

“What Did Jesus Do?” (A Walk through the Gospels)

My dad is the consummate walker. With his lean, 6'2"½ frame he walks at a very brisk pace. When I was growing up, wherever we went, I always tried to keep pace with him. Unfortunately, it was always hard to match his stride. I remember times when I hooked my fingers onto his belt loops or back pockets, held on, and just let him drag me in his wake. On one of these occasions, I noticed that my dad was wearing *Levi Moving On* action jeans. It was then that I nicknamed him, “the moving-on man.” I used to always say that my dad was, “a man on a mission.”

As I grew up, I realized that my dad was a lot like Jesus. Jesus was a “moving-on man” who was “a man on a mission.” Even a cursory reading of the Gospels reveals that Jesus always had one great end in view. From the very beginning of His public ministry, Jesus’ objective was His final journey to Jerusalem and His death there, as a substitute for sinners.¹ It was this goal of suffering that compelled Him to do what He did. This leads to the questions: What did Jesus do? How did Jesus become the greatest person to ever walk this earth? What difference should what Jesus did 2,000 years ago make in my life today? We will be considering five prominent works that Jesus did. It is my conviction that if you seek to practice what Jesus did, you will discover your ultimate purpose and significance.

1. Jesus forgave sinners. If you were to observe the events in the life of Jesus, you would note that people actually pursued Him. A woman worked her way through a crowd just to touch Him. A group of men lowered a friend through a roof just so he would be in the presence of Jesus. Zaccheus climbed up in a sycamore tree so that he could see Him.² People loved Jesus and they wanted to be with Him. However, we’re going to read about a woman who was actually forced into Jesus’ presence. Please turn with me to John 8:1-11.

In 8:1-2, **“Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.”** Underline the phrase **“all the people.”** The Bible tells us that everywhere Jesus went there was a crowd. People wanted to see Him, be around Him, and hear Him teach. The large crowd adds to the melodrama of everything that’s happening.

In 8:3-4, **“the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.’”** Right smack dab in the middle of a sermon, the Jewish leaders bring a woman they have caught in the act of adultery and put her front and center of the temple crowd where every eye is fixed upon her. It’s quite certain they did not gently bring her along. They probably dragged her to the temple “kicking and screaming.” Since she was caught **“in the very act”** of adultery, she is likely partly clothed, if at all. No doubt this woman is in tears, humiliated by her guilt and her exposure. Worse yet, she is stationed before the sinless One. I cannot imagine a more horrible experience for anyone.

In 8:5-6a, the Jewish leaders smugly say, **“Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?”** Jesus is “between a rock and a hard place.” If He votes to condemn this woman, He will be violating His stated purpose of seeking and saving sinners (Luke 5:27-32; cf. 19:10). If, on the other hand, Jesus proposes that this woman be shown mercy, He will be violating the Law of Moses, which requires that both partners convicted of adultery be put to death.³ Yet in this instance, this woman is by herself. Where’s the guy? Sleeping in? Reading the paper? Did he slip out the back when the intruders scared the camels and they barked? Why isn’t he there? It really doesn’t matter. Verse 6a informs us that the Jewish leaders are not concerned about justice. Their purpose is to “trap” (NIV) Jesus so that they might accuse Him. Circle the word **“testing”** or “trap” because this is really the backbone of this event.

Jesus is indeed trapped. Whatever His answer, it will condemn Him and His enemies will win. So what does Jesus do? He stoops down and with His finger writes on the ground (8:6b). What did Jesus write? Wouldn't you like to know? So would I. But John does not tell us. *What* Jesus wrote is not the issue; the fact *that* Jesus wrote is. I believe our Lord's silence and His writing in the dust accomplishes something very gracious. It is my opinion that this woman is only partially clothed. She has been caught in the very act of adultery. If she has been dragged along naked, or nearly so, it only serves to make the point of her accusers. Such was a way of shaming men (see 2 Samuel 10:1-5) and women (Gen 9:22-23; Deut 28:48; Isa 47:3; Lam 1:8; Ezek 16:37; Nah 3:5; Hab 2:15). I believe that when our Lord stoops down to the ground, ignores His adversaries, and writes in the dust, He not only is prevented from looking upon this woman's nakedness and shame, but He also attracts the attention of the crowd to Himself, rather than to her. The scribes and Pharisees want to put this woman on display, shaming her in public. Jesus seems to take the spotlight off of her and onto Himself. Can't you see the crowd fixing their eyes on the ground, stooping to see what Jesus is writing?⁴

As He is writing, the Jewish leaders **“persisted in asking”** Jesus questions related to the fate of the woman. After some time had passed, Jesus **“straightened up, and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her’”** (8:7). What a response! Jesus did not minimize or excuse this woman's sin; He acknowledges it. But in doing so, He also indicts the religious leaders and the crowd of sin. After these convicting words, Jesus again stooped down and wrote on the ground (8:8). As He wrote, the religious leaders and the multitude **“began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court”** (8:9). It is likely that the people, along with the religious leaders left. If the crowd had remained, by Law they would have been required to stone the woman. But they vacated the premises. Apparently, the older ones were most aware of their own sin. As all the people walked away, they were acknowledging their sins. After the dust settled, only Jesus and the woman remained.

