

KYLE IDLEMAN
MARK E. MOORE



THE JESUS WE CAN
NO LONGER IGNORE

THE
MISSING
MESSIAH



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The Missing Messiah: The Jesus We Can No Longer Ignore

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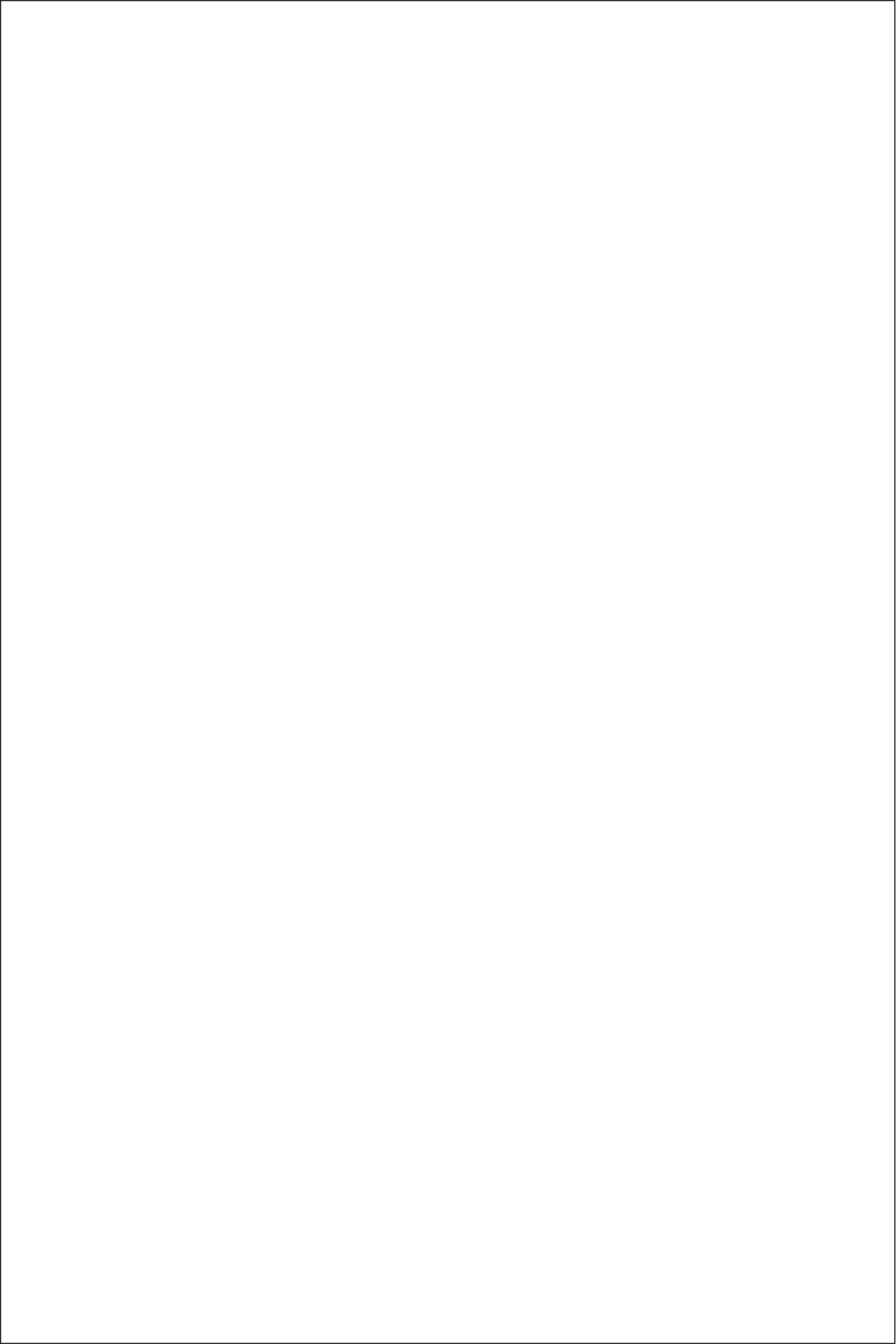
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FOREWORD

To come



INTRODUCTION

WHERE IS THE MESSIAH?

When my son was in middle school, he pleaded for a pair of Air Jordan 4s. Not just any shoes—he wanted *the* Jordan 4s. He'd been dropping hints, showing me pictures on his phone, and finally he just came out with it: “Dad, I really need these shoes.”

