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JR: Well I suppose you've all heard of Jesus.

His name is said some 2 billion times a day throughout Australia usually in a very loud voice with a (slight) slight beer slur. Monuments to his memory are erected in every city and village in the country not only in Australia but in most of the Western world. Unlike the other thinkers and great ideas he has a household word and a household thought and yet I'm curious there is a document which purports to be the story of Jesus' life and teaching and I'm curious as to how many of you have actually read through the first 4 books of the New Testament, how many have?

Half maybe have read the Gospels. That's interesting that's more than I would have suspected, I know you have [better] you don't have to keep your hand up <laughter>.

This is heavy I had a lot of trepidation about giving a talk about Jesus and I had bad dreams about it all last night.

I think it's probably the easiest way on earth to win an unpopularity contest because I can think of almost no one who's not likely to be offended by practically anything anyone is likely to say about Jesus because not only is he a thinker and a philosopher he is a symbol for people's lives. The name of Jesus, the symbolism connected with Jesus is probably the most potent set of symbols in Western life, not only to Christians but to Jews, to the whole world of Islam and in fact to virtually everyone anywhere in the West.

And it's still potent 2000 years after his death, just as potent now as it was a 1000 years ago or 1500 years ago. In fact I'm reminded of the album just released by I think it's America, the group, which has the line in it which is repeated over and over again I don't want to hear about your law and order I'm just trying to turn this water into wine and I suppose in a sense that is what can be said about all of us who are resisting what we see is the constant encroachment of rules, regulations, bureaucracy, standardization and conformity on our lives. We'd rather spend our time trying to turn some water into wine. Well that's what Jesus did we are told and he did it at a wedding.

The stories about Jesus are endless and yet most of the stories about Jesus have the quality of not saying or not being stories about what he thought or what his ideas were, they are stories rather about what he did he turned the water into wine he healed the sick he raised the dead, he died on the cross and our celebrations are contemporary celebrations about Jesus also tend to be celebrations of events. On Friday we celebrate the day he was crucified, on Sunday we celebrate the day he rose from the dead, on Christmas we celebrate the day he was born and so on and on and on through the whole litany of holy days and celebrations of each year we celebrate something that happened in the life of Jesus and almost never do we say 'well what did he say?', 'what did he teach?', 'what were his ideas?'. So what I'd like to do today is share with you what I think are some of the central core ideas of Jesus but before doing that I'd like to spend a little bit of time placing him in a historical setting and talking a bit about the man himself. Who he may have been and why he may have emerged at the time he did and why a carpenter from Galilee may have been a man whose name still resounds on throughout the world 2000 years later.

Who was he?

Well on the face of it he was apparently the bastard son of an impoverished carpenter and a 17 year old girl, who at his birth was born in a barn because they were too poor and too uninfluential to find a place for him to stay. He spent his early life working in his father's carpentry shop in a little backwater hick town on the outlying fringes of the Roman Empire. Then when he became a young man he took to wandering around the countryside preaching the strangest kinds of gospels, claiming that he had had visions and had talked to God that he had

been tempted by the devil and so on and he never left his native country to speak of and when he was 33 years old barely come into full manhood after 3 or 4 years of wondering around the country he finally as an adult went to his capital city of Jerusalem itself much of a little hick town on the outlying fringes of the Roman Empire and within a week of the time he set foot in the city he was executed by the Romans and by his own people for being a heretic and a blasphemer.

Now some people his disciples claimed that he had certain supernatural powers that he could heal the sick that he could raise the dead that he himself arose from the dead, that he could walk on the water that you could make storms go quiet but the Bible the gospels themselves make it clear that most people scoffed at that idea and that was very few people who really believed it and in fact at his trial the public scoffed at him and mocked him and made fun of him and said 'performs miracles for us healer'. So apparently even in his own day those people around him for the most part didn't believe that he had any kind of supernatural powers. Also he claimed that he was the Messiah the Saviour of Israel. Well messiahs were a dime a dozen in the Romans crucified them by the hundreds every year they all popped up out of the villages in the countryside and said they were going to liberate countries from the Roman tyrant and so the Romans wiped them out one after another in exactly the same way we wipe out the people who are to dissidents against the societies which dominate the world.

