

Jesus of Kansas

by Jim Mathis

Introduction

Any similarities between the main character of this book, Jesus of Kansas, and a man who lived 2,000 years ago named Jesus of Nazareth, are purely intentional. In fact, the purpose of this book is to put the life of Jesus in a more modern context. After spending years studying the life of Christ I began to see Him as a modern day counter-culture leader.

With that in mind, I decided to comment on his life as if he were born in 1948 in Tonganoxie, Kansas and traveled around the Midwest in the 1960's in a Volkswagen bus, preaching his age old message of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, and self-control. The same message that was preached by many people of that era who became known as "Jesus Freaks" because of their radical commitments to the teachings of Jesus Christ. I wish I had been one of them.

This book is my take on what it may have been like if Jesus lived and taught during that time.

Chapter One

The Early Years

Jesus had heard the stories since he was little, but he never knew what to think of them. He believed the story about the time they were on a family vacation and he got left behind at a truck stop. They were travelling in two cars and both groups thought he was with the other one. By the time they figured out that he was missing and circled back, he had found his way to a neighborhood church and was showing the small congregation things in the Bible they had never seen before. This was a believable story because he loved to learn and study and was often explaining things to his friends and relatives. Also like many twelve year olds, he tended to wander off on adventures.

His mother told him that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and that she was a virgin when he was born. Mary was such a jokester and full of life that you never knew for sure when she was being serious or just putting people on. Whatever the case, everybody loved her and she never had a harsh word to say about anybody. In fact Jesus, could never remember a harsh word or complaint ever come out of her mouth in his entire life.

His father, Joe, was a hard worker. He owned a cabinet shop in Tonganoxie. Jesus worked with him after school, on weekends, and all summer. They built custom cabinets for high end homes and had a steady business. Jesus was also into woodcarving and making decorative pieces out of wood. He had had some luck selling his woodcarvings at area art fairs, but mainly he just loved working with his hands and creating things of beauty. Creating beautiful things from little or nothing brought him great joy and appeared to be a natural gift, but he also knew that he spent a lot of time working and thinking about his next project. He knew that hard work, practice, and learning were the key to anything whether it was a piece of wood or a life well lived.

Jesus was the oldest of several kids and showed signs of leadership at an early age. He did well in school, got good grades, and was on the debate team. There he learned the skill of answering questions with another question – a technique that always threw his opponents off because his questions to their questions were always so thoughtful and insightful. He made them question motives and explore the background to the questions.

After high school, he went to Kansas State University. He was unsure what to major in. He took a few philosophy classes, but the teachers were all pretty lame, the other students spent too much time “navel-gazing” and few people seemed to really have a clear understanding of why they were there or how to live.

Engineering or accounting was pretty straight forward and not particularly interesting. He settled in at the art school because it just seemed to make the most sense. Making the world a beautiful and loving place was why he was here. Learning some history about those who had come before and sharpening his eye was a good way to spend time.

Campus life also brought a flood of new experiences. It was the late 1960's and young people were experimenting with drugs of all sorts and drinking more alcohol than they should. But it was also a time of great music and people honestly looking at how they were living and what they should do with their lives.

Most of the kids at college came from middle class homes. Upper class kids went to Ivy League schools back east and working class kids didn't bother with college. Middle class kids went to state colleges because the tuition was low. Their fathers had come home from World War II with nothing on their minds but building big homes, driving nice cars and living a peaceful existence in suburbia. They closed their eyes and didn't want to think about the possibility that there were people in the community who couldn't get into good schools or get good jobs just because of the color of their skin or because they spoke with an accent. In fact most of them had moved to a part of town where they didn't have to think about these things. It is not that they were racists or bigots; they just didn't want to deal with these things. After all, they now had color televisions,

V8 automobiles, and indoor plumbing was no longer a luxury.

Jesus and his new friends weren't convinced. They had friends who were black or Hispanic. They knew from conversations that they had struggles every day that the middle-class white kids could hardly imagine.

Jesus was also becoming increasingly aware that striving to make more money was a futile way to live, that there was more to life than big houses, big cars, and the latest stereo system. He also had strong sense that God was showing him a better way to live and furthermore that he might be the person to take this message of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, and self-control to the world.

John the Baptist

One day while walking across campus, he ran into his cousin John. John was a very unusual guy. John was the first person that Jesus knew that was into health food in a big way. He was a vegetarian, but not a vegan because he wore a lot of leather clothes and even had a lamb's skin

jacket. Jesus was not really into the Birkenstock sandals and tie-die T-shirts that John was fond of, at least not at that point, but they had a lot of shared beliefs about the state of the world, the lack of concern for the poor, and the general hustle and bustle of society.

John lived in an old travel trailer at the edge of town and grew his own veggies. Jesus would go out there several evenings a week and they would have long conversations about the evils facing mankind and listen to The Grateful Dead.

They talked about baptism a lot. John had been baptizing people in the stream behind his trailer. To Jesus baptism represented the dogma of the church which was part of the problem. While people were being discriminated against because of their color and forced to go to poor quality schools assuring them a life of poverty, the churches were spending billions on buildings and preachers were going on TV telling people that their lack of faith is why they couldn't get a job.

Eventually they agreed that Jesus should be baptized because God had a huge plan for his life, a plan to usher in

a new era of peace and love. The first step should be a public acknowledgment through baptism. So John baptized Jesus in the stream behind the trailer park.

They didn't expect to see much change other than an outward and visual commitment to make a difference in the world, but to their surprise, the sky cleared and a dove landed on Jesus's shoulder. Then to their amazement a voice said "This is my son in whom I am well pleased."

They looked around and couldn't find anybody else who could have said that or who could verify it. They went back inside and tried to decide if they were trying to imagine things or if that really happened. The neighbor's pot had not drifted that direction and Jerry Garcia's music had not had that effect before, so they concluded that it really was the voice of God, even if they were the only ones who heard it.

The end of the semester was near, so Jesus decided that He would take the first six weeks and take a personal retreat by himself to sort out all of the things that had been happening the past few months.

His brothers were available to help their dad at the cabinet shop and a friend had offered to loan him a cabin in Colorado until the first of July when the tourist season got underway. Jesus had bought a 1962 VW bus for \$500 at the start of the school year and it was in good enough shape to make it to the mountains and the cabin just outside Idaho Springs. It wasn't clear that it would make it to Summit County, but Idaho Springs was close enough.

The Temptation

He packed his books, an old Martin guitar, and some yellow legal pads. He wasn't sure what he was going to do, but he wanted to get some reading in and maybe write a few songs. He was also looking forward to the six weeks of silence. He had a real sense that he would come home; come off of that mountain, with a confirmed direction for his life. He just knew that God had a big plan and that he would play a pivotal role.

He was expecting a nice quiet time in the mountains; he never expected the inner turmoil that a little down time

would generate. It was as if the devil himself had gone to the cabin with him. Most of the struggles had to do with the desire to be rich or famous. Jesus had never really wanted to be a celebrity, but he realized he could be rock star like Jerry Garcia or Jimi Hendrix if he would only practice more and devote his life to making it big. The stories about the great bluesman, Robert Johnson selling his soul to the devil were probably closer to the truth than most people believe. Today we might say that you would be selling your soul to RCA or Capital Records. They will tell you what to play, where to go and what to say in exchange for a stack of money, maybe. They may just rip you off, like they had so many others, and put you out like a stray cat.

