



**WWJRD
(Sermon)**

May 9, 2020

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What Would Jesus Do?

The question “What Would Jesus Do?” has been around for quite a while. In fact its origin goes back to a sermon preached by noted English preacher Charles Spurgeon in 1891, and in a book published in 1896 by Charles Sheldon with the title *In His Steps—What Would Jesus Do?* It’s become popular again in recent years and has become a useful question for many in trying to decide a particular course of action.

I want to change it up a little. WWJRD stands for “What Would Jesus *Really* Do?” Let me explain.

What Would Jesus *Really* Do?

It’s all too easy for us to give some easy answers to “What would Jesus do?” In our church life and Christian experience, we can think that Jesus would be quite happy with the way we’re doing things. Going to church regularly. Giving offerings. Being kind to our neighbors.

The religious people of Jesus’ day would probably have agreed with us. You just do what you should, and that’s enough. They had defined things to the point that it was rather like a system you followed—rules to be observed and rituals to follow. And maybe we can become rather like that too.

So I want to take us to a rather challenging text.

Mark 3:1-6

“Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of everyone.’”

Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely

restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” Mark 3:1-6 NIV.

What were these Pharisees doing? They were asking the very same question: “What would Jesus do?” Not as an example to follow, to be sure, but as a reason to accuse Him! So a lot depends on your motive for asking the question.

Now these religious leaders thought they had worked out what God wanted. They had a whole system of how you were supposed to be good. They had lots of laws about what to do and what not to do. They believed they had it all sewn up!

They even had Community Services all worked out too! You gave alms to the poor (especially good if lots of people saw you!). You made a great show of giving donations to help the aid work done in the Temple. You fasted and prayed on street corners as a witness to those less fortunate.

So when it came to ‘what would Jesus do?’ they had the answers already. But their answers were confined to doing things in a rigid way that really didn’t take account of what people really needed. Their Community Services only fitted what *they* wanted to do, not what the people wanted.

In fact they had managed to make things so difficult that they had rules *against* helping people on the Sabbath. For example, you could help pull an ox out of a ditch, but you couldn’t do anything for a fellow human being who was in need!

So they ended up on the wrong side of what was kind and good. When Jesus turned up at the synagogue, they were watching Him to see if He would do good on the Sabbath! And you know what Jesus said and did.

They watched closely, asking, “What would Jesus do?”

Jesus confronted them head on! He had the man with the withered hand stand up in front of everyone. Then He asked them the question: “What’s the right thing to do? Should you do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”

Well it’s obvious, isn’t it? Community Services is all about doing good. Our aid programs are based on this foundational principle. Of course we’re not going to do evil, let alone kill. And what did He mean about killing anyway? Perhaps it was because of the way the Pharisees thoughts were killing everything: people’s relationship with God, the joy in life, the delight in helping others?

Most of all we’re about saving life—not just physically, though that’s part of it. We also want to talk about social health, mental health, spiritual health, and so on. We see the big picture.

But when Jesus asked the Pharisees the question, they didn’t reply. They didn’t even say a word. Mark, in his gospel records, notes that their lack of response made Jesus angry and upset.

Because they just didn't care about the man who needed help. They were more interested in their system.

So Jesus went ahead and healed the man. He knew where this action would lead—the text says these self-righteous men went away and plotted to kill Jesus. Because He didn't fit their idea of what religion was all about. He didn't fit their idea of doing good. He didn't fit their idea of Community Services. Most of all, He didn't fit their idea of what God was like.

Doing good is a principle of the highest order.

Jesus was willing to take the risk because there was such a vital principle at stake. You do good and save life whenever. It's a principle of the highest order. That's why we have Community Services and ADRA and our health system and our educational system—because we want to follow Jesus in doing good all the time.

So maybe you see why I'm asking the question, "What Would Jesus *Really* Do?" Because He didn't fit in with what was expected. He challenged prevailing religious assumptions. He was *radical* in wanting to help the poor and those in need. Why? Because He *really* cared.

So that's our question for today. Do we *really* care as Jesus did, and if we do, what are we going to do about it?

I'm not saying we abandon the methods we use that provide aid in so many ways. We need these delivery systems. But we need to remember why we're doing what we're doing, or maybe we could say it better, "*who* we are we doing it for."

My heart goes out to that man with the withered hand. He wanted healing, obviously. But he's told by the religious leaders that he can't have it. Then Jesus calls him up front and makes him a case study on what's wrong with the way human beings think about caring for the poor and the sick and those in need. In the end he gets what he wants—healing. But I can imagine he's criticized and condemned even for being there, especially now that Jesus has made such a strong case against the Pharisees.

Positive ideas.

So now I want to move the whole focus to the positive, away from such wrong-headed ideas.

