

FRAGILE
COMPLIANT
IRRELEVANT
DANGEROUS
JESUS

FOREWORD BY
Jackie Hill Perry

Why the only thing more risky than
getting Jesus right is getting Jesus wrong

KEVIN “KB” BURGESS

We are in dire need of authors who will write brave, truth-filled books. KB is one of those writers. Few voices are as courageous, clear, relevant, and necessary as his. In a world that seeks to water down the gospel and sugarcoat its Christ, his words provide a critical compass pointing us back home. The volume you are holding in your hands is personal and powerful. Once I started reading, I could not stop. Each chapter unveils the caricature that culture has painted of our Savior and presents a rich reminder of who He truly is—a revolutionary who challenged systems, shifted culture, and inaugurated a new paradigm for living. KB's vulnerability, humility, and theological acumen shimmer on these pages. And, in the end, he extends to his readers an invitation to dive deeper into the surrendered life, which is an abundant life. Read this book slowly, prayerfully, and with holy expectation.

PRISCILLA SHIRER, bestselling author and Bible teacher

KB is one of the most poignant and unique voices of our time. He finds a way to weave unapologetic truth into relatable stories that shine a light on the goodness of God.

LECRAE, Grammy-winning recording artist and *New York Times* bestselling author

KB has issued a powerful call for us to meet the real Jesus and be changed by him. *Dangerous Jesus* is a book soaked in Scripture with an eye towards the pressing concerns of the culture, especially those issues driving young believers away from the faith and hindering skeptics from considering the claims of Jesus. In this book he has done work needed in every age: to scrape away the lies and distortions the culture (and sometimes even, sadly, elements of the church) tells us about the Messiah Jesus so as to be challenged by a God that demands our allegiance.

ESAU McCAULLEY, PHD, author of *Reading While Black* and associate professor at Wheaton College

With an eagle-eye's view, KB locates the core problem areas with contemporary Christianity. Not only does he rightly assess ways we've drifted, but he astutely systematizes the way back to a healthy

expression of our beloved faith. Follow KB's words back to the Jesus of Scripture.

FLAME, Grammy-nominated hip-hop artist

Ever since Jesus walked this earth, you had everyone from laymen, bureaucrats, and even the religious establishment seeking to appropriate Him and His influence for their own purposes and interests—painting Him as the paragon of their own cause. However, Jesus never gave Himself over to any to be used in such a way; His Kingdom ethic and mission always transcended man's attempts to conflate Him with their own selfish ends. In his amazing debut book, KB helps us understand what it means to not only see Jesus aright but to live for Him in such a way that aligns our goals and vision with His will. This work will help guide us to not only love Christ with a pure heart but to also sacrificially love our neighbor as we love ourselves, encouraging us to bring a true representation of heaven to the public square.

AMEEN HUDSON, writer, speaker, and cohost of the *Southside Rabbi* podcast

I've had the privilege of knowing KB since he was in his early twenties, freshly signed to Reach Records and still finding his voice. His evolution from rapper to thought leader and author has been nothing short of spectacular. His demeanor is always humble, and his voice is always full of grace and truth. *Dangerous Jesus* is an extension of ideas KB has shared with me over the years, and I'm so excited that the general public is tuning in. I believe this is work that will shape the culture around Christianity for decades to come.

RUSLAN, hip-hop artist, entrepreneur, and content creator

Jesus has been wrongly portrayed by many in society, and sadly, even in the pulpit. That misconception has led many away from the faith. In this book, KB reintroduces us to what the Bible says about Jesus. A fierce yet loving Savior who desires a walk with you that will radically change your life.

TOVARES GREY, founder and author of *Godly Dating 101*

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Dangerous Jesus: Why the Only Thing More Risky than Getting Jesus Right Is Getting Jesus Wrong

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Designed by Dean H. Renninger

Edited by Jonathan Schindler

Published in association with the literary agency of The Fedd Agency, Inc., P.O. Box 341973, Austin, TX 78734.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-5948-0

Printed in China

29 28 27 26 25 24 23
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO THE ONES SEARCHING FOR JESUS AND
THOSE WHO HAVE FOUND HIM BUT ARE GROWING
WEARY OF HIS MISREPRESENTATIONS.**

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JACKIE HILL PERRY xi

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Somewhere along the way we traded following Jesus for creating a tame, moldable, silent Jesus who doesn't mind following us.

The church's waning influence on the culture is directly connected to Jesus' waning influence on the church.

Allow me to reintroduce this Jesus.

To recast Christianity in a land of so many misrepresentations makes the truth sound like a reinterpretation.

But dangerous impostors will give way to what's more dangerous: the real Jesus.

KB

FOREWORD

I have one story to share. It's a dangerous one, I suppose. I learned about it in a car ride through Nashville while being driven by a woman that could've been a martyr. She and her family were new transplants to the city after living as missionaries for twenty-plus years in Istanbul, Turkey. I wanted to know the differences between the Christians here, as in America, and the Christians there, as in Turkey, so I asked. She answered with a story about Easter.