In 8:10, Jesus again got up and said, **“Woman,⁵ where are they? Did no one condemn you?” She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.’”** The only One who could have thrown a stone didn't even pick one up. Jesus alone could pronounce her, “Not guilty.” Why? Because in a little while He was going to go to the cross and He was going to take all of her sin with Him as a payment for what she had done wrong. Jesus goes on to utter seven words, **“Go. From now on sin no more.”** Jesus is saying, “You're forgiven. Now, go act like it.” The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to this woman. We don't know. We don't know if she went back to her way of living; but we do know this event reveals the character of God.

So, as you look at your life—not just your behavior, because you may have good behavior like the Pharisees—but your attitude, your heart. You might ask, “So what can Jesus do for me? What has all that happened then got to do with now?” What does Jesus want to do for you? He wants to replace your guilt with grace. It's a gift. That's a picture of grace. God doesn't give you what you deserve but God gives you what you need. You deserve to be judged, condemned, but you need forgiveness. Instead of punishing you for your sins, God punished Jesus. When Jesus hung on the cross it was as if He was saying, “Keith, you deserve to be here because of your sin but I'm going to die in your place because I love you and I don't want you to be separated from Me. I want you to have a relationship with Me so I'm going to pay for it so I can look at you and say, ‘Not guilty.’” That's grace. God now wants to take the guilt of your life and give you grace. Will you receive God's pardon provided to you by Jesus? Will you believe that God has made a way for you to have fellowship with Him through the work of Jesus? Will you extend His forgiveness to others?

[Jesus came to change peoples' lives, to give freedom to people who felt trapped, to give forgiveness to those of us who feel guilty, and to give a future to those of us who feel hopeless. The primary way He accomplished this work was through His preaching.]

2. Jesus preached God's kingdom. In Luke 4:42-43, **“When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. But He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.’”** Jesus was sent to preach and He preached before large crowds! In most cases, we don't know how large. However, in Matthew 14:14-21, Jesus preached to 5,000 men. This figure does not include women and children. If each couple had two children with them, there were 20,000 people. Of course, the actual total is only speculation. The point is, Jesus preached to thousands of people during His public ministry. Our goal must be similar: We must seek to communicate the Gospel and biblical principles to as many people as possible.

- Are you taking full advantage of opportunities that you've been given to preach? A man in our church is leading a Bible study at his place of work. Is there an open door for you to do something of this nature? If you are not capable of doing this right now, could you bring in a pastor, an elder, or another leader to bring Christ to your workplace? Will you stop for just a moment and write a note that reads: “I will talk to my supervisor tomorrow and see if I can have a Bible study in my workplace.”
- Jesus frequently responded to people's questions. Are you comfortable speaking extemporaneously? When others ask you faith-related questions, are you able to respond? Do you know what questions the world is asking? Are you intentionally seeking out knowledge by talking to others and reading books? Are you attending a small group or our Wednesday evening Body Building program so that you can be equipped? Will you look up at me and say, “Sunday morning is not enough. I must have more.”

[Jesus didn't just preach God's kingdom...]

3. Jesus prayed often. All the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell us that Jesus prayed, but Luke pays careful attention to certain times when Jesus prayed.⁶ Here are several examples:

- **Jesus prayed in times of preparation.** Luke 3:21-22: **“Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.’”** Jesus prepared through prayer. This was a significant turning point as Jesus embarked on His public ministry. What transitions in your life are looming? A new job, a new house, kids graduating from high school? This is a time for you to spend in prayer.
- **Jesus prayed in times of pressure.** Luke 5:16: **“But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.”** The contrast is with the crowds that thronged Him to hear His teaching and be healed. It is easy to assume that the Lord knows how busy we are and will therefore excuse our lack of prayer. However, what inevitably happens is we dry up and just have no more to give. Jesus withdrew to pray so that He could always be fresh for people. Jesus refueled through prayer.⁷ Are you drained from the demands of ministry, work, school, or family responsibilities? There's only one way to refresh yourself and that is through prayer. Jesus found strength to sustain Him through prayer.
- **Jesus prayed in times of decision.** Luke 6:12-13: **“It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles.”** Jesus' decisions came to birth in prayer. He spent a night in prayer before calling and appointing His disciples.⁸ Jesus discovered direction through prayer.

