

## Part II:

### A Cataclysmic Change

Now that it is immensely clear that Jesus' appearance was a one-time event that cannot be duplicated either today or previously, the question must be asked as to what difference His appearance made? Probably one of the greatest miscues in answer to this question is to say that Jesus came as an example of how to live. It shows up in sentences like this, "Be like Jesus," "Do what Jesus did," "What would Jesus do?" Thus Jesus becomes a textbook example of what the reader should try to attain to in self-improvement or moral, ethical living. And the Gospels become a handbook on how life should be lived practically and successfully.

Thus, the whole summary of this view is that Jesus came to show man how to live. Some even say that Jesus elevated the Law to a new level of perfect living.<sup>9</sup> The difficulty of this statement is obvious, but somehow it is missed. If the Law was impossible to keep, then how is it that having the One who kept the Law in the flesh (i.e., Jesus, Matthew 5:17-18) is going to make it easier to follow . . . as an example? Dr. Haddon Robinson once said in a sermon at Dallas Seminary that to make Jesus an example for him to follow, mocks him.<sup>10</sup> It does so because Dr. Robinson feels that he is so totally inept at doing anything to the level at which Jesus did it. Yet it continues as people are told to be like Jesus as if they could.<sup>11</sup> Or in the same manner, people want to be called "Christ-like." Of course, in a practical nature, this is not only impossible, it is bringing Christ down to our level of accomplishment, which is exactly what the Pharisees

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<sup>9</sup> This occurs most frequently in the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount where they would claim that Jesus moved the external requirement of the Law (e.g., "commit adultery") to a requirement of the heart ("look on a woman to covet her"). However, the Law required obedience from the heart and Jesus was just pointing that out (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).

<sup>10</sup> "Have you heard about . . . the Businessman who Missed the Bottom Line," Dallas Theological Seminary Chapel, October 7, 2010. This statement occurs at 7:00 – 8:30 minutes in the video.

<sup>11</sup> Now it should be noted that there is an element here where one is to "follow" Jesus. Jesus, as the elder brother (cf. Hebrews 2) has, as a human, cleared the way for us to follow Him into the kingdom. Thus we will suffer (as He did) and then enter into glory (as He did). But none of these things that we do are on our own, but simply because we are following the path of our Elder Brother who has cleared the way for us by giving us His righteousness. Thus, we do imitate Him in the area of loyalty in faith (toward Him), suffering and entering into the reward, but it is only and always because He has enabled it and us.

did with the Law.<sup>12</sup> It will become possible, just as “keeping the Law” will become possible, but only through imputation (see Philippians 3:8-10).

Of course, hypothetical hermeneutics (i.e., setting Jesus up as an example) don’t really work if they don’t actually reflect the Scripture. So, a tour through the Gospels actually reveals rather quickly that using Jesus as an example to duplicate is not only tough, it is impossible.

I often start my Gospels class out by walking through the Book of John and asking students to raise their hands when they can do what Jesus did. In fact, I make it easy on them by telling them to raise their hands when they can do even a little part of what Jesus did. So starting in John 1 . . . “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us . . . behold the Lamb of God . . . you are the King of Israel, you are the Son of God.” “Any hands raised yet? I thought not.”

So now we go on to John 2 . . . “making water into wine, throwing the moneychangers out of the temple, claiming to be able to raise up your own body in three days? How about John 3 where the Son of Man must be lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness? How about John 4 where Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water and she declares that she has met the Christ. How about John 5, healing the lame man, or John 6, multiplying the loaves and fishes, walking on water? Or John 9 and the healing of the blind man, or chapter 10 with the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep, or John 11 with the raising of Lazarus?” As far as I know no one has ever done a little part of that deed, not even raising an animal or even a vegetable from the dead. Life giving is within the bounds of only One, and that’s God. No one else can do it, not even a little bit.

Now when one like this professor says that Jesus did not come primarily as an example, one must ask what did He come to do? Interestingly, the Christian world is so focused on itself, on doing things as a way of validating themselves<sup>13</sup> (i.e., the flesh), or

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<sup>12</sup> This is probably sourced in a mistranslation of Romans 8:28 which many seem to interpret as if “being conformed to the image of His Son” is possible in this life. While the explanation of this verse is beyond the space allotted here, in short it refers to the resurrection of the body (“that He might be the firstborn among many brethren”). Note that this verse is in the “glorification” or the “kingdom” context of the last half of Chapter 8. The point of this is that we will be seen to be just like the image of His Son at the bodily resurrection, not now (except through imputation).