Anti-Christian groups were threatening to storm certain churches on Easter Sunday with their weapons and their rage. Upon arrival, they would put bullets in every baptized body. One of the congregations under threat included my Nashville friend, her husband, and her two children.

They all gathered one night to discuss the danger. The weapons. The organized rage headed their way. Naturally fear was felt, and as it usually does, it instigated them into being strategic. The easiest strategy was to simply stay home on Sunday. If on that day, when the sun rose and after breakfast was made, nobody decided to change out of their pajamas and into their best, head to the church, and await the word, then nobody would be there when the rage arrived.

Nobody's body would catch a bullet in it. No child would lose a

parent. No parent would lose a child. No spouse would weep and no friend would mourn.

Staying home was an easy tactic—a safe and compelling one for my Nashville friend, in fact—but if my friend wanted a safe Christianity, she would’ve stayed in the States. So she did what Moses, Daniel, Paul, and especially Jesus did when danger seemed to be the only option available. She prayed. While in that divine space between the natural world and the throne of God, she sensed a reminder. She remembered what *this* Sunday represented and how it didn’t involve bunnies and eggs and hunts and pastel dresses and shiny white shoes. *This* Sunday was the communal celebration of a condescended God, wrapped in flesh, Whose body died on a cross and rose from the dead. Then, as she considered the men threatening to bring their guns into her church and what that might mean for her own body and the bodies she wanted to remain alive, she sensed the Spirit of God say, *Do you really believe in the Resurrection?* The all-wise God, through His Spirit, unveiled the irony. Resurrection Sunday has *always* been a dangerous one.

At the bottom of every fear is the contemplation of some form of death, death of control or death of life. Either way, to face the fear of death, one must believe that by dying, I am gaining, the ultimate gain being the resurrection of the body. To *truly* believe in the Resurrection for my friend meant to submit to the end of life as she knew it. By doing so, she was transcending the boring and typical tactics of Christians who quote verses regarding the Resurrection in their Instagram captions, cross-legged on their sofas, while refusing to die to self, sin, and safety.

My friend and her family decided against the “Christianity of the Land,” as KB calls it. They chose to embody the Christianity of those lauded in Hebrews 11, “who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were

made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.”¹ It is a dangerous thing to really believe the Bible.

They showed up to church that morning and scanned the room. Every single member of the congregation was there, ready to sing or die. In their case, either way was worship. No rage came though. No weapons were drawn. No bullets were scattered. Yet those saints were ready to be like their Jesus on that Resurrection Sunday.

Stories like this are inspiring and yet distant. Most of us aren't in a position to be martyred on a Sunday, but that doesn't mean we aren't under the constant threat of danger because of our faith. Not merely because of cultural and interpersonal antagonism but simply put, Christianity is a threat to our own selves first and foremost. The fundamental nature of the call to follow Jesus is preceded by the command to “leave everything” and “take up your cross and die.”

Everything we believe gives us life, love, identity, security, and sanity is threatened when Jesus shows up. No wonder we try to bring it all with us as we go. But Jesus will not and cannot allow you to love both Him and idols. Your heart is His, and by no means will He let you share your affections with a lesser love. That's scary, ain't it? When you look around and see all the shiny little things you think will make you whole and realize that to have God, you and all your little messiahs have to die? But do you *really* believe in the Resurrection—not simply that it inaugurates the resurrection of the body but that it validates the preeminence of the Son, and that if He has power over life and death, then surely He is better than everything that lives? To have Him is to have life, and power, and freedom, and joy. Put your little trinkets next to Jesus, and tell me who's more glorious. Jesus is a threat to your idols, and you, my friend, are a danger to your own self. But *be that*. There is a cross set aside for you to take up, and as heavy as it is, it is the only real way to live.

I applaud you though. To pick up this book, after reading its title and still deciding to engage with its content, you have to have some level of bravery in you. Some propensity for danger. I've come

to see that KB is good at that. At making swords approachable. If you haven't noticed this already, it's all through his music. Every song cuts and never coddles, but because it moved you to dance, or sing, or jump, or shadowbox with nothing or someone, you sang a dangerous song out loud without flinching. This work is the same, but beware: there's no music underneath the cutting to make it more palatable. No bass to move you, but trust me, this will move you still. Towards Jesus first. Towards people second. Away from yourself and into a better version that is ready to die to the easy Christianity that's popular. This book is a land mine, a double-edged sword, a cultural critique and theological commentary. KB has the pen of a writer and the heart of a shepherd. He, like my friend in Nashville, believes the Bible, and I don't know if there's anything in the world more dangerous than that.

