

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## What should I do? - The Principal Worker

It is said of a certain preacher that he always ended his sermons with the words, "Do as I say, but not as I do". That is a rather sad reflection upon the frailty of human nature, but at least the man was honest!

Today we come to the last of our series of four talks on the theme of 'What should I do?' We have looked at the life and activity of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ under the headings, 'Doing in faith', 'Doing in obedience', 'Doing in dependence'. Faith, obedience, dependence – these are indeed three important qualities that should characterise every Christian.

Today it is fashionable to speak about role models. We are anxious that our young people grow up with those whose lives and actions might provide a pattern and an inspiration for their own developing lives. There is rightly concern over the activities of some younger footballers and entertainment personalities with far more money than good sense. They provide but a poor role model for growing teenagers.

In Christian activity, there can be no better role model, of course, than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The apostle Peter, who had the privilege of being with the Lord Jesus and seeing Him in action during those three years of public ministry, makes that point very strongly when he writes, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

Today, then, we will look at some of the ways in which the Lord Jesus has left us that example of Christian activity. It will be convenient to consider the following:

1. His coming into the world.
2. His silent years at Nazareth.
3. His years of public ministry.
4. His death at Calvary.
5. His moments of discouragement.

### His coming into the world.

The writer to the Hebrews sheds some interesting light on the motives of the Lord Jesus in coming into the world: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – in the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:5-7). The writer is here quoting from Psalm 40.

You may recall that time when Isaiah was given a vision of the glory of the Lord (see Isaiah 6). That vision produced within Isaiah a deep sense of his own sinfulness and utter unworthiness for the service of God. Isaiah records, "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'" (verse 8).

It may have been a moment of crisis in Isaiah's day that led to that call, "Whom shall I send?" No such crisis attended the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world! His readiness to come, His willingness to do the will of His God and Father, had already been settled in those counsels of the Godhead in those eternal ages before even the world was created. This surely is the significance of the words, "in the volume of the book". Peter captures something of that same thought when he writes, "...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:19-20).

That readiness to do the will of His God contrasts markedly with the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There they so lamentably failed to heed God's word as to what they might eat. Jesus' readiness to do God's will was not imposed by outward constraints. Rather it sprang from what was in His heart. It is interesting that Psalm 40, from which the writer to the Hebrews quoted, goes on to add, "Your law is within My heart" (verse 8). It is also worth noting, in passing, that readiness to do the will of God characterised the Lord Jesus right through to the end of His life.

So in the Garden of Gethsemane, He could pray to His Father, "Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). As we leave this section, we cannot but be challenged by the question, "How central to my life is the will of God?"

### **His silent years at Nazareth.**

Scripture tells us very little about what the Lord Jesus did during His growing up years in Nazareth. In Luke 2, we read of one significant incident when the Lord Jesus, now twelve years old and thus having reached the Jewish age of majority, went with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. We read, "When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him amongst their relatives and acquaintances.

So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now it was so after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers" (verses 43-47). Here was no brash youngster, boasting that He knew it all. Rather, the Lord Jesus displays a beautiful humility and a subjection totally appropriate to His years.

Luke continues, "So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.' And He said to them, 'Why is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' ...Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them ... And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (verses 48-52). Even as a boy of 12, the Lord Jesus was deeply conscious of the fact that He was here to do His heavenly Father's business. But that commitment would not interfere with a beautiful obedience to His earthly parents. Mrs. Alexander's well known Christmas carol has a message that is good for every month of the year:

*And through all His wondrous childhood  
He would honour and obey,  
Love, and watch the lowly mother,  
In whose gentle arms He lay:  
Christian children all should be  
Kind, obedient, good as He.*

Luke ends with a beautiful reminder that there was a loveliness about the life of the Lord Jesus that endeared Him not only to God but also to those who saw Him in Nazareth. Would to God that our lives also spoke in that way!

But though Scripture may be largely silent about those first 30 or so years of the Lord's life, we are left in no doubt as to heaven's opinion of them. So it is, as Jesus was about to begin His three years of public ministry, Luke tells us, "Now when all the people were baptised, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptised; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22). Those words made clear to all those who stood around the River Jordan on that day that God the Father had found nothing but pleasure in those 30 years in Nazareth.