He thought about starting a business that would make a lot of money, he could be the world's next billionaire. He liked to look at pictures in magazines of beautiful homes and fancy cars. He would sit back and dream about pulling up to the front of a big mansion in his new Porsche, and tossing the keys to his garage man to have it washed and put away. Of course, he didn't know of anybody who lived that way, but surely there were and it could be him. Each time he had this kind of idea, the other side of him would

say something like “this is not about you Jesus, the world doesn’t need another rock star or billionaire, the world needs peace, love and forgiveness. This is the message you are to take to the world.”

After a few weeks of rehearsing every possible scenario in his head, with Satan on one side and God on the other, he finally came to an understanding of who he was and what he needed to be doing with his life. He figuratively and mentally cast Satan out of his life and became more committed to his mission of love and reconciliation.

The Arrest of John

Back in Kansas he learned that John had been arrested on some trumped up charge. Basically he just looked suspicious. They mentioned vagrancy or inciting a mob. John didn’t really incite anybody that much and vagrancy just meant that they didn’t like his looks. In 1968, having long hair was enough to get you kicked out of restaurants or arrested for no apparent reason. If you were black and it was in the south, you didn’t even need that much.

John's arrest showed Jesus and his friends just how much work needed to be done to confront a society that was out of control. A society that insisted on conformity, but not conformity to moral character or hard work, but conformity to a vision best put forth by TV shows like "Leave it Beaver" or "Father Knows Best." Though few people said it out loud, the prevailing attitude of "successful" people was: "I got mine, too bad for you." Some people understood this too and were getting madder by the day.

Chapter Two

The Start of Ministry

Back in Manhattan, Jesus got together with some of John's friends. Andrew and Peter were there and Jesus began to share about his experiences in Colorado and his ideas of traveling around preaching and teaching.

Peter had the idea to put together a band. They would go to college towns, set up on street corners and play a few songs, when they had gathered a crowd, Jesus would begin his teaching. They all liked the idea and began to think about others who should join the group.

Phillip was the obvious choice because he not only had the chops, but he owned a cool PA system and some other stuff left over from his previous band. Phillip suggested Nathaniel. Nathaniel was skeptical about Jesus. He said, “Isn’t Jesus from Tonganoxie? Can anything good come from Tonganoxie?” Apparently he was under the impression that where you grew up somehow affected your vision and talent. But he was soon convinced and the small group began to make plans and gather the necessary gear.

Turning water to wine

In the meantime, Jesus’s cousin was getting married. In small towns it is assumed that everybody is invited so you never know who is going to show up. Jesus’s relatives never seemed to know when to go home, so the reception

went on into the night. Jesus was having a good time dancing and laughing with his friends and relatives that he had known his whole life when his mother, Mary, came up to him and mentioned that they were out of wine.

Jesus's first thought was "Good we can go home," but his mother was insistent that he do something about it. There weren't any stores open this time of night so he wasn't sure what she had in mind. He went into the kitchen and told the servers to just fill up the empty wine bottles with water. They did and went out and served the best wine ever from the bottles that had just filled from the tap. Some of the guests said, "Why were you holding out on us with the best wine? This is a lot better than the two-buck-chuck you served when we first got here." Jesus just laughed as Mary gave a puzzled look, but nobody said anything. Only the servers and few others knew what happened. Peter, Philip, and Andrew were there and saw the whole thing. Needless to say, they were impressed but they didn't really understand what happened. Maybe they thought that this would be a good time to go into business making wine from water. That would almost certainly make more money

than playing music and preaching on street corners, even if people tossed money in a basket or guitar case.

Overturning the tables

After this, Jesus, his mother, brothers, and some of the others decided to go to the lake for the weekend. On the way back that stopped at a church to worship. Jesus was appalled at all that was going in. They were raising money through raffles and playing bingo, selling tapes of the sermon series at a high profit and promising people special prayers if they would buy figurines and other little junky decorative items. He was so outraged he kicked over the tables and said, “How dare you turn a house of God unto a shopping mall.”

Needless to say, the people were upset with this, but it made some of them stop and think about what they were really doing. Did God call us to bake sales and church raffles to buy new choir robes? Or is there a bigger calling out there? Most however missed the point, insisted that Jesus pay for the damage, and went back to selling junk and

trying to figure out how to raise money for a new stained-glass window, and maybe some heavier tables this time.

The word of what had happened quickly spread to other churches in the area and some church leaders began to take their mission a little more seriously. A few even abandoned plans for a new organ and began to think about starting a pre-school for the poorest kids in town instead. A small number even began to realize that it was better to give than to get and maybe it was time to be more generous in the community and not be so intent on increasing the church budget or to get new hymnals.

It was now time to start the plan they had been working on. Peter was married by this time and his wife was game to hit the road with the rest. Jesus and Phillip traveled in his VW and Peter and his wife had another. Nathaniel picked up a used VW bus as well and they hit the road. They made quite a parade traveling down I-70 in a series of aging Volkswagens with assorted friends, wives, girlfriends, and musical instruments.

In each town they would set up on a busy street corner. Peter was the main singer and played fair guitar. Nathaniel

played bass and Phillip played an African drum of some sort. The others would dance around and try to get a crowd. When there was a sufficient number, Jesus would get up and start talking about the need to forgive one another. He had a consistent message of love and peace. Love just means treating people right. Treat them like you would like to be treated if you were in their shoes. He empathized with the poor and the less educated and always had a special message for the kids. He regularly spoke against a system that emphasized looking out for yourself and encouraged people to look out for one another and build a community of strong relationships. He would say that life is better together, not trying to outdo one another. If you feel the need to outdo your neighbor, outdo him by loving more, caring more and giving more.

You must be born again

One evening after dinner, a Jewish man named Nick came up to Jesus and began asking all sorts of questions. Eventually Jesus told Nick that he must be “born again.” Of course Nick had no idea what he was talking about. He was

thinking about going back to being a baby, but Jesus was speaking metaphorically as he often did. Jesus loved to tell stories and ask off the wall questions to make people think.

Finally Jesus made it as plain as he could. He said, “Nick, first a person is born physically. Everybody starts life as a baby. Your mother and father raised you and cared for you. Eventually you became an adult and started making important decisions about how you will live. A very important one concerns your spiritual life. You must be born spiritually to be connected with God’s spirit. This is a conscious decision that everybody must make. When you make that decision you really are starting over, you are a new person, forget all those old habits and stinking thinking. It is just like you have a new life. That is why I said you must be born again.”

Nick appeared to have gotten the point, but it was still a hard concept to everyone. Sometimes Jesus’ illustrations were just too obtuse to grasp the point he was trying to make.

The woman at the well

The United States was highly segregated in the 1960's especially in the south. Jesus was particularly concerned about inequality. Civil rights was the catch phrase, but Jesus always took it to mean love everybody regardless of where they are from or the color of their skin.

The group decided to take a swing down through the south to check out what was going on there. They had heard about marches and riots and people getting arrested for trying to make a stand. Surely it wasn't as bad as the news media had made it out to be.