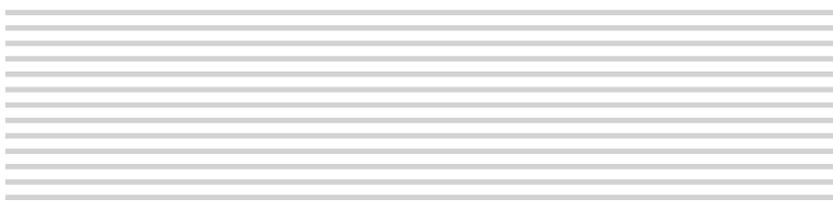
Jackie Hill Perry
Author, poet, Bible teacher, and hip-hop artist

INTRODUCTION

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN I EVER MET

No chains on me.

“NO CHAINS”



This is a story about the most dangerous man I ever met.

It starts with me, at fifteen years old, standing frozen in the hallway at my grandmother’s house.

My mother and I, fleeing an ugly divorce, had found shelter there. My grandfather, a direct descendant of a slave, was all too familiar with the unkind world his daughters would be thrust into, so he built that house, should his babies ever need it, to serve as a net of safety, restart, and redemption. It was his dream.

But his dream felt more like a nightmare to me because of the constant conflict that surrounded me there.

In this particular incident, my mom and my female cousin were engaged in a full-on MMA-style grappling session on the floor. I would never have even *thought* about challenging my mother—or any of my elders, for that matter—yet here, in reality-TV fashion, my

cousin was on top of my mother, trying to hurt her. Their relationship had been a powder keg since we moved in, but this was the first time things had gotten physical. And I simply had no category for what I was seeing.

It started off as a war of words, but then my cousin took things too far, and my mom was never one to tolerate disrespect from children. My cousin wasn't exactly a child—she was older and bigger than me, and her boyfriend was a feared man. But the argument escalated quickly, and before I knew it, my mom and my cousin were on the floor, swinging, clawing, and wrestling, my cousin shouting obscenities and my mom trying with all her might to restrain her.

I just stood in the doorway of my room, unable to move. I had never felt more like a coward. I was the only man in the house, and all I could think was, *I wish Dad were here*. He always knew what to do. I had never even been in a fistfight before. I'd never had to be.

For the past seven years, we had been living on Scott Air Force Base in southern Illinois, where my dad was stationed, and it was objectively one of the safest places in the world. Every day I saw armed soldiers with guns bigger than me protecting every side of our community. In fact, with the exception of seeing a high schooler smoking a cigarette, I cannot recall a single crime ever being committed. There was a police unit on the base, but I never saw them, because there was “nothing to see here.”

Even beyond the security of living with soldiers, my dad was there, and I was confident that my dad could beat up your dad, and anybody else your dad came with. I distinctly remember my dad comparing his biceps to mine. I was overwhelmed with the thought that this guy might actually be a superhero. He was my courage.

But after my parents split up, that was gone. The divorce didn't only cost me a father; it cost me my security.

My grandmother's house was located on the south side of St. Petersburg, Florida, which was a very different place from when my grandfather built that house decades ago. The new south side was

marked by abject poverty, food insecurity, gang violence, and vulnerability. My existence had become the great exchange—security for insecurity, safety for exposure, and military soldiers for street soldiers.

I heard gunshots nightly. I saw people running from the police and getting into shoot-outs. I remember there was a hurricane once, and the power went out all over the city. In the hood, we were typically the last people to get our power turned back on, so we were without power for what felt like an eternity. Since we couldn't watch TV, we would just sit in the living room and watch whatever was happening outside. We would see drug deals, arguments, and fistfights. I remember one dude waving a pistol in the air, screaming at the top of his lungs, "I'll kill anybody on this block!" It was like watching *Cops* without a cable subscription. It felt like a war zone.

It landed extra scary on me, but most people living there were good, hardworking, honest people. It's the 99 percent that are terrorized by the 1 percent, which is then compounded by the media's tendency to focus on the 1 percent. And even the dope boys and troublemakers making up that 1 percent are a complicated bunch. Some people are just put in situations where they are tempted to make decisions they would never make if they had more stability. Hunger breeds theft. Theft breeds violence. Violence breeds a record. A record keeps you from earning a legitimate income. Lack of income breeds hunger, and we are back where we started. When people are trying to survive, they get desperate. Desperation is dangerous.

I felt *weak*. Back then, I was 110 pounds soaking wet with construction boots on. All around me people were getting shot and jumped, and I knew it was only a matter of time before somebody came for me. Every morning I woke up grateful that I didn't get killed the night before.

Now, I just stood there, helpless, while my mom—my last line of defense against the outside world—was getting attacked by her own

flesh and blood. My cousin broke free from Mom's grip, scrambled to her feet, and screamed over my mom, "I'm going to get my boyfriend to kill you! Don't be surprised if he's waiting for you when you get in your car in the morning!"

In that moment, something flipped in my mind. I realized, *It's go time. I've got to be the man of the house. I've got to protect my mom.*

But I had no idea how. I had a switchblade that I bought off one of my cousins, but there are obvious limitations that come with a knife. For one thing, you've got to get in real close to use it, and like I said, I wasn't what you would call an imposing figure. I thought about pepper spray, but I was sure I'd get laughed off the block if I pulled that out. All roads to bona fides seemed to point to getting my hands on a gun. A gun is power. The issue of walking home from school or defending my mother—and, quite frankly, being a man in general—would be instantly solved. It was as if the clouds had opened and the panacea I so desperately desired appeared in the shape of a 9 mm handgun.