“Need?” I asked. “What do you need them for?”

“They're just . . . they're cool. Everyone's wearing them. They're classic.”

Classic. That word caught my attention. So I asked him, “Do you know *why* they're classic?”

He shrugged. “They're Jordans.”

“But do you know who Jordan is?”

“Yeah, Dad,” he said with that tone teenage sons reserve for fathers who are obviously oblivious. “Michael Jordan. He was a basketball player.”

To my son, Michael Jordan was just a logo. A brand. A name on a shoe that happened to be trendy. He had no idea about the

flu game. The shrug. The last shot against Utah. Six championships. The way Jordan didn't just play basketball, he *transformed* it. Every other player became his supporting cast, whether they were his teammates or his opponents. He operated in a different dimension. My son didn't understand that Michael Jordan wasn't a basketball player; he was *the* basketball player.

To my son, *Jordan* meant style. To me, *Jordan* meant transformation.

Same name. Same shoes. Completely different meanings.

We've done something similar with Jesus. He has become our logo, our friend, our Savior, and our confidant who approves of us, forgives us, and encourages us. He does all those things, to be sure. But to reduce him to a brand borders on blasphemy.

Ask most people what *Christ* means, and they'll probably tell you it's Jesus' last name. As if Jesus had been born to Mary and Joseph Christ in Bethlehem and eventually started the religion that bears his family name. But *Christ* isn't a last name; it's a Greek title that means "Anointed One," or "Messiah" in Hebrew. Somewhere between the first century and today, we've forgotten what that title actually means.

When the first followers of Jesus called him *Christ* or *Messiah*, they were not giving him a surname; they were making an explosive political, theological, and revolutionary claim. They were saying that this carpenter from Nazareth was the promised King that Israel had been waiting for. The one who would establish God's Kingdom. The one who would challenge every earthly power. The one who deserves total allegiance.

In the first century, it was dangerous to call Jesus "the Christ." It was the kind of thing that got you killed. People didn't casually

throw that title around. If you said someone was the Messiah, you were saying he was the rightful King, which meant Caesar wasn't. You were saying his Kingdom was ultimate, which meant Rome wasn't. You were pledging your allegiance to him above all other authorities.

That's what *Christ* meant.

But somewhere between the first century and the twenty-first, we've lost that meaning. We've turned a transformative title into a comfortable logo. We've turned the cross into jewelry or a trendy tattoo. We've domesticated a revolutionary claim into a religious label. And in the process, to some degree, we have lost *the Messiah himself*.

Oh, we still have Jesus. We talk about him constantly. We sing songs about him. We wear his name on T-shirts and put it on coffee mugs. We've built an entire religious-industrial complex around him, complete with a profitable marketing strategy. But the Jesus we have, the Jesus of modern Western Christianity, is neither the Messiah the first Christians knew nor the one his enemies feared.

We've created a personalized Savior who exists primarily to meet our individual needs, bless our lives, and guarantee our spots in heaven. We've made him into a spiritual life coach, a divine therapist, a cosmic vending machine who dispenses blessings when we pray the right prayers and live relatively decent lives.

That Jesus is safe. Manageable. Polite. Convenient. Eager to serve and save.

He validates our choices. He baptizes our politics. He asks very little of us beyond that we show up at church occasionally and are generally nice people. He fits comfortably into our lives

without disrupting them too much. On Sunday mornings, we want just enough guilt to make us feel like we've been to church but not so much as to interfere with Saturday nights.

But here's the problem: That Jesus, the one we've made in our own image, would be unrecognizable to the people who followed him in the first century.

They didn't have a personal life coach. They had a King who demanded absolute allegiance.

They didn't have a spiritual therapist. They had a Messiah who told them to take up a cross and follow him, even to death. They didn't have a divine assistant who existed to improve their lives. They had a revolutionary who promised to turn the world upside down and who expected them to execute his mission—and, in some cases, be executed for the mission.

Same name. Completely different person.

It's like my son with the Jordan 4s. We've inherited the name. We've claimed the brand. We may have even made him a nostalgic hero. But somewhere along the way, we missed the story. We've lost what it truly means to call Jesus "the Messiah." We've lost the dangerous, demanding, glorious reality of who he is and what he came to do.

This book is about recovering that story.