They stopped at a service station for gas and left Jesus with the cars while the rest went inside to get something to drink. When they came out they were surprised to see him talking with a black woman. Not only was she black, but from the way she was dressed, well shall we say she looked like she had been down the wrong road too many times.

Jesus's friends were not sure what to think because, frankly, they had not had many chances to encounter people of other races. In the towns they were from, just about everybody was white, usually of German or Swedish descent. Everybody looked alike and pretty much thought

alike. Black people seemed kind of exotic to them and the culture of the south was particularly strange.

It was in Mississippi that they saw restrooms marked “white only” for the first time. Peter thought it was a joke. Why would anybody make a restroom white only? Then around back was an outhouse that said “colored” above the door? This all struck them as bizarre, but the locals didn’t seem to notice. In fact some people thought that they were being nice to provide an outhouse for the colored people to use. Making a big deal about what restroom somebody can use, has to be one of the biggest wastes of concern imaginable.

To Jesus, it was just a reminder of why they were here and the work that needed to be done. People would talk about loving one another and their wonderful hospitality and then refuse to eat in a restaurant with people who were different than they were.

Jesus was still talking with the black lady at the service station. She had not been allowed to go inside to buy something to drink so while Peter went in to buy her a bottle of pop, Jesus began this long story about “living

water.” She probably thought that he was going to have her house plumbed since she was living with her boyfriend in a house that didn’t have running water, but he was referring to himself and the life giving resources that come from knowing God. She eventually understood, primarily because he knew so much about her life and had a real empathy for her situation. She began telling all her friends about Jesus and the life-changing words that he had for her. The small group headed back to Kansas having had about all of the south and its bigotry that they could stand.

Foretelling his ministry

The next week Jesus was asked to do the scripture reading in his local church. He picked up the pulpit Bible and read the assigned passage. It was from Isaiah 61. He stood and read the passage:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because He has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

He started to sit down, but instead, paused and said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” This puzzled everybody, but he was referring to the work he had already begun. As expected, people began to ridicule him saying, “Who does who think he is? Isn't this Joe's son, the cabinet maker?” Jesus wasn't surprised. He reminded them that a prophet is always without honor in his hometown. The people of Liverpool didn't think much of the Beatles either.

Casting out demons

This seemed like a good time to hit the road again and headed toward western Kansas. They did their normal playing, singing and teaching routine, and they were accepted with open arms. People ate up what he had to say. In Hays they encountered a man who had gotten some really bad dope. It was as if he was possessed. In fact he was because the heroin had such a hold on him he couldn't

quit. The man shouted to Jesus, “Have you come to destroy me?” Jesus said, “Be quiet, come out of him.” He was speaking directly to the drugs. The man had a short convulsion and was immediately clear minded. Everybody was amazed, because everybody knew He had been an addict for a long time. The news spread throughout the whole county and beyond about the things Jesus was doing.

Soon addicts were showing up every day wanting Jesus to help then get clean and sober which He always did.

While in the western part of the state they stopped at Peter’s parent’s farm. Peter and Jesus met at the Union at K-State. Peter was an agriculture major and was pretty typical for the time in that in was sort of rough looking with shaggy hair and a beard. But Peter had a heart of gold and would do anything for anybody.

Farmers had had a couple of rough years with low yields and even lower commodity prices. Prices were now up, but it looked like it was going to be a slim harvest. The wheat looked really bad. The guys decided that they would pitch in and help Peter and his brother Andrew with the harvest.

In spite of the way it looked it was a record crop with sky high prices and everyone was ecstatic.

They then met up with two more brothers, James and John whose father was an old time farmer named Zebedee. John and James were invited to join up with the team.

Jesus said, “Don’t be surprised at God’s abundance. From now you will be harvesting men. The fields are ripe, but the workers are few. We need to get busy.”

Chapter Three

The small group decided to get busy traveling and teaching in earnest. They would go into small towns, park in the city park or a local campground. The band would start to play in the square or at a downtown street corner and Jesus would begin teaching after a crowd had gathered.

Sometimes they would be invited to speak at a church. When that was the case, they would lead worship and then

preach. Many churches would give them a love offering to help them out, but money never seemed to be a concern. Jesus would remind them that God has infinite resources, “all the cattle on a thousand hills,” as long as they were doing God’s ministry and teaching, money would not be an issue, and it wasn’t. Jesus often reminded his followers that they needed to lead lives marked by outrageous generosity, to give freely with what they had been given.

The message was always the same. God’s kingdom is near and it is different than the culture we are used to. God wants everybody to know Him. With that knowledge comes a peace with God and a love for other people. This love is demonstrated by an attitude of forgiveness, lack of prejudice, irrational generosity, kindness to strangers, and a genuine desire to see others do well.

As they traveled and taught, many people were also healed of various afflictions. Jesus would then withdraw to a quiet place and spend many hours praying. This was the normal routine: music, teaching, healing, and then he would go away and pray. The next day or maybe a few days later, they would pack up the small fleet of VW buses and head

down the road to the next town where they would do the same thing again.

The calling of Matthew

On one trip they came upon an IRS agent who was conducting an audit. His name was Matthew. He was so impressed with Jesus's teaching that He decided to resign his position and join Jesus and the others. But first he decided to have a dinner at the local country club to introduce Jesus to all his friends. There was the usual cocktails and expensive food, so of course the church leaders who had Jesus speak at their churches were upset that he would socialize with those "uppity" of people.

Jesus shrugged them off saying, "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. Besides, I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance."

By now Jesus had a big following, so he called the group together and chose twelve of them that he designated as apostles. They were Peter, Andrew, James, John, Phillip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, another guy named

James, Simon, Judas, and Judas Iscariot. This group of twelve served as the board of directors for the fledgling ministry. There is nothing magical in the number twelve except that this number insured that they had all of the gifts and abilities they needed, but the group was not so large as to make communication difficult.

The Sermon on the Mount

They decided it was time for a major event. They rented an amphitheater on a hill over-looking Tuttle Creek Reservoir. They hired a few more bands and a few of them gave testimonies of how their lives had been changed. Finally Jesus took the stage. He started out something like this:

(Beattitudes)

“You are at your best when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You are at your best when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're happiest when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're at your best when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're at your best when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

You're at your best when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family. Peacemaking between peoples, races, and even nations is one of God's highest callings. When nations go to war, the diplomats and negotiators who stop the war are the true heroes, not those who blindly follow orders to kill other people. Soldiers are the real victims in every war.

You're at your best when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into knowing God.

Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens for though they don't like it, God does and all heaven applauds. Know that you are in good company. Prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.”

He went on to talk about us having a larger purpose in life using the metaphors of salt and light. There is no such thing as darkness. Darkness is merely the absence of light. When there is no light, darkness prevails. He was talking about good and evil. Goodness drives out evil just as light drives out darkness. In the darkest room, even a very small light makes a huge difference. We should not hide our light but rather let our light shine so that people will see all that we do. In the process, they might see God more clearly.

Salt and Light

In these times, with modern news media, darkness gets first billing on the six o'clock news. It is very important that we are always working to get the light out there.

He also talked about salt as a preservative and adding flavor. Like salt, we need to make everything we touch just a little bit better.

