

## Vintage Jesus – Strong, Courageous and Passionate

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Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century picture of Jesus needs to change. To many people Jesus looks to be weak, frightened and emaciated. To others He is inaccessible, distant, unrelated to their everyday life. Deep down people have a drawing to Christ, it's a spiritual thing. But many balk over the popular perception of Jesus; having said that, our culture appears to be quite fascinated by Heroes. That is the TV series as well as people we regard as people of bravery, courage or just sheer guts!

Our movie world is studded with heroes. What about The Batman in the Dark Knight, maybe James Bond, or the courageous Ellen Ripley from the Alien movies, or maybe Matt Damon as Jason Bourne. For me its Arnie in Predator, or Peter Petrelli in Heroes.

But would anyone today regard Jesus as a hero? Can any of you picture Jesus Christ as brave, daring and a man of steel? Would anyone see gentle Jesus meek and mild rising up as a gutsy, spirited and audacious individual? Could anyone imagine Jesus starring in the smash hit TV series called 24?

Most would say a resounding NO! But tonight I beg to disagree. I believe that mostly unknown and unawares to people Jesus represents the most powerful and courageous person we will ever meet. As Craig Detweiler expressed in his book "A Matrix of Meaning," "We believe a bold, ancient, radical Christ stands on the sidelines of the culture wars, waiting with arms wide open, eager to engage our hearts, our minds and our culture!"

Jesus is greater than any super hero you could ever imagine and His love is strong! His love is the strongest love you will ever experience in your life. I'm not speaking of some soft, squishy, fluffy love; I'm not talking about the gentle, delicate feminine love of a delicate fragrance either. Check out what the bible really says.

**Romans 8:35-39**, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is no mamby pamby kind of love here, but a strong, tough maybe even heavy-duty love! Let me tell you a story about this powerful, strong and courageous Jesus through a story that shows His character and integrity. Take a fresh glimpse of Vintage Jesus in full swing!

**Matthew 21:12-17**, "Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'." The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?" And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night."

This story follows on from Jesus entering into the city of Jerusalem. He entered the city seated upon a young donkey, a large crowd gathered and began to spread out their cloaks and coats on the road and

others still cut down palm tree branches and covered the road for him as He entered the city. It was almost like a king or a celebrity would walk the red carpets of the Academy Awards.

The crowd were excited. Vocal, loud and very passionate; they shouted praise and other sought to get His attention. It was a crazy day! The scripture says that the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" In the same way a lot of people are enquiring today about Jesus and asking the same question – "Who is this man?"

Some continue to see Him as weak, effeminate and emaciated; others see Him as a door mat of the religious rulers of His day. Others still see Him as mysterious, hard to imagine and inaccessible. Some see Him as gullible, naive and easy to fool. I mean He was supposed to be the Son of God, Messiah. But the rabble succeeded in crucifying Him didn't they? And at first glance it appears that Jesus just let it all happen.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Perception can be wrong.

After Jesus entered into Jerusalem he went into the Temple complex; it's called the Temple or the House of God – it was where people had been going for centuries to offer their sacrifices and worship God. It was the place where they brought their tithes and their offering. According to **Chronicles 7** it was the place where God said "I have stamped my name upon it and my eye is on it and my heart is in it always!"

When Jesus got there it appears he was transformed like the Incredible Hulk. He made a whip of cords and ransacked the temple foregrounds. He drove out the merchants, the money changers and those selling sacrificial animals. He scattered their coins and overturned the tables – in short he cause absolute chaos! It was now a shambles – not only did He upset the merchants there but He engendered great strife towards Himself with the religious rulers because they were making a profit from the sales of animals.

It was reported that His disciples in **John 2:17** that, "His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." Jesus was filled with a fire from heaven – zeal from God – Jesus moved with power, authority and great passion!

To put it bluntly, Jesus was angry! It was a godly and righteous anger too. It's the sort of anger you have when your best friend died from a heroin overdose; it's the sort of angry you feel when a friends of your is sexually assaulted; the sort of angry you feel when a drunk driver smashes into another car killing someone you know.

Jesus said to these merchants in **Matthew 21:13**, "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'."

I love these words of Jesus; He said My Father's house is a house of prayer. Many people think church is boring or that prayer is just a monologue with us trying to get God's attention. Some think church is predictable and that prayer is just reading words from a book; or maybe prayer is just something religious people do. But in fact prayer is a connection formed with God; it's when you talk with God and God talks back to us. Prayer is a connection!