And yet 2000 years later everybody talks about Jesus.

Now there are some explanations as to why he behaved the way he did and some of these explanations are fascinating and some are bizarre. Let's talk about a few of those explanations. There is of course the common Christian fundamentalist explanation, that he was the only begotten Son of God who came into the world on the direction of God in fulfilment of the prophecies to take upon himself the sins of the world to die on the cross as a sacrifice to expiate the world from sin so that we could find salvation.

In short that he was a divine Son of God fulfilling a historical mission to man. That's the fundamentalist Christian interpretation of who Jesus was and why he did the things he did.

Then there is interpretation given by Nikos Kazantzakis the Greek writer in his book *The Last Temptation of Christ* in which he pictures Jesus as a schizophrenia a man who was tormented by his sexual drives, tormented by homo sexual fantasies given to almost mad schizophrenia or epileptic fits in which he saw visions which he then went back and preached. That he was charismatic because he was mad and that his attempt to proclaim himself the Messiah was no different from the [attempts] 7:33 of someone in a mental hospital today who proclaims himself or herself the Messiah, Napoleon or what have you.

Then there is the fascinating interpretation, I find it fascinating because it's both so bizarre and so plausible and unless your too conventional. An explanation given by Erich von Daniken in his writings about the *Chariots of the Gods* in the return to the stars, and the gold of the gods, in which he suggests that the human race was implanted here on Earth by visitors from other stars other

planets who came and left an embryonic colony here either by living some of their own people or by interbreeding with the local animals and who occasionally have come back and intersperse themselves among us in secret to be our great teachers our great scientists our great prophets too in a subtle way bring us along help us to progress until some day we may achieve something like the level that these beings from space have achieved and can be brought into the international or intergalactic community of whatever it may be called humanity or something different and that Jesus is saying he came from another world, that the God that was his father that he had other sheep that we know nothing about, that he was here on earth to do the will of his father and was leaving again that he would come back again someday was one of these emissaries from space who came to lift the level of consciousness of mankind.

I think it's fun, I like the idea. And I know a lot of people who believe it as if you'll forgive the expression, gospel truth.

Then there is the idea put forward by Albert Camus in his play *The Fall* in which he suggests that Jesus knew that he had been tapped as a young man by the astrologers to be the Messiah for Israel. He knew that when he fled to Egypt that Herod's ordering of the killing of all the males babies under 2 years old was because of him and that his life was an attempt to expiate his guilt for the death of all those babies of about his own age who had died because of the astrological forecasts which had been made and shared with Herod and that this is the motivation, his own guilt and that he took upon Himself the sins and the guilt of others for that reason.

Then there is the conventional modern interpretation, that Jesus was in fact a member of an extreme politically radical sect and that he was essentially a revolutionary and a political activist, whose major motivation was to overthrow Roman power and to liberate his nation and that the reason he taught in parables and the reason he spoke in a mystical kind of terminology was to escape the notice of the Romans, that he knew that if he preached explicit political revolution that he would be seized and crucified immediately and so he spoke in parables, he spoke by indirection, he spoke the private language of his own people so that the Romans would not pay so much attention to him.

Well these are some interpretations which are given as to the motivations Jesus had for doing what he did and saying what he did but let's now turn if you will allow me to the biblical account of Jesus' birth and see who the historians the recorder's of his life themselves tell us that he was.

Incidentally I'm going to do a good deal of reading from the New Testament this morning because I think it's a lot easier to quote the best records we have as to what Jesus said rather than for me to try to interpretations upon it.

This is the story of the birth of the Messiah, Mary his mother was betrothed to Joseph. Before their marriage she found that she was with child by the Holy Spirit, being a man of principle and at the same time wanting to save her from exposure. Joseph desired to have the marriage contract set aside quietly, he had resolved on this when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

Joseph son of David said the Angel do not be afraid to take Mary home with you as your wife it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child, she will bear a son and you shall give him the name Jesus which means saviour for he will save his people from their sins.