Jesus then turned his attention to more practical matters. "Take killing for example. Our legal system has a definition for all types of killings, first degree murder, second degree murder, man-slaughter, vehicular homicide and self-defense just to name few. Then there are the government sanctioned killings such as capital punishment and acts of war. Jesus said that these are all bad, in fact, if you are angry enough or hate somebody enough, it is the same as killing them and you will be guilty before God on the Day of Judgment. If you have a gun in your house to protect yourself or your property, that means that you have decided in advance that your silverware or television set is worth more than somebody else's life. If you have a gun to defend yourself, are you sure that your life is more important than another person's life? Who appointed you

judge, jury, and executioner and the right to make an instant decision when someone threatens you? Who are you to make that decision?"

"If anybody has anything against you or you have a complaint against anybody else, forgive and reconcile as quickly as possible. Don't let these issues simmer. By the way, lawsuits are a pain for everybody and the only people who ever win are the attorneys. Be up front and deal with all conflicts immediately. So what if you don't always get your way? Settling conflicts is always about give and take. Don't expect to always win. Winning an argument isn't all it's cracked up to be, especially if you lose a friend in the process. "

Jesus then turned to sexual temptation. He said this was a huge issue with everybody regardless of their economic situation, gender or age. Everyone needs to be faithful to their spouse in all things and this includes even looking at someone and imagining having a sexual relation with them. He said to not even tempt yourself by reading magazines or books that might encourage you to be unfaithful. For men this might be magazines like Playboy or the Sports

Illustrated Swim Suit issue and for women it might be romance novels or the trashy grocery store magazines. Avoid those things if you want to lead a faithful and guilt free life.

Jesus reminded the crowd of the old saying, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” This is how wars get started, tit for tat. “They shot first.” He said to forget that nonsense. That is the opposite of love and peace. Forgiving one another is where it’s at, not always trying to get even. Remember that God said that revenge was His, not man’s. You cannot overcome evil with evil.

He said that the only way to stop an escalation in any conflict was to over react in the opposite direction. If someone hits you on the cheek, turn the other cheek. Go out of your way to help people and turn away anger. This is the opposite of human nature. Humanly speaking we like the eye for an eye bit, because we want to get even. But Jesus told us that God’s way is to always reply with kindness. If someone cuts you off in traffic, let them go first, what is a few minutes compared to a peaceful life. Remember the wise words of King Solomon from the

ancient book of Proverbs, “A harsh word stirs up anger, but a gentle word turns away wrath.”

Love your enemies

We tend to love our friends and hate our enemy, but Jesus said to love our enemies. “It’s easy to love our friends and all the lovely people around us that we care about. To love those who are mean to us, or who hate us because of the color of our skin, because we were born in another country, worship God in a different way, or we embrace a different form of government, that is a big deal. The guy next door who works on his race car in the middle of the night deserves your love. Maybe you should go see if he needs some help instead of calling the cops on him.”

“We have no control over where we were born or the color of our skin. We have no control over our gender or the economic situation of the family we were born into, therefore, why would we treat people any differently because of those things? Furthermore, there are things that people have some control over such as where they live,

how much education they have, or what they do for a living; don't treat people any different because of these things either.”

Jesus encouraged people to go down to the rescue mission where those who are homeless and down and out are. They need a lot of help and encouragement. They have not only run out of money, but run out of friends. They need people to help them learn the skills they need to get useful jobs and become productive members of society. They don't need people to yell at them or mistreat them. And they sure don't need people to print up a four foot long check and present it on TV to show how wonderful we are in “helping the poor.”

He told people to not make a big deal out of doing the right thing. God will reward us in the end.

Before he wrapped up the meeting on the hill at Tuttle, he turned to money. Everybody seemed uptight about money. It was a big deal to people who had a lot of money and a bigger deal to those that didn't have much.

Treasure in heaven

Jesus said to not lay-up treasures on earth because it is only temporary, but instead lay-up treasures in heaven. In other words, invest in eternal things, lives of people. “Cars, houses, televisions and boats will be in the junk yard before you know it. If you have ever spent thousands of dollars on a car and then 15 or 20 years later see it hauled to the crusher or setting on blocks behind a barn you know this is true. Jesus said to spend money on things that last, things that will encourage people to live their lives to the fullest. There is no better way to spend your time and money than helping people see God more clearly or helping them live the life God wants them to live. You can spend your money and time anyway you want, but you can only spend it once. Make it count.”

He reminded those there that nobody can serve two masters, especially when they are telling you two different things. “If you try to serve God and follow the principles of love, joy, peace and patience, if you are always kind and look out for the other guy, you are going to have a difficult

time serving the world's system and the popular culture of getting all you can get.”

“If you are not striving for the next raise or the next big payday, you will have a whole lot less to worry about. Worrying isn't going to make your life any longer; in fact worrying will shorten your life.” Jesus was pretty plain when he said that there was nothing to worry about in the grave.

The bottom line: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and everything else will fall into place.”

Jesus then spoke about being critical and judgmental of other people. “We don't know other people's situation, what they have been through. We almost certainly have our own issues anyway. Most of the time, we judge people on purely superficial things like their clothes, their job or lack of one, and the length of their hair or the color of their skin. We don't want people judging us like that. Besides, judging others is God's job, not ours.”

Jesus then closed the teaching time on the hill with prayer as he often did. He said, “When you pray, don't get all

caught up with formulas or reciting memorized prayers, just tell God what is on your mind. After all, praying is just talking to your best friend. He will always listen. He knows what you need but He wants to hear it from you. If you lack the things you need, maybe it is because you haven't asked Him for it. He has wonderful gifts just waiting for people to ask Him.”

As a last caution he reminded people to remember what he told them. “These teachings are like a solid rock. Build your house, your life, on solid ground, on a rock. Don't build your life on shifting sand of the latest fad. Storms will come along. Bad things will happen to you just like they do to everybody else. The lives built on solid ground will withstand the storms. Those built on sand or uneven ground will fall at the least amount of wind and rain. In this part of the country we have severe storms. We know that a house made of stone on a good foundation or a steel and concrete building will withstand the strongest wind, but a house of paper and sticks or a building made of lightweight tin, will blow down at the first sign of a storm. Likewise, build your life on a good foundation and make the house that is your life strong.”

As Jesus turned and walked off the stage, the crowd just stood there in amazement. They were used to teachers, professors, and even preachers who spoke like they didn't know what they were talking about (they didn't.) But Jesus spoke with such authority that they knew that what they had just heard was a life changing message – directly from God.

Chapter Four

In the coming days, large crowds followed him and the others wherever they went. Many wanted to be healed of diseases or addictions, while others just wanted to hear more of his life changing message.

By now, Peter had bought an old school bus and converted it to living space for him and his family. Some of the other apostles had similar arrangements, but Jesus kept his Volkswagen bus that he had since he first started the traveling ministry. Together, they formed an interesting parade of buses and vans as they traveled down the highway to the next town where they would set up camp.

The women would set up tables of food while the kids would kick a ball around or start an impromptu game of basketball.

This would serve as an introduction to the town as people were invited to come for something to eat and neighborhood kids would quickly join in the playing. They always shared freely whatever they had. Some of the guys would scout around and find a good place to have a meeting. They would play music, entertain the crowds, and start teaching and discussion groups.

