

I. Quotes

A. He began His ministry by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life. Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water. Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King. Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons. Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world. Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death. Gregory of Nazianzus, A.D. 381.

B. Christ's statements are either cosmic or comic. John Blanchard

C. Jesus didn't die so we can go to church! Greg Murtha

D. The Greatest Man in History, Jesus, had no servants, yet they called Him Master. Had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher. Had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today. Author Unknown

E. Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western Culture for almost twenty centuries. Jaroslav Pelikan, Yale Historian

II. Introduction

A. A while back I read a newspaper article about Klout – spelled with a K, KLOUT – a web site designed to “measure your influence.” The writer explained that early in a job interview he was asked what his Klout score was. He confessed that he had no idea what the guy was talking about. The interviewer went online, entered this guy's info at the Klout website and then did two things: he announced that the writer's score was a 32, and he rather rapidly ended the interview. Thirty-two was a rather unimpressive score.

B. The writer went on to note that the guy who got the job he was after had a Klout score of 65, and that since then he had been working to raise his Klout score because, “just about everything depends on it.” He explained that everyone had a Klout score and that soon everyone would be paying attention to yours – in fact, just about everyone already was.

C. Well, against my better judgment, I put the article down, walked over to my computer, logged my information into Klout.com and was promptly told that my score was 17. Which, while it doesn't say LOSER in capital letters, it did suggest that if I was back in fourth grade I'd get beat up on recess.

1. I shared my Klout Score that night at dinner, at which point one of my sons walked over to a computer, logged into Klout and then announced that he was a 38. By the way, that was a few months ago. I recently went back to Klout to see if my score had changed. It had, I've gone down to a 13.7.

D. Well today we are going to look at the person with a slightly higher Klout score. In fact, today we are going to look at the person with the highest Klout score ever. Whose standard of influence is unmatched, and in fact, unapproachable. Today I want to highlight the influence of Jesus of Nazareth.

E. If you read the first chapter in *The Life of Jesus Christ* you got a glimpse of this. There I argued that Jesus is worth studying for at least seven reasons:

1. He is the most influential person who ever lived.
2. He is the greatest teacher who ever lived.
3. He claimed to be God.
4. You likely know less about him than you think.
5. There are good reasons to think that he is God.
6. Whoever He is, He cannot simply be a good man.
7. And the stakes are high.

F. Today I want to expand on this a bit, focusing on this very first point and the implications it brings: Jesus is the most influential person who ever lived.

III. It's worth briefly marveling at the fact that we are still talking about this man.

A. Most people's influence begins to wane as soon as they die. Jesus's influence has grown every year for the last 2,000 years, rising from being limited – regional at best – at the time of his death, to today, where he is history's most familiar figure.

B. And he secured this global impact in spite of the fact that: he spent his first 30 years in obscurity, was dead before he turned 34 and did not do any of the things most people do if they want to be remembered. He didn't write a book, build a building, run an office or conquer any land. He wasn't Linked In. He didn't tweet, he didn't blog, He didn't have any friends on Facebook.

C. Some people try to secure a legacy by naming things after themselves. Caesarea was named after Caesar. Constantinople was named after Constantine. Trump Towers, Trump Entertainment, Trump Airlines, Trump Golf and about three hundred other things are all named after The Donald. You can generally tell who wants to be remembered.

1. Jesus did not put his name on anything, and yet, if you look at a map today you see his influence everywhere. Our oldest son lives Santa Domingo in the Dominican Republic – a town and a country named after the 12th century Christian leader who founded the Dominicans. One of my brothers lives in Saint Charles, IL which was named after a 16th century Christian leader who did a lot to care for the poor during the plague. Every “Saint Something” you see on a map – Saint Charles, Saint Louis, Saint Paul, Saint George – plus all those who use a different term for “saint” like San Francisco, San Diego, San Antonio, or Sao Paulo, Santa Lucia – are all named after people who dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ.

2. And there are lots of other towns whose names are linked to Christ in some other way. I was born in Moline, IL. Moline means “cross.” Sacramento, CA is named after the sacraments of baptism and communion set up to help us draw near to Christ.

3. When you start to pay attention to a map you begin to see that though Jesus didn't name anything after himself, a whole of things got named for him.

D. On a related note, it was not uncommon for ancient rulers to date things according to their own birth or the date they began to reign.¹ Luke writes, “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...”

