

The Wonder of Jesus

The Puzzle of His Conduct

Lesson #7 for May 17, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 4:12,13; 8:28-32; 11:18,19; 21:12,13; Luke 2:41-51; 5:32; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28.

1. People sometimes do strange things! Even Jesus did a number of “strange” things while He lived here on earth. Was He intending to set an example for us? Do we just blindly follow His example? Or do we need to understand why He did what He did?
2. We have often suggested—following the words of Ellen White (*DA* 362.5; *Ed* 80.3; *RC* 228.5)—that Jesus’ life was guided hour-by-hour by the Father and the Holy Spirit. Could we have the same kind of guidance? Could we have the same kind of behavior? If we did, would we do “strange” things?
3. Read John 5:30. Does this tell us that Jesus—even minute by minute—did exactly what His Father wanted Him to do? How did He know His Father’s will for Him? Could we know God’s will for us and could we follow God’s will for us in the same way?
4. In recent years we have heard the mantra, “What would Jesus do?” When asking that question, do we need to consider what Jesus actually did and the circumstances around His actions? Or is it enough to just ask, “What would Jesus do?” Does that settle everything? Or is it just one person’s opinion of what Jesus would do against another person’s opinion? And how do we know which of Jesus’ behaviors we are to follow at any given time? A number of years ago, a cartoonist pictured a young boy coming into his home with several of his friends. On the table was a single piece of chocolate cake. When the boy picked it up and was about to eat it, his mother asked, “What would Jesus do?” The boy replied, “He would make 5000 pieces of cake!”
5. Do we sometimes pick out the sayings and the actions of Jesus that we are comfortable with and ignore the others? Is that what we are supposed to do? When we do that, to what extent do we re-create Jesus “in our own image”? Do we sometimes make Jesus sound like us in our social groups?
6. Read Luke 2:41-51—the story of Jesus in the Temple at age twelve. Why do you think Luke is the only gospel writer who records this story? Was this a case of neglect on the part of His parents or did Jesus show disregard for His parents? Can you imagine traveling a whole day in a large crowd and not seeing your child even once? How could His parents do such a thing? (*DA* 80.4) Had they become so accustomed to Jesus acting in very responsible ways that they almost forgot about Him? Considering what they knew about who He was, shouldn’t they have been very careful to keep track of Him? Where do you think Jesus ate and slept during those three days? Did any of the priests or scribes make an attempt to help Jesus find His parents? Did any of the priests or scribes feed Him or give Him a place to sleep at night?
7. Read Luke 2:49. What did Jesus actually say to His parents? What did He mean by what He said? (*DA* 81) What does this story tell us about Jesus’ understanding of His mission and of His parentage?
8. We know about the theological debates and arguments that have persisted down through the generations, even centuries, about the birth and parentage of Jesus. We also know how cruel

children can sometimes be about other children who are different in one way or another. Was Jesus teased about His parentage? What kind of temptations would Satan want to “throw at” Jesus as a child?

9. Did Jesus have a bar mitzvah? Did He go through all of the “rights of passage” common to Jewish boys in His day?
10. Many stories are told in apocryphal gospels about Jesus’ behavior as a child. According to those apocryphal authors, on one occasion Jesus, as a child, was playing by a stream on the Sabbath. He was creating little birds out of mud. When the people came to accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath, He simply clapped His hands, turned the “mud birds” into living birds, and they flew away. On another occasion, so the story goes, Jesus was helping His father build a house. Lumber was very scarce and very expensive in Galilee in those days. When they came to the point where they needed to put the last beam in the roof of the house, they discovered that it was too short. According to the story, Joseph took one end of the plank and Jesus took the other end and they simply “stretched it out” until it was long enough and then nailed it into place!
11. Other early Christian writers suggested that the furniture and items of woodwork that Jesus produced in the carpenter shop were essentially perfect and that they were cherished for years. Do you think the quality of Jesus’ work was significantly better than that of other carpenters in His area and time?
12. We know that Jesus grew up in a town noted for its bad reputation. He lived a short distance from a new city being built by the Roman government. Many of the Jews in Nazareth were probably working for Romans. As you might guess, that kind of behavior was frowned on by the “more conservative” Jews. Did that result in Jesus’ growing up in association with sinners and outcasts? We know that Jesus associated with some very outstanding people such as Nicodemus and Simon the Pharisee—Simon the leper. But He spent a lot more time with Mary Magdalene, the prostitute who had been demon-possessed, and other similar characters. We know that Jesus kept prominent in His thinking and His behavior the goal of reaching all mankind and saving them. What do you think the onlooking universe thought as they watched Jesus doing those things? Does it tell us anything important in the great controversy?
13. Read John 2:13-22 and Matthew 21:12-17. Did Jesus “cleanse the temple” on more than one occasion? Many critical scholars believe that those are two recordings of the same event. Ellen White and many conservative scholars suggest that there were two different “cleansings.” The first “cleansing” as described in John occurred very early in His ministry. It took the Jewish authorities completely by surprise. They asked themselves, “How did He get away with that?” Why did people just obey His orders? They even reached the point where they said, “If He comes in and tries to do that again, we will resist Him. We will not obey.” But when He came on His next-to-the-last day in the temple, Jesus “cleansed” it again without any problem!
14. Was Jesus actually “angry”? Why did the moneychangers, sellers of animals, and others flee from Him? How do you think those sellers would have responded to an angry Jesus? What gave authority to Jesus’ words? That was the portion of the temple designated for Gentiles. Because the Jews cared virtually nothing for Gentiles, they thought they had a better use for that part of the temple! But Jesus wanted to invite the world into the temple to learn the truth about His Father. How could one go and worship God in the middle of a busy market with animals making noises and moneychangers competing for attention?

