

Did Jesus Do?

What *Did* Jesus Do?

by Staff

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In 1896, Charles Sheldon wrote a novel entitled *In His Steps*. It presents an unlikely hero, a tramp dressed in rags, who disrupts the status quo in a Midwestern church service by making a shocking statement after his repeated pleas for help are disregarded by the well-dressed and outwardly reverent townspeople. After the song service, he says, "It seems to me there's an awful lot of trouble in the world that somehow wouldn't exist if all the people who sing such songs went and lived them out." With this gut-wrenching indictment, he dies. The stunned congregation, realizing the hypocrisy in their lives, pledge that for the next year they would ask themselves one question as they related and responded to others: "What Would Jesus Do?"

Most of us have heard about or seen bracelets, bumper stickers, and innumerable other items emblazoned with the initials "WWJD." This popular movement came into being after a church youth group in Holland, Michigan, read this novel, pondering among themselves how to affect their generation and their culture, and decided to put these four letters, "WWJD," or the full question, "What Would Jesus Do?" into daily practice. They started with the basic assumption that, if each person would ask himself these four words before any decision, the world could be changed for the better.

While the premise of asking this question should be important to us, a much more important and fundamental question is probably more relevant to our lives: "What *did* Jesus do?" Both questions obviously relate to how we should conduct our lives, but asking what He did focuses on and teaches the basic principles of how He actually lived His life, without presuming how He might handle many of our "modern" problems not explicitly covered in the pages of the Bible. Obviously, this does not diminish the necessity of applying godly principles of living in our lives and understanding how He might conduct Himself if He were a human today. However, one significant problem that arises with the first question is that too many modern Christians deny many of the things that He actually did that do not fit their traditional beliefs.

To the average church member, the obvious issues would be the denial of God's Sabbath and holy days and their replacement by Sunday and pagan holidays. Exodus 31:12-17 speaks of these days as a sign between God and His people of a perpetual—that is, unending or eternal—covenant. Since we know that Jesus Christ is the *Logos* (John 1:1-14), the God of the Old Testament (I Corinthians 10:1-4), and Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28), it seems rather incongruous that those who ask, "What would Jesus do?" would refuse to embrace this basic tenet of His life, but unfortunately, such is the case.

Christ's Human Experience

Most everyone is familiar with Jesus' human life. As covered in the gospels, from His birth in Bethlehem to His death on Golgotha, we see a human, though begotten by the Father, living a normal life. Growing up as a carpenter with brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3), He experienced life as we all do, with a few notable exceptions.

Apart from Moses and Elijah, who were also being tested for monumental tasks (Deuteronomy 9:9; I Kings 19:8), Jesus is the only biblical notable who fasted for forty days. We know that His life had to be tested by the ultimate accuser of mankind, Satan (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2). Contrary to normal human response, Jesus denies the need for food, protection, and power, as Satan offers it. In doing so, He uses these significant words that become the foundation for how He would live His human life—and how we, too, should live it:

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" . . . Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" . . . Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10)

Here, too, we see how mainstream Christianity fails to embrace the true life of Christ. In reality, most people cannot relate to His walking on water, turning water into wine, or healing people of their diseases. When we fully examine the life of Jesus, we can easily see that simplistically asking "What would Jesus do?" is little more than a feel-good way of seeing only the "good deed" side of Christ and not the complete package that reveals who He is, what He teaches, and why He lives as He does.

It is easy to read the simple words of the Sermon on the Mount but fail to see the way of life Jesus teaches and demands of us. Likewise, we read the many parables that He gives as teaching tools but overlook their practical applications, which instruct us in details of Christ's character.

Obviously, unless God opens a person's mind to see the entire process, it is as James 1:23-24 reveals:

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

We might *think* we know what Christ would do, but unless we know what He did, we do not have the proper image by which to compare ourselves and our conduct (II Corinthians 10:12-18; I Corinthians 2:9-16).

Suffering and Trials

Men have suffered trials and death in many of the same ways Christ did. People are horrifically killed, maimed, and executed every day somewhere on earth. In fact, the death that Christ experienced was not all that different even from those of His apostles, as certain historians relate (for example, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, pages 4-5).

Of course, the major difference is that He did nothing to deserve it. Some might argue that many killed in various gruesome ways did not deserve death either, but such people lived lives of sin, and Christ did not. Any sin brings the just reward of death without the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cover it (I Corinthians 15:54-55; Hebrews 9:26-28).