In all that was falling apart around me, school was the only thing that came easy to me. I don't know if I was gifted or simply killing it at a failing school, but my GPA qualified me for a pilot program that allowed me to start college at age fifteen. I shortly found myself taking classes with adults.

I became friends with one guy that I would play basketball with after class. He was one of those guys that could get their hands on anything. And by anything, I mean *anything*. Everybody in the hood knows a guy like this. From fake IDs to DVDs of movies that hadn't even come out yet, he was the plug. Often after we finished playing ball, we would do a little gambling. I'd have my lunch money, and he would wager things like sneakers or throwback jerseys—whatever he had that could serve as currency.

The game of choice was called quarters. We'd flip the quarter, somebody would call out heads or tails, and whoever got it right would win. We had been playing long enough that we were raising

the stakes beyond the money we had with us, so I rested the quarter on the back of my thumb, and before I flipped it, I said, “So what else you got?”

He sat back and thought about it for a second. Then he said, “I got this gun at home. It’s not a real gun. It’s one of those Airsoft guns that shoots BBs. But it looks just like a real one. It won’t kill you, but if you get shot with it, it will break the skin.”

I thought, *Man, there must be a God—this is exactly what I need!* It was the best of both worlds. That gun would offer the threat of a real gun but without the lethal capacity and subsequent incarceration that comes along with it. Of course, I wasn’t factoring into my mind that I would be pulling a fake gun on people that had real guns, but in my mind, the aesthetic was king, and I’d cross that other bridge when I got there.

I was all in. I put up my sneakers and gleefully shouted, “Let’s get it!” Then I flipped the quarter. “Call it.”

“Tails.”

I caught the quarter in my right hand and slapped it onto the back of my left.

“Heads!”

He slumped back and cursed under his breath. Then he looked at me. “I’ll bring it on Friday.”

Man, I was lit. I mean, this was it. I was finally going to be taken seriously. I was finally going to be the threat I knew I needed to be.

When Friday rolled around, I went to open gym and asked the guy, “Yo, did you bring it?”

“Aw, man,” he said. “I forgot. I’ll bring it next week.”

Next week, same thing. Though everyone in the hood knows that guy that can get anything, we also know that guy is usually unreliable.

The thing is, the whole time I was waiting for him to bring me the gun, all I kept thinking was, *So this is where I am. I’m relying on this gun to protect me and my family, and it’s not even real. Just like me. I’m a fraud.* I remember my father repeatedly telling me as I was

growing up that the lowest a man could fall was when he needed a gun under his pillow to sleep. I was already dabbling in drugs, I'd become a womanizer, and my anger was out of control. Now, to top it all off, I needed a gun to feel human. These thoughts kept playing over and over in my mind until all I could think was, *I need help*. Or worse, *Maybe I should get a real gun and use it on myself*.

The next week in school, I ran into a dude named Jeremy Baker. Jeremy was a year older than me and was one of the few other Black males in the pilot program I was in. He was kind of quiet and kept to himself, but I had heard he was a really good rapper.

Now, I had done a little cafeteria battle rapping myself, and I had seen the movie *8 Mile*, so naturally, I thought I was a rapper. When I ran into Jeremy, I said, "Hey, man, I heard you were a rapper. You wanna battle sometime?"

He paused before answering, "I actually don't battle. I'm a Christian rapper."

I didn't even know where to go with that. I mean, if you had looked at my BlackPlanet page (Facebook for Black people before Facebook existed) under religion, you would have seen "Christian," but Christianity was just culture for me. I'd never thought about Jesus having so much influence on me that I'd need to reference Him for what I should or shouldn't do. That was all *my* choice. But Jeremy just threw it out there without any qualifications. No fear that I might think he was soft or lame. He was a Christian, and because of that, there were things he wouldn't do. He was unashamed.

"Oh, okay," I said. "Cool." And that was it.

A couple days later, Jeremy was outside eating lunch, and when I walked over, I noticed there was a CD on the table. It had a guy on the front with dreadlocks like mine going down his back, a red bandana across his forehead, another one across his mouth, and a long necklace with a key on the end of it. Then I saw the name of the album.

"Bloody Streets Volume One," I read aloud. Seeing my chance to remedy the cognitive dissonance he had caused, I said, "Yo, I thought

you were a Christian. Why are you listening to this? This looks like murder music.”

“No, man,” he said, calmly shaking his head. “This is Christian music.”

I was not convinced. “Fam, it’s called ‘Bloody Streets.’ This man is clearly about to rob a bank. How is this Christian music?”

He just smiled at me. “Take it home. Listen to it.”

I picked it up. It had one of those parental advisory stickers on it, but on closer inspection, the sticker actually said, “This album is not to be sold. It is only to be given away for free.” I had never seen that before.

