

The Mind of Christ

What Did Jesus Teach About God - Part Three

INTRODUCTION:

- I. He was only seven years old when his godly mother died. Since his father had abandoned the family years earlier, the young man was turned over to relatives to raise him. Unfortunately, they wanted nothing to do with religion, and so the young man soon forgot the Scriptures his faithful mother had once taught him.

He went on to become an apprentice seaman and later joined the British Navy. By then, he had earned the reputation of being able to curse for two hours straight without repeating a word. But because he couldn't stand the Navy's strict discipline, he deserted, fleeing to Africa so that, in his own words, "I might sin my fill."

And he did.

Wicked to the core and now very distant from God, the young man fell into the hands of a Portuguese slave trader. For months, the chief woman of the trader's harem treated the young man like an animal, beating him and forcing him to grovel in the dirt for his food. By now he was weak and thin, but the angry young man managed to escape and make his way back to the African coast.

There he was picked up by a passing ship. Because he was skilled as a navigator, he soon earned the position of First Mate. But while the Captain was ashore one day, the young man broke out the ship's rum and got the entire crew drunk.

When the Captain returned, he was so incensed that he hit the young man, knocking him overboard. He would have drowned were it not for a sailor who pulled him back on board after spearing his thigh with a boat hook. The wound was so immense that it left a scar big enough for the young man to put his fist into it.

Some weeks later, when the ship was nearing the coast of Scotland, it sailed into a terrible storm and nearly sunk. Manning the pumps in the dark hole of the ship was the wounded young man.

It was there that he cried out to God.

God answered that helpless, wretched cry, and the young man would later emerge from the hole of that ship to eventually become Chaplain to England's Parliament and to even preach before the King.

It was this same vile blasphemer, who one day sat down to write:

“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now I'm found;

Was blind, but now I see!”

That young man's name was John Newton.

- II. There are many examples of the grace of God in Scripture, but none as dramatic as the story we want to look at right now.
 - A. In this story, Jesus paints for us, what I'm sure you will agree, is the most beautiful of the portraits Jesus painted of the God of Heaven.
 - 1. Because, in this story Jesus not only reveals things about the nature and character of God that had never before been revealed, He allows us to see a side of the Father that brings hope even to the most vile of sinners.
 - 2. It's a story of deep love and compassion, and one of most amazing grace.
 - 3. It's the story we know as the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" – found in Luke chapter 15.
 - B. Before we look at this parable of Jesus, let's first consider the setting in which this parable was spoken.
 - 1. In the opening words of Luke 15, you'll find Jesus surrounded by three groups of people – two groups who were considered outcasts of society by the third group that looked down on the other two with self-righteous pride.
 - a. One group was the "tax collectors" (also called "publicans") – those Jews who worked for the Romans and who collected

taxes for Rome from their fellow Jews, often charging more than was lawful and pocketing the rest for themselves.

- b. The other group were simply called “sinners” – people who had not only deserted the stiff, formal religion of the day, but were also living their lives to please themselves, seeking self-gratification and pleasure.
 - c. The third group were the “Pharisees and scribes” – the religious “elite” of the day, a group of men who considered themselves to be the “spiritual watchdogs” of the Jewish faith, but who were nothing more than rank hypocrites, judging everyone around them as being spiritually inferior.
2. Like they typically do, the Pharisees and scribes were whispering behind Jesus’ back, trying to impugn His character by saying;
“this man receives sinners and eats with them.”
- a. Jesus wasn’t associating with these people for the purpose of approving of their lifestyle. He was reaching out to bring them back to the Father in heaven.
 - b. But rather than rebuke the Pharisees and scribes for their hypocrisy and self-righteousness, Jesus chose rather to teach them something about God’s attitude toward sinners.

- (1). The Pharisees believed God hated sinners, and that He actually delighted to see calamity and catastrophe come their way.
 - (2). But Jesus wanted them to know that God is not ONLY loving and merciful, but that He actually SEEKS those who are in sin, attempting to bring them back, and when they return, He welcomes them as His loving child.
3. To illustrate this fact, Jesus told three parables.
 - a. One was the parable of the Lost Sheep.
 - b. The second was the parable of the Lost Coin.
 - c. The third parable, one which we often call the parable of the “Prodigal Son” (because the word “prodigal” means “wasteful”), is a parable that could more accurately be called the parable of the “Lost Son” – since it deals with a young man who not only lost the fellowship of his family, but lost the fellowship of his God as well.
 4. Let’s turn our attention to this wonderful story of “amazing grace,” and see what Jesus wants us to understand about the true nature and character of God.
 5. This is the story of three people – a wayward son, a loving, merciful father, and an unforgiving brother.

