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## **The God of Christmas 2**

A Loving, Yet Scorned Father, Luke 15:11-32 and John 3:16

Psalm 8:1: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth..."

Psalm 20:7: "Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God."

Psalm 124:8: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is

safe.”

From these passages it should be obvious that there is more to the “name” of God than simply a means of identification. In fact, as we have seen in the past, the word in the Hebrew carries the idea of “character” and thus represents the essence of what a thing is. This gives new meaning to the third commandment which says, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain [that is, ‘lightly’]...” (Exodus 20:7a)! The calling here is NOT talking primarily about using God’s name as a cuss word, BUT for us NOT to take God’s character — that is, His holiness, His sovereign rule, His compassion, and the like — lightly!

Toward that end, let us want to go beyond the vale and consider the God of Christmas. Another facet of God’s character as revealed in Scripture is found in this Christ-event! To do that, once again, we are obligated first to establish that the name we will be looking at today is indeed ascribed to God, and then show that it is behind Christmas! The fact that He is described in the Bible as a loving, yet scorned Father! We begin with Luke 15 and the Parable of the rejected/scorned Father where Christ teaches His disciples another facet of God’s character.

Luke 15:11-12, “A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ And he divided his wealth between them”: as is a typical theme today, the story here is of a child seeking to be free from parental constraint.<sup>1</sup> He is restless and wants to “see the world.”

And so, in line with Deuteronomy 21:17, this “younger son” requests his share of his father’s estate.<sup>2</sup> Now what is amazing about this request is that its fulfillment could only come as the estate was broken up and liquidated — which translated meant the destruction of the father’s house.<sup>3</sup> W. H. Hendricken wrote of this this way:

Entirely aside from the fact that in all probability this meant that the entire estate had to be broken up- a considerable portion of the holdings sold and converted into cash- and that as a result whatever was left would be seriously affected, did he at all consider how what he was doing would grieve his father? What an insult it was to him? As if the young man’s ‘freedom’ would actually be better for him than the loving care and advice he was constantly receiving from his father at home! (Hendrikson, 1978, p. 753)

What son would ask this of a parent? “*Destroy your livelihood so that I can have fun! Liquidate your household because I want your money!*” And as shocking as that may sound, that is the request here. Yet in this instance, *the father was willing to bear that burden!* — Obviously we’re talking more about God at this point than an earthly dad!

Luke 15:13-16, “And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country [the implication with the mentioning of the ‘severe famine’ is that there would be no one to help

this Jewish man; all would be fending for themselves], and he began to be in need. And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him”

Consider some of the particulars of this section.

Luke 15:13b, “...went on a journey into a distant country...”

According to ancient records, during this time many Jews were moving away from their homeland such that while only half a million remained in Palestine, over four million Jews were living in the Diaspora. In light of this, the request of the “son” at first blush may not have been that shocking. Yet what begins to raise our suspicion is that Christ says that this boy “journeyed into a distant country.” The implication is that the prodigal, much like Jonah, moved as far away from his home as he dared.

Luke 15:13c, “...and there he squandered his estate with loose living.”

The emphasis in this phrase is on the foolishness of the son. He put nothing aside in case his plan should not work out and he should wish to return home. Rather, he spent his money right and left until, in no time, it was gone!

Now according to Luke 15:14-15a, about this time a severe famine hit the land such that “he began to be in need.” And so, he hired himself out to a local farmer who...

Luke 15:15b, “...sent him into his fields to feed swine.”

This would be understood by Christ’s listeners as one of the greatest insults for a Jew. For as you know, in Judaism pigs are unclean animals (Leviticus 11:7)!<sup>4</sup> My how this mighty boy had fallen!

Luke 15:16a, “And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating...”

Most likely this refers to the carob pods of the locust tree given to pigs and eaten by the very poor. Accordingly, hunger now was added to his humiliation. In fact, he is so desperate for food, he not only was willing, but he was “longing” to eat the food of pigs!<sup>5</sup>



Luke 15:16b, “...and no one was giving anything to him.”

The clear implication is that pigs had become more valuable than this Jewish male!

And so, as a result of his loose living, the prodigal ends up humiliated and hungry. Truly, the boy has come to the end of himself — which brings us to this:

Luke 15:17-19, “But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”””

There are a couple of phrases in this section that are worth noting.

