

ARE YOU THE GRINCH? (Part 3) - Wonder, the Remedy for Cynicism

Last week, we talked about MATERIALISM and the Bible's remedy for materialism which is GIVING. Today, we want to talk about CYNICISM, which seems to have overwhelmed our culture. But thankfully, there is a remedy in the Bible for that as well. We could simply call it WONDER.

CYNICISM: an attitude of scornful or jaded negativity, especially a general distrust of the integrity or professed motives of others

The Oxford English Dictionary describes a **CYNIC** as a person "disposed to rail or find fault" and as one who "shows a disposition to disbelieve in the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions, and tends to express this by sneers and sarcasm." In short, a cynic is "a sneering fault-finder" ... they critique and distrust everything around them!

Cynics, of course, think that they're just "REALISTS" who see the world exactly as it is. One cynic gave this definition on his website: "a cynic is an idealist whose rose-colored glasses have been removed, snapped in two and stomped into the ground, immediately improving his vision."

VIDEO CLIP: WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD (MADAGASCAR)

The only cure for our culture's cold cynicism is WONDER, a sense of innocent awe, fascinated astonishment, or excited admiration. Where is the best place to see wonder? In the face and the heart of a child!

One elementary school teacher in Atlanta asked her pupils to write down their favorite Christmas carols. Here are some of the answers received:

- Deck the halls with Buddy Holly
- We three kings of porridge and tar
- Later on we'll perspire, as we dream by the fire
- He's making a list, chicken and rice
- With the jelly toast proclaim
- Oh, what fun it is to ride with one horse, soap and hay
- Noel, Noel, Barney's the king of Israel
- O come, froggy faithful
- You'll tell Carol, "Be a skunk, I require"
- You'll go down in Listerine

Mark 10:13-15 ¹³ And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

Matthew 18:2-4 ² And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³ And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

It is bad for Christians to be CHILDISH, but it is good for them to be CHILDLIKE. We should always be in a state of innocent awe, fascinated astonishment, and excited admiration at what God has done for us!

Matthew 21:15-16 ¹⁵ And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased, ¹⁶ And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

What is your reaction when you see "younger" Christians (spiritually or chronologically) worshipping the Lord? Are you pleased? Or displeased?

Cynics are apathetic, bored, disenchanting, indifferent, jaded, lukewarm, and nonchalant. They are unconcerned, unexcited, uninterested, uninvolved and unmoved (and almost act unconscious!). And there's nothing worse than a "Christian cynic" who should know better!

But have you ever met someone who is a "child at heart"? Some people call them naïve, others think them simplistic, but they just carry a sense of playful wonder throughout life.

Proverbs 17:22 (GN) Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is a slow death to be gloomy all the time.

VIDEO CLIP: MR. BEAN AND THE NATIVITY SET

You don't yawn when you're standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon – you get an adrenalin rush. That's the way it should be with our living for God every day of our lives! Like the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple, we need to be filled with wonder and amazement at the ways in which God has made our crippled, broken lives whole again!

Acts 3:10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

THREE WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS FACTS:

1. GOD'S LOVE IS NOT EARNED.

Have you ever watched kids perform in a Christmas concert? They sing off-key, they sing the wrong words, they sing too loud, or they don't sing at all. They wiggle, they wander around on stage, they pinch the kid next to them, or they engage in embarrassing social habits. They don't follow the script, they don't know their lines, they have to be prompted every second word, or they hold their props upside down. They laugh, point, talk, cry and leave the stage when they're not supposed to. AND YOU APPLAUD!

Why? BECAUSE THEY'RE YOUR KIDS! They're not that good in anyone else's eyes, but they did an awesome job in your opinion.

THEY ARE YOUR KIDS – THEY DON'T HAVE TO PERFORM.

So why is it, when the Bible states so clearly many dozens of times that we are the children of God, do we feel like we have to perform?!

There are really two reasons that God came to earth in the person we know as Jesus Christ. First, He wanted to give His life and shed His blood to redeem us from our sins. Second, He wanted to show us what "God in flesh" acts like! That's why Jesus prayed, wept and faced temptation; it's why He rebuked proud people, forgave bad people, and loved all people. It's why He – God in flesh! – wanted to be baptized by John the Baptist ... to fulfill all righteousness.

Matthew 3:13-17 ¹³ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. ¹⁴ But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? ¹⁵ And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. ¹⁶ And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: ¹⁷ And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

But there's something else in this passage – did you see it? **God is showing us how He feels about us!** Before Jesus has ever done a miracle, preached a sermon, or died on the cross, the voice from Heaven says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."
THAT IS GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD YOU!

"But I haven't accomplished much for God yet, I can't contribute much, I don't have many abilities or talents, and I still have struggles."