Healing Peter's mother-in-law

On one trip they stopped at Peter's house where his mother-in-law was very sick. When Jesus touched her hand, her fever broke and she got up and began to insist that she fix them something to eat.

Drugs were very common at that time, even in the Midwest, and Jesus was able to help many people break out of the habits that seemed to possess them in a severe way.

Calming the storm

Once while in Missouri a few of them decided that they would take a ferry across a lake. Almost immediately a storm came up. Storms in that part of the country can come up quickly and can be surprisingly vicious. They were all very nervous and it looked like the ferry was going to sink, when Jesus got up and chastised the wind and immediately the wind and rain stopped and the water settled down.

The disciples had seen him do some amazing things, but calm a storm was really out there, even for Jesus.

Some people brought a man who was paralyzed to Jesus. They carried him in on an air mattress. Jesus saw the man, his friends and their faith and was impressed. He said, “Be strong, your sins are forgiven.” The preachers, politicians, and attorneys who were standing around were outraged. They said, “You just can’t go around forgiving people’s sins. No man can do that.”

The paraplegic

Jesus turned to them and said, “Is it easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or get up and walk? I could have done either one.” With that he turned to the man who was paralyzed and said, “Get up and walk,” and he did. He turned and walked home. Everybody was awe struck because they had known this man for a long time and had never seen him walk.

The Sabbath

A lot of people asked Jesus about the Sabbath. One of the Ten Commandments given to Moses was to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, but exactly what that means has always been sort of controversial. First of all, when God created the world in six days, or six eras, or six somethings, He rested on the seventh. So supposedly we should all rest on the seventh day, which is Saturday. Our Jewish friends and many others consider this to be from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday, but the early Christians

worshipped and met together on the first day of the week – the day we call Sunday.

The preachers and theologians were often giving Jesus trouble about whether or not he was properly observing the Sabbath. Of course they couldn't even agree on what day of the week it was. Finally he said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Of course this just made them mad. He even got in trouble for healing people on the day that they thought he should be following some sort of strict legality of doing nothing.

Jesus didn't have much use for these self-righteous types who cared more about following rules than loving people. This went double for politicians who passed laws that deported people or put others in jail instead of actually helping them have a better life or overcome bad situations. Jesus had seen too many people put in jail because they possessed some substance that the law consider bad. They probably did need some help to avoid these bad habits, but locking them up was not the answer. Other friends, who were born in other countries that were less prosperous, came here to better provide for their families. The

government frequently grabbed them and sent them back without making any effort to help them get their working papers in order. This kind of thing really bothered Jesus and he frequently spoke against such things.

Parable of the Sower

One day Jesus was teaching by a lake in an agriculture area. There were a lot of farmers there, so he began to talk about farming. He used the analogy of seeds, comparing them to God's word or teaching. He compared the various types of soil to people's hearts. Some were good soil, ready to receive the seeds and grow. Other people were like rocky soil, where the seed would be planted and then quickly die. Other people's lives are full of distractions like thorns and weeds and they just never get around to changing their lives because they are choked by weeds that are useless but take up all the energy and nutrition.

But just because the ground isn't ready for planting doesn't mean it is useless. Sometimes the job is picking up the rocks and throwing them aside, or pulling up the weeds to

prepare the soil. This is done by building friendships and relationships with needy people.

Sometimes there is a great crop; many people's lives are changed. Other times, the seed never takes root. The job for his followers is to plant seeds, God gives the increase as He sees fit.

That said, the more seeds planted, the better chance of a good harvest. "The measure you use is the measure you get back." "You reap what you sow."

Casting out demons

The next day they stopped by a cemetery to eat their lunch. A man came screaming out from between the tombstones where he lived. He had been in and out of mental hospitals, but the state closed the mental institutions and put him out on the street. Most people in the area knew him and left him alone.

He ran up to Jesus and fell on his knees saying, "What business do you have with me, Son of God? Don't hurt

me.” Jesus asked him his name and he said, “My name is Mob. I’m a rioting Mob.” And he begged Jesus not to banish the mob. Jesus then saw a herd of pigs nearby so he ordered the mob of demons into the pigs. The pigs then ran off a cliff into the lake and were drowned.

This caused a huge uproar in the town, but when the people came to see what was going on, they found the man sitting by Jesus, dressed normally, acting normal, and recounting the story in a rational way.

When Jesus and his followers were ready to leave, the man asked to go with them, but Jesus insisted that he stay there and tell everybody in the area what had happened to him. Needless to say, this became a big story and the man became a local hero and legend.

The Councilman’s daughter

A few days later they were in another town where a large crowd was gathering. One of the city leaders, named Jarius, came up to Jesus and said, “Please come to my house. My daughter is dying and you can help her.” So Jesus and the

crowd began making their way to the councilman's house, when suddenly Jesus said, "Who touched my jacket?" This was an odd thing to say because there were people all around pushing and shoving, jostling for position.

Jesus looked around and saw a woman crying. It turns out that she had been ill for 12 years with a hemorrhage and nobody could figure out how to stop it. She had been to a series of doctors, none of whom could do anything to help her. She said that she knew that if she could just touch Jesus's coat, she would be healed. She was right, the bleeding stopped immediately. Jesus was very impressed with her faith and told her, "What faith! You are healed, so live well and be blessed."

He continued on to the Councilman Jarius' house when a neighbor came up and said that the girl had died. Jesus didn't believe him, but continued to the house to see the girl. When they got there, there was a crowd bringing condolences and of course, covered dishes and casseroles. Jesus, Peter and John and the child's parents walked into the bedroom where the girl was on her bed. Jesus held her

hand and said, “Get up little girl.” And she got up, wiped her eyes and started walking around.

Everybody began to celebrate but Jesus said, “Let’s get her something to eat. She is hungry, and so am I.”

Next stop Tonganoxie.

Chapter Five

Without honor in his hometown

Jesus and the disciples found their way back to Tonganoxie and began to do the same type of singing and teaching that had become their norm in every other town. But this was different.

First, not many people came and then there was this murmuring about. People were saying, “We know this guy, he grew up here. What makes him so smart all of a sudden? He is just one of us.”

Jesus said, “I should have known, only in his hometown is a prophet without honor.” Even Jesus was surprised at the

lack of response in “Tongie.” He told his followers, “Let’s get back on the road where we were having success.”

Teaching in pairs

This time they decided to do something different. He sent the twelve out in pairs of two. Jesus told them to travel lightly this time. He said, “Don’t take any food, money, or extra clothes. Just live on what people give you, but keep it simple. You won’t need much. We want to give people an opportunity to be generous but don’t make them feel any obligation. Oh, and if they don’t accept you, don’t worry about it. Move on and don’t look back.”

They headed out teaching people about living simply in peace and harmony. They were able to do much healing, both spiritually and physically.

After the disciples got back together after traveling in pairs, they decided to have a little retreat and took a pontoon boat out on the lake for some down time.

Feeding the multitudes

People recognized them from the shore and began to gather from all the towns around. By the time they got back to the dock there were thousands of people waiting. Jesus was impressed with the crowd and had compassion on them and began to teach them all the sorts of thing about love, joy, and peace that He had been teaching all along.

