

THE COMPASS

SHOCK TALK: *Straight From Jesus' Mouth*

Part 1:

Lost Son Found

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People make such a big deal out of Jesus.

This person who lived 2,000-plus years ago, and claimed to be the Son of God, and they say he died and rose again and went back to heaven.

And today, 20 centuries later, some people still have fights about him, some people pray to him, some people are embarrassed by him.

Napoleon Bonaparte, great conqueror that he was, was fascinated by Jesus. He said, "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him."

H.G. Wells said, "I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history."

Mahatma Gandhi said, "A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act."

Albert Einstein said, "As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by" Jesus.

What is it with this guy Jesus?

I'll tell you what I want. I want video.

I want there to have been a 24/7 live streaming webcam crew following Jesus around back when he was alive on earth, because I want to know what this fellow was really like. This guy who has made such an impact on civilization.

I want to know what he looked like, what he dressed like — was he a snappy dresser? Did he keep his fingernails clean?

And what did he sound like? You know they say Abraham Lincoln had a high, nasally voice. Maybe Jesus talked with a lisp, or had a habit of smacking his lips, or who knows what?

The historical records say his physical appearance was unremarkable.

Well, what's that supposed to mean?

This kind of stuff makes me crazy.

But I can tell you what we do know. We know what he said. We know a lot of what he said, anyway, because he had so many people following him around all the time paying close attention.

And people were so mesmerized by what he said and did that at least four guys wrote biographies of him — that's where we get those first four books of the New Testament. They're known as the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; they're named for the authors.

Each of these guys had a different target audience, so one would include one incident, and the others would leave it out. Or two would include a story Jesus told, and the other two would leave it out. Or whatever.

You know, in some Bibles, the regular text is in black, but all the words of Jesus are printed in red. They're called "red letter" Bibles.

Well, we can lay all four of these biographies alongside each other and pretty much figure out the whole chronology of Jesus' life on earth — and then we can track through all the words in red, everything Jesus said, and get a pretty comprehensive picture of what he was really about.

Because if this is a character that people live and die for — if this is the person that millions and millions of people have called themselves "Christians" because of, and supposedly still follow the teachings of — then I want to know what he really said, and what he really meant.

Well, I'll just cheat a little and fast-forward to the end and tell you what we're going to find.

We're going to find that this guy was a radical.

Most of our preconceived notions about Jesus are going to be seriously challenged — I would even say exploded.

Because he was not some quiet, pious religious leader.

He wasn't what you would call "safe."

He wasn't even predictable.

He kept shocking people — some people, he made uncomfortable; other people, he shocked by making them comfortable when they didn't expect to be comfortable.

Big shots, he took them down a notch.

Small fry, he treated like royalty.

Whatever the status quo was, he kept shaking it up.

He was a radical.

I think a lot of people — I mean zillions of people — call themselves Christians or call themselves Christ-followers without really knowing what Jesus actually said and meant and stood for.

They don't realize that actually being a Christ-follower means being kind of a "red-letter radical" — somebody who embraces, I guess I would call it, a truly "alternative lifestyle." An alternative "thought-style." A different way of thinking and talking and acting and reacting than the average person does.

A lot of so-called Christians have made such a bad impression on people — like Mark Twain said, "If Christ were here now there is one thing he would not be — a Christian."

The life Jesus lived, and the life he called people to follow him in, isn't ordinary at all. Jesus didn't respond to pressure in the typical way; he didn't respond to temptation in the typical way; he didn't respond to conflict or frustration or even *religion* in the way you would expect!

He had something going on inside his head, inside his heart, that made him radically different from the ordinary man on the street.

I mean, from the very first red letters in the Bible — the first words we have recorded in history that came out of Jesus' mouth — he was only 12 years old, and he was

already a radical!
Let me show you.

The scene (**Luke 2:41-52**) is ancient Israel, of course. That's where Jesus lived his whole life.

Jesus was actually a pretty common name — the Old Testament version of it was Joshua.

He was a normal Jewish boy of the time.

Did normal boy things.

Had normal boy experiences.

And Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary, were devout Jews, what we would call Orthodox Jews today.

There was a religious law that said every Jewish man had to go to the religious capital, Jerusalem, three times a year to participate in certain worship rituals, called "feasts."

But a lot of people were so poor, they literally couldn't afford to make the trip three times a year.

So many of them would save up and do just one of the feasts, and take the whole family — and a lot of times they would choose what was regarded as the most important of the feasts, which happened at Passover time.

Now there were no Southwest Airlines family fun fares. Everybody traveled the old-fashioned way, and since thousands of people were heading toward the same destination at about the same time, these huge caravans would form — dozens and dozens of families trudging along the same road at the same time. People on donkeys, people on foot.