All this happened in order to fulfil what the Lord declared through the prophet. The Virgin will conceive and bear a son and he shall be called Emmanuel a name which means God with us.

Rising from sleep Joseph did as the angel had directed him he took Mary home to be his wife but had no intercourse with her until her son was born and he named the child Jesus. Know you will note that Joseph believed that his wife had become pregnant and he intended to set aside the marriage and then he had a dream saying that the baby was of divine origin and that his wife was without sin.

I allow you to make your own interpretations as to whether this is a spiritual truth or a psychological rationalization.

Jesus was born at Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of Herod. After his birth astrologers from the East arrived in Jerusalem asking where is the Child who was born to be king of the Jews, we observe the rising of his star and we have come to know him homage.

King Herod was greatly perturbed when he heard this and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the chief priests and lawyers of the Jewish people and put before them the question where is it that the Messiah is to be born? At Bethlehem in Judea they replied and they referred him to the prophecy which reads Bethlehem in the land of Judah you are far from least in the eyes of the rulers of Judah for out of you shall come a leader to be the shepherd of my people Israel.

Herod next call the astrologers to him in private and ascertained from them the time when the star had appeared. He then sent them on to Bethlehem and said "Go and make a careful inquiry for the child when you have found him report to me so that I may go myself and pay him homage".

They set out at the King's bidding and the star which they had seen and its rising went ahead of them until it stopped above the place where the child lay. At the sight of the star they were overjoyed. Entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother and bowed to the ground in homage to him then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh and being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod they returned home another way.

After they had gone an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said to him "Rise up take the child and his mother and escape with them to Egypt and stay there until I tell you for Herod is going to search for the child to do away with him". So Joseph rose from his sleep and taking the mother and child by night he went away with them to Egypt and there he stayed till Herod's

death this was to fulfil what the Lord had declared through the prophet I called my son out of Egypt.

When Herod saw how the astrologers had tricked him he fell into a passion and gave orders for the massacre of all children in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood of the age of 2 years or less corresponding with the time he had ascertained from the astrologers. So the words spoken through Jeremiah the prophet were fulfilled of voice was heard and Rama wailing with loud laments it was Rachel weeping for her children and refusing all consolation because they were no more.

The time came that Herod died and an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt and said to him "Rise up take the child and his mother and go with them to the land of Israel for the men who threaten the child's life are dead". So he rose took the mother and child with him and came to the land of Israel hearing however that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod is king of Judea he was afraid to go there and being warned by a dream he withdrew to the region of Galilee. There he settled in a town called Nazareth. This was to fulfil the words spoken through the prophets he shall be called a Nazarene.

Joseph was a dreamer.

We still must ask given this interpretation by the Disciples of Christ as to the nature of his portentous birth and the reason for his coming into the world. Why is it that what he taught still pervades Western thought and Western philosophy

after two millennia? And perhaps the underlying concept which needs to be brought in here is that statement, "Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come" and it is perhaps because the time had come for the message which Jesus had to preach that the idea was so powerful. Remember the parable which Jesus himself gave about seed falling on barren ground and the birds come and take it away a seed falling among the nettles and the nettles spring up in the weeds choke it and seed falling on stony ground and it withers and so on and finally seed falling on fertile ground it springs up and bears full fruit. Now if you will take an idea whose time has come as being seed which has fallen on fertile ground then perhaps an examination of the kind of ground into which Jesus cast his seed 2000 years ago will help us understand why those ideas were so powerful.

What was the nature of the situation in which Jesus was born and in which he taught? First of all you must understand that it was a world in which all that was known to the Western man was Roman Empire. The Romans had conquered the entire Mediterranean area. Roman Empire in those days was far more powerful to the Western world than was the British Empire ever and perhaps even more powerful and more all-pervasive than is the Euro American Empire today.

