

The Mind of Christ

What Did Jesus Teach About God - Part One

INTRODUCTION:

- I. When Jesus began His work of preaching and teaching, His message was called a “gospel” – a word that means “good news.”
 - A. That’s because the message of Jesus was a message of joy and hope.
 1. Certainly no one would have called the message of John the Baptist a message of “good news,” because it was a message that carried a threat – where the Lord is pictured as standing with ax in hand, poised to strike at the root of the tree of decadent Judaism – ready to destroy.
 2. But the message that Jesus came preaching, and the message His disciples preached after Him, was indeed a message of “good news.”
 - B. Among the many outstanding characteristics of the message of Jesus was what He taught about God.
 1. Before Jesus came into the world, there were many things about God that were either misconceptions about His nature and character, or things that had never been taught before.
 2. This is why the things Jesus had to say about God were, without question, “good news.” He not only cleared up many

misconceptions about God, He also revealed some new truths about the true nature and character of God.

- a. In His day, Jesus had to confront many misconceptions about God.
 - b. And surprisingly, these misconceptions were not just among the pagan religions of the day (the religions of the Greeks and Romans), but even among the Jewish religious leaders.
 - c. So, the message Jesus came preaching about God often clashed with many popular beliefs of the day – not just those of the Greeks and Romans, but even with those of His own Jewish brethren.
3. The pagan world of the Greeks and Romans held many erroneous beliefs about the nature and character of God.
- a. These beliefs ranged from believing that the gods were so insanely jealous of man's accomplishments that they might just strike down a successful man – like lightning striking the tallest trees. . .
 - b. To the belief that the gods were totally detached from the cares and concerns of the world, and really didn't want to be bothered with mankind's problems on earth.

- c. All these varying philosophies came into focus in two belief systems that were held by virtually every Greek – the philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism.
 - (1). The Epicurean believed that the only way to live a life of absolute untroubled serenity, and thereby be like the gods, was to live a life in which there is no thing as an unsatisfied desire – in other words, experience every possible pleasure and don't deny yourself of anything (Hedonism).
 - (2). The Stoic believed the only way to live a life of absolute untroubled serenity, and thereby be like the gods, was to live a life that was absent of any feelings such as love, pity, or compassion – in other words, to have these feelings means our emotions will be controlled by outside influences, all of which we must block out to live a life of perfect peace and tranquility.
 - d. In Epicureanism, men believed the gods were NOT EVEN AWARE of their existence, and in Stoicism, men believed the gods COULD NOT be concerned about mankind without destroying their life of perfect peace and serenity.
4. But even the Jewish religious leaders of the day held many misconceptions about God.

- a. Some believed that God is so HOLY and divine that He could NEVER BE APPROACHED DIRECTLY by mere men. This belief was bourn out by passages such as:
- (1). Isaiah was troubled because he had seen the glory of God in a vision.
 - (2). **Isaiah 6:1-5** – *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."*
- b. To others, God was so UNPREDICTABLE that He can do anything to us that He pleases – perhaps even destroy us at a whim, and that all the sorrow and anguish we experience in life is sent directly by the hand of God. This belief came out of misunderstandings of passages such as:

- (1). Jeremiah's parable of the potter and the clay is a good example.
- (2). **Jeremiah 18:1-10** – *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.*

c. And to practically every Jew, God was a vengeful God. He is so opposed to sin that He actually delights in the suffering and destruction of the sinner. This belief came from a misapplication of passages such as:

(1). **Psalm 104:35** – *May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more.*

(2). **Isaiah 1:28** – *The destruction of transgressors and of sinners shall be together, and those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed.*

(3). **Isaiah 13:9** – *Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it.*

C. None of these misconceptions about the character and nature of God had any basis in truth whatsoever.

1. Therefore, for us to fully understand the gospel (the “good news”) Jesus preached, we need to begin by understanding what He taught about the God of heaven.

BODY:

I. In the beginning, three very important facts stand out in Jesus message about God.

- A. First, the fact that Jesus came into the world as God the Son to take on Himself the form of man clearly shows that God wants to be known and understood by man – not just by the philosopher or the scholar, but by the common man as well.
1. There is a great difference between “**knowing**” a person, and “**knowing about**” a person.
 - a. To “**know about**” someone is simply an exercise of the mind. We might know **about** several historical characters without ever having met them, or without ever having really known them.
 - b. However, to “**know**” someone is an exercise of the heart. It is the kind of knowledge that comes out of a personal relationship.
 2. There are many things we may never fully “**know about**” God in this life. But the ability to “**know**” God and Jesus Christ as our friend and as the lover of our souls is a knowledge open to all.
 3. The coming of Jesus Christ into the world clearly shows that God doesn’t simply want us to “**know about**” His nature and His character. He wants us to “**know**” Him in a close, personal way.
- B. The second great fact that stands out in the message of Jesus about God is that God is deeply concerned about what goes on in our lives.

1. This is one thing about the nature and character of God that both the Jews and the Greeks denied in their own philosophies.
 - a. The Jews believed that God was so holy and righteous that He could not have any contact with sinful mankind.
 - b. And the Gentiles believed that the gods either did not know about our existence, or that they could not allow themselves to care about us without destroying their own peace of mind.
2. However, by Jesus coming into the world as God in the flesh, He proved that God is not only involved with man's existence, He actually cares deeply about each and every one of us.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** – This is why the apostle Paul called God, *“the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation.”*
 - b. **1 Peter 5:6-7** – This is also why in, Peter says, *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”*
 - c. **Hebrews 13:5-6** – And why the Hebrew writer could say, *“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”*

C. The third important fact that Jesus came to reveal about the nature and character of God is that God is **NOT** a “**selfish**” God, but rather a “**self-sacrificing**” God.

