable mind

of God with a perfect knowledge that has no limits. God knows himself. God understands his eternality to perfection. God knows his omnipotent power. God knows his omnipresence. He understands his Trinitarian essence to perfection and has no problem comprehending that. He understands his own unchanging being. He knows himself. God is the highest object of his own knowledge. His omniscience is most fully displayed when we realize that God understands himself. God knows himself, that's the first mark of his omniscience. And beloved, here's the thing: when you study these attributes of God is to realize that we really do have to just kind of step outside of ourselves. We must go beyond our own thinking and any kind of self-reference point with this and you start with who God is and what he is and what he knows and you start there rather than from a perspective of humanity and you just enter into the outer court, if you will, of the greatness of God's being and you start with what he knows separate and apart from anything related to humanity and there you have your highest object of his knowledge laid out before you. God knows himself. You know, we don't even know our own selves, do we? Scripture says that our hearts are deceitful and wicked and who can understand it, Jeremiah 17:9. We can't even understand our own heart, our own motives, and yet God who is uncreated, eternal and perfect in all of his essence and attributes, God understands himself perfectly. Wow. You just kind of want to take off your shoes because you realize that you're on holy ground when you talk about these things.

Now, secondly, what else can we say about God's knowledge, his omniscience? Well, God knows his creation. God knows his creation. Scripture says, Genesis 1:1, that God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, and he knows his creation in detail. Look at Psalm 50, beginning in verse 10. Psalm 50:10 and there is a variety of passages that we could go on this just from the Psalms but we just want to highlight things just for the sake of an overview. Psalm 50:10, God says, "every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine." How many animals are there in creation? How many birds are there in the air? The estimates run into the billions just for birds and it says, Scripture says, God declares, "I know every one of them." You know, his object and his care and the detail of his knowledge of his creation far transcends anything that we would try to take account of. He is so aware and so knowing of every single detail of his creation that it goes to things that we would consider to be unimportant. What does it matter what a flock of birds is like on Mount Kilimanjaro? Well, to God it matters. It's part of his creation and he knows it perfectly. He knows those birds to perfection. Scripture says elsewhere, doesn't it, in Matthew 10, that even a sparrow doesn't fall to the ground apart from your heavenly Father, Matthew 10:29. And here's what I want you to see: from the infinite perfection of a majestic God, God knows that to perfection to the detail of a brute beast that has its breath in its nostrils, lives, flies for a while and then falls to the ground, of no human value whatsoever, God says, "I know that. I know when that sparrow falls."

Look over at Psalm 147:4. We go from the earth to the galaxies. Psalm 147:4, actually let's just start at verse number 1 because all of these things point us to worship, they point us to a humble adoration and a silence before a greatness that is beyond our comprehension. Psalm 147:1, "Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is becoming. The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He

gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted And binds up their wounds." Then there in verse 4, "He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them." Billions of birds, billions of stars, countless galaxies filled with galaxies, and God counts them, as it were, knows them all by name. He knows every star. He knows the sea and all that is in it, Scripture says. And so God knows his creation in perfect detail in a way that transcends our ability to even grasp. We can't even grasp the mathematical concept of how much there is. God not only understands the math of it, he understands everything that the math represents when we talk about his creation. He knows his creation in detail. He knows himself.

What else can we say about the omniscience of God? Well, thirdly: God knows man. God knows man. Look over at Matthew 10 at this point, and I would just have you impressed with God tonight. I would just have you astonished at the greatness of who he is, the greatness of his knowledge. He knows the physical component of man. Look at Matthew 10:30, just after Jesus had said, "no sparrow falls to the ground apart from your Father." Verse 30, he says, "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." The hairs on your head are numbered. Numbered by who? Numbered by God. How can he do that? You can't count the hairs on your head. A few of you maybe you could but that's a different thing about male pattern baldness that we're not talking about here. The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Numbered by who? Numbered by God, a God who knows all things. You say, "Why would he bother? Why would he trivialize with that? That's a trivial matter," you might say. Well, it's part of God's creation. He knows it perfectly. It's part of man and he knows man perfectly. So we realize that God knows aspects of his creation that we considered unimportant, God knows it in great detail, in perfect detail without exception. There is not anything anywhere in the course of creation in the universe or in any man that has ever existed that God has not known to perfection, even the hairs of your head are numbered.