Luke 15:17a, “But when he came to his senses...”

The idea is that the son had been reflecting over some time upon his present state and all that led him there. This meditation led to a shocking realization.

Luke 15:17b, “...how many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread...”

In Christ’s day, teachers, engineers, and full-time servants were NOT hired; as craftsmen, their services were a commodity that you purchased (akin to a carpenter today). ONLY DAY LABORER’S WERE HIRED — which is quite telling. For you see “hired men” would have been unskilled at a trade and thus at the bottom of the socio-economic structure of Judaism (even below slaves). Many of them were not far above beggars! They worked from job to job, many of which lasted no more than a day, and often less. They had no guarantee of work beyond what they might be doing at the time. As such, they would gather in the marketplace before dawn in hopes of being hired (cf. Matthew 20:1-16). And so clearly, the emphasis here on the lowliness of the men working for his father, and yet even these lowly men were cared for! As such, the boy decides to go back to his father’s house with this appeal.

Luke 15:18b, “...I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight...”

This is not the confession of an unrepentant person seeking further to manipulate. Rather, these are the words of a broken man! Notice, he knew his sin ultimately was against God — and this is always is where genuine repentance begins!<sup>6</sup> And so we see here a different “son.” His proud and ungrateful disposition is replaced with a “broken and contrite heart” which led him to this confession.

Luke 15:19, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”

With this the son mentally accepts the LOWEST position of his day: The hireling.<sup>7</sup> And so, because of his actions and his foolishness, this “son” expected to live NOT as a son BUT as a hired man! That is the scorning! Most of his life the boy clearly had a defective view of his father (that he existed for the boy’s happiness), just as his older brother whose heart is revealed when he didn’t get his way. Now during his mini-temper tantrum where his father was appealing to him as a loving son, we read this:

Luke 15:29, “But he [the older brother] answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you [lit. ‘slaving you.’], and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a kid, that I might be merry with my friends.”

Frederick Danker wrote of this:

When he says I have served... the mask drops, revealing the frigidity of the soul. The father thought he had a son! But to the older son the father’s house spelled slavery. (Danker, 1988, p. 277)

With this in mind, the Bible reveals this about the character and nature of this scorned Father:

- Was he as harsh as the older brother thought?
- Was he as unrespectable as the younger son believed?
- What was the Father really like?

Luke 15:20, “And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him.”

This perhaps is one of the most incredible verse in the Bible- as it reflects the heart of God the Father! Notice:

- That while [the boy] was still a long way off, the child obviously had not journeyed very far in his return home (recall that he was in a “distant land”). The implication is that in spite of the son’s scorning, his father was seeking him and coming after him!
- His father saw him, and felt compassion for him. The idea here is that the father’s heart “went out to him.” His son’s misery aroused in his heart love — NOT anger, wrath, or vengeance!
- And ran. In Christ’s day, it was considered undignified for an elderly man to run; yet, this father runs! But at this point, it didn’t matter what others thought. His boy was returning; he couldn’t be bothered by worldly conventions.
- And embraced him. The idea is that he threw his arms around his son’s neck. Passionately he embraced his son.
- And kissed him. This translation does NOT do justice to the original! The word in the Greek is a compound of intensity — *καταφιλέω* (*kataphileō*) from *φιλέω* (*phileō*), to kiss or love and *κατά* (*kata*), which serves to intensify the verb. And so, the father didn’t give him a perfunctory peck on both cheeks,<sup>8</sup> rather, he kissed him over and over and over again!

Now as incredible as is this description, it gets even more mind-blowing when you understand that Christ told this parable to convey the heart of the Father towards His children WHEN THEY SIN! In this regard, notice that at this point the son had yet even to confess a sin! Contrary to

the plan of v. 18 where the son scripted his plan reunion with his father, no confession has yet to be expressed here. This means that God's love for you is never forfeited or lessened by your sin. Way before we ask for forgiveness, we've got it!

That having been said, the son does endeavor to confess.

Luke 15:21, "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'"

As this is what the son intended, we are NOT surprised by his confession. HOWEVER, there is a "shocker" here. Once again compare the confession of this verse with the planned confession in Luke 15:18-19. What is missing?