¹ John Ortberg, *Who is This Man?* Zondervan, 2012, p. 13.

1. These leaders did it in an effort to state that they were the reference point. And this wasn't just done by Roman Emperors. During the Enlightenment the French tried to reset the calendar according to the Age of Reason. In the early 20th century the Soviets tried to reset the calendar according to the date communism was established. Jesus didn't try to impose a calendar on anyone.² But today, virtually everyone recognizes the birth of Christ as the reference point –the hinge point of history. We reference Christ every time we put a date on the page.

E. We can make a similar argument with common names.

1. At the time Christ died the big names were Herod, Nero and Caesar. And these men not only named cities and buildings after themselves, they named their children after themselves. Herod the Great – the King of the Jews at the time that Jesus was born – named all of his children, including the girls, Herod.³ Nero and Caesar did similar things.

2. Jesus had no children to name after himself, yet today names like Herod, Nero and Caesar are used mostly for pizza parlors, casinos and dogs, while the names of Christ's followers – Peter, James, John, Andrew, Mary, Paul, Mark, Matthew – are given to our children.

F. My name, Michael, is a biblical name. Which means, when I identify myself as Mike Woodruff, born in Moline, IL in November of 1960 – I am giving three reference points to Christ. I have a biblical name. I was born in a city named after the cross, and I was born 1,960 years after Jesus was born.

² Luke dates Christ's birth by writing: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar--when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene."

³ This may be where George Foreman got the idea.

G. Christ didn't do the things people tend to do if they want to be remembered. And yet, 2,000 years later he stands in the middle of everything. More books have been written about him than about any other person – and new ones come out at the rate of three per month. More music has been written about him or in his honor than for any other person. He has inspired more art and inspired more acts of sacrifice than any other person. He's inspired more charities, hospitals, orphanages and schools than any other person. Once you start to pay attention to this, you see his influence everywhere. I mean, when people get mad and start to swear, they don't yell "Nero or George Washington!"⁴ It is Christ's name they take in vain.

H. There are lots of ways in which this man is part of the fabric of this world. Which raises a big question: why? Why does Jesus have such a big footprint? Why does he have such a high Klout Score? What, exactly, is he famous for?

I. Jesus is famous for a lot of reasons. And over the next few weeks we'll be looking at a number of them. Let me focus right now on three you may not have thought of.

IV. First, Jesus raised the perceived value of human life – especially for women, children, the sick and the oppressed.⁵

A. It was not self-evident to the ancients that everyone was created equal – that every person had value. It wasn't self-evident to Socrates. It wasn't self-evident to Aristotle.⁶ It took Jesus to teach us to value everyone.

B. It was Jesus who elevated the status of women.

1. He was born into a world where there was a dramatic shortage of women – by some estimates, there were 140 men for every 100 women – because baby girls were far more likely to be left to die.⁷

⁴ I mean, if you visit a mental institution it's not uncommon to find someone there who claims to be Jesus. Not Caesar or George Washington or Buddha or Columbus, but Jesus.

⁵ Ortberg, p. 15.

⁶ Aristotle wrote that inequality was the natural order of things, "For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule." (Ortberg, p. 26.)

⁷ Out of the 600 families known about in the city of Delphi, only one raised more than one daughter. The rest were apparently abandoned to die. The Greek poet Posidippus (3rd century BC) wrote, "Everyone raises a son even if he is poor but exposes a daughter even if he is rich." (Ortberg, p. 47).

2. He was raised in a time when the Greek's considered a woman a child no matter her age, where laws about women were laws about property⁸ and where few women were allowed to attend school or encouraged to learn to read. In that setting:

a) His longest recorded conversation is with a Samaritan woman. It's a conversation in which he not only showed that he cared for her, it's one where he listened to her – where he took her mind and thoughts seriously.

b) And when Mary and Martha chose different paths – Martha was cleaning and cooking and Mary was sitting at Jesus feet, a shocking, radical thing in that day – Jesus affirmed Mary.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Jesus gave women human dignity...Prior to Jesus, women were regarded as inferior beings, religiously speaking.”⁹

4. Christ's treatment of women led to the formation of a community that was so congenial to women that they joined it in record numbers. In fact, the early church was disparaged because of the status and value it gave to women.

C. It took Jesus to teach us that children had value.

1. In a book entitled, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*, O.M. Bakke explains that prior to Christ elevating the status of children, many viewed them as less than fully human.

