

# Jesus' Actions That Puzzle Us



## SABBATH—MAY 10

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 4:12, 13; Matthew 8:28–32; Matthew 11:18, 19; Matthew 21:12, 13; Luke 2:41–51; Luke 5:32; 1 Corinthians 1:26–28.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “But when the Son of Man came [Jesus], He ate and drank as you do. And people say, ‘This fellow is always eating and drinking far too much. He’s [He is] a friend of tax collectors and “sinners” ’ ” (Matthew 11:19, NIV).

**WE ARE OFTEN TEMPTED** to re-create Jesus in our own image. This mistake is unavoidable. Our own culture,<sup>1</sup> experience, and situation can shape who we want God to be, often without our knowing it. But to be aware of this fact offers some hope that we can evaluate (judge) Jesus as He is described in the Gospels.<sup>2</sup>

When we are able to do that, we find that it is not easy to “label” Him. It is not easy to put Him in a tidy little package with the word *solved* on top. Instead, we find ourselves truly puzzled by parts of His actions. We wonder: *Does He expect us to do that, and in the same way?*

This week we will consider some of the more puzzling actions of Jesus. We need to learn what we can use and when to use it—or not use it—in our own lives.

1. culture—the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and way of life of a certain people at a certain time; civilization.

2. Gospels—the four books of the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

**SUNDAY—MAY 11****NEGLECTING (FORGETTING) PARENTS? (Luke 2:41–51)**

The Gospels are almost totally silent on the first 30 years or so of Jesus' life. Not much is given, but there is one story that makes us think carefully.

**What does Luke 2:41–51 teach us about how Jesus showed His respect for His parents? What else might have been going on here? What hint could be found in verse 47?**

This is one of those events that shows the limits of using Jesus' actions as examples. What is happening is that Jesus' messiahship has already begun to shine through at the age of 12. He is becoming aware of His loyalty to God, who is higher than His parents, even though He respected them. Luke's story is perhaps too short because it leaves a dozen questions unanswered. For example: Who fed and housed the lad those three days? Did the priests worry about finding His parents?

**Read Jesus' answer to His parents. What was He telling them indirectly?**

“But,” Luke reports, “they did not understand what he was saying to them” (Luke 2:50, NIV). Jesus would

return home with them and, as a child, be obedient to them (verse 51). But He had been caught establishing the position of a higher loyalty to God.

**Jesus' entire life depended on how great God and God's kingdom was, even if He was misunderstood. In what ways might your loyalty to God be misunderstood by others? If this has ever happened to you, what did you learn that could, perhaps, help someone else going through almost the same experience?**

**MONDAY—MAY 12****SHOWING ANGER? (Matthew 17:17)**

When Jesus walked down from the mount of transfiguration,<sup>3</sup> a man came forth from a crowd at the foot of the mountain. The man asked Jesus to heal his son. The man explained that he took the boy to the disciples (followers of Jesus). But they could not cure him. Bible translation seems to show that Jesus was angry when He answered, “‘You unbelieving and evil people! . . . How long do I have to put up with you? Bring the boy here to me’ ” (Matthew 17:17, NIV). Such words do not seem to agree with the “gentle Jesus, meek and mild.” How might we explain Jesus' angry voice here? It is a difficult call. The Gospels give other examples when Jesus seemed to be angry, too.

3. mount of transfiguration—the mountain where Jesus' body shone in glory, and He was seen with Moses and Elijah.

### How do you understand Matthew 21:12, 13 and Mark 3:1–5?

Many Christians think that a good way to make choices in our modern world is to ask: What would Jesus do? It sounds simple enough. But what if one asks this question: What *did* Jesus do? Here we find that the answers are not always as simple as we may think. For example, what do the above verses mean to us for our own actions today?

“Suppose that what Jesus would do today has some connection with what he really did two thousand years ago. . . . Then how in the world might a modern Christian go about repeating these odd events of cursing a tree or upturning tables in God’s temple? Suppose our favorite grocery store does not have a special fruit that we want because it is out of season! Do we proceed, with Jesus’ blessing, to curse the fruit bin, the produce manager, and everything else in sight? Suppose the preacher preaches too much about money . . . or we get angry about different church people and programs. Do we bust in during a worship service and start destroying pews, pulpits, altars and throwing out ushers from the grounds?”—Adapted from F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?* page ix.