It's about rediscovering the Jesus the original Christians knew, not just as Christ but as *the Messiah*. It's about understanding how Western culture has gradually reshaped Jesus into our image. It's about recognizing the difference between a personalized Savior and a revolutionary King. And it's about the high cost, as well as the greater gain, when we stop treating Jesus like a spiritual accessory and start following him as the infinite Messiah.

To be clear, this journey won't be easy. If you're looking for a book that reinforces your current understanding of Jesus, validates your lifestyle, and tells you that you're doing just fine, this isn't it. If you want a Jesus who fits neatly into your life without disrupting anything important, you're going to be disappointed.

But if you're willing to ask hard questions, if you're ready to discover that you might have been following a version of Jesus that is partial, shallow, or accessorized—an image Jesus wouldn't recognize in the mirror—if you're open to the possibility that there's a bigger, more dangerous, more majestic Messiah than the one you've inherited, then keep reading.

We didn't lose Jesus because he went somewhere. We lost him because we stopped looking for him. We settled for a smaller story, a safer Savior, a more convenient Christ.

But he's been there all along, waiting. Waiting for us to stop being satisfied with the logo and start seeking the living legend. Waiting for us to trade in our hand-me-down understanding of who he is for the real thing.

In the chapters ahead, we're going to trace how this happened, how the explosive title *Messiah* gradually lost its potent implications. We'll see what the first Christians believed about Jesus and why it got them killed. We'll discover what Jesus himself claimed about his identity and mission. And we'll wrestle with what it means to follow this Messiah in the twenty-first century.

This is going to challenge your assumptions. It might mess with your theology. It will definitely disrupt your comfortable Christianity. But it will also give you back the Jesus of the Gospels, the Messiah worth dying for, the King who demands

everything, the Savior who doesn't just improve your life but completely transforms it.

The Messiah isn't missing, of course. We have been missing him. You are invited on this journey to chase hard after the Messiah and, along the way, make Jesus famous.

MOVEMENT 1



**SEARCHING FOR THE
MESSIAH**

WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?

“Daddy, can I put another heart in him?”

My six-year-old daughter stood at the stuffing station in the Build-A-Bear Workshop, eyes wide with wonder. We were celebrating her birthday, and she had chosen a fluffy brown bear that was now partially stuffed on the counter. The attendant smiled and handed her a small satin heart.

“Of course you can. The more love, the better!” At least, I’d like to remember responding with such supportive affirmation.

She remembers me using it as an opportunity to explain to her that bears only have one heart. Never mind the fact that it’s not made of satin.

My daughter pressed the (second) heart to her lips, made a wish, and carefully tucked it inside her bear. Then the attendant helped her step on the pedal that would fill her creation with stuffing.

“How do you want your bear to feel? Super squishy or nice and firm?”

“Squishy!” my daughter declared without hesitation. “I want to be able to hug him really tight.”

As the bear filled with stuffing, the attendant continued, “Now, what kind of voice do you want? We have growling or roaring, or you can record your own message.”

My daughter chose to record herself saying, “I love you beary much!”

Then came the clothing options: princess dress, superhero outfit, sports jersey. She selected a rainbow tutu and a sparkly tiara. I put the football uniform back on the rack and reminded myself that this was her bear and she could customize it exactly how she wanted to.

As I swiped my credit card to pay for this personalized stuffed creation, it struck me that the Build-A-Bear was exactly the way she wanted it . . . but nothing like a real bear.

This isn't just a childhood teddy bear phenomenon; it's the air we breathe. We live in a culture obsessed with customization, where “Have it your way” has evolved from fast-food slogan to lifestyle manifesto. Our coffee orders have become paragraph-length recitations of personal preferences. Streaming services curate content with precise algorithms that are tailored to our viewing history. Our news feeds filter reality through the lens of our political leanings. Some of our medications even come with genetic testing to ensure optimal personalization.

From curated playlists to build-your-own burrito bowls, we instinctively assume the world should conform to our specifications. We're no longer just consumers; we've customized our

consuming. The customer isn't just always right; the customer is now the designer, and the market scrambles to accommodate our every preference.

Personalization can be helpful. We're all unique, and it can be beneficial to find products and services that align with the way we're wired. But there can be a dark side to this, especially when it comes to spiritual truth. Somewhere between selecting our smartphone cases and personalizing our license plates, we've unintentionally found ourselves taking a "Build-A-Jesus" approach to our faith.