As the day drew on, the disciples reminded him that the people were getting hungry and maybe they should send everybody away to try to find dinner on their own. Jesus said, “No we should be able to handle it; we can take care of their dinner.” To the disciples, Jesus clearly didn’t understand the situation. They said that it would take at least \$25,000 just to feed everybody, assuming they could even find a caterer.

Jesus asked how much food they had. A quick inventory found five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus said, “Have everybody sit down and start passing out the food.” He blessed the food and they started serving everyone. There were about 5,000 families represented and everybody had

all they wanted to eat. After the meal the disciples picked up twelve baskets of left-overs.

After the service and the big meal of fish sandwiches, Jesus told the disciples to go ahead and get in the boat and head out while He dismissed the crowd. He also wanted to go up on the hillside to do some praying.

Walking on water

By now it was late and the disciples were out in the lake still trying to get across because the wind had come up and it had become a struggle. Jesus decided to walk across the lake. He was planning to walk right past them when they saw him. They thought he was a ghost and it scared them to death. He calmed them down and climbed into the boat. Immediately the wind died down.

You would think the feeding more than five thousand people with a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread, and walking on water would be pretty impressive, but it only served to confuse the disciples. They still didn't get it.

The next day many of the people realized that Jesus was gone. They were confused because they knew only one boat left and he wasn't in it. Eventually they figured out that he had gotten to the other side somehow, so a number of people traveled around the lake to catch up with him.

Jesus realized that they were at least, to some degree, looking for a free meal. He saw this as a teachable moment and began to tell them about the folly of just working for food, or struggling for the bare essentials of life. Jesus reminded them, or kept telling them, that true joy is not in filling your bellies, but in living for God, keeping His commandments.

They asked which commandments they must follow to earn God's favor. Jesus said that the work of the Father was to believe in the one He has sent. This led to a big discussion with the crowd trying to figure out who God had sent. They talked about God sending manna from heaven in the time of Moses. Jesus once again pointed out that they were trying to follow rules and get food. Most people follow the rules of their job to get paid to buy food so they can work some more. This is not what life is about. Sure it is

important not to starve, but true life comes from feeding on God's word and the person God sent and following his teaching of love and forgiveness.

The Bread of Life

Finally some of them said, "OK gives us this bread you are talking about." Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life." Others said, "Come on now. What are you trying to prove? We know you are Joe and Mary's son from Tonganoxie."

Jesus kept referring to himself being the "Bread of Life" that some began to think he was talking about actually eating him, as in cannibalism. Of course, they were put off and some left in disgust. Even those that stayed were confused, wishing he had done a better job of explaining what he was talking about.

Chapter Six

On another day in another town, Jesus and his followers were sitting around having lunch at the park when some area politicians and pastors came up to them and challenged them about the way they were eating. First of all, they didn't appear to ask the blessing on the food, their manners were bad, and most importantly they could not pass the strict health code laws. The law clearly states that dishes have to be washed a certain way, that knives used for cutting meat can't be used on fruit and vegetables, and besides, the cook had long hair and no hair net. They could go on, but they got the idea.

Jesus just looked at them. After a few minutes He answered. "So let me get this straight, you take away people's kids for the crime of letting them walk to school by themselves, but then let anybody who wants to carry a gun do so without a permit or background check. You encourage weak people to squander their pay checks on state sponsored gambling and then make it all but impossible for them to go to college because you won't subsidize state universities. You preachers are concerned

about the traditions of the church such as what colors to wear on certain days of the year and whether to sing from hymnals or projected words, when there are people killing each other outside your door. And then your biggest concern is whether my friends and I are using the right fork.”

He then turned to the people standing nearby and said, “It is not what goes into your mouth that pollutes the body, but what comes out. In other words, what or how we eat is nothing compared to what we say or do.”

Peter's Confession

One day when they were on the road to the next town, Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Who do people say that I am?” Peter said, “Man, they are all over the place. Some Jews think you are Elijah that they have been waiting for; others think you are a prophet or some guru or wise man.” “What about you Peter, who do you think I am?” Peter said, “Without a doubt, you are the Christ, the Messiah we have been waiting for.”

Jesus said, “That is correct. Only God could have revealed that to you. And do you know something else Peter, upon this rock I will build my church and I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus had given Simon the nickname “Peter” which was sort of a pun on *petra* which meant rock. Jesus was always a kidder and one never knew for sure what he was talking about or when he was serious. Some thought that Jesus meant that Peter was the rock that the church would be built on, to the point that they believed an actual big basilica would be built on top of his grave. Others thought he meant that the statement “You are the Christ” was the rock or unmoving foundation of the church. He may have meant both. He would often use clever comments or ambiguous language. Whatever the intent, Jesus said to not talk about it for a while because there was still a lot of work to be done.

After that Jesus began talking a lot about the end of his earthly ministry. He didn’t mean that he was going to retire or just that his work would be done. He didn’t mean that he was going go back to school to finish his MBA. He meant that he was going to be killed. Every time he would start talking that way, Peter or another of his followers would

chastise him saying, “Don’t talk that way, we will never let that happen.”

But Jesus said, “You don’t get it. I must suffer and die, and if you are going to follow me, you will suffer and perhaps die as well. Everybody is going to die, so if you spend your whole life trying to stay alive, you will miss living and die anyway just like everybody else. Whoever is not busy living is busy dying. I have come that you might have life and have it to the fullest. You can’t have that if you are only concerned about saving your own skin and staying comfortable. Furthermore, what can you give in exchange for your soul? Don’t worry; you will be rewarded grandly on the last judgement day.”

The Transfiguration

The next week they were in Colorado. Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to the top of Pikes Peak. They had been there before and the weather was always unpredictable. Sometimes there was blazing sun and sometimes blinding snow. But this time was totally different. The sun shone on

Jesus's face and He began to glow and suddenly Peter, James, and John realized that Moses and Elijah were standing there having an important conversation with Jesus. Peter said, "This is really cool, let's build a monument to this occasion." While he was still talking a bright cloud enveloped them and a voice said, "This is my Son whom I love, in whom I am well pleased, listen to Him."

Naturally the three fell face-down on the ground, but Jesus told them to get up and not be afraid. When they got up they were the only ones there. On the way down the mountain, Jesus swore them to secrecy until after he was gone. Of course they had a lot of questions. How did they know what Moses and Elijah looked like, but also, wasn't Elijah supposed to come back before the Messiah? That is the Jewish tradition. Jesus said that Elijah had already come. We called him John the Baptist. Then it started making sense.

The fish and the coin

He healed a few more people in Colorado before heading back to Kansas. Back in Manhattan, it was time to pay property tax on their vehicles. Jesus told Peter to go out to Tuttle Creek, drop a fishing line in the lake. The first fish he caught would have a twenty-dollar gold piece in its mouth. That should cover the taxes. Peter did as told and paid the taxes.

A servant leader

As they sat down for dinner, everybody was pretty quiet. Jesus finally asked what they had been talking about on the road. Nobody said anything because they had been arguing about who was greatest among them. Finally Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be great among you must become the least among you. Whoever wants to be a leader must become a servant.” He called over one of the kids and said, “If you don’t become humble like this child, you will never enter the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, whoever welcomes a little child like this, welcomes me.” He went on to say that if anyone misled or did harm to one of these little ones, he would wish that he had never been born.