**What principles (rules) should we follow when we deal with such questions? Where does spiritual common sense come in? Jesus came as the Messiah, the Savior**

**of people. How do we tell the difference between what Jesus did in certain situations and what He plans for us to do?**

## TUESDAY—MAY 13

### DESTROYING PERSONAL PROPERTY? (Matthew 8:28–32)

This week’s lesson centers on how we use Jesus as our model (example). How straightforward is the goal of “following His example”? This is something that requires the most careful thought and study. Often we can find a clear example to follow. But in other examples the principle is not very clear. Two examples:

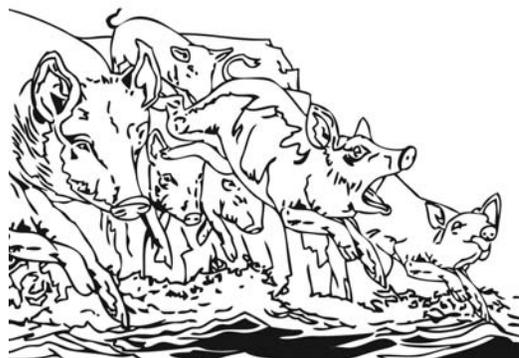
**Read Matthew 8:28–32 (then read Mark 5:1–20 and Luke 8:26–39) and Matthew 21:18, 19 (then read Mark 11:12–14, 20, 21). Why do you think Jesus let the demons enter the herd of pigs? Would He have done the same thing if the animals had been sheep? Did it matter that the herd meant income (money) for one or more families in the town? How would the idea of paying back fit into this picture?**

“If these pigs were owned by Gentiles, we should be left without a reason for why they were destroyed. Suppose we said that Jesus ordered the devils to leave the men, and that they entered the pigs on their own? This would not agree with the fact that the devils themselves asked Jesus to

do so. And Mark and also Luke reported that Jesus gave them permission.”—Adapted from R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), page 353.

Another Bible expert finds “a powerful protest [message] in Jesus' action.” He says, “The name ‘Legion’ and the pig mascot<sup>4</sup> symbolize [stand for; mean the same as] the Roman army.” So Jesus' plan was to protest<sup>5</sup> against Roman control of Israel.” —Adapted from F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?* page 101.

**Ellen G. White says that “in mercy God had permitted the loss of the swine to come upon the owners. The owners were too interested in earthly things, and did not care for spiritual life. Jesus desired to break the spell of selfish indifference, so that they might accept His grace.”** —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 338. These comments might help us to understand certain happenings that come upon us personally. But how do they set an example for our own actions? Or is this one of those actions connected with Jesus' calling as Messiah-Prophet (Special Messenger) that is not supposed to be an example for us to follow? In what way would you say this case is the same as the cursing of the fig tree? (The tree probably had a personal owner, too.)



**Jesus let the demons enter the herd of pigs out of concern for the owners, who cared more for earthly things than for God.**

### WEDNESDAY—MAY 14

#### NEGLECTING THE PEOPLE WHO SUFFER? (Matthew 25:36)

In His most powerful example of the last judgment, Jesus tells about how He will divide the nations into two groups, the sheep and the goats. To the sheep He says, “‘I was in prison and you came to visit me’ ” (Matthew 25:36, NIV).



**Jesus will divide the nations into two groups at the last judgment; the sheep and the goats.**

4. mascot—a person, animal, or thing thought to bring good luck by being present.

5. protest—to speak out against; to object.

**Read Matthew 4:12, 13; Matthew 11:2, 3; and Matthew 14:1–13 with Jesus' judgment announcement in mind. Give your opinion on how you think Matthew 25:36 is connected with Jesus' prison statement in the judgment.**

How do we explain Jesus' action during the imprisonment of John? When Jesus first hears that John is in prison, He returns to Galilee (Matthew 4:12). And proof from the Bible suggests that John did not receive a visit from Jesus while in prison. This is hinted at in Matthew 11:2, 3. According to the verses, John sends his disciples to Jesus with a question. That is the only way John can reach Jesus. After the visit of John's people, Jesus praises the suffering prophet, but He does not visit him.