“Go ahead,” Jeremy said again. “Take it. See what you think.”

So I did. The project had eight songs on it. I loved every single one. The first seven weaved a compelling story of the rapper’s life. His stage name had previously been Synista, and he was the front man of a group that was making a lot of noise in Tampa and getting the attention of some major labels. Like many rappers, he was involved in a lot of street activity—drug dealing, shoot-outs, and wild escapades. But at the height of all that, he experienced this dark moment that he described as coming face-to-face with the devil. He deduced from that experience, “If the devil is real, God must be real.” He bolted to his grandmother’s house, where she instructed him to read through the Psalms. When he read Psalm 23—the one that begins “The Lord is my shepherd”—God began to change him radically. He left his old life behind, dropped the *S* from his name, and became Mynista. The eighth song on the album was a gospel presentation.

After listening to his story, I believed the gospel Mynista sang about. And that day, at my own grandmother’s house, I believed on Christ as my Lord and Savior, and I’ve literally been walking with Jesus ever since.

I never did get that gun. I told my friend I didn’t want it anymore. Jesus had restored my security. As I learned of His promises and His commitments to me and my flourishing, they became infinitely more

protective than extended clips and six-inch blades. I learned who God was and almost immediately saw who I was supposed to be. Jesus gave me an invincibility not based on *my* ability to defeat others in conflict but in *His* defeat of death, sin, and the devil—the ultimate source of conflict in my soul. I saw that the hood didn't belong to whatever gang was claiming authority. It belonged to God. In a song I later wrote called "Crowns and Thorns," I said, "I've never been a place that my God don't reign."¹ In other words, I have never stepped foot onto a square inch of this planet that didn't fall under God's jurisdiction. Nobody can touch me unless God allows it, and if He does allow it, He still has me! Whoever threatens the sons and daughters of God is always in far more danger, because God is with His children.

All my life I had wanted to be dangerous. Someone who is not to be played with. Someone whose presence demands respect, admiration, even fear, simply because of who he is. Resources, power, and respect are hip-hop's holy trinity. To have these is to achieve a kind of god status. The man or woman that commands this triune reality is truly the dangerous one.

But what I saw in the face of Jesus is the quintessence of all we've longed for—more resources, more power, and so worthy of respect that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is truly "that guy."

I am reminded of the iconic scene from the hit series *Breaking Bad* where Walter White is explaining to his wife the power of his drug operation and why she should not fear that his enemies might hurt their family. Walter says the threats that his enemies pose to him pale in comparison to the threat that he is to his enemies. He says, "I am not in danger; I am the danger."

Jesus most certainly kept the same kind of energy in my life. All of the strongholds that plagued my existence were overpowered by the stronger hold of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything must adjust to Him. He puts danger in danger.

He is the most dangerous man that ever lived.

CHAPTER 1

DANGEROUS JESUS

Many men claimed Him but did He ever claim them?

“NEW PORTRAIT”



No one was more dangerous than the Lord Jesus.

From the moment He arrived on the scene, Jesus posed a threat to the unjust, a threat to the oppressors, and a threat to every semblance of authority wielded by the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus' life is what happens when all that is good, true, and beautiful is perfectly embodied in a human being living in a world that is the opposite of all three—so much so that His very existence became an act of rebellion.

He invaded the world with love for the forgotten, hope for the hopeless, and freedom for the bound. His theme song of mercy, grace, and truth defied anyone and anything that dared to play a different tune.

His ideas were disruptive, subversive, and dare I say scandalous to the world around Him. They challenged the status quo and turned the ancient world upside down.

Who else would choose the ghetto of Nazareth over the palaces of Egypt as His home, not just in time but forever? The man who claims to reign for all eternity will forever be called Jesus *of Nazareth*, that is, Jesus of the ghetto. The place “nothing good comes from” becomes the place that everything good depends on!

Who else would entrust his gospel message to a group of disciples who were thought of as uneducated and lacking in speaking skills? I love the moment at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit gives Jesus’ disciples the ability to speak in other languages. The onlooking crowd is amazed because these disciples from Galilee were known to use improper, barbaric speech. It’s equivalent to the way some people today prejudicially look down on Ebonics. But Jesus, the Word made flesh, entrusted His gospel to the dialect of the poor.

Who else would form a movement not from kings or high priests but from the needy and the forgotten?

Who else would define greatness as humility and service, not riches and excess?

Who else would teach that the best thing for me centers around intentionally thinking about what’s best for my neighbor—even when my neighbor doesn’t deserve it?

Who else preached loving your enemy, forgiving your offender, and giving to those who can do nothing for you in return?

Who else would structure their kingdom on the first coming last and weakness being an advantage? The very people the world calls supremely weak—the poor, the meek, the peacemakers—He calls supremely blessed. The world steps over the least of these in the society. Jesus says, “I *am* the least of these. An assault on them is an assault on me.”