Jesus continued to talk about their disagreements. He said, “This is trivial, but if it were a serious issue, you need to talk it out between the two of you. If you can’t reach an agreement, bring in a third party to help mediate. Finally, bring it to the larger community. If everyone agrees that one party is totally wrong and out of line and is not willing to change, expel them from the group. You cannot stand to have someone who is disagreeable being part of the close knit community. Don’t go around suing each other. That only causes bitterness and the only winners are the attorneys.”

Chapter Seven

Mary and Martha

Mary and Martha were sisters and good friends of Jesus, and his entire group of friends for that matter. They would often travel with the troupe, cooking, watching the kids, or doing whatever chores needed to be done. They were part of the community and believers in Jesus and the work.

One day they stopped at Mary and Martha's house for a meal and to rest. Martha, as you would expect, was busy getting things ready. She had been busy cleaning and cooking, making sure that everything was just right. Jesus didn't actually visit in their home that often, so she wanted to make a good impression. In fact, it was just the right thing to do. Martha had always prided herself in being a good hostess and believed she had the gift of hospitality. She did. Their home was always a welcoming place.

On the other hand, Mary was interested in hearing what Jesus had to say. They had not been out on the latest trip and she wanted to catch up and see what kind of new teaching or insights He had discovered. Martha was noticeably frustrated and asked Jesus to send Mary into the kitchen because she needed some help.

This is the kind of issues that come up in a community. Which is more important, serving or learning? Listening or working? Jesus told Martha to calm down; pointing out that Mary had chosen the better thing. Not that serving and preparing food were not important, but sometimes just

being with friends and learning from one another was the best way to spend our time.

The raising of Lazarus

Mary and Martha also had a brother named Lazarus. One time Lazarus got very sick so Mary and Martha sent for Jesus to come and see what he could do for him. Jesus was tied up at the time, but he came when he could. Before he got there, Lazarus died and Mary and Martha were furious that Jesus hadn't come right away because they thought that he might have been able to help him. Of course, Jesus was upset too. Not only for the loss of his friend, Lazarus, but also for the grief that Mary and Martha were going through.

They decided to go to the funeral home where Lazarus' body was being prepared for burial. Jesus looked at the body in the casket and said, "Lazarus, get up." Lazarus opened his eyes, looked around and got up out of the casket, got in the car and went home. Needless to say,

everyone present was dumbstruck. It was a totally amazing thing.

The rich young businessman

One day when they were out on a speaking tour, a successful young businessman came up to Jesus and asked, “What must I do to get to heaven?” Jesus said, “Well you know the commandments, honor God with all you heart, mind and soul, don’t steal, don’t murder, don’t covet, don’t lie, honor your father and mother, all that stuff.” The man answered that he knew all that and had always tried to do the right thing. So Jesus said, “Well then, go sell all you have and give to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven, then come and follow me.”

The young man went away disappointed because he had a lot of investments and possessions that he couldn’t or wouldn’t give up. His worldly possessions had clouded his spiritual vision. Jesus just looked at him and said, “It is really hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. You don’t own stuff, the stuff owns you and won’t let go. It

is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God - a snowballs chance in hell.” Jesus didn’t mean that everyone should sell everything and give it to the poor; he meant that we should get rid of everything that is keeping us from God. It could very well be our money. If a person seeks to get rich, it is going to be very hard for him to understand or be a part of the Kingdom of God.

His disciples asked him who then could be saved. Jesus said that with God anything is possible, yes, anything is possible. Even a rich man can get to heaven through God’s grace and mercy.

The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son

Jesus liked to tell “Lost and Found” stories. He would talk about the shepherd who had a hundred sheep but one of them wandered off. The shepherd would leave the flock and go looking for the lost sheep. When he found it he would celebrate. Even though he had a hundred sheep, one was still very important.

He told about the lady that had ten coins but lost one of them in her house and would sweep and clean and move everything until she found the coin.

A favorite story was the lost son. A man had two sons and one day the younger son decided that he would go off to the city to seek his fortune. He took his share of the family money and left. Of course as you might expect, he lost everything and had to humbly return home, just looking for a job at the family farm. Instead of reprimanding him and scolding him for being so stupid, his father welcomed him back and threw a big party.

Instead of joining the party, the other son was very upset, pointing that he was the one that stayed home and worked hard every day. His good-for-nothing brother blows half the family fortune, and you give him a party? Jesus's point was that God always welcomes us back and is even willing to go out looking for the lost sheep, coin, or son. It was too bad that the older brother didn't share the father's heart and love for the younger brother. The implication is that we are often too quick to rush to judgement and not welcoming the lost back home, just like the older brother in this story.

Parable of the talents

Another time Jesus told the story about a man going away for an extended business trip. This guy had three people working for him, managing his investments. Sort of at random, he gave one person \$50,000, another \$20,000 and the last one \$10,000. He told them they could do whatever they wanted with the money, but when he returned he expected an accounting of what they had done.

At the end of the allotted time, he called in the employee that he had given \$50,000 to. The employee presented a financial statement showing he had doubled the money, earning a good return. The owner was very happy and gave that employee a big raise and more responsibility. He then called in the person he had given the \$20,000 to. Same story. He doubled the money to \$40,000. The owner said, "Great job," and gave him a raise and a promotion as well.

Then he called in the employee he had entrusted the \$10,000 to. This person proudly gave back the \$10,000 saying they had carefully hidden it away to protect. He

knew that the owner would be mad if he had lost any of the money through bad investments, so he kept it safe.

The owner was furious and fired the employee on the spot and gave the \$10,000 to the first employee who was faithful with \$50,000.

Jesus liked this story because it illustrated that God has given each of us gifts and opportunities and expects us to use them to the best of our abilities. Not everybody gets the same amount, but we will be judged on what we did with the amount we were given. Hiding our gifts is not an option. We also can't compare ourselves with the person who was given more.

There could be a lot of versions of this story. What if one of the investors had lost money or one had tripled the amount? Jesus's point was that we are all different, with different opportunities and gifts. Getting out there and doing our best with what we have is all that God, the owner of it all, expects.

One time the followers came to Jesus and said that your mother and brothers are here to see you. Jesus said that my

family is the people who love me and follow my teaching. It is great to have a genetic family, but our real family is the people that we live, work, and serve God with.

Chapter Eight

Jesus often talked about going to Washington. His followers discouraged this. Traveling around in small towns, talking to ordinary people was one thing, but going to the capital and drawing the attention of the leaders that were set on maintaining the status quo at all cost was something completely different.

Washington was made up of a lot of special interest groups that maintained a careful balance of objectives.

First were the Wall Street bankers and the big money interest in general. Jesus's talk about giving away money or even that money wasn't everything was sure not to set well with them. Telling farmers that money was not the most important thing in life was one thing, but telling that to the high rollers on Wall Street was something else. Saying that

the love of money was the root of all kinds of evil would not win friends on Wall Street or Washington.