I Peter 2:19-24 provides insight into Christ's suffering and death, as well as the proper approach toward them:

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. . . . But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness. . . .

We should consider these words very carefully. They speak of a willingness to suffer wrongs without recourse, even to be willing to follow in Jesus' footsteps in dying for our beliefs. When we ponder these things, we can understand how we should do likewise, but it all stems from what Christ actually did.

If we ask ourselves, "What did Jesus do?" we see Christ as more than willing to "walk the walk." He lived His life with the full realization that one day He would suffer greatly for who He was and what He stood for. He lived His life as an example of how we should live, even to suffering patiently and not retaliating.

Jesus reveals His humanity in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44) and in the feeling of total desertion or loneliness at the time of His death (Matthew 27:46). Anyone who thinks that it must have been easy for Him to endure the physical, mental, and emotional turmoil and suffering that led up to and accompanied His crucifixion obviously has not thought it completely through. Yet, even in these extreme situations, He shows us by His example what to do when faced with seemingly insurmountable trials.

For us, it is striving to remember that, no matter how bad a situation or circumstance becomes, God is there to help (Psalms 51), and we know God promises not to give us more than we can handle (I Corinthians 10:13). Unlike the worldly premise of wondering what Christ would do, in the gospels we have an exact representation of what, where, who, when, how, and why in Christ's very life! We have no need to guess. This knowledge should give us great comfort, unlike those who see only the "good deeds" or diminish the actions of God in the flesh through syrupy misrepresentation.

In His Word, Jesus gives us examples that can aid us in overcoming the trials we face, but they also help us to live as He did. It can change the "me only" mentality that hampers so many today. It can teach us how to serve others and give of ourselves in everything we do.

Serving Others

Throughout Christ's life, we see Him serving. Even though He has the same physical attributes and limitations of other men, His service is exhaustive—in stark contrast to His self-centered opposition. Some of His service manifests itself in the words He preaches of His life-giving way. Sometimes, He serves by righting wrongs perpetrated against various people and God. He serves by feeding thousands, and His healings constantly remind us of God's power to help those who needed it.

Perhaps His most impressive example of service occurs in the familiar story of footwashing (John 13:3-17). This scene shows Christ revealing to His disciples a way of even greater service. In what must

have been the worst time of His life, He serves them by washing His disciples' feet! In essence, He teaches that not only should we serve mankind during good times but just as much during the most difficult. Knowing how we live as Christians, He gives us instruction encased in His example that helps us face even the worst of trials.

This is not to say that we will not feel the pain of our trials, but it is always beneficial to shift the focus off ourselves and on to others when we are enduring some terrible difficulty. The hobo in *In His Steps* had the apathetic church pegged as people who were not there for the needy, though they certainly had something to offer them. It is a point all of us who are involved in the lives of others should remember. At some point, when our trials seem insurmountable, each of us will need the help of others, and where better to apply this than among God's people?

This practice and attitude should affect every person in his family life. As parents, we start by serving our children's needs, and this continues throughout their lives. However, as they mature, we allow them to begin to take a more active role in helping themselves and others and in dealing with life's difficulties. We do this by discussing God's way with our children and by living it. We do it by serving the needs of others and involving our children in those activities. We teach them to deal with life by giving of themselves, even when it is not easy or convenient.

The example of the early church in Acts 2:41-47 is a good barometer to determine how well we are doing. This attitude and approach faded over time, but it is a good reminder of just how Christ wants His church to be. They embraced the teaching of the apostles, who themselves had just experienced just how Christ did things. It is an excellent reminder for any of us who occasionally forget what the church is, the body of Christ, and what we must do to help it fulfill its purpose.

It should comfort us to realize that, no matter what we face, Christ faced similar circumstances (Hebrews 4:14-16). Yes, He always had God's Spirit, but He still managed to go through 33½ years without a wrong thought, word, or action. He lived as a human with all humanity's inherent frailties, yet lived sinlessly, handling each situation properly.

While we cannot completely discount asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" when faced with modern-day problems, we can be reassured that what Christ did gives us an example in approaching any situation. After all, He did not come to take away the basic principles of life He had already given—for example, the Ten Commandments and other Old Testament laws, which mainstream Christianity disregards. In fact, He simply elevated what was already in place, adding the spiritual dimension to a righteous way of life. He put into action and words the basic premise of the true religion: Follow God and live His way. That is what Jesus did.