

What Kind of a Man Is This?

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Introduction.

- A. During His time on earth, Jesus provoked many different reactions, but apathy and complacency were not typically among them. Much more common, in fact, was the reaction of His apostles when Jesus stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, as recorded for us in Matthew 8:27. Those men saw this awesome display of power and realized that they had to come to grips with Jesus as someone completely different.
- B. Interestingly enough, though, for us 2000 years later, we often face the opposite problem from the one the apostles faced. Many of us are taught from our earliest years about the teachings of Jesus and about the miracles of Jesus. As a result, those two things dominate our perception of Him, so that we turn Jesus into a doctrine-spouting, miracle-working robot. Such a two-dimensional portrait of our Lord does justice neither to Him nor to the richness of His portrayal in the four Gospels. Those inspired records reveal not just what Jesus said and did, but who He was, and so to us, what it would have been like to talk with or live with Jesus.
- C. It's critically important, friends, for us to understand Jesus in this way, because without it, we can't really understand Christianity at all. His apostles heard His teaching and saw His miracles, yes, but what drove them to live and die for Him was the loyalty and love they felt for Him personally. In the same way, friends, we have to come to know Jesus as a real live person if we want to attain the highest levels of service to Him. Just like those men on the Sea of Galilee, we need to ask, "What kind of a man is this?"

I. The Purpose of Jesus.

- A. The first thing that really defined Jesus as a man on earth was His purpose. Lots of folks out there change their mind about what they want to do more often than they change their socks. Jesus was precisely the opposite, and we see this as we consider the record of just how **DETERMINED** He was. Among many passages, we see this in Luke 9:51. Jesus was never under any illusions about what He had come to earth to do. He loved life just like any of us do, but He knew that God's plan required Him to die in an extremely gruesome and painful way, and He knew that He would die just as soon as He got to Jerusalem. If just about any of us knew the place of our appointment with death, I daresay that we would take our sweet time about getting there. Not so with Jesus. Instead, He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem and His death.
- B. This is certainly a character trait we need to emulate. Just like God sent Jesus to earth with a purpose in mind, He has sent us to earth with a purpose in mind. We are on this earth to serve God and to glorify Him. Our success at accomplishing that is what truly defines our lives, and we need to live like it. We need to spend our days in a constant search for what will better please Him. We need to be as determined as Jesus.
- C. The purpose that made Jesus so determined also made Him **RIGHTEOUS**. Throughout His life, Jesus invariably resisted temptation, and we see one of these instances recorded in Matthew 4:8-10. Jesus fought so tirelessly against sin not just because He knew it was evil, but because He knew that God's plan for Him depended on Him keeping Himself righteous. If Jesus had sinned even once, He would no longer have been the Lamb without blemish, and every other human ever to live would have been doomed along with Him. Because the stakes of disobedience were so high, Jesus lived with an unyielding commitment to purity.
- D. In the same way, friends, we need to understand how important it is to God's purpose for us to be righteous. Remember, friends, that the Biblical idea of righteousness is of conforming to a standard, and standards are just as important to God as they are to us. I'm doing a lot of trim work these days in my eternal renovation project. I start by measuring a length of wall, then measuring the baseboard or quarter round that I want to go along that wall, and finally by cutting the trim to fit. If I'm off in that process by even a quarter of an inch, I have to start over with another piece of trim. The piece I cut didn't match the standard. In the same way, if our lives don't match the standard of God's word, He can't use us in the way that He wants to either. When we sin, we are not just endangering our souls, we're interfering with God's work. Let's be righteous instead.
- E. Similarly, we see that Jesus was **UNCOMPROMISING** on matters of right and wrong. When I read my way through the gospels, at least, one of the things that most startles me about Jesus is how bluntly spoken He was. Never once did He soft-pedal His condemnation of evil. For instance, look at the conversation recorded in Luke 11:45-46. Jesus had been blasting the Pharisees, and one of the lawyers—that is, an expert in the Jewish law—who had been listening to Him said, "Hey, Jesus, You're kind of stepping on our toes too!" Many of us would be tempted in a situation like that to back off and say we didn't really mean it, but not Jesus. Without skipping a beat, He looked right at that lawyer and condemned Him for His evil too.
- F. Likewise, friends, as we let our light shine before men, we need to make sure that we aren't compromising with the truth of the word of God. In our dealings with outsiders, there can be a tendency on our parts to imitate the I'm-OK-you're-OK religious philosophy of the world around us. We sometimes give our friends and neighbors the impression that it would be good for them to become Christians, but it's no big deal if they don't.

Folks, that's the kind of doubletalk that can cost people their souls. We need to be loving, but we also need to make sure that the people around us understand the urgency of their situation. The word of God leaves no doubt about the status of those who have not put on Christ, and it's not our call to compromise with that.