In an otherwise barbaric culture, Jesus advocated nonviolence. He told people, “If anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”¹

Jesus redefined love and radically shifted our understanding of

what it means to be a lover of people. John 3:16, perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible, says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (ESV). That’s it right there. That’s the shift. Love is demonstrated not by what we hold on to but by what we are willing to give up.

But this Jesus was more than just a godly man with good ideas. This Jesus was God in the flesh, who secured every promise He made with divine certainty. This Jesus’ life, death, and glorious resurrection is not just the point of *His* story; it is indeed the point of *history*. Everything that Jesus accomplishes He claims as a win that extends to the entire cosmos.

This Jesus started His ministry by turning water into wine, and He ended His ministry by raising a man from the dead. In doing so, this Jesus demonstrates—both by festival and by funeral—that redemption will always have the final word.

This Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection pattern the course of history. Things live, things suffer, but—blessed be our God—things will have their redemption. It’s a genius flex. What other savior can say that the redemption of an imperfect world will be more glorious than a perfect world that never needed redemption?

Jesus was so dangerous, the powers that be killed Him. But the joke is always on the opposition—this Jesus can’t be canceled. Three days later, when He rose from the dead, He became even *more* dangerous, because His life is nothing short of contagious.

Even today, Jesus poses a threat to the status quo. He’s a threat to our division. He’s a threat to our rebellion. But the beautiful thing is, He’s a good threat. I mean, if I got termites in my house, I want someone to bring the poison, you know what I mean?

To the degree that someone holds power, they can become a threat for unimaginable good or a threat for unimaginable harm. Take Rachael Denhollander.

THREAT TO THE THREAT

Rachael Denhollander was a young gymnast from Kalamazoo, Michigan. When she was fifteen, she was sexually abused by Dr. Larry Nassar—and she was not alone. Nassar was the team doctor for USA Gymnastics, and over the course of two decades, he sexually abused hundreds of young girls. The long-term emotional damage he caused was unimaginable. One of the girls he abused even committed suicide. And because he was so powerful, the girls he hurt were afraid to speak out against him. They were afraid that they wouldn't be believed. That they would get in trouble. That their own reputations would be damaged. So he just kept on going, kept on hurting.

Other people in positions of power—members of law enforcement, officials at the university where he worked, the powers that be at USA Gymnastics—could have stopped him. They were told what was happening. But they didn't do anything. And their lack of willingness to use their power for good made Nassar even more powerful.

That's the thing about power. In the wrong hands, left unchecked, it can do unspeakable damage, like a tornado or a hurricane. But in the right hands, power can also do unimaginable good.

Enter Rachael Denhollander. Rachael, animated by her relentless trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, stood up to Larry Nassar. She shared her story. She got others to listen. She raised up an army of fellow survivors, and together, they took Nassar down.

Larry Nassar was dangerous. But Rachael Denhollander was even more dangerous. She became a terror to terror.

Nobody was, is, or will be a greater threat to evil than Jesus. He is the kind of dangerous that is so infused with power from on high that nothing stays the same when He walks into the room. His love is so strong, it's intoxicating. His truth is so good, it sets people free. And His peace is so resilient, it doesn't make natural sense—it “surpasses all understanding.”² This is the scary good Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Here we sit, two thousand years after Jesus lived, died, and

was resurrected, and Jesus is the most admired figure in history, boasting a following in the billions. But the paradox of this Jesus is that even though He is the most observed man in history, He is simultaneously the most ignored. And perhaps worse than ignored, He is the most weaponized, reinterpreted, and misappropriated figure in history. And the only thing more dangerous than getting Jesus right is getting Jesus wrong.

**THE ONLY THING MORE
DANGEROUS THAN GETTING
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A GOOD KIND OF CONTAGIOUS

Jesus, understood correctly, spawns life. From Martin Luther to Martin Luther King, from Lemuel Haynes to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jesus produces world-changing, life-sacrificing, heaven-summoning, dangerous Christians. This is precisely what we see in the early years of the church.

Rodney Stark, a sociologist of religion, studied the rise of Christianity in an effort to make sense of how, with no weapons, no wealth, and no position of influence in society, within just three centuries, Jesus' followers grew from twelve disciples into millions of followers across the globe. My good friend Keas Keasler boils down the following points:³

First, there was a “radical reordering of social relations.” In other words, people from different ethnic and social groups treated each other as family.

Then, “women were given higher status” and were allowed to lead in worship. Up to that point, all pagan religions were dominated by men.

The early Christians “practiced radical hospitality toward one another and toward outsiders.” They saw strangers as neighbors and neighbors as family.

They refused to use violence to spread their movement. The early

church “was completely nonviolent,” and “for its first three hundred years of existence,” Christians did not see partnership with the state as the means to spread Christianity.

They “showed compassionate care for the poor and stayed in cities during plagues to care for the sick.” In the days of the early church, the Plague of Galen “devastated the known world.” Because there was no way to stop it, when the plague arrived in a city, everyone left the sick to fend for themselves. But “historians note there was one group that stayed behind to care for the sick”: Christians. And many died as a result.