We decide how "squishy" our Jesus should be—firm enough to support us, but not so firm that he challenges our comfortable lifestyle. We select which voice we want him to have—perhaps he says, "I love you" or "You're forgiven," but certainly not, "Take up your cross" or "Sell your possessions." We dress him in accessories that fit our preferences—perhaps a pin matching our politics or a self-help book that promises prosperity.

This customized Jesus becomes a spiritual stuffed animal rather than a Messiah-King. We stuff him with attributes that make us feel secure—unconditional love, grace, and mercy—while conveniently leaving out his demands for justice, sacrifice, and surrender. We prefer the Jesus who rides on a donkey rather than the white horse described in Revelation. We choose the warm, gentle eyes of a Jesus who approves of our lifestyles, not the piercing gaze that saw through the religious hypocrisy of his day. We select the soft hands that heal and comfort, not the calloused hands of a carpenter who made tables and flipped them.

And so we end up dressing Jesus in whatever fits our aesthetics—conservative values, progressive causes, patriotic

fervor, therapeutic spirituality—the list goes on. Just like my daughter’s bear, our customized Jesus is designed primarily to make us feel good. He exists to comfort us, to assure us of heaven, and to be hugged tightly when we’re scared, not to scare us with talk of repentance, sacrifice, or revolution.

This idea of a customized Jesus might sound innocuous. After all, shouldn’t we have a Jesus who meets our needs—maybe one with two hearts? The danger is this (and it’s a real danger): If we make Jesus in our own image, we’re placing our hope in a false Messiah. If our Messiah is artificial, our hope is baseless and will fail under pressure. Our faith will be little more than a “Flat Stanley”—convenient for carrying in our pocket and taking selfies with, but not something we can build our lives on. The real Jesus is far more mysterious, dangerous, and exhilarating. Chasing after him is worth the risk—it will be the adventure of a lifetime.

HAVE IT YOUR WAY: THE CUSTOMIZATION OF CHRIST

I first realized how deeply I’d fallen into this “Build-A-Jesus” mentality during my third year as a pastor. I was preaching through the Sermon on the Mount, and as I prepared a message on loving our enemies, I found myself searching for ways to soften Jesus’ radical commands. *Surely he didn’t mean we should literally love those who harm us*, I thought. *There must be exceptions, qualifications, reasonable limits.*

That night, as I wrestled with the text, a disturbing realization washed over me: I wasn’t trying to understand Jesus; I was trying to domesticate him. I was looking for loopholes because his actual teachings were too demanding, too disruptive to my

comfortable worldview, too hard for people to hear. I wanted a Jesus who fit neatly into my upper-middle-class life, not one who would turn it upside down.

Christianity has largely been reduced to a transaction: Believe in Jesus + Improve yourself = Get to heaven.

This equation has become the dominant formula of modern faith. Getting into heaven is a transaction where the payment is simple intellectual assent, marked by repeating a prayer, walking down an aisle, or throwing up a hand.

While this idea is rooted in a powerful gospel promise, it's a reductionist view—one that threatens to diminish the revolutionary Messiah who overthrows empires into a passive savior who exists primarily to secure our afterlife. The Jesus who proclaimed, "The kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15), has been relegated to a distant past and pushed to a distant future, his message stripped of its present power and urgency.

This cosmic transaction has become Christianity's primary selling point: Believe these doctrinal points about Jesus, and in exchange, you'll receive eternal life after death. Heaven has become the product, belief the price of admission. And in the process, we've reduced the Messiah to a mere ticket agent and his primary function to checking our ticket to make sure we can get through heaven's gates.

I've seen this firsthand in the churches I've attended and served. Our evangelistic approach can sometimes be summed up as "Are you going to heaven when you die?" The entirety of faith is compressed into ensuring our eternal destination. Week after week, the invitation at the end of the service is the same: "If you

were to die tonight, do you know where you'd spend eternity?" The urgency is all about what happens after death, with almost no mention of how Jesus' Kingdom might transform our lives today.

But what if Jesus isn't just offering an eternal destination? What if he's inviting us into eternal life that begins now—a movement so radical that it will transform how we live, love, and lead today? What if the most dangerous misunderstanding about Jesus isn't found in secular culture but within our churches? We've mastered getting people ready for heaven while neglecting Jesus' invitation to bring heaven to earth. We've become experts at helping people die well while failing to show them how to live well in the Kingdom Jesus inaugurated.

When Jesus taught his followers to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), he wasn't offering a pleasant liturgical phrase; he was articulating the heartbeat of his mission. Yet we've sanitized this revolutionary prayer into a religious recitation while continuing to push God's Kingdom safely into the afterlife.

