

The Son of God Among Us



“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NIV).

Time to Be Called Out

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 23:12

I remember it well. It was a Sunday, and I was with my best friend. During the past two months God had called me out from my home city and brought me to a Christian couple that gave me a job, a place to stay, and an environment in which I could see life differently.

I was not a Christian nor was I raised with Christian beliefs. As far as I knew, life was mine until I burned it out. I did whatever I wanted to find satisfaction, but never really got it. So when I figured that I had done everything under the sun, God called me out.

I moved in with this couple, and went to work—16 hours some days, on my knees banging hardwood floors down into new homes. You see, God had to break me down. I was like a wild horse, and stubborn like a mule. I had been broken physically, and I was in excruciating pain. Then my best friend said to me, “Why don’t you ask Jesus to heal you?”

That night, lying in bed, I would never have asked Jesus to do that if God had not broken me. I was too smart for this Jesus stuff.

But I did ask, and the next morning I was out of pain, physically. I attributed some of this to coincidence, but I was also smart enough to let go and let God heal me if He was ever going to use my life. From then on, Jesus was more real to me than my whole

I was like a wild horse . . .

life had ever been. In the pulpit, the pastor spoke to me, but it was actually God, not the pastor. He said things to me that had plagued me for decades, that removed the garbage from me. He said things that you would expect if the King of the universe were to speak to you. I can’t deny it. He answered my life questions. There was no mysticism, no magic, no fear or trembling. Instead, Jesus came to me like a father comes to his broken son.

Was Jesus among us two thousand years ago, and is He here today? The answer is a resounding Yes! The proof is found in asking Him to share with you that He died to give you everything. As you study this week’s lesson, listen to what He is saying to you. Don’t be too smart for that Jesus stuff.

Who Cares?

EVIDENCE

John 1:14

These days it seems as though we have more things to be thankful for than any previous generation. So why are we finding ourselves in deeper and deeper despair?

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control's 2004 report, more than 30,000 people in that country took their lives by suicide in the year 2002. That same year, more than 130,000 people were hospitalized after a suicide attempt. Drug use and teen pregnancy is rising at an alarming pace in our society.

Why do we, who have so much, find ourselves lacking so much hope? Where can we find the hope for the present and future?

The answer is Jesus. When His created beings didn't worship Him, He didn't just abandon them. Rather, He saved them, and therefore us, from eternal death by becoming one of us and dying the second death of eternal separation from God. That same Jesus also wants to hear our little problems in life. He will comfort us if we are hurting from a broken relationship with a special friend. He knows that we are worried about passing finals, getting a job, or our newborn being healthy. In Luke 12:7 He tells us that He cares enough

He didn't just abandon them.

about us to know how many hairs are on our head. And whenever we are in despair and in need of a friend, Jesus will give us rest from the world of trouble (Matt. 11:28).

Knowing that Jesus cares for us will help us live a happier and more fulfilling life. According to the Department of Health and Human Services in the United States, people who regularly attend religious meetings have significantly lower rates of cigarette, alcohol, and drug consumption.* And the November 2005 issue of *National Geographic* magazine states that Adventists live longer, healthier lives than non-Adventists. Living according to Jesus' principles will enrich your life here on earth as well as in heaven, because He cares about all of us.

REACT

How can we convince others who do not have the same faith as ours that Jesus died for everyone?

* "Religious Involvement and Substance Use among Adults," The National Survey on Drug Use and Health Report, March 23, 2007. Retrieved November 13, 2007 from (<http://www.drugabusestatistics.samhsa.gov/2k7/religion/religion.cfm>).

Monday
July 21

Whistleblower Walks the Talk!

LOGOS

Matt. 23:23; John 1:29, 12, 40, 41; Mark 9:12

Authenticity and Consistency (Matt. 23:23)

A *whistleblower* is someone who calls attention to problems before they cause great damage. Jesus was a *whistleblower* when He exposed corruption in the temple and among religious leaders. The Gospels show Jesus' authenticity in stark relief against surrounding hypocrisy. While the religious leaders said one thing and did another, He walked His talk, faithfully putting His words into action. The only certainty with hypocrites is their inconsistency. They say one thing while doing just the opposite! In speaking against their hypocrisy, Jesus noted the Pharisees' commitment to tithing. However, He also called for consistency and commitment to more important issues like justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt. 23:23).