- G. The bluntness of Jesus, though, was not just limited to outsiders. He could be just as **DEMANDING** with His own disciples. Look what He says to Peter in Matthew 15:15-16. Peter is still needing Jesus to explain things to him when he should have been understanding things on his own, and Jesus rebukes him for it publicly. The Lord knew that He only had a limited time to teach Peter, and Peter needed to be growing and getting it.
- H. In our own situation today, we need to learn to be more demanding of our brethren too. Just like obeying the gospel is not optional, maturing in Christ is not optional, and we need to look for and expect spiritual growth in one another. And, folks, when our brethren aren't growing, we need to hold them accountable. We do a brother or sister in Christ no favors when we overlook spotty attendance and spiritual uselessness. That's the sort of behavior that destroys souls and cripples churches. We can do better. Let's demand better.

II. The Heart of Jesus.

- A. If we consider the personality of Jesus only in light of His overriding purpose, it's not a very pretty picture that emerges. If we overlook the other aspects of His character, He comes across almost as a single-minded bully, blasting through people without any regard for them. Of course, that's not what Jesus was like at all, and that's why we need to consider the heart of Jesus too. For one thing, Jesus was infinitely **WISE**. He knew exactly the right thing to say and do in any situation. Look, for example, at His reply recorded in Matthew 22:20-21. Here, the Pharisees and the Herodians have tried to trap Jesus by asking Him whether they should pay taxes to Caesar or not. If Jesus says they should, He offends the Pharisees and the Jewish people. If Jesus says they shouldn't, He offends the Herodians and the Roman government. However, Jesus responds to this trick question in such a subtle and wise way that no one can find any fault with His reply. He was wise.
- B. In our spiritual lives, we too should imitate the wisdom of Jesus in knowing how to respond to each person. While keeping the purpose of Jesus before us, we need to recognize who of the brethren in our lives will respond best to the stern rebuke and who will respond best to a gentle admonition. We need to understand ourselves too, and what we as individuals need to do to avoid temptation and live righteously. We can't just live heedlessly and headlong. We need to wisely consider the options open to us to be like Jesus.
- C. Jesus was not just wise, but **COMPASSIONATE**. Consider what is said about His behavior and His motivation in Matthew 9:35-36. This does much to explain why Jesus was so driven. He was so dedicated because He could look all around Him and see people who needed Him, and look forward in time to millions who hadn't even been born yet who needed Him too. He was compassionate toward those people and helped them.
- D. We need to have this same sort of compassion in our lives. It's not enough, friends, for us just to be people who help others because it's the right thing to do, or who try to teach others because it's the right thing to do. Jesus didn't do that. He helped and taught because He cared, and we need to care too. We need to learn to feel the problems and the suffering of others as though they were our own, and we need to be motivated by our sympathy to intervene and give them what they need most because it's best for them.
- E. Jesus' personality was further softened because of how **HUMBLE** He was. The classic example of this appears in John 13:3-5. Jesus, who had more authority and rank than any other human ever to live, willingly took upon Himself the duty of the lowliest slave to teach His disciples how to serve. Jesus never had any interest in elevating Himself or defending His position or making sure that everyone knew how great He was. Instead, His concern was totally focused outward. He came not to elevate Himself, but to elevate all of us.
- F. Likewise, friends, we need to be humble. For some of us, this can be a real challenge. We start comparing ourselves to those sinful wretches in the world, or to those poor deluded souls in the denominations, and we start thinking that we're pretty hot stuff. We condescend when we help others, and when we try to spread the word, we too often give the impression that the guy we're talking to is so incredibly dumb that the only way he can get smart is by listening to us, because we've got it figured out. Friends, that's not the impression that Jesus gave either. Instead, we need to recognize that to the extent that we are better, it's because Jesus made us better, not because we bettered ourselves. On our own merits, we have no reason at all to boast. We'd be in the same boat as everybody else, but for the grace and the blessing of God. Let's interact with others with that in mind, with the humility of Christ instead of the arrogance of the Pharisee.
- G. Finally, though, and perhaps most of all, Jesus was **LOVING**. Consider what Jesus reveals about His love in John 15:13-14. This is an amazing passage, friends, because in it, Jesus tells us that He didn't just go to the cross because it was God's will. He went to the cross for love of us. He came to earth and died because He looked at each one of us, saw our desire to serve God, saw how horribly we sin and fall short, and said of each one of us, "That's someone I love. That's someone I'm willing to give my life up to save."
- H. Once we understand that Jesus died because He loved us, and that Jesus judged every person worthy of His love, it changes the way we look at ourselves and everyone else forever. Who are we to place a lesser value on a soul than Christ did? Who are we to love less than Jesus? Christ teaches us how much we have to love.

Conclusion. If you want to give your life to Jesus in return for His love, now would be a wonderful time to do it.