Is it possible that in our efforts to make Jesus accessible, we've made him unrecognizable?

The transaction-based gospel offers a Jesus who makes minimal demands in the present while promising maximum rewards in the future. It presents a Jesus who saves souls but leaves societies, systems, and daily lives largely unaltered.

Outside the University of Louisville, in Louisville, Kentucky, our church took a team to gather college students for a focus group. Participants were asked to give their gut response, without overthinking, to this question: "What features or attributes would you want in your ideal spiritual leader?"

The answers came quickly:

“Someone who helps me find my purpose.”

“Someone who can get me into heaven.”

“A comforter who reduces my anxiety.”

“A guide who helps me figure out my life.”

“Someone who supports my political views.”

“A figure who gives me hope but doesn’t demand too much.”

“I’d want him to meet my needs, not make demands.”

“Someone who’s understanding when I mess up and doesn’t make me feel guilty.”

“I want spiritual guidance without all the religious rules.”

“A mentor who helps me become my best self.”

“Someone who makes me feel special and chosen.”

“A leader who focuses on love and acceptance, not judgment.”

“A spiritual figure who helps me achieve balance and success in my life.”

Notice what’s missing from these responses. The students didn’t want a spiritual leader who points them to a kingdom and a higher standard. They weren’t looking for a faith that demands allegiance, surrender, obedience, or sacrifice. These students didn’t want a king; they wanted a consultant. They weren’t seeking a Lord; they desired a life coach. And can we blame them? This is precisely the Jesus who has been marketed to them—the Jesus of the cosmic transaction, who exists primarily to meet their needs and secure their afterlife, not to command their devotion or transform their world.

We've turned Jesus into a product. Listen to popular sermons, and you'll hear how Jesus wants you to be happier, healthier, and wealthier. Pick up a bestselling Christian book and discover how Jesus can fix your marriage, advance your career, or ease your anxiety. And while it's true that Jesus cares about our relationships and our well-being, he came for a much greater purpose.

The transactional gospel has produced a transactional Jesus—one who offers heavenly benefits with minimal earthly disruption. We've placed him in our shopping cart along with our other lifestyle choices and personal preferences. We've accepted his offer of eternal life someday—and his role as our personal cheerleader, life coach, therapist, political ally, and success guru while we wait.

THE MESSIAH MISCONCEPTION

Jesus himself defined eternal life not as a destination but a relationship: “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Eternal life isn't what we get when we get to heaven; it's what we get when we get Jesus.

Picture this: If someone proposed to you and gave you an engagement ring, and you said yes, but then you both agreed, “Let's not see or talk to each other until we get married in two years,” that would be ludicrous. The ring isn't just a promise of a future ceremony; it's an invitation into a present relationship. Yet somehow, we've reduced following Jesus to securing our spot at the wedding, completely ignoring the relationship he's inviting us into today.

This redefinition of eternal life hit me like a thunderbolt when I was in seminary. I'd spent my entire Christian life thinking of eternal life as something that started after death—a future reward for present belief. But Jesus defines it as a quality of knowing, a depth of relationship that begins now. This means that eternal life isn't just about living forever; it's also about living now, in the reality of God's eternal Kingdom. It means knowing and understanding who Jesus claimed to be.

When Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15), he wasn't conducting a theological pop quiz or determining his identity by taking a poll. He was asking the most consequential question any human can answer. Peter's response—"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16)—wasn't just correct; it was revolutionary.

The Hebrew word *Messiah* (or *Christ* in Greek) carried explosive expectations in Jesus' day. It didn't simply mean "savior" in some vague spiritual sense. It referred to the promised King, the Deliverer who would establish God's reign on earth. The title was so politically charged that claiming it could get you executed, which, of course, is exactly what happened to Jesus.

Yet we've domesticated this revolutionary title. My guess is that most people today think that "Christ" is Jesus' last name rather than a declaration of his Kingdom authority. We sing about Jesus Christ without considering what his messiahship means for how we live today. In short, we've separated Jesus the Savior (who gets us to heaven) from Jesus the King (who demands our allegiance now).

It's important to understand that this division would have been incomprehensible to Jesus' early followers. For them, salvation

wasn't merely about the afterlife—it was about being rescued from all that opposes God's rule and being brought into his Kingdom in the present. Jesus put it this way: "The kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15).