In this situation, Jesus was an agent of hope. Yet, "the Pharisees thought themselves too wise to need instruction,

Jesus was an agent of
hope.

too righteous to need salvation, too highly honored to need the honor that comes from Christ."¹ So Jesus turned to fishermen, prostitutes, and tax collectors. Their changed lives

are evidence that they believed Jesus was who He claimed to be.

The Dividing of Time and Opinion (John 1:29; 7:12, 40, 41; Mark 9:12)

By His birth Jesus divided time. By His claims He divides opinion. Jesus' family, friends, followers, and detractors all had an opinion about Him. Then as now, public opinion was divided. John 7:12 identifies Jesus as a "good man" and conversely as one who deceives people. Some identify Him as a Prophet, others as the Christ, and still others say this cannot be so (John 7:40, 41).

Everyone who encounters Jesus must determine the validity of His message and their response to Him. John the Baptist and Mark authenticated Jesus by referring to ancient prophecies found in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, which Jesus would soon fulfill (Mark 9:12; John 1:29). Sadly, the prophecy of rejection continues to be fulfilled today.

Luke, writing with the benefit of hindsight, was more concerned about recent predictions than ancient ones, recalling after the resurrection what Jesus had predicted about His trial, death, and resurrection (Luke 9:22; 18:32, 33; 24:7). Luke is satisfied that Jesus indeed "walked the talk."

Paul, initially a hostile witness, accepts Jesus as authentic, concluding He is “now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9, NIV).

After hearing what others said, Jesus asked His disciples, “ ‘But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?’ ” (Matt. 16:15, NIV). The disciples had been His constant companions for a year or more and had observed evidences of His divinity, so Peter replied unequivocally, “ ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ ” (Matt. 16:16, NIV).

But what if Jesus were to ask you who you say He is? His question does not ask who do you *know* or who do you *think* Jesus is? *Knowing* and *thinking* are cognitive functions and are entirely internal events; but *saying* who He is means communicating, sharing that knowledge and those thoughts with others. By your *words* and *actions*, who do you say Jesus is?

Atheists believe there is no God. Jews see Jesus as a nationalistic Jew whose preaching angered the Romans, and they subsequently executed him.² Muslims see Jesus as a great prophet.³ Scoffers question the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection and make Him a mere mortal.⁴ However, few are as qualified to comment on Jesus’ identity as Dr. E. M. Blaiklock, former professor of classics at Auckland University. He writes, “I claim to be an historian. My approach to classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history.”⁵

What does your life say about who Jesus is?

REACT

Why is it easier to say with words than actions who Jesus is?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 279.

2. Katz, L. (2007). “Who was Jesus?” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from <http://judaism.about.com/od/beliefs/a/jesus.htm>.

3. Wolfe, M. (n.d.). “Jesus Through a Muslim Lens.” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from <http://www.islamfortoday.com/wolfe2.htm>.

4. Oser, S. (August 15, 1994) “Historicity of Jesus FAQ.” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/scott_oser/hojfaq.html.

5. McDowell, J. (July 13, 2002). “Evidence for the Resurrection.” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from <http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html>.

Tuesday
July 22

Who Made the Top Ten?

TESTIMONY

Matt. 20:25–28

“In the estimation of heaven, greatness of character consists in living for the welfare of our fellow men, in doing works of love and mercy.”¹

“When Jesus said of the widow, She ‘hath cast in more than they all,’ His words were true, not only of the motive, but of the results of her gift. The ‘two mites which make a farthing’ have brought to God’s treasury an amount of money far greater than the contributions of those rich Jews. The influence of that little gift has been like a stream, small in its beginning, but widening and deepening as it flowed down through the ages. . . . Her example of self-sacrifice has acted and reacted upon thousands of hearts in every land and in every age.”²

“[Abraham’s] own example, the silent influence of his daily life, was a constant lesson. . . . In his household there was not one law for the master and another for the servant; a royal way for the rich and another for the poor. All were treated with justice and compassion, as inheritors with him of the grace of life.”³

“What are we giving for
Him?”

“Christ has left us a wonderful example of self-sacrifice. He pleased not Himself, but spent His life in the service of others. He made sacrifices at every step, sacrifices which none of His followers can ever make,

because they have never occupied the position He occupied before He came to this earth. He was commander of the heavenly host, but He came here to suffer for sinners. He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. Because He loved us, He laid aside His glory and took upon Him the form of a servant. He gave His life for us. What are we giving for Him?”⁴

REACT

If you ranked the influences in your life, would Christ make the top ten?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 613, 614.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 616.

3. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 194.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

How to Find Jesus in Everyday Life

Wednesday
July 23

HOW-TO

John 1:4, 5, 10–14

With everything that's happening in the world, it's a miracle that some mornings we can find the strength to face the day. This is why it's so essential for people to recognize that even though Jesus returned to heaven, He continues to be with us. Knowing this makes it much easier to face each new dawn and to relish the opportunity to live it.

Unfortunately, remembering that Jesus is with us is not always easy. Work, school, family, finances, and other demands of life, all play a part in keeping our minds and bodies occupied. We need to take a breath and stop to focus on what's truly important. Once we've done that, tackling stress not only becomes easier but begins to take on a certain insignificance when we see it in light of Jesus' life.

To help yourself find reminders of Christ's presence in everyday life, practice the following:

1. *Build a strong relationship with Jesus.* The closer you are to Him, the easier it will be for you to recognize the miracles He is performing in your life. Meditating daily on His Word and praying often will help you to solidify your relationship with Him (Ps. 119:97, 105; Eph. 6:18).

**Even within the hardships,
God plants seeds of hope.**

2. *Expect small blessings to have a big impact.* A phone call from a friend or a favorite song played on the radio at just the right time can be signs of His presence just as much as huge, over-the-top signals. (1 Kings 19:10–13).

3. *Focus on the good things in life.* Every day we are bombarded with tragedy from the morning paper to the evening news, making it easy to lose sight of what is good in life. Even within the hardships, God plants seeds of hope. Do not forget to nurture those seeds (Phil 4:8).

When you remember to practice these three things, the joy in life takes over. Anger, bitterness, and resentment wash away, and in their place come joy, happiness, and fulfillment. Knowing that there are signs of Jesus around you everywhere is the biggest thrill you can experience.

REACT

Why is it so easy for even the most faithful Christians to overlook what Jesus is doing for them in their lives?

Thursday
July 24

A Messenger to the Deaf and Blind

OPINION

John 1:10–14

The Son of Man was here on our planet, a missionary to us all. He came to die on the cross so that we could have eternal life. Many people saw Jesus on earth. They became His disciples and His friends. We know He was here because the Bible tells us so in John 1:10–14: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (NIV).

He is calling us to go home with Him, if only we would believe He is the Son of God, our Savior. John 3:16 says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one

“You can’t handle the truth.”

and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’” (NIV). But many in the past and today claim deafness and blindness. We look the other way when we see evidence that Jesus is the

Son of God, because, as Jack Nicholson said in the film *A Few Good Men*, “You can’t handle the truth.”

As a student missionary in Pohnpei, Micronesia, I experienced being a stranger in a new place. But unlike Jesus, I was blessed with friendly faces and open arms from people such as my host family. I was a teacher, and my students could see I was there, right in front of them, standing in their classroom, teaching them math, science, reading, and about Jesus’ love for them. When I left Pohnpei, they told others that I had been there. The truth that I was there is a fact, just as Jesus was here on earth, preaching and teaching and inviting us to accept Him.

REACT

1. How does the fact that Jesus died for us on the cross make Him more real to us today?
2. What can you do in your life to make Jesus real to those around you?

A Work in Progress

EXPLORATION

John 1:1–18

CONCLUDE

Most historical biographies are written about remarkable people after they've died. In some respects, this is true of Christ in that He was a historical figure who lived in time and space. In another sense, however, Christ's biography is still being written. The best part is that we all have a role in the continuing story . . . and we know how the story ends!

CONSIDER

- Charting the different ways people view Christ. Be sure to include the category you fall into.
- Keeping a list of all your blessings—big and small—for one day. Also include your reactions to each blessing.
- Comparing different views of Christ that you've held at different times in your life and reflecting on whether you're happy with how you view Him at this particular point in time.
- Researching historical evidence regarding the life of Jesus.
- Listening to various songs about Jesus and identifying what the songs focus on and what they neglect. What would you include or exclude if you were to write a song about Him, and why?
- Writing your own biography of Jesus by having people answer the question, "Who do you say Jesus is?"
- Reflecting on who you say Jesus is and on how your actions do or do not reflect this assertion.

CONNECT

Douglas Beyer, *Basic Beliefs of Christians*, chap. 4; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, book 2, chap. 3; Max Lucado, *Next Door Savior*; Max Lucado, *He Chose the Nails*; Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, chaps. 5–10.