YOU ARE GOD'S CHILD – YOU DON'T HAVE TO PERFORM!

Ephesians 2:8-10 ⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

God has planned a path of good works for you to walk, but it is not those good works that save you. **JESUS CHRIST SAVED YOU!**

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

Colossians 2:15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

During the Roman Triumph March ("thriambeuo" – a noisy, joyous victory procession"), as the people celebrated the military success of a general, as the spoils of battle were paraded in the streets, and as the enemy captives marched in humiliation and defeat to the coliseum, the general's sons walked behind him in a place of honor. They didn't fight the battles, but they shared in the Triumph March because they were related to the General by blood!

Romans 8:15-16 ¹⁵ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. ¹⁶ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

Salvation is a gift to be received, not a goal to be achieved.

2. GOD'S LOVE IS NOT FAIR.

Sometimes people say "God is not fair!" and they mean it in a negative sense. But aren't you glad God is not fair? If He was fair, we wouldn't be here; if He was fair, we certainly wouldn't be saved!

Maureen Hawkins expresses a Mother's true feelings: "Before you were conceived I wanted you, Before you were born I loved you, Before you were here an hour I would have died for you, This is the miracle of life." BUT GOD'S LOVE GOES EVEN DEEPER!

Romans 5:6-8 ⁶ For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. ⁸ But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Matthew 20:8-16 (MES) ⁸ "When the day's work was over, the owner of the vineyard instructed his foreman, 'Call the workers in and pay them their wages. Start with the last hired and go on to the first.'
⁹ "Those hired at five o'clock came up and were each given a dollar.
¹⁰ When those who were hired first saw that, they assumed they would get far more. But they got the same, each of them one dollar.
¹¹ Taking the dollar, they groused angrily to the manager, ¹² 'These last workers put in only one easy hour, and you just made them equal to us, who slaved all day under a scorching sun.'
¹³ "He replied to the one speaking for the rest, 'Friend, I haven't been unfair. We agreed on the wage of a dollar, didn't we?' ¹⁴ So take it and go. I decided to give to the one who came last the same as you. ¹⁵ **Can't I do what I want with my own money? Are you going to get stingy because I am generous?**' ¹⁶ "Here it is again, the Great Reversal: many of the first ending up last, and the last first."

BUT THAT'S NOT FAIR! You're right ... but think about it, aren't you glad God is not fair? JUSTICE would give us exactly what each one of us deserves, but GRACE gives us what we don't deserve. And isn't it ironic that we're glad God wasn't fair with US, but we really want Him to be fair with THEM? Thank God I'm not the judge!

Remember Jesus' story about the prodigal son who left home and squandered his inheritance in immoral living? Did you know that was a famous story in His day? The rabbis told it regularly, but their story ended differently. The prodigal son arrived home and found out that he was no longer welcome ... the father rejected him, the father had died, the estate had been sold, etc. There were dozens of variations, but always with the same theme to teach rebellious sons a lesson.

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (CEV) A father and a mother may have a stubborn and rebellious son who refuses to obey them even after he has been punished. If a son is like that, his parents must drag him to the town gate, where the leaders of the town hold their meetings. The parents will tell the leaders, "This son of ours is stubborn and never obeys. He spends all his time drinking and partying." The men of the town will stone that son to death, because they must get rid of the evil he brought into the community. Everyone in Israel will be afraid when they hear how he was punished.

But Jesus changed the ending! His version of the story was so controversial that theologians still debate His meaning. Think about it. The son's return has nothing to do with missing his family, he's just hungry! The father forgives him, before he ever gets a word of apology out of his mouth! The faithful elder brother is made out to be the villain just because he resents his lazy baby brother coming home to live on his share of what's left of the family fortune!

Luke 15:20-24 (MSG) When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

Then, as now, the people who find this story offensive tend to be those who have never 'left home.' They have never squandered their inheritance. They have never abandoned their responsibilities. And God loves them for that, just as the father loved the elder brother. But God has other children too, those who have made horrible mistakes, taken foolish risks, and basically wasted their lives. And God loves them in spite of that! The father welcomes sinners home, even at the risk of offending obedient sons who didn't do the same.

What Jesus was teaching had a whole lot more to do with the love of the father than with the sin of the prodigal. The sin was horrible, but the love was unconditional. We learn from Jesus that the wages of sin is indeed death – a boy starving to death in a pigpen, but the gift of God is eternal life – a welcome home party to blow your mind!

Psalm 103:8-13 The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

3. **GOD'S LOVE IS NOT LACKING.**

VIDEO CLIP: HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED

John 3:16-17 ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Christmas is about WONDER. It is about the MIRACULOUS. God's love is not lacking toward you, and it changes everything! Cynicism says, "I doubt it." Wonder says, "I can hardly believe it, but I receive it!"