HITCHHIKING VERSUS HIJACKING

History is littered with examples of how we've distorted Jesus to fit our agendas. The Crusaders marched under his banner while slaughtering those who didn't share their faith. In 1095, Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade with these words: "God wills it!" Thousands took up arms, stitched crosses to their garments, and proceeded to massacre Muslims, Jews, and even Eastern Christians in their quest to reclaim the Holy Land. Jesus said, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44), and told Peter, "Put your sword away!" (John 18:11). Instead, Jesus was made into a warlord.

Later, American slave traders quoted Scripture to justify human bondage. They took passages like Ephesians 6:5 ("Slaves, obey your earthly masters") out of their intended context while ignoring the revolutionary equality proclaimed in Galatians 3:28 ("There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free"). Slave owners created a Jesus who supported their self-serving economic system rather than the Jesus who came to set the captives free (see Luke 4:18-21).

It doesn't get much more twisted than Nazi Germany. The Jewish Messiah was made into an Aryan executioner, exterminating his own countrymen. Nazi leaders removed the Old Testament from their Bibles and edited the New Testament to eliminate

Jewish references.¹ The Jesus who was born of Jewish lineage, who taught in synagogues, and who fulfilled Jewish prophecies was whitewashed into a Gentile champion of German nationalist ideology.

During the Cold War, American Christianity often portrayed Jesus as the ultimate anti-communist. The risen Lord who transcended all political systems became the mascot for free-market capitalism and national exceptionalism. The Jesus who warned about the dangers of wealth became the champion of financial success.

Today's prosperity preachers transform the man who had nowhere to lay his head (see Luke 9:58) into a champion of wealth accumulation. They promise that faith in Jesus will bring financial blessing, conveniently overlooking his warnings about money and his call to sacrificial living. The Jesus who told the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions (see Matthew 19:21) becomes the Jesus who wants everyone to become a millionaire.

It's easy to identify these misrepresentations in history. It's far harder to recognize the blind spots in our own thinking. Could our comfortable, personalized versions of Jesus be just as unrecognizable to the real Jesus as the sword-wielding Crusaders' interpretation of Christ? Are we any less guilty of reshaping Jesus to fit our cultural moment and personal preferences than those we so easily critique from the safety of historical distance?

I'm as guilty of this as anyone. In high school, I wore a WWJD ("What Would Jesus Do?") bracelet while carefully avoiding certain people who didn't follow Jesus and who lived in a way that was opposite of what I thought the Bible taught. I claimed to follow Jesus while avoiding the very people he would have sought

out. I had created a Jesus who affirmed my comfort zone rather than challenged it. I can neither confirm nor deny, but I may have punched a kid in the face during a soccer match for using the Lord's name in vain. (Okay, that did happen.)

We create a "convenient Jesus," who fits neatly into our Sunday mornings but doesn't intrude on our Monday meetings. We compartmentalize our faith, keeping Jesus in the sanctuary while our business practices, entertainment choices, and financial decisions remain largely untouched by his teachings.

We imagine a "safe Jesus," who never offends anyone. In our desire to be winsome and relevant, we filter out his more challenging statements. We highlight his love but downplay his calls for repentance. We celebrate his inclusivity while ignoring his exclusive claims. This Jesus is acceptable at dinner parties and workplace conversations because he's been scrubbed of anything controversial.

We craft a "spiritual but not religious Jesus," who offers the wisdom of Yoda but makes no demands for committed community. This Jesus encourages personal prayer and meditation but doesn't insist that we gather with other believers, submit to spiritual authority, or participate in ancient practices like Communion and baptism.

We construct a "partisan Jesus," who conveniently agrees with our political platform. On the right, he becomes a flag-waving nationalist focused primarily on traditional family values and individual liberties. On the left, he transforms into a social justice warrior concerned exclusively with systemic change and collective action.

We mold a “middle-class Jesus,” who blesses our pursuit of comfort and security. Our bloated homes are blessings from God, not idols that could be holding us back from abundant life. This Jesus wants us to have nice homes in safe neighborhoods with well-funded retirement accounts. He encourages responsible financial planning but never questions whether our resources could be better used for Kingdom purposes. His calls for sacrificial generosity are interpreted as suggestions for occasional charity, not a radical reorientation of our relationship with possessions.

We sculpt a “success-oriented Jesus,” who measures ministry effectiveness the same way corporations measure quarterly earnings. This Jesus cares about numbers, growth, and influence. He wants bigger churches, larger platforms, and more efficient systems. The metrics of the Kingdom—faithfulness, service, and love—are replaced by attendance figures, social media followers, and fundraising totals.