Historians tell us that the women and children would typically set the pace, and the men would bring up the rear. I guess this way the guys, with their longer legs, wouldn't get way out ahead of everybody.

People talking and kids playing around; you might talk to somebody for a couple hours and then wind up hanging out with somebody else for a while; people would keep an eye on each other's children.

Older kids might hang out with the men for a while, then race up to the front and hang out with the women and the smaller kids awhile.

Anyway, the year Jesus was 12 years old, he and his parents went on a trek like this, from their home in Nazareth, way up in the north country, down to Jerusalem, for Passover.

It was about 65 miles — how long would it take *you* to make that kind of a trip on foot? A few days, anyway, if it was me.

So they get to Jerusalem, go through the ceremonies and everything, and when it's time to head back to the north, the caravan forms and everybody starts back out of town.

They get a full day's journey from Jerusalem when Joseph and Mary gradually realize — their kid has disappeared.

Wasn't he with you? No. Wasn't he with you?

They ask their relatives. They quiz their friends. They go from group to group, trying to

get a clue.
Where is our child?

This is a sickening feeling.

When my son was 6 or 7 years old, we were at Sea World in San Diego, with throngs of people all around, and after several hours my wife and I were pooped — of course the 7-year-old is still going strong — so we plopped down on a bench in a big kind of playground area, and turned Kristofer loose to go play.

The benches are right in the middle of the playground; the kids play on playground equipment and stuff all around you.

But some of the equipment is so big, you can't see over it or around it.

And after quite some time, we realized we hadn't seen Kristofer for a while.

I went walking around the playground area; Kristina went walking around looking for him — calling, "Kristofer! Kristofer!"

And every moment you can't find the child, you hear this drumbeat in your head — it's your heart pounding, the panic rising.

Did he wander far enough away that we can't hear him crying, but he's panicked and yelling for Mommy?

Did he get hurt and somebody took him to the first aid station?

Is he still playing someplace and doesn't realize he's lost? *Oh please, let that be what's happened.*

Did somebody snatch him and they're heading out of the park with him right now? It's just a horrible, horrible feeling.

It took Joseph and Mary a full day to get back down to Jerusalem, and even after they got to town it took another day to find their boy.

But finally, they tracked him down — and he's in the temple.

He's in the middle of all the religious teachers.

He's been listening to them teach, he's been asking them questions — and the teachers are stunned. I mean, this is a 12-year-old kid, but they're knocked out by both his questions and his answers!

But his mother is not impressed. I can imagine her just about hyperventilating — she's gone three days wondering if her boy was dead or alive, wondering if she would ever see him again, imagining all kinds of terrible things happening to him.

And she says (in **Luke 2:48**), "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been **"anxiously searching for you"**

Although there's no good word in English to translate what she really said — it wasn't just "anxiously"; in the original language, it was a word that's used to describe torment, or grieving.

They had been *suffering*, looking for him.

But now here it comes — the very first words Jesus ever speaks in the scriptural record (**Luke 2:49**):

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

You know, on the face of it, it sounds like he's sassing his parents, doesn't it?

But the truth is, we don't know what his tone of voice was. We don't know where he laid the emphasis.

The Scripture says even his parents didn't understand his meaning (**Luke 2:50**). So we have to imagine. And no matter how we imagine it, we find something pretty cool. What we find is that, with these 17 words — even as a 12-year-old kid — Jesus was setting the stage for his entire ministry. Setting the stage for his entire relationship with you and me.

Take a look.

First, Jesus responds with a question.

If we look at all the words in red throughout the four gospels, we find a lot of question marks.

Jesus often used questions when he dialogued with people.

Again and again we find him asking leading questions to help people zero in on the truth.

Jesus didn't come to set up a flimsy, emotional faith system.

Christianity has gotten this reputation for requiring people to check their brain at the door.

Some groups have gone all emotional in their expression of faith; some have actually been suspicious of education, as if learning is an enemy of faith.

A big chunk of the institutional Church down through the centuries has contributed to this check-your-brain-at-the-door reputation by reducing faith to a series of formulas or rituals or compliance with a grid of regulations, pushing people to obey the rules as if this is what God wants from us: punchcard Christianity.

But that's not what Jesus was about.

From Day 1, he was about engaging the brain.

Look where his parents found him — in the thick of intellectual give-and-take with the most educated people of the day, the teachers in the temple at Jerusalem.

And what impressed them about this young guy? Not just his answers. His *questions*.

Jesus was comfortable with questions. We'll never find him saying Don't ask that question. That's a stupid question. Or, That's an evil question.