2. It was customary not to name a child during the first week of its life because it was a while before you decided whether or not you were going to keep it.¹⁰ They – especially girls – were often abandoned on the garbage heap to die of exposure.

3. It was a Christian Emperor – citing Christ's call to let the children come to him, and who said, “unless you become like a little child you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” – who made this practice illegal.

⁸ In the ancient world if a woman was sexually violated, the compensation went to her husband.

⁹ Ortberg, p. 51.

¹⁰ “The pagan world, as such, would not have understood any such thing as a serious suggestion that a child is higher or holier than a man. It would have seemed like the suggestion that a tadpole is higher than a frog...Peter Pan does not belong to the world of Pan but the world of Peter.” G.K. Chesterton.

4. And it was the value that Christians placed on children that led those who were going to abandon their child to start leaving them outside churches or monastic communities – which was the beginning of orphanages.

D. It was Jesus who elevated the value of the sick

1. In *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*,¹¹ Sociologist Rodney Stark notes that during the reign of Marcus Aurelius – around 165 AD – an epidemic of what we now think was probably small pox killed as many as one-third of the people of Rome. A second epidemic hit about one hundred years later and 5,000 people died every day in Rome alone.

2. Panic set in. People abandoned anyone who got sick. After all, there was no call to compassion from Homer or Zeus. The followers of the Greek gods were not told to put themselves in harm's way to care for those who couldn't care for themselves. Consequently, many who might have lived died.

3. The Greek historian Thucydides writes about what happened in Athens when the plague hit there.

a) “They died with no one to look after them. Indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any intention for care. The bodies of the dying were heaped up, one on top of the other...No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence.”

4. The epidemic eventually spread to Rome, and when it did Thucydides – a Roman historian – wrote:

a) At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead... hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease.

¹¹ Stark points to a number of advantages that Christianity had over paganism to explain its growth: While others fled cities, Christians stayed in urban areas during plague, ministering and caring for the sick; Christian populations grew faster, due to the prohibition of abortion, infanticide and birth control; Christians did not fight against their persecutors by open violence or guerrilla warfare. They willingly went to their martyrdom while praying for their captors, which added credibility to their evangelism. Women were valued and allowed to participate in worship leading to a high rate of secondary conversion, whereas in paganism, men outnumbered women. (Wikipedia). Stark's basic thesis is that, ultimately, Christianity triumphed over paganism because it improved the quality of life of its adherents at that time.

5. But, those who followed Christ – those who followed the example of the man who touched lepers and who instructed the disciples to tend to the sick – took a different tack. They cared for the sick. They put themselves in harm’s way. When everyone else fled the city or abandoned the sick, the Christians did the opposite.

a) Dionysius, a 3rd century bishop of Alexandria, wrote that during these plagues Christians, “Heedless of the danger, took charge of the sick, attending to their every need, and ministering to them in Christ.”

6. Jesus had persuaded people by his example and teaching that we need to care for one another. That everyone has value, even those who are sick and weak. This was revolutionary. Stark argues that it’s part of what fueled the rapid growth of the early church. In fact, he argued that it was not just that:

a) The Christians were growing because they were raising other people’s babies

b) And gaining converts from those they nursed back to health

c) And picking up lots of other people who saw the way they loved one another and wanted in.

d) He argues that part of what led the church to explode is that their care for others helped they develop immunities to a number of the diseases that later devastated other communities.

7. There is a lot more that could be said on this theme.¹² I’ll simply note that one of the reason so many hospitals or aid groups have names like Good Samaritan, Good Shepherd, St. Mark’s, St. Luke’s, Red Cross¹³ is because hospitals in general – the idea of caring for the sick – grew out of Christ’s teaching and example.¹⁴

¹² And by the way, we know others were paying attention to how the Christians were living. The Emperor Julian the Apostate – obviously no big fan of the Christian faith given his title – is on record chastising his pagan priests for not keeping up with the care being offered by Christians. He wrote: I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by priests, the impious Galileans (i.e., Christians) observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence... The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.”

¹³ The Red Cross was founded by Jean Henri Dunant, a Christian, who couldn’t stand the sound of soldiers dying on the battlefield after they had been wounded. He devoted his life to helping them in Jesus name.