What Jesus was saying was His House is a house of connection. It is a place where people can connect with God; a house of salvation, a house of deliverance, a house of healing and house of power. His House is a place where God turns up! It is supposed to be a place of worship of sacrifice, a place where destiny is forged and promise fulfilled; it is a house of innovation, creativity and a house of passion a house of compassion; a place that seeks to deliver justice, honesty and integrity.

These religious people had made it something it wasn't supposed to be. These religious people had made it a den of thieves and robbers. What the merchants were doing, with the religious rulers in agreement, was to sell animals to those who had travelled far to be in Jerusalem for worship. But the animals were sick, diseased and weak, many were lame, blind and feeble. The guys who were doing the money exchange were charging exorbitant rates for the service ripping people off big time. The whole thing was a massive rip off. They were taking advantage of people's needs. They were villains; real bad guys ... but nowhere near as cool as the Joker!

Jesus got sick of this shambles and cleaned out the temple. Jesus drove these men and their animals out of the temple. He over turned tables, that would have been exciting; He must have been really fierce, authoritative and ferocious because people got out quick.

Jesus then restored the temple to be a place where God connected with people again. It is recorded in **Matthew 21:14**, "The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them." It says in the bible that the religious were so upset with him they sought ways to kill him but it is recorded in **Luke 19:47-48**, "Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words."

Here is a hero, here is a man of steel, and here is a man of courage, strength and passion. Here are real bad guys trying to kill a real good guy. If ever you doubted Jesus was able to save you, if ever you wondered is He strong enough to help you in your darkness doubt no more! May I present to you Jesus the Son of God, a hero for all ages?

But why did He die? The religious rulers got him didn't they? They succeeded in destroying Him? They crucified Him, hanging Him on a Roman cross, they hurled abuse at Him, they spat at Him, and they pulled out the hair of His beard they clothed in a robe of purple and made fun of Him. They viciously placed a crown of thorns upon his head, they nailed His hands to the cross, they nailed His feet in to the wood.

Why didn't he save Himself?? The crowd asked the same question. **Mark 15:29-32**, "Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads and saying, "... come down from the cross and save yourself!" In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked Him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

But Jesus endured the cross, the insults, the torture and the humiliating experience. He even endured death; not because He was incapable of stopping it all. The bible says He could have called 12 legions of Angels to come and rescue Him. But Jesus was following a plan laid down from the beginning of time.

He was playing out a role designed for him from before the foundations of the earth. He had come to die as the ultimate sacrifice for all mankind, He was dying not for His own sins for He was pure, holy and utterly without sin, He would never cut this short and simply save Himself. Instead he endured the cross with great courage, with conviction with strength and with purpose!

If ever you have wondered is Jesus able to save you this is your time to consider what great a salvation He bought for us! For he died and because sin could not hold Him He rose again from death, victorious, triumphant and conquering! He rose again from death as the first fruit of those who would be saved. He was raised the victor from the dark domain of hell and Death never to die again. He rose again from death

with such power, strength and victory that the weakest of us as we connect with Him will see this victory in our lives!

This is no weak, effeminate and emaciated Jesus just barely able to crawl from His grave the victim of a badly done crucifixion. This is no religious myth designed to make you cry and feel sorry for Jesus. This is no mamby pamby invitation to connect with some weak, feeble, frail, weedy and pathetic saviour who you will regard as a crutch for the rest of your life. No way.

I present a Vintage Jesus; powerful and strong, bold and ancient, able to deliver and able to care for you. I present a Jesus who is aware of your destiny and desires to work with you to achieve greatness in this life and the one to follow. This is a Jesus who is able to forgive you of your sins, wash you clean and keep you clean. I present a Jesus who is able to make you stand in His grace and walk under His favour!

This is vintage Jesus; strong, robust, unafraid of demons and spirit, powerful in the face of opposition. He is solid, durable and tough, no one can stand against Him and it has been said that even the weakest saint upon his knee will make the powers of darkness shudder and shake with fear.

It is this Vintage Jesus who said, **Matthew 16:18**, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." It will be a church expansive with energy, passionate, vibrant, creative, innovative and original, fresh and relevant. A church for today!

I sort of think it's also time for us Christians to get mad as well. Not mad at people because they are not our enemies, but mad at the Devil and mad at the evil he spews upon the earth.

It's time to get mad at injustice, mad at poverty, mad at human trafficking, mad at inequality, mad at the things that are destroying the fabric of our community. As the light of the world and as salt to the earth it is time for the church to arise and be what it was made to be. It's time for us to truly become His hands and feet – to be His voice in the world once again.

It's not time for judgement, condemnation or bigotry, but it is time for strength of conviction, it is time for the church to walk with love, compassion and acceptance, to mirror the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only is it time for a Vintage Jesus to be seen but it is time for a Vintage church to arise!