They “willingly went to martyrdom while praying for their captors.” They weren’t afraid of death, and even showed love to those who killed them.

They “took in unwanted babies.” Roman law allowed people to abandon unwanted newborns outside of the city, leaving them to be killed in the outlying areas by weather or wild animals. But Christians not only refused to engage in this practice; they would also rescue babies who had been abandoned because they believed each one was “created in the image of God and someone whom Christ had died for.”

One of the most profound observations that came out of Stark’s research, though, is that it was not what the believers *taught* (important as it was) that made them so impressive to the outside world; it was how they *lived out* what they said they believed. They followed in the footsteps of the good-dangerous Jesus.

This brings us to, as I see it, the biggest problem for American Christianity today—we’ve too often separated Jesus’ words from His walk. Dallas Willard used the term “vampire Christians” to describe those who say to Jesus, in essence, “I’d like a little of your blood, please. But I don’t care to be your student or have your character. In fact, won’t you just excuse me while I get on with my life, and I’ll see you in heaven.”⁴

The blood of Jesus and what it affords us—eternal life and

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forgiveness of sin—are the essential perks of the package. But we try to bifurcate the perks of His blood from the person who shed that blood. In other words, we want what He can do for us, but we don't want to engage with what we are called to do through Him. It is of little benefit to have the words of Jesus in our mouths and not the ways of Jesus on our feet.

This is precisely why so many of us think spirituality is merely doing our devotions every morning—just us and God. Devotions are important, but true religion—the religion God is pleased with—is demonstrated in action. Christianity is doing what Jesus did. He lived among us, loving, healing, and caring for others, along with teaching about His Kingdom.

The Christian faith, as exemplified by the early church, is the most complete, life-altering, world-changing, supernatural, God-blessed institution on this planet. Like yeast in dough, it permeates all of society. It transforms cultures. It brings the dead to life. It is literally connected to the risen Savior. It's an unstoppable, immovable force. But when the Christian faith moves from the pure Christianity of Christ to what the great emancipator Frederick Douglass referred to as the Christianity of the Land—“where the church regards religion simply as a form of worship, an empty ceremony. . . . A worship that can be conducted by persons who refuse to give shelter to the houseless, to give bread to the hungry, [and] clothing to the naked”—it becomes “a curse, not a blessing to mankind.”⁵ The Christianity of Christ, like Jesus Himself, is dangerous to the forces of evil. The Christianity of the Land is often a participant in that very evil.

THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE LAND

There has been no body of work that's influenced my faith like what I have termed “slave theology”—the witness of enslaved Africans in the antebellum South. During this time, people on plantations all over the country made every attempt possible to destroy, thwart,

and pervert slaves' interest in Jesus—from attacking my ancestors' ability to read to, when that didn't work, creating slave Bibles that omitted all the verses about freedom to routinely sending white and commissioned Black preachers to tell my ancestors that their destiny was bondage because of their subhuman status. I have a theology work from the slave era titled "*The Negro a Beast,*" or "*In the Image of God.*" The conclusion of the slave-owning author is the former. In fact, almost 50 percent of all literature defending American slavery was written by Bible-believing Christians.⁶

That may be why Charles Spurgeon once said, "It is the Church of Christ that keeps his brethren under bondage; if it were not for that Church, the system of slavery would go back to the hell from which it sprung."⁷

Perhaps most damning, however, was the general fear that enslaved Africans had of their masters who claimed to be Christians. In fact, slaves would pray that their masters were *not* religious because religious masters were usually worse. Fredrick Douglass said he remembers watching his master, Thomas Auld, beat a fellow slave to an inch of his life, gather himself, and then go inside for family devotions.

Yet Jesus, through some kind of divine intervention, was still able to have a profound impact on the people who were being abused in His name. Slaves formed their own churches in defiance. Negro spirituals served as testaments of hope and resilience. And to this day, African Americans are statistically more likely to follow Jesus than the general population. They're more likely to read their Bibles. They're more likely to attend church and pray regularly. And they're more likely to say that the Bible and Jesus are central to their life.⁸

This is not the result of brainwashing. Brainwashing typically reproduces the indoctrination and behavior of the oppressor in its victims, yet these men and women denounced the faith of their enslavers. In defiance of what they were taught, the slave church believed the Bible was their path to freedom and that Jesus was on the side of the oppressed. They simply understood, theologically,

who Jesus was: Jesus was an ethnic minority who was marginalized by the religious establishment and executed by the state.

In fact, there is nothing from theologian Jonathan Edwards (who, by the way, was able to write theology for thirteen hours a day because he had slaves taking care of his property) or the Great Awakening that impresses me like what God was doing in the hearts of slaves in the midst of a mainstream misrepresentation of who He actually was.