<sup>13</sup> This is the Western concept of success, the “dream big” philosophy. The success in our lives with respect to God is not measured by physical means, not by numbers, not by health, not by financial success, nor even by conversions, baptisms, or other. Thus, the motivation for measurable accomplishments is not of God. God’s measure is whether one walks with Him through His Son, and reflects that in his daily

of painting themselves as victims in some relationship, that they frequently don't know what to do with the Gospels if there is not some practical, everyday, application for them in every story, something that can elevate their worth or self-focus on their victimization. This was exactly the problem of the Pharisees. They looked at the Law and saw themselves as being able to keep it, to be able to contribute something to God, doing something that gave them worth. They did not see God, but they saw a god who reflected their values. They saw themselves as able. But the Gospels are there because the reader can't do anything (any more than he could justify himself by keeping the Law) and when he does he only hinders the Kingdom, not adds to it. (Now many readers at this point will find strong objection since they feel that they must do something or it shows they don't care about God, e.g., Lordship salvation). Yet that is the exact point of the Law, to render you helpless so that you will embrace the full gift of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23). The Law was not to show you how to be worthy, but unworthy. Jesus didn't come to encourage you to do a better job of keeping the Law, but to show you that He alone would keep it, and you cannot. You, on the other hand deserve the pits of hell for your best efforts.<sup>14</sup>

A word of explanation about effort needs to be made here. There are two kinds of efforts; those that are done as a self-identity (bad) and those that are done because of who we are in Christ (good). Matthew 6:1-18 is the guideline here. The Pharisees did their deeds to be seen of men (men noted and valued them as doing good). Believers are to do their deeds only to be seen of God (God notes them and values them) because the mercy from which one acts is totally given by God through Christ. So, I often tell students to strive to do your deeds totally unnoticed by anyone, and make sure you are thinking only of God and the gift of mercy through Christ when you are doing them.

Let me give you a "for-instance." I love to catch fish with my son (although we have a long history of failure, we still try). When we go fishing, I don't have to tell anyone what I've done. I don't want the pastor to hold me up in front of the church and tell people what a good father I am. We generally don't say anything to anyone. Why? It is simply because it's our character to love fishing. We do it because we enjoy it. The enjoyment of doing it is enough. That's what the character of Christ given to us is like. To show mercy to other believers is not something that we should want announced in church, or for others to say that we are spiritual, or even to confirm to people that we are truly saved. We don't care about such things. Why? It is simply because it's our new

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life, his daily opportunities and problems. It is solely a character issue. And if one acts in the character of God given to him in Jesus Christ, the merciful deeds will follow.

<sup>14</sup> Now it must be stated here what part imperatives have in the life of a believer. All activities are a result of the new character that has been placed in one. Thus what the believer does is because he wants to, not because of an obligation or to prove anything. What he does is because of gratefulness (received mercy) for what he has become in Christ.

character. We do it because we want to. We do it because we are expressing the gift of our Father, God . . . His character of mercy and our love of Jesus.

Now interpreters will try to obligate their readers, to give them guilt, to say if they are truly a Christian, then they have to do these good things or it shows that they are not. They will use everything they can to get others to “do” something . . . everything but teaching about the gift of mercy given to believers in Jesus. But “doing something” is not the problem. The problem is that believers do not know that they have a character of mercy given to them and thus do not act on it. They must know who they are in Christ so they can respond out of a Godly desire. Thus, the character in Christ should be taught. The motivation must be known before one is motivated by it. It is the “renewing on one’s mind” (Romans 12:3). And that motivation is what God alone sees. All other external acts are seen by men and judged by their standard. God judges on the motivation of the heart (1 Corinthians 4:5).

<sup>5</sup> Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men’s* hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (1 Corinthians 4:5)

Jesus did not come to give His followers an improved sin nature. He came to give them a new life, a perfect life, and perfect behavior. Now that’s a change . . . a cataclysmic change. (Of course that should result in an improved life, but the point is a perfect life that He puts in you.)