We develop a “therapeutic Jesus,” who exists primarily to heal our emotional wounds and boost our self-esteem. This Jesus is always affirming, never confronting. He wants us to forgive ourselves before seeking forgiveness from others. His primary concern is our happiness, not our holiness. He calls us to self-care more frequently than self-denial.

The revolutionary Messiah who flipped tables in the Temple, who challenged the religious and political powers of his day, who demanded complete allegiance from his followers, and who called for a radical reordering of values and priorities—this Jesus is far more challenging than the customized versions we create. And it’s precisely this Jesus we need to rediscover.

THE COST OF CUSTOMIZATION

If eternal life starts with knowing God through Jesus, then misunderstanding Jesus has consequences far beyond theological debate. It affects how we live now. When we reshape Jesus into a spiritual life coach, political ally, or success guru, we miss the revolutionary King who offers something far greater than personal comfort or heavenly fire insurance.

I felt this tension acutely when I began pastoring in an affluent suburb in Southern California. Many in my congregation were successful professionals who wanted Jesus to bless their already comfortable lives rather than disrupt them. When I preached about Jesus' radical teachings on wealth, status, and power, I could feel the resistance. One businessman told me after a sermon, "I appreciate your passion, but we need to be realistic about how Jesus' teachings apply in today's world." What he meant was "I want a Jesus who fits into my lifestyle, not one who challenges it." (I may or may not have punched him in the face. Okay, that didn't happen.)

The Jesus of the Bible doesn't just invite people to believe certain things about him—he is recruiting for a revolution. His Kingdom isn't just coming someday; it is breaking into the present, challenging every system and structure that opposes God's rule. His call isn't to simple belief but to radical commitment.

Consider how he described discipleship: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). These aren't the words of someone offering a comfortable religious experience or an add-on to our already established lifestyles. These are the words of a revolutionary King calling for complete allegiance.

For many of us, the danger isn't that we'll reject Jesus outright. It's that we'll accept a version of him that doesn't challenge us, change us, or call us into his revolutionary movement. We'll keep our "Build-A-Jesus"—the one who is comforting and comfortable—while the real Jesus stands at the door knocking, waiting to lead us into something far greater than religious consumerism. He is not a spiritual stuffed bear; he is a roaring lion on mission.

A REVOLUTIONARY DECISION

So here's the question: Are you willing to meet the real Jesus even if he doesn't match the version you've created? The comfortable Christ of Western Christianity bears little resemblance to the revolutionary Messiah who turned the world upside down. Are we prepared to abandon our cultural idol in allegiance to the King?

Take a moment to answer these questions honestly:

1. Does your Jesus exist primarily to get you to heaven or to establish God's Kingdom on earth through you?
2. Is your Jesus primarily concerned with your comfort and happiness or with your transformation and allegiance?
3. Does your Jesus reinforce your political and cultural values, or does he regularly challenge them?
4. Is your Jesus a comfortable addition to your lifestyle, or is he constantly disrupting it with Kingdom priorities?
5. Does your Jesus look suspiciously like you—sharing your preferences, prejudices, and perspectives—or does he transcend your cultural impressions?

6. Do you find yourself avoiding certain teachings of Jesus because they're too demanding or uncomfortable?
7. Is your relationship with Jesus primarily about what he can do for you or about what he wants to do through you?

In the pages ahead, we'll rediscover what *Messiah* meant in Jesus' world. We'll examine how the expectations for the Messiah developed through Scripture, how they were understood in Jesus' day, and how they challenge our domesticated gospel today. The most important question isn't who we want Jesus to be; it's who Jesus actually is—and whether we're ready to follow him as he truly is, not as we've reimagined him.

Jesus refuses to be our custom creation. There's a lot I don't know about Jesus. He is majestic and mysterious beyond the borders of my imagination. But this I know: He's claustrophobic. He will not be stuffed into the satin skin we've relegated him to. He *will* break out. He came as the Creator, the King, and the revolutionary Messiah, and the choice before us is clear: Will we settle for a transactional approach, or will we join the Messiah's movement that changes everything? Because the revolution Jesus started isn't finished. It's waiting for people who are bold enough to join it.

The real Jesus—the revolutionary Messiah—is waiting for us to put away our custom creations and follow him into the revolution he began.