- Jesus prayed in times of solitude. Luke 9:18: **“And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, ‘Who do the people say that I am?’”** The decision to question the disciples about their understanding of His messiahship and sonship was likewise preceded by prayer (cf. Matt 16:13).
- Jesus prayed in times of success. Luke 9:28-29: **“...He [Jesus] took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.”**
- Jesus prayed in times of instruction. Luke 11:1-4: In the gospel of Luke, as in the other Gospels, Jesus tells His disciples that they are to pray, and they see Him as an example to follow. There is a passage in Luke’s gospel where Jesus was praying by Himself and His disciples came to Him and said, **“Lord, teach us to pray.”** (11:1). In answer to their requests Jesus gave them what we call the Lord’s Prayer, and then taught them about prayer. Jesus modeled prayer to others. Who has asked you about your prayer life? Who are you currently mentoring in prayer? How are you challenging this person to pray?
- Jesus prayed in times of intercession. Luke 22:31-32: **“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”** Jesus told Peter that He was especially praying for Him, so that his faith would not fail. Jesus cared through prayer. Who are you currently praying for? Do you pray for those who are in your ministry? Will you write yourself a note that you will begin to pray for those who are in your ministry, at least once a week?
- Jesus prayed in times of testing and suffering. Luke 22:39-47: It was Luke who tells us that Jesus prayed for the people who were crucifying Him. Are you willing to pray in the midst of the worst trials of your life?

Prayer is essential to spiritual health. Will you indicate on the communication card if you’re interested in becoming a disciple of someone who can help you make prayer a regular part of your relationship with God? Will you commit to joining one of our small groups where prayer and accountability takes place? Will you say, “I’ll begin to attend the Wednesday evening adult Body Building ministry?”

[Jesus derived power in prayer. His power was further validated in the fact that...]

4. Jesus performed miracles. The four Gospels record 35 of the many miracles that Jesus performed in His brief public ministry.⁹ In these miracles, Jesus demonstrated His authority over nature (Mark 4:31-35), disease (John 9:1-7), demons (Mark 5:1-20), and death (John 11). It is interesting to note that the miracles of Christ were done publicly, sometimes before thousands of eyewitnesses. It is also significant that many of these eyewitnesses were hostile to Christ. Yet, none of Christ’s critics ever denied that He performed these miracles. They could only challenge the source of power that He used (cf. Matt 12:24) and His personal authority to do them (cf. Matt 21:23).

Why did Jesus do miracles? First, He did them primarily to minister to hurting people. The Gospels record that Jesus healed all who were sick.¹⁰ Over and over we see His concern for those who were broken, even when it meant criticism and attacks from His enemies. In working His miracles, Jesus also loved the unlovely. One of the small gestures that Jesus often made when healing lepers was to touch them with His hand. Lepers were required to stay outside of the town in areas sequestered and inhabited only by other lepers. They couldn’t come into town or near people without shouting “Unclean! Unclean!”

to announce their presence. Thus, most lepers were solitary, rejected sorts who rarely receive pleasant words or a touch. When Jesus healed lepers, He touched them while they were still lepers as a sign of compassion and love. A modern example of such astounding compassion occurred when Princess Diana reached out to children with AIDS, cuddling them and seating them on her lap.¹¹ Jesus ministered to hurting people. Who has God placed in your life that could be considered “down and out”? Have you physically touched this person and extended Christ’s hands and feet?

A second reason Jesus did miracles was to authenticate Himself as God’s Son. In one situation, people brought Him a paralytic on a pallet. In Matthew 9:2-7, we read, **“And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, ‘Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.’³ And some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This fellow blasphemes.’⁴ And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, ‘Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?’⁵ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, and walk?’⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, pick up your bed and go home.’⁷ And he got up and went home.”** From this passage we can see that Jesus specifically authenticated His ministry on the basis of His miracles. His power proved that He was the Son of God, the Messiah. Jesus authenticated Himself as God’s Son. When is the last time you have prayed for another person and asked Jesus’ power to be revealed?

A third reason Jesus performed miracles was to move people to repentance. In Luke 10:13, Jesus said, **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.”** Jesus moved people to repentance. When have you prayed in faith that God would use a miracle to draw a neighbor or co-worker to Christ?

A final reason Jesus performed miracles was to unleash a weapon to combat the activity of Satan, freeing people from the power of evil to live under the rule of God. Therefore, our lives ought to reflect God’s supernatural activity.