But we will see him, very often, responding to a question by asking a *different* question — often questioning the motive behind it.

So on one level, he's saying to his parents, "*Why* were you searching for me?"

Why was this such a puzzle to you?

Think about it: what was it about me that you didn't get — so you were in the dark about where you would find me?

Which is the same question, in a way, that God asks us today.

If I really want to find God, why?

Is it fear — because I feel I have to; it's an obligation?

Maybe I feel religious guilt. Pressure from family or friends or a religious institution.

Or maybe I feel the kind of fear that really hopes there's nothing significant there — like, Jesus will turn out to be just an interesting historical character, and he's basically

irrelevant to how I'm going to live my everyday life.
Maybe I'm coming at this as a skeptic, or a critic.

That's OK. I can come to God from whatever perspective I want.

But my fear is unnecessary.

God isn't looking for me to fulfill some kind of religious obligation.

He's looking for relationship between him and me that will redeem me, that will be good for me.

All the way back in **Isaiah 48:17**, about 700 years before Jesus ever showed up, God was saying: **"This is what the Lord says — your Redeemer...: 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.'"**

Look again at what Jesus said to his parents: **"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"**

This is a sort of modernized translation of what Jesus actually said.

The old King James Version of the Bible, translated 400 years ago, doesn't say "in my Father's house"; it says "about my father's business"

But it's not really house *or* business, in the original.

It's more generic. Today we might actually say, "Didn't you get it, that I have to *do my Father's thing?*"

Jesus was saying, I'm just doing God's thing.

You don't have to be fearful, when you come looking for me.

What you're going to find is that I'm the earthly picture of your heavenly Father — I'm just doing God's thing — and God's thing is to help you. To redeem you.

We can see this truth all through the Old Testament — and all through the New Testament — and we're going to see it all through Jesus' life and ministry.

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Or maybe the way Jesus asked the question was, **"Why are YOU searching for ME?"**
Because the truth is, God sees it the opposite way.

He sent Jesus to find *us*.

He invaded our world. He turned himself over to us. He humbled himself to the point that he actually *needed* us — as a tiny baby in a feed trough.

That's why there was a 12-year-old boy named Jesus sitting in the temple when his parents came through the door — he was God, in human form, in the process of going through all our human stuff!

Jesus could have been saying, Hey, you've got it backwards, people.

You think you're searching for me?

I've come to *you*. I'm searching for *you*.

For years we've heard the term, and used the term, *seekers*.

We want to reach seekers. Jesus came for the sake of seekers.

But in reality, we should probably talk about "*seekees*".

Jesus came *as* a seeker!

I think this is why, when I'm doing something that will bust God's design for my life, or

when I'm thinking about doing something that will jeopardize the flow of God's blessing into my life, or when I'm in denial about something in my life that really needs to be turned over to God, so that I can be more effective and successful and live more at peace — whenever I'm out of synch with my Father in some way — I feel this little twinge. The loving little nudge of God's Spirit, poking me in the ribs.

I interpret it as guilt — but God calls it love. He's looking out for my best interests. He doesn't want me to hurt myself. He doesn't want me to hurt somebody else. So he meddles. He seeks me out. He finds me. I don't have to go searching for God to help me.
Doug, why are YOU searching for ME? I'm on it!

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Well, OK. I can imagine one more take on this scene. Because Jesus uses a tiny but very powerful word in his response to his parents. He says “**I HAD to be in my Father's house**” *Had* to be about my Father's business. I've *got* to do God's thing. Over the course of Jesus' lifetime, he used this word over and over again. I *must* do this. I *must* do that. It's an expression of compulsion, of propulsion. Jesus was saying, if there's work that God wants done, I've gotta be there.

If there's something in my life that needs God's attention, Jesus is on it.
If there's something broken in my life that needs fixing, Jesus is on it.
If there's something corrupt that needs redeeming, Jesus is on it.
His Spirit is going to go to work. I'll feel him messing around in there, inside me.

This isn't the work of organized religion. This is the work of God himself. It's redemptive work. It's God's thing. It's the thing Jesus was about from the beginning. It's the thing he's still about.

You don't have to fix what's broken in your life in order to get to God. Jesus came *seeking* the broken — he came as a fixer. He fixes us so we can get to God. No matter what I do, God's love keeps after me. Because he loves me so much!

He doesn't mind if I question him. He may question me right back, but that's conversation. He's interested in conversation with me. Because he loves me so much!

He won't hide from me. He comes looking for me. Because he loves me so much!

Maybe — just maybe — living in that kind of love, enjoying that kind of love, is what red-letter radicalism will turn out to be all about.
Maybe — just maybe — living in the power of God's love is all Jesus really came to help me do.