1. Both the Jews and the Gentile world believed in a “**selfish**” God.

a. Since the supremacy of God demands absolute obedience, the Jews believed that sinners must be destroyed so God’s glory and majesty can be maintained.

b. To the Gentile world, the serenity and tranquility of the gods was all that mattered, and for the gods to be involved in man’s troubles would upset that serenity and tranquility. So, these gods selfishly protected their own peace and tranquility by ignoring man.

c. However, Jesus came preaching about a God that loved mankind so much that Jesus Himself came from heaven as God the Son, took upon Himself the form of a man, lived and eventually died on the cross to provide all mankind the possibility of the remission of their sins.

(1). **Romans 5:6-8** – The apostle Paul explains God’s love this way: *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates*

*His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.”*

II. In addition to these three great facts about the true nature and character of God – that God **wants to be known and understood**, that God **wants to be involved in our lives**, and that **God is self-sacrificing** – Jesus also revealed other great truths about the nature and character of the God of Heaven – the Only True and Living God.

A. First, Jesus tells us that God is actually an “**inviting**” God. God actually **desires** to be approached by man.

1. Jesus, as God the Son, show this in His own life when He **invited** men to approach Him – to come to Him and be with Him.

a. **Mark 1:17 also Matthew 4:19** – Jesus invited men to follow Him as His disciples: *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’”*

b. He even invited His disciples to share time with Him when He wanted to be alone from the crowds to spend time in solitary prayer and communion with God: *“And He said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’”*

(Mark 6:31)

c. Jesus also invited everyone who is weary and heavy laden to come to Him for rest and comfort: *“Come to Me, all you who*

labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

2. There is one very interesting event in the gospels that has tremendous importance in helping us understand the true nature and character of God, and that we sometimes overlook.
 - a. According to **Matthew 27:51**, when Jesus died, the veil of the Temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two – from the top, down to the bottom.
 - b. In Old Testament times only one man could enter the Holy of Holies. He was the High Priest, and he could only enter the Holy of Holies and come into the presence of God once a year on the Day of Atonement to make an offering for the sins of the people.
 - c. But the tearing of the veil is actually symbolic of several things, including the fact that all the barriers that separated man from God were completely removed in the death of Jesus Christ.
 - d. As we said before, it had once been the belief of the Jews that to come into the presence of God would bring immediate death. But Jesus came with an invitation to mankind to enter

into the presence of God with a child-like confidence and boldness.

(1). **Matthew 7:7-11** – In His sermon on the mount, Jesus said, *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”*

(2). This is also why the Hebrew writer tells us, *“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (**Hebrews 4:14-16**)

B. This invitation to approach God was not just given to those who were morally good and spiritually devout – but it was given to the sinner as well. Therefore, Jesus taught that God was not only an “*inviting*” God, He was also a “*forgiving*” God.

1. Jesus surrounded Himself with sinners and publicans, and the women of the streets. He ate with them, and associated with them, so much so that the religious orthodox of His day insultingly called Him the “*friend of sinners and publicans.*”

a. But Jesus said these were the very ones He had come to seek and save: “*For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*” (**Matthew 18:11**)

b. Furthermore, in **Luke 15:7** Jesus said there was joy in heaven when a sinner repents: “*I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.*” In **verse 10** He went on to say, “*Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*”

2. Here was the striking difference. The orthodox Jew and the Pharisee would avoid sinners like the plague. And the people who knew they were sinners would never approach **these** super-religious hypocrites.

3. But Jesus came preaching a message of hope that said God's love for man could not be destroyed by sin, and that God's greatest desire was for mankind to repent and accept the forgiveness that God was offering.
 - a. This concept was totally foreign to the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, and was something the Greeks and Romans couldn't understand either. Their pagan gods would never dream of reaching out in love and genuine forgiveness to sinful mankind, gently urging the sinner to repent.

CONCLUSION:

- I. The message Jesus came preaching about the nature and character of God was indeed revolutionary and unique.
 - A. Jesus painted a portrait of God that was completely different from the God of the Greeks and Romans, and even different from the God in which most Jews believed.
 1. Jesus taught that God:
 - a. Wants to be known and understood by mankind.
 - b. Is deeply concerned about what goes on in our lives.
 - c. Is self-sacrificing – seeking our best good.
 2. Jesus also taught that God:

- a. Actually invites men to approach Him – to come to Him and be with Him.
- b. Is a forgiving God – full of mercy and compassion toward even the lowest of sinners.

II. Who could possibly turn their back on a God like this?

A. The reason why we know all these things about the nature and character of God is because we have seen them in the life and teaching of Jesus – Jesus came to “*show*” us the Father.

- 1. Jesus left the glory of heaven and took upon Himself the form of a man to live as one of us because . . .
 - a. He wanted to be known and understood by us, and
 - b. He wanted us to know that He is deeply concerned about what goes on in our lives.
- 2. Jesus also wanted us to know that . . .
 - a. He wants us to come to Him and be with Him, and that
 - b. He is forgiving – full of mercy and compassion toward even the lowest of sinners.

B. Knowing all these things about the true nature and character of God and Jesus Christ, who among us could possibly turn our back on the Lord?

- 1. You don’t want to do that.

- a. If you've never been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, don't turn your back on the Lord's invitation to be washed clean of all your sins.
- b. And if you're a Christian, and you're not living as you should, don't turn your back on the Lord's plea to come back home.