A Perspective on What Would Jesus Do **[1]**

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It is the favourite counterfactual of Christians who grew up in the 90s. It was a modern creed, both a declaration of faith and a moral compass: if Jesus was in my situation, what would He do (WWJD)?

> What would Jesus do, walkin' in my shoes?
> Workin' at my job, going to my school?
> And I hear people say, "Jesus is the way"
> I believe and that is why I am asking you
> What would Jesus do?
>
> Big Tent Revival, "What Would Jesus Do?"

While I do believe in counterfactuals [2], I also believe that they are only possible in certain worlds. And I do have to wonder, would it ever have been possible for the Son of God to be, say, working at an IT company, dealing with my exact same personal issues, with my particular emotional baggage?

Now, to be clear, I do believe that Jesus was fully human, in the sense that He experienced the essential qualities of what it is to be human, such as personal struggles. Living 2000 years ago, He never agonised over His smartphone screen cracking or how to best reply to an obnoxious person on Twitter. But stripping away the veneer of all of these particulars we find, at the core, a small set of common elements which constitute the human experience, and these are universal experiences for human beings. Nothing about my life is unique or special that Jesus could not or cannot sympathise with it.

What I am saying, is that Jesus would not be encumbered by, and approach, situations with the same biases and traumas as we would. Rather, He had a unique relationship with the Father. Being also fully God, Jesus had a distinct relationship with the Father and understood, and could do, His will perfectly.

We, on the other hand, are products of our parents (good or bad), of teachers who are not perfect, a limited understanding of Scripture, doubt, dichotomous socio-political views, our culture, et cetera, et cetera.

Therefore, although not impossible, it has become for me really difficult to imagine Jesus being in my

particular situation (oftentimes a hole which I had dug for myself) and have to respond (read: get out of that hole). For example, having been sinless, Jesus would not need to have dealt with the consequences of His sin. Instead, I have started to wonder how much of the "WWJD" question is really about inserting Jesus into our lives, versus us inserting ourselves into the Jesus story? It has gotten to the point where the question borders on the absurd for me.

Additionally, Jesus's life was never meant to be a complete template for all human activity. One example is that Jesus Himself said that His role was a sower, but the disciples' were that of reaper (John 4:34–38). After Jesus had ascended, the disciples were left without an exact blueprint on how to fulfil their commission. Rather, they had to allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).

Rather than trying to establish some direct equation between us, and the perfect and divine Son of God, there are, I believe, a few basic things which we can think about to navigate our daily situations and struggles. These things flow from the Bible, and keeps us firmly rooted in the divine creation order.

Remembering the Imago Dei

All humans, without exception, are created in the imago Dei (the image of God; Genesis 1:26). All of humanity was cursed during the Fall, and redemption is available to all who believe in Christ as Saviour. Nobody is above or more deserving than anyone else. None have merited what they have, or are essentially punished in their very being. Our varying circumstances result from a complex mixture of the consequences of sin and God's common grace; a mixture so complicated we cannot hope to understand it. Indeed, our purpose is not to understand it, but to make the most of what we have, and "love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:36–40). We should do these things while remembering that we are undeserving in the grace that we have, therefore grace should flow out from us to others.

When Jesus came to earth, He was not born into a wealthy or royal family, but to blue collar family in a relatively obscure part of the world (in those times). He did not hang out with kings or princes, but with fishermen, tax collectors and prostitutes; not to revel in their company, but to preach salvation to them. He was not physically attractive (Isaiah 53:2), but was essentially and fully human.

High Tolerance of Sin, Low Tolerance of False Teaching

Reading the gospels, we are struck by the consistency with which Jesus lived. He had immense patience for the poor and humble. He forgave their sins. He taught crowds of people desperate for righteous teaching (Matthew 7:28–29). He never chastised people for their past sexual sin or greed or pride. Rather, He recognised that these people needed the gospel more than anyone else, and He had compassion on them. He was not repulsed by them, but instead sought them out to save them.

However, there are several examples of Jesus being quite angry (John 2:13–17, Luke 11:37–54, Matthew 23). His angry was never directed towards sinners, but to the people who knew God, who were supposedly in the service of God, and whose conduct was contrary to what they taught and believed. False teachers, who claim to know God but exploit people for their own gain, are public enemy number one. And we should not fool ourselves into complacency by thinking that Jesus's anger was directed only to the Pharisees; in His letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, He chastises Christian churches and sect leaders as well (Revelation 2–3).

Where do we draw the line between sinner and false teacher? In general, if someone knows the gospel and teaches contrary, they are a false teacher. If someone does not know or claim to teach the gospel, but still teaches falsehood (for example, on a moral issue), Christians should definitely be distressed by it, but they should not be chastising, rather treating people such as this as sinners.

Grace is Now, Judgement is Coming

Another consistent teaching of Jesus is that He did not come to judge the world (John 3:17), but that He is returning, and when He does, He will bring judgement (Matthew 25:31–46). We live in a period of grace. We must make the most of the forgiveness which is available now; not just for us, but anyone who earnestly and sincerely approaches Jesus. This is the good news that we have to share.

But this is a limited time offer. Two thousand years is a long time, but at some point this offer will end, and then there will only be judgement. Those who were forgiven will remain so, and those who were unrepentant will remain so. We must always keep in mind those among us who are on the other side of the diving line now, and that they can be brought into glory as well, if only we show them the love and grace which others have shown us in bringing, and persisting, in the gospel.

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- Theology [3]

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