[Jesus did many great works: He forgave, preached, prayed, performed the miraculous, and finally...]

5. Jesus prioritized disciples. Earlier we saw that Jesus preached to multitudes of people. Yet, Jesus also invested in a few good men and women. He would regularly withdraw from public ministry and spend time with His disciples. He had an outer group of followers that numbered in the hundreds. Then there was a team of 70 people who were more involved in His movement. Finally, He had 12 disciples who were with Him all the time. And even within the 12, He was especially close to Peter, James, and John. Building into these people on a life-on-life basis, He was preparing the nucleus of a following that would take the message of salvation to the world after He was crucified.

- We too must invest in a select group. Who are your Peter, James, and John? What are you currently doing to train them up in the faith? Do you know what they need from you to continue to grow? How are you preparing your disciples to surpass you? If you currently don’t have a disciple to invest in, would you please begin to pray daily that God would bring you a disciple? Would you indicate on the communication card if you’re willing to learn how to disciple a few. Maybe today you will say, “I’m willing to share my spiritual pilgrimage with another person.” “I would be interested in investing my life in a child or teenager who may need a positive spiritual influence.” “My wife and I are open to mentoring another couple in their marriage and family struggles.” The possibilities are endless! If the Lord is tugging on your heart right now, indicate your willingness to be used by Him by simply expressing your interest on the communication card. In God’s service our greatest ability is our availability.

Suppose you wanted to start a company to make computers. You put together a business plan to manufacture 100,000 computers over the next five years. You raised \$100,000,000 from an investor. Five years later your investor returns and asks for a report. You say, “We’re doing great! We did it! We produced 100,000 units! We made 50,000 lava lamps, 21,000 microwave ovens, 15,000 refrigerators, 10,000 toasters, and we’re up to 4,000 computers!” Your investor replies, “4,000 computers? That’s only 4% of what you projected!” “Oh yes,” you say, “but look at all the other useful things we’ve produced!” “That’s wonderful,” he says, “but I was planning to use those computers to change the world. Now it cannot happen. You’ve made the world more comfortable. I wanted to make it different.”

For 2,000 years the church has only had one business plan: “Go and make disciples…” (Matt 28:18-20). Our investor, Jesus, could have directed us to make anything he wanted. He could have said, “Go and make workers,” or “Go and make worshippers.” He didn’t. Of course, He’s interested in workers and worshippers, but Jesus knew we won’t get workers by trying to make workers. Instead, we get workers by making disciples. Everything falls into place when we make disciples. True disciples can’t wait to work (and worship, tithe, serve, perform social justice, evangelize, love one another, and so on). So the question is: What are you doing with the money our investor has entrusted to you? Are you investing it like He told you to? How your answer will determine whether you change the world, or merely make it more comfortable.¹²

What did Jesus do? In an ultimate sense, Jesus forgave sinners so that sinners might become disciples and then in turn disciple others. Making disciples is the irrefutable mission of this church. That is why we can say, “Knowing Christ and making Him known” is the one thing worth giving up everything else for.

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Notes

¹ Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10.

² See Luke 8:43-48; 5:17-26; 19:1-10.

³ See Exod 20:14; Lev 18:20; 20:10; Deut 5:18; 22:13-29.

⁴ See Bob Deffinbaugh, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (www.bible.org: Biblical Studies Foundation, 1998), 212.

⁵ Jesus uses this same word “woman” (*gune*) while He is on the cross in reference to His mother (see John 19:26).

⁶ The terms “prayer” and “pray” are found 13 times in Mark and 17 times in Matthew. However, they are found 21 times in Luke and 25 times in Acts. See Robert H. Stein, *Luke: NAC* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 51.

⁷ Early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up in order to pray (Mark 1:35). As we remember His constant busyness, He must have been tired at the end of each day. Nevertheless, He looked for a place of quietness in those early hours of the morning before the crowds gathered with their urgent needs and requests.

⁸ No other New Testament passage speaks of all-night prayer. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 118.

⁹ The variety of healing needs was great: fever, leprosy, paralysis, perpetual hemorrhage, blindness, inability to speak, deafness, epilepsy, spinal deformity, and dropsy.

¹⁰ Luke 4:40; cf. Matt 8:16-17; 12:15-21; 14:34-36.

¹¹ Mark Littleton, *Jesus: Everything You Need to Know to Figure Him Out* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 89-90.

¹² Pat Morley, “The Irrefutable Mission of Your Church,” *Man in the Mirror Weekly Briefing* Volume 67 Feb 23, 2004.