The bankers got along fine with the second group, the war-mongers, or the “Military-Industrial Establishment” as some called them. Some people in this group thought that the problems of the world could be solved by whoever had the most bombs or the fastest airplanes. Others believed that the billions of dollars flowing out of Washington to keep building weapons and pay military personnel was the backbone of the economy. Either way, Jesus’s insistence on being peacemakers and reaching out to our enemies didn’t fit their plans.

Of course there were people in Washington who wanted to help the poor, or build better schools, or improve transportation, but they all had different approaches, and different ideas and injecting Jesus’s ideas about love, forgiveness, community and working together wasn’t really part of anybody’s plan.

Still, Jesus insisted that he needed to go to Washington to try to talk to some people in authority, even if the worst would happen, which it might.

He was already getting a lot of criticism in the news. News media would sometimes report about a gang of “hippies” traveling around disrupting towns and preaching revolutionary ideas. In a sense this was true. Some people called them hippies because of their appearance and their general disregard for fashion and Jesus’s teachings were indeed revolutionary, but the idea of a revolution, meaning over-throw of the government, was certainly not what he had in mind. The hope was that they would be disruptive to the status quo and the “Stinkin’ Thinkin’” that they saw all around them.

The media got more interested when he began telling people that he was going to Washington. There speculation that he might run for office, have a sort of “Million Man March,” or maybe make a big speech on the Washington Mall as others had done.

Actually, his plans were a lot less grandiose. Many of his followers had heard that he was coming and wanted to have a parade or at least some sort of gathering. But he tried to think of how to make humble entrance. He decided to just do the normal thing and fly in. There were crowds at the

airport waiting for him to make a speech, but he didn't make any grand comments or do anything he hadn't been doing for the past three years.

That evening they all got together for dinner. After they had finished eating, Jesus passed around some bread. He said, "This bread represents my body. I want you to use it to ceremonially remember me. Whenever you eat it, remember my body broken for you." Then he poured everybody some wine and said, "And this wine represents my blood. Whenever you drink it, remember me." All of his followers who were there ate the bread and drank the wine and nodded in agreement, even though they didn't really understand what he was talking about.

Soon the authorities were alerted to his whereabouts. He had been on a FBI watch list as suspected revolutionary, so they knew which plane he was on and followed him to his hotel. The plan was to wait for him to make some sort of minor infraction and then arrest him before he had a chance to make any speeches or public appearances that might stir up trouble.

When he didn't do as much as walk against a traffic light they decided to make up something and arrest him anyway. The usual routine was to plant drugs on somebody and then arrest them for possession of a controlled substance. With Jesus's reputation of helping people get off of drugs, that would hardly be believable, so they decided that conspiracy would be more believable in Jesus's case since he had preached in clearly revolutionary terms. They followed him for several days trying to gather evidence of a conspiracy.

The arrest of Jesus

Meanwhile, Jesus and his followers went to Lafayette Park near the White House to pray for the country and what they might do next. Jesus somehow knew that he was going to be arrested. He had heard that there was talk of conspiracy charges, and no matter how vague that was, it was very serious. Jesus prayed all night, even as his followers went to sleep. He prayed that if there was any way that what was going to happen be avoided that God, his father, would intervene.

The FBI had paid Judas \$3,000 to make a positive ID on Jesus, so they wouldn't arrest the wrong person. To the FBI all of those long-haired hippie freaks looked alike. The cops came to the park as planned and Judas pointed out Jesus to them. Peter came out swinging, but Jesus stopped him and went peaceably with the police.

Peter and the followers tried to find out where he was taken, but nobody seemed to know. The papers the next day carried the story that the police had thwarted a conspiracy by arresting the leader of a group intent on overthrowing the government. The group was in Lafayette Park getting ready to attack the White House. The story didn't mention that they had no weapons and had made no indications that they were planning any hostile or violent action.

The death of Jesus at the hands of the authorities

Jesus was beaten in the police van even though he never put up a struggle. He was then denied the medical attention that he needed. That night, the police took him to a court and tried to get the judge to sentence him on the spot. But

the judge would have nothing to do with it and basically walked away without taking any action one way or another. He was then tortured in jail as his accusers tried to get him to admit to a conspiracy and identify his co-conspirators. Of course this was not the case but they kept attacking him anyway. As he was near death, He cried, “Father, forgive them because they don’t know what they are doing.” This outraged the attackers and they proceeded to kill him. He died a tortuous death at the hands of the authorities, even as he forgave them, and at the same time, questioned why God had forsaken him.

Jesus’s followers were understandable horribly dejected. They had no plans beyond following Jesus to the end, and this looked like the end. They did not understand that Jesus’s tortuous death at the hands of the authorities had paid the price for the sins of everyone who chose to accept his gift of forgiveness. Instead, they met in Peter’s hotel room and began to pray about heading back to Kansas.

Burial

Meanwhile, Nick, remember Nick from the earlier “Born Again,” discussion went to the coroner and got Jesus’s body, took it to a funeral home and had it prepared for the burial. They decided to use a local cemetery rather than go to expense of shipping the body back to Tonganoxie.

The Resurrection

Two days later they all began making plans to head home and probably split up the group. It had been a great three years, but now it was over. Some of the women decided to visit the grave site one more time before they headed out, but when they got there it was clear that something was wrong. The grave had been disturbed. There was a person standing nearby that they presumed to be the caretaker. He said that He is gone, He has risen.

They didn’t know what to think, so they ran back to the hotel to get the rest of the people that were still in town. Back at the cemetery it was clear that he was gone. Either someone had stolen the body, or a miracle had happened and he had risen from the dead.

Some of the group had already started to drive back home when suddenly Jesus appeared in the van with them. He talked with them awhile and then was gone. Later those who were flying back saw Jesus in the plane with them.

When they got back to Kansas, Jesus's followers decided to go fishing and try to digest all that had happened. While they were in the boat on the lake somebody called to them from the shore. They soon realized it was Jesus. He cooked the fish they had caught, they all sang some songs, and talked about all that had happened. He made sure that they understood that he had paid the price for their lives with his life. They were now free because they had been bought with his blood.

In the next forty days he traveled around visiting with some of the people he had met on his travels and encouraging them to keep the faith. He met with over five hundred people during that time.

The Great Commission

Near the end of the forty day period he was having lunch with his followers when they asked him what was next. What was the plan? He said, “All authority has been given to me, now then go and make disciples among all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and teach them to do all the things that I told you. And surely I am with you always to the end of time.” And with that he disappeared into the clouds. As they were standing there dumfounded, two men in white stood with them and said, “Why do you stand here looking up, this same Jesus who was taken from you into heaven will return the same way you saw him go into heaven?”

After that, his followers began traveling around on their own, starting churches, leading Bible studies, teaching youth groups, writing books, in general doing just what Jesus told them and taught them about showing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and all with irrational generosity to everyone regardless of who they were or where they came from. They taught that Jesus had indeed paid the price of sin with his sin-free life and death, and that He rose from the dead, like he said he would, to prove that everything he said and did was true.

Millions of people put their faith in him and accepted his free gift of forgiveness and began living fulfilled lives of love, joy, and peace and continue to do so every day since.

Conclusion

If you noticed a similarity between Jesus of Kansas and Jesus Nazareth who lived 2,000 years ago, great. He really did teach a message of love and forgiveness and he wants us to have a full and abundant life by putting our faith in Him and His message of reconciliation.