¹⁴ St. Basil the Great, motivated by Christ’s example, decided to build facilities to care for lepers. His brother, Gregory of Nyssa, preached what is regarded as one of the most famous sermons of that century in which he announced that lepers were made in the image of God in the same way others have been – and then, based on

- E. And it wasn't just women, children and the sick whose value was championed by Christ. The value of slaves was also changed.
1. Slavery was universal in the ancient world. Unlike American slavery it was not race-based. You fell into slavery when you got into debt or were captured. Slaves had few rights. In the Roman world they were *non habens personam* – literally, “not having a person” or “not having a face.”
 2. It was Christians – confronted with the idea that God had not only become a man, and that this man had not only come to serve – to wash the feet of others – but who identified himself as a slave and who championed the rights of the least of these – it was Christians who eventually moved to abolish slavery.
- F. I do not want to suggest that Christ's followers always – or quickly – got it right.
1. There are times when you are left to marvel that Jesus could survive his followers. The Crusades, Inquisition, the defense of slavery argued by some churches are only a few of the ways his followers ignored what he said and did and tried to justify the opposite.
 2. But there can be no doubt that Jesus elevated the status of the “have nots.” Indeed, He not only reached out to women, children, the sick and oppressed – He not only argued for the care for widows, orphans, aliens and prisoners – He went to all those others avoided: tax collectors, Samaritans, the disabled,¹⁵ lepers
- G. Jesus elevated the value of life – of the value of those overlooked.
- V. A second remarkable thing that Jesus did was elevate the life of the mind.

Christ's statement that whenever you take care of the least of these you take care of him – he said, “Let us take care of Christ while there is still time. Let us minister to Christ's needs. Let us show Christ honor.” This was the beginning of hospitals. The council where these two brothers worked – which is the same place where the Nicene Creed would emerge – proclaimed that wherever a church was built a hospice – a place of caring for the sick and poor – must be built.

¹⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff writes, “Jesus' understanding of who are the downtrodden has been expanded well beyond the Old Testament understanding, to include not just the victims of social structures and practices --- widows, orphans, aliens, the poor, the imprisoned – but also those excluded from full participation in society because they are defective, malformed, or seen as religiously inferior. The coming of God's just reign requires that those too be lifted up.” (Ortberg, p. 38).

- A. Though he never wrote a book, his call to love God with all our mind lead to the formation of a community that not only promoted literacy and learning, it changed our world in three huge ways.
- B. First, it was the church that pulled Europe out of the Dark Ages
1. If you read Thomas Cahill's book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, you know that when Rome finally fell and the classical world stumbled into what is sometimes called the Dark Ages, it was Christian communities – particularly the Irish monasteries – that helped pull it out. They loved people and loved learning. They had preserved books – and not just the Bible, but all books – and kept literacy alive.¹⁶
 2. And it was Christian missionaries – who not only took The Book with them as they took the message about Christ, but who also took reading – that helped spread literacy around the world. There are hundreds if not thousands of languages that have been reduced to writing only because of Christians wanting to take the Bible to people.
- C. Second, it was Christians – and the Christian worldview – that gave us the scientific revolution.
1. Many are shocked by this. They think that science and faith line up against each other, missing the fact that those who gave us the scientific revolution – I'm thinking here of people like Francis Bacon, Galileo, Blaise Pascal, Louis Pasteur, Isaac Newton and others – were followers of Christ.
 2. And they gave birth to science because as Christians they believed that creation was orderly and good (not bad, as some said) but not god (as others said). This meant it could be studied, analyzed. And they were motivated to do this in part because they believed that the Creator had revealed himself in his creation.
 3. Science grew out of Christ's worldview.
- D. Third, it was Christians who were the driving force behind higher education. The call to love God with our mind not only spilled out in broad sweeping pushes for learning and literacy, it led to the formation of the university.

¹⁶ According to Jaroslav Pelkikan, "one may perhaps begin to comprehend how completely Christ the Monk conquered the scholarly world of the Middle Ages by checking, in the standard modern editions, how many works of antiquity even exist for us today only because they were copied by monks in some medieval scriptorium...[works of] not only Christian saints but of classical and pagan authors." (Ortberg, p. 65).

1. It was Christians who formed Oxford and Cambridge – because Jesus had told us to love God with our mind. In fact, the motto of Oxford is “The Lord is my light” from Psalm 27.

2. And it was Christians who established Harvard, where the mission statement was that “every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life., and to lay Christ as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.”