Now, what is more, go back to Psalm 139 now, or go to Psalm 139, I should say, Psalm 139:1. Again, the omniscience of God, what he knows. David writing in a Psalm of worship says, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all." Now, notice what he's saying here in the context of what we've been saying tonight. He says, "God, you know me," and our point was that God knows man and we said he knows the number of hairs on our head, representing that he knows everything about the external man that you and I see when we look at each other. But now what David is saying, he takes it another step further and he, as it were, goes inside of man, goes to the immaterial part of man, goes into the soul of man, goes into the heart of man where his motives and his actions and his attitudes and his priorities are all manifesting themselves and working themselves out and what does he say about that? He says, "Lord, you know me. You have searched me. You understand it perfectly." Look at verse 2 again, Psalm 139:2, "You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path," in other words, "You see the pattern of my life, you see the course of my existence and you are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before I say anything, you already know it."

Now, Matthew Henry, the Puritan commentator said this, he said, "God not only sees man, he sees through him. God not only sees men, he sees through them." Now, think about what this means. Think about what we have done just in this short course of time here this evening. We have said, we have brought the nature of God, the character, the being of God, and put that on center display and we said that God knows that. From the highest, loftiest, most impenetrable nature of things outside us, God knows himself. As it were, mentally speaking, we step from the character of God and into his creation and we see God knowing the fullness of the universe, knowing down to the tiniest of animals to the most majestic of galaxies, knowing them all by name, and then we focus on the pinnacle of his creation, as it were, man created in the image of God, and we see that God knows man not just as a collective humanity but individual men, all men who have ever lived, all 7 billion presently populating the earth, and all of our ancestors he knew them perfectly and not just according to outward appearance, he knew their inward thoughts. So from the unsearchable greatness of God outside us to the innermost part of our own being, at all points in between, God knows it all.

There is one other aspect of God's omniscience that we want to remember here this evening. We've said, first of all, God knows himself; secondly, God knows his creation; thirdly, God knows man; and fourthly, God knows the future. God knows the future because he has determined the future. He has declared the future from the beginning and there are a couple of passages in Isaiah that make that imminently clear. Isaiah 42, if you would turn over there, Isaiah 42:8 and 9. God says through his word, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you." In other words, before these things happen that will constitute the remainder of this book of prophecy in Isaiah, I'm going to tell you now what will happen in the future to come. No one can do that. No man can do that from his position of limited knowledge. The only way that you could speak forth accurately the future is if you knew it in advance.

That's what God knows. That's why he is able to declare today what the future will be tomorrow in a way that is utterly foreign to our existence because compare what that says, actually let's do it this way, go to Isaiah 46 and then I want to take you to the book of James by comparison. Isaiah 46:9 and then we'll go to James 4 by comparison. Remind me if I get sidetracked because I hadn't planned to go to James. Isaiah 46:9 says, "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'" You see, to us from our perspective, the future is contingent. We don't know what's going to happen next.

James 4. We just make the comparison and set the omniscience of God and the grandeur of God over against our own ignorance and weakness and our own mortality. James 4:13. James here is rebuking a false sense of omniscience, you might say, among men, men who think they know what is going to happen. James 4:13, he says, "Come now, you who

say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." What are they saying except, "I know what the future holds and here is what the future is going to be like. We'll go to the city. We'll do business and we'll make a profit." And James rebukes that and says the realm of knowledge, certain knowledge about the future does not belong to man. He says in verse 14, "you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." He says, "You can't talk that way. You can't speak confidently about what the future holds because you don't know the future." Do you see the contrast with the way that God spoke about the future in Isaiah? He said, "I declare the end from the beginning." No hesitation. No contingency. He knows it fully. He can say that because he already knows it. So God is directing all things to accomplish his predetermined will. He already knows what's going to happen even though we don't.

So what can we say about his omniscience? A couple of things. First of all, the omniscience of God provides the basis of knowledge from which his sovereignty operates. How is it that God is all-powerful and how does he work all things to accomplish his purpose? How does he work all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose? How can he do that? Well, he can do that because he has a perfect knowledge of everything: a perfect knowledge of himself, of his creation, of men, of what is good for his children, a perfect knowledge of what the future is. He knows it all and so he is able as he exercises his omnipotence to accomplish his will, he's not responding to unforeseen events, he's responding to his perfect knowledge and by his power working out his will from that which he perfectly knows.