Luke 15:19, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."

Why didn't the son say this? Once again, the father did NOT give his son the chance! In fact, far from being as a "hired man," notice what the father does.

Luke 15:22-24, "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry."

We see the heart of God the Father. Notice the elements.

Luke 15:22, "...quickly bring out the best robe..."

This was a status symbol (cf. Genesis 41:42). In the eyes of the father, his son was most important, and so would be clothed with the "best robe."

Luk3 15:22, "...put a ring on his hand..."

This most likely was a signet ring (cf. again Genesis 41:42) which was an indication of authority — royal authority. In other words, the father is saying, "Not only are you my son [by virtue of the robe], but I give you authority over my house."<sup>9</sup>

Luke 15:22, "...put... sandals on his feet..."

The significance in this is that in Christ's day slaves did NOT wear sandals. That the father puts sandals on his son's feet indicated that his son was NOT to be treated as the loser the boy thought he was, BUT, as he really was, HIS child!

Luke 15:23, "...fattened calf..."

In Christ's day, the diet of most Jews rarely contained meat; it was too expensive.<sup>10</sup> As such, the slaughtering of a fattened calf occurred on very special and rare occasions on account of very special guests. In essence, the father says to his son that there was no one more important in all the world than him!

From this parable we learn a "name" of God the Father —that He truly is the God of Love and so always loving toward His children even though they spurn Him! It's one of His attributes.

An attribute is defined as something that can be said to be true about God. In this regard, we have before us a passage which tells us something true about God. Yes, He is awesome, holy, glorious, majestic, the King of kings, and so great that the universe next to Him is less than a speck of dust! And yet we must understand that this Being also is love!

1 John 4:8: "...God is love."

Amazing! We do NOT read in the Bible that God is wrath. Yes, God does exercise wrath as an extension of His holiness and justice, BUT God is NOT wrath! He is Love! Speaking of Moses we read this:

Exodus 34:6-7a, "Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious [That is who He is! Because of this, notice what He does; He is...], slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin...'"

Psalms 103:10-14, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust."

Christian! This is your God! In this regard, let's consider this facet of God's character as it relates to the coming of Christ and so Christmas. Christ informed Nicodemus a teacher of the Law this way:

John 3:14-15, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life."

With this, Jesus informed Nicodemus as to the REASON that He, Christ, came to this world. And what was that reason? That He might die in the place of His children in order to deliver them their sin! This is the gospel!

In this regard and amazingly, liberal theologians have labelled this teaching, "*Slaughterhouse Religion*"- picturing...

- A petty, vengeful God wanting to crush man on account of his sin, and then...
- A weak, Santa-clause figure named Christ stepping in the way — taking the brunt of His wrath.

Yet based on what we've just seen, nothing could be further from the truth. Who, in the passage before you, is the One said to be behind Christmas? Who is the One who initiated the coming of our Lord to this earth to die in the place of the sinner?

John 3:16-17, "For God [the Father] so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him."

This is contrary to what you naturally think when it comes to Christianity! Because of our default program that wants to relate to God on the basis of our track record (which is miserable), when we think of God the Father we tend to do so from the perspective of guilt (we see this in our own relationships). And so, we *imagine* God to be so many things He is NOT: angry, hateful, mean, petty, stern, hostile, and strict! We see a natural disaster and we think of God as the Ant Bully!

And yet, what member of the Godhead is behind "The Plan" of Redemption? What member of the Godhead is responsible for the coming of Christ? It was and is God.

John 3:16a, "For GOD so loved the world..."

John 3:17a, "For GOD did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, BUT that the world should be saved through Him."

Do you understand the disposition that God has toward you this day in Christ? He is as The Scorned Father of the parable we just looked at: A Loving Father who does NOT wait for His son to return BUT is ever and always seeking after him!

In the movie *Toy Story*, they describe how every child thinks about their toys, that they actually are alive! And when the child leaves the room, the toys talk and relate to each other just like you and me! A favorite element to this series is the repeated times when one of Andy's toys doubts if they are loved, valued, or important that it is pointed out that Andy had written his name on the toy — that is how valuable the toy was to Andy!