Roman Empire everything was under the wing, the umbrella, the rulership of Rome and what was the nature of the Roman Empire? I think it's fair to say that the underlying value that is the underlying mythology, the underlying belief system of the Roman Empire was that power is its own justification, that it is power which is what men should seek, that it is power which (is) has a right to rule individual lives and a right to rule the world and empire based on the frank

and open adulation of power. Power as the ultimate value and the instrument of Roman power was the most magnificently trained and organized and commanded army the world had ever seen. An army which had excellent, detailed tactics worked out for battle on both land and sea and army which had swept over all of the world and had been irresistible by anyone. An army which after it had conquered a nation continued to be the major ruling force in that nation because the army then gave birth to its own commanders, its commanders of ten hundred and a thousand and so on, who then became as well the civilian rulers of the nations in adjunct with the appointees the political appointees of the Emperor from Rome.

Which leads us to the third characteristic of the Roman Empire which was very very efficient government. A highly developed system of decision making, a highly developed system of administration, a highly developed postal system, communication system. In short a civilization, a government which had brought unity, organization and efficiency out of the chaos of tribes, city states, nation states, nomadic peoples and so on which before the Roman Empire and lived on the border of the Mediterranean.

It was an Empire which had borrowed much of its culture from one of its conquered peoples, the Greeks. Which was obsessed with its emulation of Greek art, Greek ideas, Greek music, Greek mathematics and which apparently if we are to believe the historians was occasionally a bit self-conscious about the fact that it had so much imitated the Greeks and taken over from the Greeks rather than developing to a higher level its own intrinsic culture but the culture which had been taken from the Greeks, Romanised, added to, was then expanded and

became the standard for culture in all of the conquered nations which the Romans ruled.

It was an Empire which had the frank goal of limitless expansion. No apologies about aggressive war, no apologies about the self-determination of all the peoples of the world, no crap about the democratic rights and making the world safe for diversity. The goal was expansion and ruling endless expansion, endless growth and the glory of Rome was the ultimate justification for that endless expansion and it was an Empire which had slavery as the human basis of its social order, an Empire whose menial tasks were performed by slaves either slaves under the whip or slaves under the threat of punishment if they didn't behave in acceptable household domestic animal ways.

Slaves to man the galleys, slaves to man the front ranks of the armies, slaves to man the mines and so on. It was an empire which imposed a discipline upon its elites by the adulation of Caesar as divine, so that the God of the Roman Empire was the same as the political head of the Roman Empire.

And finally and somewhat perversely it was an empire which tolerated a great amount of local diversity on the part of the people that it conquered. It was the Romans who developed the triune system of law; the concept of natural law, that is the law of nature, of the law given by God, the concept of Roman law that is the law of the Empire and the concept of the law of the peoples so that if the Romans went in and conquered a particular area the people were allowed to keep to a great extent their own traditions their own laws rather than having

Roman law imposed on them. Roman law was imposed only in things having to do with foreign relations and in the ultimate kinds of penalties and sanctions within the state other than that local custom was allowed to prevail. Now this last point explains why within the framework of the Roman Empire (the state) the states such as Judea and so on were allowed to maintain their own traditions, their own rulers their own hierarchy, their own customs. Now looking at Judea and the Jews what was their situation under the Roman Empire? (the) to what extent could they maintain their own traditions and their own ideas?

Well first of all it was a state in which ancient custom ruled almost all aspects of daily life. In which for the devout, for the believers, every movement was prescribed, every social relationship was carefully defined. A state in which elaborate ritualized forms had long since replaced a dynamic changing kind of society. It was a state in which commandments furnished the basis for social life and I should add a group of people which lived very much by the code of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth originally from the Code of Hammurabi and taken somewhat modified by Moses in the Ten Commandments.

Let me give you some examples of the extremity of the nature of the code of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If someone looted a house which was on fire, that person was thrown into the house on the spot and burnt to death. If someone broke into a house they were impaled on stakes. If an innkeeper cheated his customers and was caught doing so he was drowned. If a farmer made a contract to cultivate a field and failed to carry out the contract to cultivate the field he was hitched behind a team of oxen and dragged to death. If the builder, a carpenter built a house and in a high wind or a slight earth tremor the house collapsed the builder was beheaded.