One question humans (people) often ask is: "Where is God when we hurt?" In the experience of John, we have a part of the answer, in how Jesus answered through His action. Jesus was God in human<sup>6</sup> flesh, with power to act. But He does not act to save John, who had helped prepare the ground for Jesus' ministry (work). And after John's murder, all we get from Jesus is silence. (But we suspect that Jesus was greatly saddened.)

**How would you explain Jesus' action during this dark time for John? What was the probable situation that might have influenced**

(shaped) Jesus' decision? (Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 316. This suggests that the Jewish leaders were trying to silence both John and Jesus.)

**And how can His actions during the entire experience with John the Baptist help us understand the silence of God in our own times of trouble?**



Jesus asks that we love Him more than anything else.

### THURSDAY—MAY 15

#### MIXING WITH THE WRONG KIND OF PEOPLE (Matthew 9:10–13)

Most of us have a personal opinion of Jesus. And often we hear that He mixed with those whom His own people considered poor or "lower class." But our imagination prevents us from going all the way or going too far.

6. human—of, or concerning, men, women, or children.

Often, we should quietly study what that part of Jesus' life should mean for us personally today. But we use His actions to criticize others for being too snobbish or too careful about "certain" people. But, if we study carefully the reason for Jesus' relations with the outcasts<sup>7</sup> of His day, we would feel a bit uncomfortable.

**Examine Matthew 9:10–13; Matthew 11:18, 19; Luke 5:32; 1 Corinthians 1:26–28. What message can we take from them?**

Imagine if this story were to take place today. We could imagine how Jesus would sit down with "lower-class" people to share a meal. Eating and drinking are taking place. Loud music is heard. Practicing prostitutes are walking around in the shadows. That is the setting where Jesus went.



**Jesus ate meals with people who were not accepted by others.**

Interestingly, Jesus Himself tells us that His enemies called him "a glutton and a drunkard" (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34, NIV). "These accusations would never work against a John the Baptist or a Gandhi.<sup>8</sup> But for one who spends as much time as Jesus does with outcasts at dinner parties and banquets [feasts], they make a strong point." —Adapted from F. Scott Spencer, *What Did Jesus Do?*, page 90. It was nothing unusual for the Savior of the world to be accused of drinking alcohol or eating too much food.

**What can we learn from these verses that we can use in our own lives? What should we not use? As you answer, think about what purpose Jesus had for being with these people. How does that answer help us understand what useful principles we can take away?**

### FRIDAY—MAY 16

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "Jesus saw that every soul needed to receive the call to His kingdom. He reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who wished to do them good. He looked for them in the public streets, in private houses, on the boats, in the synagogue [Jewish church], by the shores of the lake, and at the marriage feast. He met them at work, and showed an interest in their worldly affairs. Jesus carried His

7. outcasts—people who are not accepted by members of society.

8. Gandhi—India's famous religious leader, who fought for his country's independence in the 1940s. He was assassinated (murdered).

teaching into the household, bringing families in their own homes under the influence of His godly presence. His strong personal sympathy helped to win hearts.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, “At the Marriage Feast,” page 151, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mixed with people as one who wished to do them good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to [helped] their needs, and won their confidence. Then He commanded them, ‘Follow Me.’”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, “Teaching and Healing,” page 143, in *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What is *righteous anger*? When is it right to show it, and when is it not? Take your thoughts to class for discussion.
- ❷ How is Jesus’ relationship with the outcasts of society a guide for us? Under what conditions might our fellowship with *sinners* become a danger to our own souls? In all His social dealings, Jesus seemed to be in charge. What should that say to us as we try to mix with outcasts?
- ❸ How far should Jesus’ actions be examples for us today? To what extent are they not? What are other examples of His actions that might cause problems for us to follow?
- ❹ Think more about this idea of being misunderstood by others as we try to follow God’s will. We find examples of this, such as in Jesus’ early life. But why must we be careful? For example, some people have done some very damaging things to themselves and to others. This is because they believed that God told them to. How do we know for sure that God is calling us to do certain things that might cause people to misunderstand us? Why should we be open to the counsel (advice) of others before we do things that we believe God told us to do? But, at the same time, how can we be careful not to stop someone from doing God’s work in ways that might seem strange to us?