

Jesus Was Just Like Me

by Bob Pulliam

Not only is it common for people to think that Jesus was just like them; it is really quite natural. We would rather think that the Savior was just like us, than conclude that we might need to change to be like Him. We all know that "change is good" C when applied to someone else...

The worldly will commonly look to Jesus' life for approval. After all; how could you condemn their practices when Jesus did the same? Drinking alcoholic beverages is an excellent example of this. "Surely you know that Jesus and His apostles drank wine!", they will tell us. They may even point out that Jesus kept a party going by changing water into wine (although they probably won't know where that's found). Jesus was regularly seen hanging out with the sinners, too. How could we possibly object to questionable friendships when we see who Jesus ran around with?

Now it is important that we understand why these people look to Jesus in these situations. Are they looking to Him as their supreme example so they can serve God faithfully? Let's give them the benefit of the doubt and try them out:

- Do they go about preaching the word? Jesus did (Mk 1:38).
- Do they condemn the wicked? Well, here we see a problem. They can't seem to figure out what is and isn't wicked. But Jesus condemned the wicked and told them to repent (Lk 13:3ff).
- Do they gather with the people of God to study His word? Although the church was not yet established, Jesus was constantly in the temple and synagogues. Can you imagine the bars closing down on Wednesday night and posting signs that read: "We should all be where Jesus would be tonight C with God's people." Don't hold your breath. The drinker who looks to Jesus isn't really trying to please Jesus.

I once knew a fellow who thought it would be noble for him to be in a bar teaching the lost rather than at Bible study. I asked him why he would need to be there during Bible study when there would be plenty of opportunity to do such "teaching" at other times? He didn't have an answer. The problem was that he felt more comfortable in the bar than among the people of God.

I'm sure you can think of other matters; but this illustrates the fact that these people don't raise the issue of Jesus' example because they are trying to serve Him. They do so to get you off their backs without looking too bad.

And Then...

And then there are the "Christians" who justify their practices in the very same way. They wouldn't dream of going into a bar, but feel right at home at their neighbor's >wet bar'. They probably know exactly where to find the passage about Jesus making the water wine, and use it in rebuke if you even think to question their actions. They'll even point out that Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach (I Tim 5:23). Do they really see a correlation between social drinking and the life to be lived by a Christian, as seen in Jesus and the apostles? Of course they do!... Remember, Jesus was just like them! But a good

long look at scripture shows us a big difference between the worldliness of social drinking and the lives of Jesus and His disciples.

While people today try to look as much like the world around them as they can; Paul's admonition still rings true:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,** that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:1f)

And then there are the sins listed by Peter:

For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles; when we walked in lewdness, lusts, **drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties,** and abominable idolatries." (I Pt 4:3)

You may make friends and influence people by going to the drinking parties; but God won't be in the number duly impressed. God expects us to keep our minds clear to be what He has commanded us to be. Drunkenness and giddiness (surfeiting) induced by alcohol does not accomplish that (Luke 21:34). In fact, Paul used getting drunk as an illustration of what we are **not** to be in I Thessalonians 5:5-8. "But I don't get drunk!" you say... Paul commanded us to be "sober" (vv 6 & 8). This word is translated from a Greek word which means to be "free from the influence of intoxicants" (Vine's, p583). That's pretty clear! Is this word being used as nothing but a metaphor in the passage? Some would say so, but verse seven makes Paul's play on words much broader than that.

But Jesus Made the Wine!...

With no regard to what may really be spoken of in the text, people hang on these words to the bitter end. If only they would hang onto some of the other sayings of Jesus as tenaciously as with this!

Did you know that "wine" in the Bible does not always refer to that which is fermented? That concept is foreign to us today, but the Greeks (and in the Hebrew language as well) did not usually use distinct words for fermented and unfermented grape juice. Here are a few Old Testament examples (Gen 27:28 & 37; Deut 7:13; II Kgs 18:32; Ps 4:7; Prov 3:10; Isa 16:10; Isa 24:7; Isa 27:2; Isa 36:17; Isa 65:8; Jer 31:2; Hos 2:8 & 9; Joel 2:24). Wine is not mentioned as often in the New Testament, and therefore has fewer places to pin down meaning by context. Let's look at the case of Jesus changing the water to wine.

John 2:1-11 is where we find this event. Let's **assume** that the social drinker is correct, and Jesus changed the water into fermented (>tie one on') wine. Here is what we end up with. Every one at the party has already "drunk well" (v10). This would mean that drunkenness was already present. Jesus, to show who he really was (v11 C this was a >sign') made more wine for these drunken guests. Jesus showed what by this "sign"?... That He's the worldly party type, and can't make up His mind as to whether drunkenness is a sin or a virtue C because later He would send the Spirit to inspire Paul to list drunkenness as a work of the flesh which keeps one from going to heaven (Gal 5:19-21). How absurd!

Now let's consider what **really did happen** here. In accordance with the customs of the day, this wine was not fermented. In fact the best wines were esteemed to be those which were unfermented because they were sweeter. Jesus remedied the oversight of the host and made water into a superior wine for the guests. Superior, **not** because of its alcoholic content; but because of its taste (sweetness). There's no alcohol even hinted at in the text.

It Makes Great Medicine...

If only I had a dime for the number of times a drinker has spoken of drinking alcohol because of the health benefits. Not very convincing is it. "Didn't Paul tell Timothy to drink wine for his stomach?" Yes, he did in I Timothy 5:23. He was told to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake. Oh! That was so the alcohol would kill the bacteria in the water! No, let's let someone from that period tell us about it. Pliny wrote:

"The first of the artificial wines has wine for its basis; it is called *adynamon* (i.e., without strength), and is made in the following manner: twenty sextarii of white must are boiled down with half that quantity of water until the amount of the water is lost by evaporation. This beverage is given to invalids (stomach wine that Timothy was advised to take a little of) to whom it is apprehended that wine (i.e., fermented wine) may prove injurious." (Book 14; chapter 19)

Doesn't sound like anything someone might have at a party nowadays, does it?

Conclusion...

If you want it, you might go to any length to get it. If all else fails, we just conclude that Jesus was just like me' and rest assured He would be proud. But God said it best long ago:

These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes." (Ps 50:21)