

The Mind of Christ: Understanding who Jesus is!

To even begin to take on the mind of Christ as a goal for ourselves we must do everything we possibly can to understand His mind. The Gospel of John clearly teaches that the Jews of His day did not understand Him or His mission. They came to the conclusion that God's redemptive plan was a means to take care of oneself and excluded the possibility of being redemptive for the whole world.

The Jews did not understand that God cared for the entire world. They could not believe the lengths that God would go in order to save His/our world. Because of this when Jesus went to the cross most had no ability to process that He was the Savior of the world.

John writes about Jesus in the classic verse from chapter three:

“For God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”

The Marks of a King

Do you ever wonder why the Jewish religious leaders missed knowing who Jesus was? The reasons they gave for rejecting Him were the very reasons they should have accepted Him. Because Christ logic is nearly always backwards from the way we think it is critical that we seek the mind of Christ or we will be just as blind to the truth as they were.

It is the miracle of the incarnation of Christ. How far was God willing to go in order to reach you and me? You don't expect to find your King being born in a smelly barn. You and I don't expect the One on whom our existence depends to be dependent on one of us. But Jesus was a helpless baby dependent on His mother's care and provision. He became one of us in order to rescue us.

Julia Johnston wrote these words in 1920's:

There's a sweet and blessed story
Of the Christ who came from glory,
Just to rescue me from sin and misery;
He in loving-kindness sought me,
And from sin and shame hath brought me,
Hallelujah! Jesus ransomed me.

From the depth of sin and sadness
To the heights of joy and gladness
Jesus lifted me, in mercy full and free;
With His precious blood He bought me,
When I knew Him not, He sought me,
And in love divine He ransomed me.

Hallelujah! what a Savior,
Who can take a poor, lost sinner,
Lift him from the miry clay and set me free!
I will ever tell the story,
Shouting glory, glory, glory,
Hallelujah! Jesus lifted me.

If you and I don't have the interest and drive to pay attention to our faith and relationship with Christ we will also miss who He is and who He expects us to be. There are four symbols of Christ our King in the Gospel of John yet we could easily miss all of them if we don't take the time and energy to think beyond the entertainment we fill our lives with day after day.

What is the mind of Christ? What's on His mind? How does He think?

1. He is a rejectable King

We have a choice to make

He came to His own home but the people did not receive Him. Rev. 3:20, *"Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."*

Holman Hunt's famous painting of Christ knocking on the door, is entitled, The Light of the World, and it hangs at St. Peter's Cathedral in London. In the original painting Jesus is wearing a king's robe and a priest's garment so He is the Intercessor King. He wears a crown on His head and carries a lantern in His hand. He is knocking at a door that has no handle or no way of opening it from the outside.

No head of state, or President, or King knocks on doors. There is always someone there to open them for them. The President of the United States does not knock at doors. Someone always goes before him and opens them. He would never put himself in the awkward situation of being rejected by someone not opening the door to the President. Yet the King of Kings and Lord of Lords came to our world as One who is both vulnerable and rejectable. The Jews never expected that and therefore very few of them saw Him as the Messiah. He came to them as He comes to us to test us and see if we will reject or accept Him. The choice of course while on this earth is entirely up to you.

You and I have a choice to make about Christ but be very careful because your choice will affect you for eternity.

2. He is a humble King

We have a courage to muster

Another picture of Jesus found in the book of John, is of Him riding into Jerusalem on what we refer to as Palm Sunday. The people heard about Him and His miracles and the crowds that followed His miraculous power. In fact, He had just raised Lazarus from the dead. The buzz was

sensational. The crowds are shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And then Jesus, rides into town on a donkey. The crowd was looking for a military genius to rise up against the Romans that controlled the country. No Roman general would ever ride around on a donkey. No Egyptian pharaoh ever hitched a donkey to chariot. In this world the horse symbolized power and the donkey was a humble beast of burden.

Most of us would prefer riding on a horse to a donkey. The horse is symbolic of power and worldly glory; Jesus however did not come to seek glory; He came to serve, not to be served.

So He rode into town on a donkey. He laid aside the tools and trappings of power to appear as a servant. Do you and I have the courage to serve like Jesus?

3. He is a servant King

We have a challenge to master

A few days later, on Thursday evening, Jesus gathered His disciples in an upper room and blew them away by doing a job reserved for household servants. He proceeded to wash their feet. The apostle Peter couldn't believe what he was seeing. Upon completing this task Jesus admonished them to do to others what He had done to them. To assume that this challenge was just to establish a ritual in the church of foot washing is to sadly miss the point.

This was about getting dirty and doing things to serve others that many would never do. It is upside down thinking from a human perspective and is typical of the mind of Christ.

Serving others is probably one of the most missed Christ like characteristics of church people today. A vast majority of church attendees are far more about serve us then service.

To possess the mind of Christ we must master the challenge of serving others.

4. He is a self-sacrificing King

We have a cross to manage

The fourth picture of the mind of Christ is found in John's account of Good Friday. History of course is full of men and women who die for other people but nobody could comprehend or imagine a God that would die for them.

People viewing the cross on Good Friday must have thought it clear evidence that Jesus was not the Son of God as He claimed.

Normally kings come with entourages, crowns and thrones and keep this in mind; When Jesus returns someday He will come with all those symbols of power. In fact in one of the descriptions of Him in the book of Revelation we read that He will be riding a great white horse. In fact, the bible says He will come and there will be no patient knocking on doors but He will come with power and authority. Every eye on Earth will see Him and bow before Him. No one will be able to shut Him out when He comes to earth the second time.