Douglass framed the conundrum like this:

I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels.⁹

Brothers and sisters, I contend that the boldest of all frauds is a Christianity born of human imagination parading around as the Christianity of Christ, and the battle of the ages is separating the pure Christianity of Christ from the corrupt Christianity of the Land. Because the Christianity of the Land is not Christian at all. We must all take a hard look in the mirror and ask ourselves: *Which Christianity am I proclaiming?*

REAL AND PRESENT DANGER

Over the past several years, I have watched a surge of people I love walk away from Jesus, disillusioned by the church. And that is not just anecdotal. Studies show that for every person who enters the Christian faith, four leave.¹⁰ And from what I have observed, few have cited Marxism, critical race theory, or secularism as the culprit. It was not the world that pulled them away from Jesus. It was people

claiming to belong to the church. Almost all the individuals I know that have had their faith shipwrecked have cited the politicizing of Christianity and their church's apathy—and often hostility—toward justice and other issues concerning neighborly love.

The problem is that what is often propagated as mainstream Christianity is simply not worthy of the name. It is an updated Christianity of the Land. People have believed in a version of Jesus that is either silent or complicit in enabling what is clearly wrong.

Now, when I refer to the politicizing of Christianity, I have a word for my brothers and sisters on the political right before we go any further. I suspect throughout this book, some people who find themselves in this space may feel I am being one-sided in my critique of the Christianity of the Land. But the reason why my critique may seem more strongly aimed at the right is because most often, the political left is not concerned about representing Jesus. Rather, it is the conservative side—admittedly, the side of the aisle I lean—that is often referencing Jesus as a sponsor of their politics. And if they're claiming my Lord, then I'm inevitably going to have more to say to them concerning how they may (mis)represent Him. It was the same with Jesus in the Gospels—remember, there were a lot of religious alternatives in Jesus' day, but He zoned in on the Pharisees in part because they were the ones who considered themselves representatives of His Father. So when I write about the Christianity of the Land and its intersections with partisan politics, I do so as a lover of the reputation of Jesus and as somewhat of an affiliate of the tribe.

More than two thousand years ago, Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” and His disciples responded, “Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” But then Jesus directed the question squarely at them: “Who do *you* say that I am?” And Peter responded, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”¹¹

Let's walk that same question out today. There are many prominent representations of Jesus. But who do *we* think He is?

Is He ultra-right-wing Jesus, who spins a Christianity that is hostile toward the vulnerable and defensive of the powerful?

Is He condemnation Jesus, who spins a Christianity that insists people know they are wrong without insisting they know they are loved?

Is He patriot Jesus, who spins a Christianity that places America at the center of the universe, making the success of the United States tantamount to the success of God Himself?

Is He weak Jesus, who spins a Christianity steeped in fear and fragility, consumed with threat-finding and a subsequent retreat from culture?

Is He “vibes” Jesus, who spins a Christianity that is partner to our good time but never challenges us to be righteous?

Is He winning Jesus, who spins a Christianity that associates the presence of God with success with little to say about suffering?

Is He overspiritual Jesus, who spins a Christianity that scoffs at therapy, science, and any kind of pleasure perceived as worldly?

**JESUS IS NOT WHO
WE WANT HIM TO BE.
HE IS WHO HE IS AND
ALWAYS HAS BEEN.**

If we are following the real Jesus, the answer is “none of the above.” Jesus is not who we *want* Him to be. He is who He is and always has been. *He* didn’t change. *We* did. *We* have too often perverted true Christianity into a Christianity

of the Land, a Christianity devoid of Christ. And a Christianity that is devoid of Christ is a danger to all that is good.

There must be a recasting and a revival of what it means to truly belong to Jesus—the *real* Jesus. The Messiah. The Son of the living God. Likewise, there must be a recasting and a revival of true Christianity. We need to reclaim Christianity from the land and restore it to the pure, peaceable Christianity of the risen Christ.

A Christianity that cares for the marginalized, the poor, and the oppressed.

A Christianity with a global Savior and a global agenda that is

influenced by what God is doing all over the world, not simply in suburban America.

A Christianity that is as not *of* this world as it is *in* this world, meaning it has an actual effect on people's spiritual, social, economic, and environmental state.

A Christianity whose adherents are bringing the culture of heaven down to the culture of earth.

A Christianity that does not pit a biblical sexual ethic against genuinely caring for those whose lifestyles it doesn't endorse. A Christianity that loves marriage and a biblical sexual ethic as much as it loves those who oppose it.

An enemy-loving, humility-pursuing, and others-centering Christianity is indeed the Christianity of Christ. That Christianity is a good kind of dangerous. That kind of Christianity is a threat to evil—a terror to terror. That Christianity changes the world. That peaceable, pure, good-dangerous Christianity of Christ is exactly the Christianity the world is thirsty for!

If people reject our Savior, let it be because they reject Him for *Him*, not because they are repelled by a caricature of Him—a being of our own creation that only borrows His name.

Brothers and sisters, we need a revival. Better said, we need a recovery, because it's not a new Jesus we're talking about but a true Jesus.

We need to reconnect with the real Jesus—the most dangerous man I know.

We need to follow in the footsteps of this dangerous Jesus. We need to again become a threat to the threats.

Let the pure and peaceable Christianity of Christ rise, making the church dangerous for good once again.