In this regard, a most incredible verse written describing the wrath of Satan toward the church (Revelation 12) and the passion of the antichrist to crush God's people (Revelation 13), we read of God's commentary on the place and position of His children during this time



Revelation 14:1, "And I looked, and behold, the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand [the number speaks of wholeness and so the sum total of the Old Testament and the New Testament people of God], having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads."



Christian, rework your theology today! When you think of God, that which comes to mind is "the Father" of The Parable of the Good Samaritan! The boy, just like you and me, on account of his sin thought he lost his relationship with his father and so returned to him as one lower than a slave! This is what sin does to our psyche! Yet what do we read? Way before the son confessed his sin... way before his son even got close to home, the Father was there, loving Him, embracing Him, kissing Him!

1 John 4:9-10, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

How it behooves you and me to brain wash ourselves at this point! For it only is the Love of God that will

1. Give us hope when we let God down,
2. Enable us to stand when we have fallen,
3. And produce in us vibrant, passionate Christianity!

Psalm 94:18, "If I should say, 'My foot has slipped,' Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, will hold me up."

Psalm 13:5, "But I have trusted in Thy lovingkindness; my heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation."

Psalm 102:17-18, "He has regarded the prayer of the destitute, and has not despised their prayer. This will be written for the generation to come [this expression of God's love]; that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord."

Listen to how Jeremiah interacted with God so long ago:

Lamentations 3:19-24, "Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies

never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'"

## References

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- Ryle, J. C. (2013). *Holiness*. Create Space.

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> This is a rather interesting concept here. See the command for a man to "...leave his father and his mother..." (Genesis 2:24) does not imply a physical separation, just a spiritual one. "Leave" carries the idea of leaving with a view toward establishing another covenant family/unit. And thus, it was very common for extended generations to live on the same land, work the same business, and even sleep in the same dwelling, and yet be in perfect harmony with Genesis 2:24.

That obviously is the relationship between the Father and the sons in this particular parable. While the sons obviously were adults (the younger son would never have been allowed to leave his father's household if he wasn't an adult), they nevertheless lived in the same house as their father and worked the same land. N.B. Because marriage usually occurred for Jewish males between 18 and 20, it has been suggested that this boy was no more than 17 years of age. Yet, because exceptions to the above age span can be found, the above age suggestion for this boy obviously is not conclusive.

<sup>2</sup> In this case, the share probably was 2/9 of the property. Had the father died, the share would have been 1/3 in accordance with Deuteronomy 21. Yet in the case where the father had yet to have died, the share obviously would be less, approximately 2/9 of the family wealth — see I. Howard Marshall's treatment in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* on Luke, p. 607.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbinic law maintained that the land of just such a liquidation would become the property of the purchaser, but the previous owner could live on it till his death. See Leon Morris' commentary on *Luke*, TNTC, p. 263.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, one of the sayings of the Jews in Christ's day at the time was, "Cursed is the man who rears swine..." (*Baba Kamma* 82b; cf. SB I, 492f.; cf. 448-450. Cf. also Hendriksen, *Luke*, NTC, p. 753 and Ahikar 8:34 syr)

<sup>5</sup> I. Howard Marshall quotes an ancient source which said, "When the Israelites are reduced to carob pods, then they repent" (Marshall, 1978, p. 609). From this we get a sense of the desperate situation of the prodigal.

<sup>6</sup> High views of God- accurate views of God- lead to repentance and grief over one's sinfulness. Low views of God lead to wantonness and rebellion! Show me a man who willingly sins, and I'll show you a man with a defective view of God! W. S. Plumer wrote, "We never see sin aright until we see it as against God... All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His law that is broken, His authority that is despised, His government that is set at naught... Pharaoh and Balaam, Saul and Judas each said, 'I have sinned'; but the returning prodigal said, 'I have sinned against heaven and before thee'; and David said, 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned.'" - of the two groups, we know it was only the prodigal and David that were restored! (Ryle, 2013, pp. 20-21)

<sup>7</sup> See my comments in v. 17 on the "hired men."

<sup>8</sup> As was the custom for greeting someone in that day.

<sup>9</sup> cf. also 1 Maccabees 6:15; Jos. Ant. 12:360; Est. 3:10; 8:8.

<sup>10</sup> Recall the meal Jacob made that tempted Esau... stew.