3. Yale, Princeton, William and Mary, Brown and hundreds of other schools were founded with similar missions. Ninety-two percent of the first 138 colleges were founded by Christ followers. And well into the 19th century most college presidents were pastors – and that was often the case in state schools. As I have noted, a student was expelled from the University of Illinois – which last month was ranked number four among party schools by the Princeton Review – but in the early 20th century a student was kicked out for missing chapel. Things have changed a fair bit – but let’s note, higher education was driven by Christians because of Christ’s celebration of thinking.

E. Some are surprised by this – unaware of Christ’s influence on the life of the mind. Perhaps even skeptical of my claims, so let me add one more data point. In addition to the statements of the founders of all of these colleges – who make it clear that they were starting these schools both because of the call of Christ to love God with their mind and the desire to learn more about Christ – in addition to the statements of these founders we might add a second data point. Christ’s impact on higher education can be documented another way. He wins the academic prize.

1. In the world of higher education, scholar’s keep score by noting how many times their work is cited by others. At one level they count how many things they have published. But when you move up in the ranks, the question isn’t how many things you wrote – but how many things have been written about what you wrote. On this front Jesus’s impact is unparalleled. According to Harvey Cox, who recently retired from Harvard after teaching there for 35 years: “the words of the Sermon on the Mount are the most luminous, most quoted, most analyzed, most contested, more influential moral and religious discourse in all of human history.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Harvey retired from Harvard in 2009. See also: Ortberg, p. 62.

VI. Finally, in addition to Jesus changing the way people think about others and leading a revolution of the mind, Jesus changed our understanding of right and wrong.

A. For instance, He is the one who elevated humility. Before Christ humility was understood to be a sign of weakness. The Greeks and Romans looked down on those who admitted their faults. But there was a “humility revolution” that secular historians have traced back to Jesus.¹⁸ His followers were so taken by his life and his teaching that they decided that greatness looked and acted very differently than they previously thought. Before Christ the idea that a great person would serve others – would wash someone else’s feet – was unheard of.

B. Before Christ, the moral high ground was “only do to others what they had done to you.” Limit revenge to “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

1. You were to help your friends and punish your enemies. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus changed that. He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

2. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

C. Jesus is the one that persuaded us that forgiveness is an act of moral beauty not a sign of weakness.

VII. Men and women, this man changed the world. I could go on – there is more to say. This uneducated, itinerant, never-wrote-a-book carpenter changed the world more than anyone else.

A. But I want to be sure you hear this. He stands alone in terms of global historical impact.

¹⁸ See John Dickson’s book, *Humilitas* for an overview of the research done about the “humility revolution.”

- B. The map is littered with references to him.
- C. He is the hinge point of history.
- D. He raised the value of human life
 - 1. He elevated the status of women
 - 2. He elevated the status of children
 - 3. He changed the way we view the sick and the oppressed
- E. His ideas about thinking reshaped our world – fueled the spread of literacy, helped pull Europe out of the Dark Ages, gave birth to science and essentially led to the formation of colleges and universities.
- F. The way the world thinks about right and wrong was profoundly changed by him.
- G. No one has changed the world in these ways. No one has a resume that includes things like – elevated the status of all people! And yet – hear this – we tend not to talk about these things because there are other things about him that are more amazing.
- H. We tend not to talk about the remarkable way he changed the world because other things about him – other things he did – were even more amazing.

VIII. We are going to pick up there next week – and look at what Christ had to say about himself and his mission – what he thought mattered most.

- A. Let me be clear, it's big.
- B. He came to reconcile all things – starting with you with God.
- C. Jesus is bigger and more important than your biggest thoughts about him.
- D. Next week we will look again at the life and work of the Jesus of Nazareth. Bring your friends and come back!

IX. In closing let me note that this is the last easy chance to fully participate in this campaign.

- A. Daily devotions will start tomorrow. And small groups will start meeting right away. There is a table in the lobby where they can help you with any of this.
 - 1. Get signed up for the devotions
 - 2. Pick up the materials – the book, workbook and DVD

3. Start a small group or join one

B. And I would push one last time to encourage you to invite your friends. The start of The 01 means we have more room in our AM services on this campus, especially at 11. Invite a friend. Give them a copy of the book and say, “We’re talking about this. It’s a six week series. I think you’d get something out of it.”