He will not come to kneel at our feet to serve but ironically we are told that we will fall on our faces before Him.

In that day there will be no more redemption opportunities. And that is why it is so critical that we pay attention to what Jesus is thinking. Our highest desire ought to be to seek the mind of Christ for our lives.

Jesus emphatically taught that we were to pick up our crosses and follow Him. Life is never fair but somehow we need to find the grace and strength to embrace the cross before us and endure till we lay it down some day.

The sacrifice of self: the way of redemption

In John 12 when Jesus told his disciples, “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,” He was not talking about His so-called triumphant entry into Jerusalem. He was talking about the cross. The cross was the only way for Him to accomplish His mission. So He said to them, *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

If we wish to bear fruit with our lives we must be willing to do the same. We must come to the end of ourselves and we must follow Christ’s path of vulnerability, where our lives are exposed to rejection and pain.

If we want our lives to be wholly His, we cannot be characterized by the pomp and circumstance of the world, any more than He was. We must be servants. Our lives must be poured out for others.

No matter what we may feel or how fair or unfair life is we must be willing to sacrifice it all for our faith to flourish.

I know that we live in a society especially in America that is built on getting ahead. Having more than others. We are all about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness but in reality following Christ may decrease your liberty, curb your happiness and in fact take your life.

We are called to sacrifice our feelings and our rights. Very rarely do you find authentic demonstrations of this even in the church world. When I was writing this sermon I thought about saying especially in the church world.

We easily get sucked into thinking about ourselves until the notion of self-sacrifice becomes like a foreign language to us. It will always be a tension we have to manage and live with.

Let me illustrate a great demonstration of self-sacrifice that lead to redemption.

A younger wife and mother was asked to teach an adult Sunday School class in a traditional church. It became clear that she was inadvertently hurting a few folks feelings. She wasn't saying anything wrong but there was a petition passed around to get her to resign as teacher.

Her pastor encouraged her to stand her ground but she said there was no way she could keep teaching. She also expressed how sad she was because she had just talked her non-believing husband into coming to church with her. She was so sad that she would have to leave the church and that her husband would get a bad taste in his mouth about Christians.

Her pastor challenged her to seek the mind of Christ. What if He wanted her to keep coming to the church even though she had been mistreated? At first she said there was no way that could happen. She was hurt. She was disappointed and saddened. She even argued about what her husband might do to the people who had signed the petition.

Then her pastor said this, "Well if you must go back to church full of bitterness and resentment you shouldn't go. But can you go back next Sunday and pray for the woman that is teaching your class? And can you love her?"

She burst into tears but finally acknowledged that by God's grace she could do it.

The next week she was there. She sat in the third row of the class and prayed for the woman who was teaching. She went back to the class Sunday after Sunday. Not once did she pout so everyone would feel sorry for her. She sacrificed her personal feelings, picked up her cross and followed her Lord.

Several months later the head of the petition drive flagged the pastor down in the parking lot one Sunday and asked if he had heard what happened to the former teacher's husband.

He blurted it out. He got saved. He accepted Christ and became a Christian.

The pastor couldn't wait to see her husband and sure enough he confirmed it. But I want you to listen to his words.

"Well you know that wife of mine. You remember what they did to her in that Sunday School class. It made me so angry that I was ready to kill them all. But every night, before we went to sleep she would kneel down beside the bed and pray for them all. While she prayed I stewed. But while she was praying last night, I rolled out on the other side of the bed and onto my knees and said, "Honey, pray for me. I'm the one who need it." Beside the bed with my wife, I found God last night.

It's part of universal law. Keep your life for yourself and you will lose it. Give it up wholly and completely to the Lord and you will find it and you will bear fruit. We started this sermon with the familiar words of John 3:16. The reason? Jesus is our example. If you have His mind you will have a deep passion for lost people and for a world full of lost people. Your heart will break

because of evil and evil doers. Without the mind of Christ, you will just live your life with not much spiritual focus, make your money, live the dream and one day look back on it all and wonder what you did that was transforming for the world around you.

The bottom line of life from a Christian perspective is simply this. We have a purpose and that purpose can only be found by genuinely following Christ. I am not talking about attending church but following Him every moment of everyday.

There are some biblical principles that are simply life changing if you follow Christ completely. We like to make our own rules and make it up as we go but God has clearly laid out a plan for us to follow with our lives.

The slogan of the Outback Steak House is “No Rules—Just Right”...but I suspect that if you showed up and didn’t wait for the hostess, took a table ahead of people waiting, ordered something not on the menu, then walked out without paying your bill, the manager would think differently!

Roger Staubach who led the Dallas Cowboys to the World Championship in ’71 admitted that his position as a quarterback who didn’t call his own signals was a source of trial for him. Coach Landry sent in every play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run and only in emergency situations could he change the play (and he had better be right!). Even though Roger considered coach Landry to have a "genius mind" when it came to football strategy, pride said that he should be able to run his own team. Roger later said, "I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory."

I once talked with General Charles M. Duke, a former astronaut who went on the Apollo 16 mission to the moon. I asked, “Once you were there, weren’t you free to make your own decisions and carry out your own experiments. He smiled and said “Sure, if I didn’t want to return to earth!” He went on to describe the intricate plan, the precise instructions, the essential discipline and the instant obedience that was needed right down to a split second. He explained how they landed with sixty seconds of fuel remaining. Talk about being obedient!

Are you and I willing to follow Christ. I mean really follow Christ?