If anyone was caught practicing any of the pagan cults they were executed.

If they were caught breaking a commandment such as working on the Sabbath they were executed. If a son cursed his father he was stoned to death.

Tough customers it was a brutal, brutal, brutal society in which it was assumed as the basic groundwork that have someone infringed the laws, if someone broke the rules they were to be stoned, hanged, burned or drowned. It was also a society which had an overwhelming sense of its own impotence. The Jews knew that they were powerless in the face of the Romans and they had developed any (elaborate) elaborate system of indirection and deviousness of trying to find a little areas where their own laws, their own customs could rule in the face of overwhelming Roman might and at the same time they had become the kind of people who are bowed by the sense of knowing that in the final analysis they are helpless.

This of course carried with it a kind of despair, a hopelessness and as my final comment it was a society which was torn, which was permeated by fanatics.

Every week, every month you had new sects, new political movements, new messiahs springing up in the villages, in the cities, in the deserts. National liberation movements, indeed national liberation movements, people promising that they were the prophesied Messiah who had come to liberate Israel from the Roman yoke and as I said as quickly as they sprang up they were stamped out by the Roman overlords.

So this is the ground into which Jesus dropped his words. An efficient, ruthless expansionistic Empire lording it over a weak traditional ruthless local tribal or semi tribal society.

So what did he say?

Let me read you some of Jesus' doctrine, this is from the book of Matthew.

Matthew I think spends more time recording the actual words of Jesus than any of the other writers. Mark and Luke tell us all the events that happened and John is more of a love letter to Jesus.

Here is what Matthew records as being Jesus' first sermon or the first sermon which we have recorded at least.

"How blessed are those who know that they are poor, the kingdom of heaven is theirs. How blessed are the sorrowful, they shall find consolation. How blessed are those of a gentle spirit, they shall have the earth for their possession.

How blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail, they shall be satisfied. How blessed are those who show mercy, mercy shall be shown to them. How blessed are those whose hearts are pure, they shall see God. How blessed are the peacemakers, God shall call them his sons. How blessed are those who have suffered persecution for the cause of right, the kingdom of heaven is theirs. How blessed are you when you suffer insults and persecution and every kind of calumny for my sake, except with gladness and exultation for you shall have a rich reward in heaven in the same way they persecuted the

prophets before you”.

And he said in regard to Roman and Jewish law “You have learned, if a man wants to sue you for your shirt let him have your coat as well, if a man in authority makes you go a mile go with him two miles. Give when you are asked to give and do not turn your back on a man who wants to borrow from you. You have learned love your neighbour, hate your enemy but what I tell you is this love your enemies and pray for your persecutors only so can you be children of your Heavenly Father who makes his sunrise on good and bad alike and sends the sun and the rain on the honest and the dishonest. If you love only those who love you what reward can you expect, surely the taxpayers do as much as that the tax gatherers do as much as that and if you greet only your brothers what is there extraordinary about that, even the heathen do that much you must therefore be all goodness just as your heavenly Father is all good”.

That's an extraordinary doctrine to be dropped into the seed or into the ground of Roman Empire and Jewish tradition. It's a doctrine of submission, of mercy, of non-resistance to authority. No wonder the Jews who are looking for a militant Messiah to save them from the Romans hated him and no wonder the Romans were so eager to forgive him his preachings.

A doctrine of non-resistance the Romans should have loved it and yet the Romans didn't love it entirely and perhaps it's because they saw what as David Hitchens mentioned yesterday in the social enquiry lecture and Edward Gibbons saw in the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. They saw that while Jesus did

not directly challenge the military and the governmental power of the Roman Empire as the Jews had hoped that he would what he did was challenge the underlying value structure on which the empire was based. He struck at the very foundations of Roman power, the Romans taught power, efficiency, order, expansion, retribution, dominance and conquest and Jesus taught turning the other cheek, loving, submitting, looking within for your happiness, allowing each other person his own rights and your respect of him or as Gibbons calls it the masculine Roman empire coming into conflict with the feminine teachings of Christ and I will not say the obvious thing that Jesus was perhaps the first women's liberationist.