### **His years of public ministry.**

Those three years of public ministry, lived out before the gaze of many in Palestine, were not governed by what men expected the Lord Jesus to do or to say. On many occasions, the Lord Jesus made plain that what He did was dictated by His Father and not by men. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Gospel of John. John tells us of a time when the Lord Jesus, wearied by His journey, sat by a well at Sychar. His disciples went into the nearby village to buy food.

Meanwhile, Jesus speaks to a needy Samaritan woman who had come to the well for water. This leads to her spiritual blessing. John tells us, "In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But He said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.' Therefore the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work'" (John 4:31-34).

That there is an obesity crisis in the western world today is eloquent testimony to the attraction and power that food has in our lives. But the power that motivated the Lord Jesus was His complete commitment to doing His Father's will. His Father's will had prior claim upon all that He did!

Interestingly in another food related episode, after the feeding of the 5,000, we read, "And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst ... All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:35-38).

Another statement of the Lord Jesus emphasises this same commitment: "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29). These challenging words cut right across that spirit of our day that makes a god out of self-pleasing. As Paul so tellingly reminded the Romans, "Even Christ did not please Himself" (Romans 15:3).

### **His death at Calvary.**

So far as we have looked at the things Jesus did, we have seen: His readiness to come to do His Father's will; the pleasure that He gave to His Father in those silent years at Nazareth; His complete commitment to His Father's will. All these features shine out beautifully in perfection in His death at Calvary.

Just before the cross, the Lord Jesus turned to His Father in prayer. In the certainty of an obedience that would do His Father's will to the very end, He can pray, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). That work of answering to God for the sins of mankind could be taken up by none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. As the children's hymn puts it,

*There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin;  
He only could unlock the gate  
Of heaven, and let us in.*

But having taken up that work in His coming into the world, He would indeed see it through. So when the work of bearing your sin and mine in His own body on the tree (see 1 Peter 2:24) was complete, He could cry in triumph from the cross, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Many of us will, at one time or other, have started a job but for a variety of reasons, have failed to finish it. Perhaps a piece of tapestry started with such expectations. Or a jigsaw puzzle started but abandoned as being too difficult! Or a book started with such anticipation but given up through lack of time to finish it! But not so Christ! At Calvary the work was done and completed! His commitment to His Father's will was total! May we seek His grace that our commitment, too, may be the same. The little chorus reminds us:

*I will not work my soul to save –  
That work my Lord has done.  
But I will work like any slave  
Or love of God's dear Son.*

### **His moments of discouragement.**

It may, at first, seem surprising even to suggest that the Lord Jesus, with His total commitment to do His Father's will and with the sense of His Father's entire approval, nevertheless knew what it was to be discouraged.

That fact is hinted at prophetically in the Old Testament. In the book of the prophet Isaiah, there occurs a series of so-called 'Servant Songs' which are best regarded as utterances prophetic of the Lord Jesus, God's perfect Servant. In Isaiah 49, we read, "Then I said, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, and my work with my God'" (verse 4). There is a touching moment in the Gospels when many of those who had followed the Lord Jesus went back because they found His words too difficult. John tells us, "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:66-67).

One cannot but sense the sadness and the discouragement that lay behind that question of Jesus. He felt the pain of circumstances as you and I do. But how Peter's answer must have cheered His heart: "Then Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (verses 68-69). Jesus wept over the refusal of those in Jerusalem to believe in Him and so come into blessing (Luke 19:41-44). Just before the cross, in all the desolation of those moments, having entered the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples, Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him that they might share His sorrow. But they let Him down – they fell asleep! (Matthew 26:36-46).

We should not be surprised that we, too, in our service for the Lord Jesus, experience times of discouragement. Hebrews 4:14-16 reminds us: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with

our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Let us keep our eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). He has perfectly gone through the pathway of obedience to God. He knows exactly the cost of it all. He understands thoroughly all that we are going through. He is thus well able to help us on that same pathway for His glory. He has promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

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