- a. For now, we only want to focus on the first part of this parable. On a later occasion, we'll deal with the teaching of Jesus regarding the unforgiving older brother.

BODY:

- I. The story begins when the younger son decides living at home isn't worth all the trouble.
 - A. As sometimes happens in our own day, this young man had apparently grown tired of all the restrictions that went along with living at home.
 1. As a result, he had grown to where he viewed his home, his family, and his life with nothing more than utter contempt.
 2. In fact, we see just how ungrateful this young man was by the demand he made to his father.
 - a. **Luke 15:11-12** – *Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.*
 - b. He didn't even have the respect, let alone the patience, to wait until his father died before he sought to claim his inheritance – he wanted it now!

- c. There wasn't even a "please" or "thank you" – just a cold, callused, unloving demand.
 - d. I'm sure this father's heart was shattered by the shocking, insensitive demand of this ungrateful son.
 - e. But rather than plead with his son to stay at home, the father chose rather to simply let him go – this Dad put his son in God's hands and let go.
3. So, the father divided the inheritance between the two sons – both the younger and the older son.
- B. Soon after this, the younger son left home – no doubt, never planning on coming home again.
1. **Luke 15:13** – *And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.*
 2. He got as far away from home as he could get – putting as much distance between himself and the family he had deserted.
 3. And once he settled down, he began living life the way HE wanted – enjoying making his OWN rules, spending his OWN money, partying with his OWN friends.
 - a. I have no doubt but that this young man had lots of new friends – and why not? He had lots of money!

- b. As long as the money flowed – as long as he furnished all the “wine, women and song,” he would never want for friends.
- c. But these so-called friends were only interested in one thing – they were only interested in what HE could do for THEM.
- d. Because as soon as everything was spent – when he could no longer do anything for THEM, they deserted him

COMPLETELY!

C. When he had spent all, and had nothing left, this young man suddenly woke up to the sad reality of all he had lost.

- 1. **Luke 15:14-16** – *But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*

D. Notice the chain of events.

- 1. First, he was forced to face the reality of having spent all.
 - a. There were no more friends, no more all-night parties, no more nice clothes, no more fancy places to live.
 - b. The bank account was now closed because of Insufficient Funds, and the money was all gone.

2. Second, he was forced to face the reality of “*a severe famine*” which broke out in the land – very possibly by the providence of God.
 - a. Not only did this young man find himself without money, there was no way he could even get a decent job.
 - b. The famine not only had a devastating impact on the farmers, it impacted the entire economy – including all the merchants that dealt with produce, driving up prices, causing employers to lay off employees – making matters even worse than before.
3. Third, he was forced to face the reality of his own want – he had no money, no food, and couldn’t even get a half-decent job.
4. But there was one thing he still had – his **STUBBORN PRIDE**.
 - a. Rather than pack his bags and go back home, this young man tenaciously clung to his foolish pride.
 - b. There was simply no way he would ever admit defeat, even if he had to starve to death – and he almost did.
5. Eventually, the only job he could find was working for a pig farmer, feeding “slop” to the hogs.
 - a. I don’t know how many of you have ever “slopped hogs,” but if you have, you know how putrid slop is.
 - b. This young man got so hungry that he would have eaten the slop, but no one would give him anything.

3. It's been said that before some people can come to their senses, they have to first hit bottom – that's what it took for this young man to come to HIS senses.
 1. **Luke 15:17-20a** – *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' 20 "And he arose and came to his father.*
 2. When we find ourselves on the bottom, we often begin to remember how different our life USED to be – when we enjoyed the fellowship of those who REALLY loved us – our family, and most importantly, our God.
 - a. That's what happened here – this young man began to think of home.
 - b. He would give anything to be back home – oh, how he missed home!
 - c. He remembered all the privileges he enjoyed as his father's son – even the servants in their house lived better than he was now living.

- d. So he decided to humble himself and go back home.
 - e. If he could simply become one of his father's servants, that would be good enough for him – after all, he didn't consider himself worthy of anything more.
3. But the most important thing in these verses is that this young man not only regretted the mistakes of the past, and became truly repentant of the way he had messed up his life – the most important thing is that he packed his bags, and began his journey home.
- II. The scene in Jesus' parable now shifts back to the father back home.
- A. I have no idea how many days this old man stood scanning the horizon for signs of his son, but I can imagine that not a day went by but that this old man thought about his son.
 1. I can imagine his heart swelling with hope every time he saw someone walking down the road leading to the farm – only to be disappointed when he realized it wasn't his son.
 2. Then one day, the father sees someone approaching the farm once again.
 - a. I can imagine him straining his eyes trying to make out the figure.