What he did however was he taught and attempted to legitimize values which had formerly been either absent or totally scorned and so as I said before and I repeat he did not directly attack the instruments of Roman power but he attacked the very basis, the foundation values of Roman power.

Now let's go back again to some more of the teachings of Jesus and see what he said about how we ought to live with one another as human beings.

"I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive and cloths to cover your body, surely life is more than food and the body is more than clothes. Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. You are worth more than the birds. Is there a man of you who by anxious thought can add a foot to his height. And why be anxious about clothes, consider how the lilies grow in the fields that are

not work they do not spin and yet I tell you even Solomon and all his splendour was not attired like one of these and if that is how God clothes the grass in the fields which is there today and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, will he not all the more clothe you? How little faith you have. No do not ask anxiously what are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear? For these are things for the heathen to run after not for you because your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else and all the rest will come to you as well so do not be anxious about tomorrow, tomorrow will look after itself each day has troubles enough of its own". Does that sound familiar?

Turn on and tune in and drop out the universe will take care of you.

"And now a man came up and asked him Master what good must I do to gain eternal life? Good, said Jesus, why do you ask me about that? One alone is good but if you wish to enter into life keep the commandments. Which commandments he asked. Jesus asked do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false evidence, honour your father and mother and love your neighbour as yourself. The young man answered I have kept all these, where do I still fall short? Jesus said to him if you wish to go the whole way sell your possessions give them to the poor and then you will have riches in heaven and come and follow me. When the young man heard this he went away with a heavy heart for he was a man of great wealth.

And finally "Master which is the greatest commandment of all and he answered love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind that is the greatest commandment It comes first, the second is like it, love your neighbour as yourself everything in the law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments, teachings of Jesus about how to live and how to relate to others" and finally the teaching of Jesus about how to die. "This is my commandment love one another as I have loved you there is no greater love than this that a man should lay down his life for his friends. This is my commandment to you love one another"

And finally, (on) sorry I said finally about 3 times didn't, and finally on political order and political revolution. "The Pharisees asked him when will the kingdom of God Come? he said you cannot tell by observation when the Kingdom of God comes. There will be no saying look here it is or there it is for in fact the kingdom of God is within you".

Now I suppose in listening to these ideas of Jesus the reaction is to say well these are common thoughts, these are common ideas (ah) there's nothing unusual or particularly revolutionary or different about these ideas to love others so on but you have to remember that they were almost new ideas in that time and that era now if I can put it in a somewhat different context let's try thinking about it this way.

Robert Ardrey in his book *African Genesis* suggests that there are a number of characteristics, almost instinctual characteristics which have evolved in the

human species during some 14 million years in which we have been formed as the species we are. I won't elaborate on those sets of characteristics except for one of them, Ardrey argues I think very persuasively that it has been the fundamental orientation of the human species to organize itself into small groups, clans, tribes, families, small communities and that this has been the way we have lived for most of our evolutionary history and that for 14 million years the emotional loading of that small group organization has been what he calls the amity and enmity, set of relationships and by that he means that you love and support and trust those within the small group of which you are a part of all others are to be hated, to be looked upon as inferior, to be fought against and to be destroyed, so there are the insiders your own group and the outsiders all the rest of humanity who are to be hated.

Now if Ardrey and other writers who take this point of view are anything like right that means that for something like 14 million years we have had built in to our emotional structures, into our bodies, into our social patterns, into our very thought processes, the idea which was encoded as love your neighbour and hate your enemy, amity and enmity. Acceptance and trust of your own group, hatred of all others and that this amity, enmity is the foundation for much of the sorrow we see in the world.

Jesus said Love your neighbour and love your enemy and I would suggest to you that after 14 million years of evolutionary history 2000 years for that teaching to take effect is not very long love your neighbour and love your enemy I would suggest to you is perhaps still the most revolutionary doctrine around the world

today thank you.

<Applause>

End of Transcription