When it comes to the disadvantaged, God goes out of His way to bless them.

Mary, in her prayer-song of thanks to God, says this: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant... [He] has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things." Luke 1:46-48, 52, 53 NIV.

When Jesus gives His “manifesto” for His coming ministry He quotes from Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Luke 4:18-19 NIV. Who is Jesus addressing? The poor. The prisoners. The blind. The oppressed. All those in need that we also want to address through our community programs, particularly community services and aid projects.

When John the Baptist’s messengers come to ask Jesus if He’s really the Messiah, Jesus points to what’s happening: the miracles of healing and the preaching of good news to the poor. “Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.’” Matthew 11:4-5 NIV.

In Matthew 12:15–21 Jesus quotes Isaiah, pointing to justice for all. When He drove out the money-changers from the Temple, He did so because they were misrepresenting God and exploiting the poor. Immediately afterwards He healed the blind and lame who came to Him because they were in need (Matt. 21:12–16; see also Mark 11:15–19). Jesus Himself knew what it was like to be discriminated against as an outcast from society (See Isaiah 53:3–6).

In so many ways Jesus’ life shows a special love for the disadvantaged, wanting to help them with their needs and to heal them. This is replicated in the life of the early church, who gave of themselves and their resources to help those around them. There’s no time to go into detail here, but just think of a few texts:

- Acts 3:1-10. Peter and John responded to a call for help by healing the beggar.
- Acts 5:12-16. The sick were brought to the apostles.
- Acts 6. The early church had a comprehensive food distribution program.
- James 1:27. Caring for widows and orphans was a demonstration of Christian faith.
- Galatians 2:10. James, Peter, and John tell Paul and Barnabas not to forget to help the poor.

It’s obvious. Yet, all too often we don’t really think about what we should be doing. When we ask the question, “What Would Jesus *Really* Do?” we discover how radical Jesus was, and how radical He expects us to be.

Remember Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. He refers back to the laws given in the Old Testament, and then goes to the heart of what they *really* mean in practice.

He even begins by pronouncing a blessing on the poor! Then He makes it clear He hasn’t come to get rid of the law. What He does next is to talk about motivation, not just practicing the letter of the law:

- It’s true, don’t murder. But don’t even get angry with someone.
- It’s true, don’t commit adultery. But don’t even look at anyone with lust.

- It's true that if you divorce, you must do it legally. But don't do it unless trust in the marriage has been destroyed through adultery.
- It's true you shouldn't break an oath. But it's better not to swear an oath at all.
- It's true that people operate on an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But it's better not to retaliate at all.
- It's true you that should love your neighbor. But you should love your enemies too.

There's a lot more in that sermon—about not being judgmental, not using your religion to show off, not boasting about your giving, and so on. He wants us to have an honest relationship with God and those around us, and not to act like hypocrites.

Radical Jesus.

Jesus was *so* radical! You can imagine the common people nodding in agreement, while the religious leaders shook their heads, disagreeing with just about every word He said!

That should tell us something. While we might like to think we would know what Jesus would do, more often than not He goes a lot further than we would expect. Offer the other cheek when someone hits you. If someone sues you and takes your shirt, give them your coat, too. When a Roman soldier forces you to carry his heavy pack for a mile, graciously carry it for two miles.

Jesus is preaching outrageous generosity and grace. Because that's what Jesus would *really* do!

So when it comes to us, as followers of Jesus, we need to be practicing outrageous generosity and grace, too. Our commitment to Jesus needs to be as radical as Jesus was in all He said and all He did. The consequence of this needs to be seen in all we do, especially in the way we help others, for example through our service to the community.

In *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis wrote, "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you."

So our challenge is to examine how much we believe in Jesus!

During the times of Roman persecution in the early church, Christians were given a choice. Offer a pinch of incense in worship of the Roman emperor and you'd live. If you refused, you'd die. It would be easy to rationalize and say to yourself, "It's only a tiny act of compromise. I'm not really worshiping the emperor, not in my heart. Jesus will understand."

But those who really understood what this meant refused, because they never wanted to deny their loving Lord Jesus.

A Young Nigerian writer, Ogwo David Emenike, comments that "Nothing will blind the eyes of man quicker than the touch of compromise. A principle not compromised is a principle worth dying for. A dream not compromised is a dream worth living for."

So when it comes to our service to humanity achieved through Community Services, let's not compromise our commitment to Jesus in any way! Think of all that Jesus stood for. Think of all He said and did—His radical actions that were based on His great love for all of us. Think of what He meant when He said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9 NIV).

In the outrageous generosity and grace of Jesus, we see the true character of God!

May we do the same, as dedicated followers of the God who loves us so much, asking ourselves, “What Would Jesus *Really* Do?”