

7. The Puzzle of His Conduct (2Q 2008—The Wonder of Jesus)

Biblical material: Matt. 4:12, 13; 8:28-32; 11:18, 19; 21:12, 13; Luke 2:41-51; 5:32; 1 Cor. 1:26-28.

Quotes

- If you want to understand Jesus, you have to study the whole Bible. Christian duty is not defined solely by the words in red. *Randall Terry*
- Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that men can understand. *S.D. Gordon*
- As the print of the seal on the wax is the express image of the seal itself, so Christ is the express image - the perfect representation of God. *Ambrose*
- Jesus does not give recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He is himself the way. *Karl Barth*
- The message of Christ is not Christianity. The message of Christ is Christ. *Gary Amirault*

Questions

Why did Jesus act the way he did? Did he deliberately court controversy? What was he really trying to do? In what way should we try to copy him, if at all? Are his actions *really* puzzling? How would you best explain what he did to others?

Discussion/Comment

“...we discover that it is not easy to pigeon-hole Him, not easy to place Him in a tidy little package with the word *solved* on top. Instead, we find ourselves genuinely puzzled by aspects of His conduct, wondering: *Does He expect us to do that, and in the same way?*” Sabbath’s lesson. This is indeed a very real question. If we think that Jesus is our example, then we will do some very strange things. The lesson mentions only a few. The way he spoke to his parents after going missing at age 12. Not going to John the Baptist when he was imprisoned. Sending demons into pigs. Eating and drinking with tax-collectors and sinners. Strong actions in the temple. Saying he wasn’t calling the righteous but sinners to repentance. And as Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:27, God chooses the foolish! An interesting set of puzzling actions...

Christ was never viewed as a “safe” option in his lifetime. He was always seen as someone who made a difference, who was radical, dangerous even. In fact he was not allowed to live because the powers that were decided he just was *not* safe to have around. Only with the passing of the years has his revolutionary nature been accommodated into a placid, reassuring, and comfortable faith.

For he was radical even for the radicals. He himself said: “Don’t think I’ve come to bring peace on earth—I didn’t come to bring peace, but a sword. I’ve come to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man’s enemies will be those of his own family! Matt 10:34-36 FBV. Why did he accept Simon the Insurgent as one of his disciples? Why did he tell his disciples to sell their coats and buy swords (Luke 2:36)?

Jesus did not hesitate to use a direct approach and was not a stranger to controversy. He called the religious leaders of his time “whitened sepulchers, full of dead men’s bones.” He called the respected pious men of his day hypocrites. He called the king a fox. He identified the establishment as a “brood of vipers.” He was associated with publicans and sinners, accused as a glutton and a wine-bibber (Matthew 11:19). He accused the religious leaders of turning the Temple into a den of thieves. In his public addresses he did not mince his words but clearly showed what he thought of the narrow-mindedness of religious tradition. Jesus had no time for mock holiness.

He used unconventional approaches to healing; he deliberately healed on the Sabbath knowing what offence this would bring to those who were especially religious by the values of the time. He recognized that his identification of the Isaiah passage with himself in Nazareth would bring immense conflict and danger, but went ahead anyway. He seemed not to care about property ownership when he sent the demons into the pigs; when challenged about his civic duties he arranged a miraculous payment from the mouth of a fish.

Jesus cared nothing for wealth or social position or power. He didn’t even bother talking to Herod, the ultimate insult to a king. To Pilate he was brief and to the point, not seeking any kinds of favors.

That is why Jesus challenged the religious norms of his time. Why he did not accept the accepted wisdom. Why he demanded re-thinking of the givens... The first will be last, the last will be first. Whoever wishes to be great must be a servant. Wisdom and praise not from the educated adults but from babes and children. Such ideas fly in the face of contemporary beliefs, and rips the ground out from all the self-satisfied professional religionists. Jesus operates in opposition to normative concepts of the time, and it is hardly surprising that those in power and authority react against him and enforce their leadership. Jesus is “anti-establishment,” and they demand to know “by what authority do you do these things?”

As a consequence, and because of such division on the very basics of who God is and how He operates, Jesus is placed in confrontation.

To the Pharisees: “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?” Matthew 22:18 NIV

To the Sadducees: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” Matthew 22:29 NIV

Of the teachers of the Law: “But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders.” (Matt 23:3, 4 NIV). “You teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (see Matt 23:13). White-washed tombs: you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (see Matt 23:28).

“You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” Matt 23:24 NIV. (Don’t tell me the common people did not laugh at that one...)

Puzzling conduct, if we see just the actions and the words. But if we look deeper for the reasons, recognizing *why* Jesus came, and how much he wanted to help people to change, to accept the life that only he could give, then it begins to make so much sense...