15. when Jesus “cleansed” the temple, did the sellers and traders lose significant property?
16. What about the tree that Jesus “cursed”? Was it perhaps genetically defective? Was it right for Jesus to curse a tree belonging to someone else? Will there ever be a time when we should do something similar? Could we? While we recognize that Jesus may have been teaching a spiritual lesson, was it appropriate for Him to destroy property in the process?
17. Read Mark 3:1-5. Was it right for Jesus to disrupt the church service to heal a man’s hand? It is interesting to note that on this occasion—in contrast to other miracles performed on the Sabbath—Jesus did not do anything, or ask the man to do anything, which was a violation of any of the Jewish laws regarding the Sabbath! How could one make a law against “stretching out” one’s hand! Was Jesus actually “angry” when He did this? How would you describe the emotions you think Jesus may have had on that occasion?
18. Jesus also did “strange” things outside the territory claimed by Jews. Read Matthew 15:21-28. How do we explain Jesus’ behavior toward the Syro-Phoenician woman? As a good Jew, should He have refused to speak to her at all? What was Jesus trying to teach His disciples by His behavior? Was His initial behavior exactly what the disciples expected from a Jewish teacher? What do you think the disciples said to each other about that experience after it was over?
19. Read Mark 5:1-20. Compare Matthew 8:28-32 and Luke 8:26-39. When Jesus cast the demons out of those two men, why did He allow the demons to destroy so much property? Did Jesus as a Jew consider those pigs to be worthless? Why did Jesus cross the Sea of Galilee to that region at all? Apparently, the only thing that He did while He was there was that miracle. Notice Ellen White’s words about His motives:

It was in mercy to the owners of the swine that this loss had been permitted to come upon them. They were absorbed in earthly things, and cared not for the great interests of spiritual life. Jesus desired to break the spell of selfish indifference, that they might accept His grace. [339] But regret and indignation for their temporal loss blinded their eyes to the Saviour’s mercy. {DA 338.4}
20. Those two men were the first Gentile converts that we know about. Was Jesus starting to introduce His disciples to the idea that their mission was to “reach” more than just Jews? What did Jesus tell those two men to do when He left them? What was the result? (Matthew 15:32-39; DA 339,340; 404.2)
21. How would you feel if you saw your pastor or a group of church leaders associating with the kind of people that Jesus associated with? Did anyone take seriously the charge that Jesus was a drunkard and a glutton? (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34)
22. In Matthew 25:36, we are given one of a set of principles that we generally regard as Christian. A number of Christian pastors and laymen have had great success in ministering to prisoners. Since that has seemed to be a successful field in which to work, why didn’t Jesus give us an example by doing that? Read Matthew 4:12,13. When John was arrested, instead of Jesus doing something for Him, He left for Galilee! After spending months in prison, John even began to question whether or not Jesus was the coming Messiah. Matthew 11 tells us how Jesus answered that question. But later, when John was beheaded, Jesus left the Jewish territory completely and went to Tyre and Sidon! (John 6; Matthew 14 & 15) Was Jesus running away because He was afraid for His own safety? Did Jesus recognize that if He stayed in the region, He would be arrested prematurely and His ministry might end prematurely? Was Jesus’

behavior toward John true neglect? Why did God allow this wonderful “forerunner” of His to be beheaded? Was Jesus capable of helping Him? Read *Desire of Ages* p. 224.

23. What kind of people did Jesus spend most of His time with? See Luke 8:1-3 and:

Jesus chose unlearned fishermen because they had not been schooled in the traditions and erroneous customs of their time. They were men of native ability, and they were humble and teachable,—men whom He could educate for His work. In the common walks of life there is many a man patiently treading the round of daily toil, unconscious that he possesses powers which, if called into action, would raise him to an equality with the world’s most honored men. The touch of a skillful hand is needed to arouse those dormant faculties. It was such men that Jesus called to be His colaborers; and He gave them the advantage of association with Himself. Never had the world’s great men such a teacher. When the disciples came forth from the Saviour’s training, they were no longer ignorant and uncultured. They had become like Him in mind and character, and men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. {*DA* 250.1; *CE* 203.3; *CC* 282.3}

24. Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.” {*MH* 143.3}

25. How are we to apply that principle to our own lives in light of some of the “strange” behaviors that we have talked about?

26. When we carefully analyze the behavior of people in our world today, we learn that virtually everything people do is for selfish reasons. Was Jesus ever motivated by selfishness? Is that why His behavior seemed “strange”?

27. What do these “strange” behaviors teach us about God? Did Jesus do those things to get attention? Did He do those things to reach out to different segments of society? Did He make a conscious effort to reach every segment of society? Did either Jesus or John reach out to the Essenes? How successful was Jesus at reaching Pharisees? (Acts 6:7) Is God trying to get us to “think outside the box”? What “undesirable” characters live in your neighborhood? What would God want you to do to reach out to them? What would Jesus do with present-day gang members and drug addicts?

28. If Jesus were alive today, would He make efforts to reach out to the scientific community? To people like Bill Gates? To “Wall Street”? To university professors? To Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims around the world? What kind of “strange” behaviors might Jesus get involved in today? Certainly, no one could suggest by taking a comprehensive look at the life of Jesus that He was exclusive in any way! Jesus did His best to reach everyone. How do we reach everyone?

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