We could also say, bringing it to the doctrine of Scripture, that God was able to deliver to us an inerrant, infallible word, every word inspired by God, perfect in truth, perfect in its ability to guide us in all matters of doctrine and faith and practice, perfectly accurate in all that it affirms about creation and history, and every other realm of human knowledge that is actively affirmed in this book; God was able to give us a book like that, an inerrant, inspired word like that because his omniscience provided the basis for him to do that. To question the inerrancy of God, the inerrancy of God's word, I should say, is an attack on his omniscience. It's an attack on his power to be able to deliver a word through human authors that perfectly represents his thought. You see, a high view of the attributes of God ultimately will help preserve your doctrine of Scripture as well. So his omniscience provides the basis from which biblical revelation was made and thus ensures its inerrancy.

In light of all of these things, beloved, let's go back to that Library of Congress example that I opened with and you'll appreciate it more, I think, in light of what we've said here this evening. Let's assume for a moment that it wasn't impossible for you to know the full contents of the Library of Congress. Just assume for a moment that you could snap your fingers and have a perfect knowledge of the entire contents of the Library of Congress, all 838 miles of its bookshelves. Imagine that. You know, a line of bookshelves going from here nearly to Denver and you knew it all, and you knew it exhaustively, you knew it perfectly. Do you realize that even if you had that knowledge, it would not begin to plumb the depths of the omniscience of God. It wouldn't tell you everything about

creation. It wouldn't tell you everything about the galaxies. It couldn't tell you the inner thoughts of men. It couldn't tell you the names of every bird that had ever existed. It couldn't tell you the numbers of hairs on the heads of men. The Library of Congress bows before the omniscience of God in utter amazement and wonderment at how majestic he is because God's knowledge is infinitely greater. And what is more, God didn't learn it. God didn't acquire knowledge from an outside source. God knows the Library of Congress perfectly and he knows infinitely more than that as well and his omniscience is independent of outside contribution. No one ever taught him anything and no one ever will.

Someone might ask, "Is there any end to his knowledge? Is there any way that we could if we could get on a spaceship that could go at the speed of light and travel for millions of years, could we ever reach a boundary where the knowledge of God would stop? Is there any end to the knowledge of God?" Actually, no. There is not. Look at Psalm 147:5 and we'll close here. Psalm 147:5. After everything we've seen tonight, this almost seems understated. Psalm 147:5 says, "Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite." It had no beginning and it has no end. That's a measure of how great our God is.

Now, what does that mean for your life? A whole lot more than you would think. A whole lot more than you would expect and we're going to unpack that next Tuesday. I hope you'll be here with us.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we bow and humble ourselves before the majestic nature of your omniscience. Any one of these matters, Father, would be beyond our capacity to understand. The nature of God is something that we cannot plumb the depths of. Secret things belong to the Lord that are withheld from us. The boundaries of creation are beyond our exploration. The depth of the human heart, who can understand it? What lies ahead in the future, we don't know tomorrow, let alone what happens after that. So, Father, as we see your omniscience and compare our weakness and futility and our ignorance and our limited being, Father, all we can do is bow before you in utter worship and magnify your great name, the great name of Yahweh, the great name of the God of the Bible. Yes, Lord, you are great. You are abundant in strength and your understanding is infinite. And Father, how could it be that a God like you would condescend to know someone like us? Still more, how could it be that a God like you would step into earth in time in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in order to go to the cross of Calvary to redeem us by a sacrificial act that would turn away the wrath of God from our sin? Why would you bother, O God? And yet you did. Fully knowing the depth of our sin, fully knowing the depth of our rebel heart against you, nevertheless Christ still came, still offered himself up on a cross to save sinners just like us. And you saved us by an act of supernatural power, imparting a new nature so that we would repent and believe in Christ and receive him for our salvation. Father, knowing that you would bring about that result in time which you appointed before the beginning of the world, because you knew in advance,

God we are humbled before you. We bow before you in quiet worship. Let all the earth be silent before this great God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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