- (1). “This can’t be my son – he’s barefoot; he dressed in rags; his hair and beard are matted with dirt and filth.”
 - (2). “But he walks like my son; he’s about as tall as my son.”
 - (3). “No, this man is only a beggar – not my son.”
- b. But as the young man got closer, the father suddenly saw beyond the rags and the matted hair – he saw his SON!
 - c. Jesus tells us his father was overjoyed and gladly welcomed his son back home.
 - d. **Luke 15:20b** – *But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*
3. The young man had probably rehearsed his speech all the way home – he was going to tell his father he was no longer worthy to be a son, and simply wanted to be a hired servant.
 4. **Luke 15:21** – *And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*
 - a. But he never got the chance to complete his speech.
 - b. The father wasn’t interested in hearing any speeches – he didn’t need for his son to tell him how sorry he was, he didn’t need for his son to grovel, begging for forgiveness.

- c. The father had ALREADY decided to forgive his son, LONG before his son ever asked for forgiveness – and what father or mother wouldn't do the same?
- d. So the old man calls out to his servants and gives them several orders. The father restores complete honors to his son.
- e. **Luke 15:22-23** – *"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;*
 - (1). Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him – the robe of honor that only special guests are allowed to wear.
 - (2). And put a ring on his hand – the signet ring that gave him the authority AS a son.
 - (3). And put shoes on his feet – slaves didn't wear shoes, only sons and daughter's wore shoes (like the words of the old Negro spiritual – *"I got shoes, you got shoes; All o' God's chillun got shoes..."*)
 - (4). And bring the fatted calf – the calf being saved for the most important guest and the most important celebration – kill it and let's eat and be merry.

- f. Then the father says, *“for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”* **(v. 24)**
- (1). There is something very significant in the statement, *“for this my son was dead and is alive again.”* We miss this significance because we are not familiar with Jewish culture and custom.
 - (2). Whenever someone died, the Jews mourn that passing with what’s called a Shivah – a ceremony lasting 30 days in memory of the dead.
 - (a). But the ceremony wasn’t always conducted in memory of those who had LITERALLY died – it was also held in memory of those who had since disgraced their families, and who had forsaken and abandoned their Jewish faith.
 - (b). To their families, they were dead.
 - (3). This young man had also disgraced his father, his brother, his family’s good name – but worst of all, his God.
 - (4). And so, there is no doubt but that this father also mourned and wept over the loss of his son whom he considered as good as dead – and he held a Shivah in memory of the son he once had.

(5). But now, *“this my son was dead and is alive again! He was lost, and is found! He’s alive! He’s come back home to us and to his God. My son is alive!”*

CONCLUSION:

- I. In his book, *“No Wonder They Call Him The Savior,”* author Max Lucado tells a true story that illustrates God’s indescribable grace toward His prodigal children.
 - A. The story is about a loving mother named Maria, and her teenage daughter Christian.
 1. Longing to leave her poor Brazilian village, young Christina wanted to see the world.
 - a. She had grown discontented with living in a home with only a pallet on the floor, a washbasin, and a wood-burning stove.
 - b. She dreamed of a better life in the city.
 2. One morning, Christina slipped away from home, leaving her small village behind, and breaking her mother’s heart.
 3. Maria knew what life on the streets would be like for her young, attractive daughter, so she hurriedly packed to go find her.
 - B. Here’s where we pick up the story.

1. “On her way to the bus stop, Maria entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black-and-white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro.

Maria knew Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that were before unthinkable.

Knowing this, Maria began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place she left her picture – taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo she wrote a note.

It wasn't too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village.

It was a few weeks later that young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth, but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dreams had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she

had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet the little village was, in too many ways, too far away.

As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation. *'Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home.'* And she did."

- II. In the New Testament, God has provided a picture for us – it's the picture of His Son, Jesus, dying on a wooden cross.
 - A. It's God's way of saying, *"Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home."*
 - 1. There is simply no way we can look at that picture of incredible pain and suffering, and not be moved...
 - a. Moved either to give our lives completely to Jesus Christ in obedience to Him – by repenting of our sins, confessing our faith in Him, and being buried with Him in baptism, or...
 - b. By being moved, as a prodigal son or daughter to come back home.

2. The Lord stands with outstretched arms, ready to welcome you home.
 - a. And in that welcome is this one simple message: *“Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn’t matter. Please come home.”*