



The Boy Jesus  
 from painting by N.C. Wyeth  
 [frontispiece, *The Man Nobody Knows*]

## BRUCE BARTON

# THE MAN NOBODY KNOWS

## A DISCOVERY OF THE REAL JESUS

1925 ■ EXCERPTS

When advertising executive Bruce Barton published *The Man Nobody Knows* in 1925, he had already published dozens of upbeat articles offering guidance for business and marketing success. But nothing reached as wide and receptive an audience as his recasting of Jesus as the “founder of modern business” whose self-confident leadership modeled the best of executive skill, and whose parables reflected the essentials of effective advertising. Sincere and reverent throughout, Barton retold the Gospel accounts of Jesus’s life and preaching as a modern man’s guidebook to honest wealth and business success.

“Wist [know] ye not that I must be about my Father’s *business*?”

### HOW IT CAME TO BE WRITTEN

The little boy sat bolt upright and still in the rough wooden chair, but his mind was very busy.

This was his weekly hour of revolt.

The kindly lady who could never seem to find her glasses would have been terribly shocked if she had known what was going on inside the little boy’s mind.

“You must love Jesus,” she said every Sunday, “and God.”

The little boy did not say anything. He was afraid to say anything; he was almost afraid that something would happen to him because of the things he thought.

Love God! Who was always picking on people for haying a good time and sending little boys to hell because they couldn’t do better in a world which he had made so hard! Why didn’t God take some one his own size?

Love Jesus! The little boy looked up at the picture which hung on the Sunday-school wall. It showed a pale young man with flabby forearms and a sad expression. The young man had red whiskers.

Then the little boy looked across to the other wall. There was Daniel, good old Daniel, standing off the lions. The little boy liked Daniel. He liked David, too, with the trusty sling that landed a stone square on the forehead of Goliath. And Moses, with his rod and his big brass snake. They were winners—those three. He wondered if David could whip Jeffries. Samson could! Say, that would have been a fight!

*Daniel, David, Moses, Samson:*  
 strong Jewish figures  
 of the Old Testament

*James Jeffries:*  
 famed heavyweight  
 boxing champion

But Jesus! Jesus was the “lamb of God.” The little boy did not know what that meant, but it sounded like Mary’s little lamb. Something for girls—sissified. Jesus was also “meek and lowly,” a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” He went around for three years telling people not to do things.

Sunday was Jesus’ day; it was wrong to feel comfortable or laugh on Sunday.

The little boy was glad when the superintendent rang the bell and announced, “We will now sing the closing hymn.” One more bad hour was over. For one more week the little boy had got rid of Jesus.

Years went by and the boy grew up and became a business man.

He began to wonder about Jesus.

*The Man Nobody Knows*  
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He said to himself: "Only strong magnetic men inspire great enthusiasm and build great organizations. Yet Jesus built the greatest organization of all. It is extraordinary."

The more sermons the man heard and the more books he read the more mystified he became.

One day he decided to wipe his mind clean of books and sermons.

He said, "I will read what the men who knew Jesus personally said about him. I will read about him as though he were a new historical character, about whom I had never heard anything at all."

The man was amazed.

A physical weakling! Where did they get that idea? Jesus pushed a plane and swung an adze; he was a successful carpenter. He slept outdoors and spent his days walking around his favorite lake. His muscles were so strong that when he drove the money-changers out, nobody dared to oppose him!

A kill-joy! He was the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem! The criticism which proper people made was that he spent too much time with publicans and sinners (very good fellows, on the whole, the man thought) and enjoyed society too much. They called him a "wine bibber and a gluttonous man."

A failure! He picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world.

When the man had finished his reading he exclaimed, "This is a man nobody knows!"

"Some day," said he, "someone will write a book about Jesus. Every businessman will read it and send it to his partners and his salesmen. For it will tell the story of the founder of modern business."

So the man waited for someone to write the book, but no one did. Instead, more books were published about the "lamb of God" who was weak and unhappy and glad to die.

The man became impatient. One day he said, "I believe I will try to write that book myself." And he did.

*adze*: tool similar to an ax

*money-changers*: men cast out of the Temple of Jerusalem by Jesus for conducting business activities in the synagogue

*publican*: tavern-keeper (in this context)

*bibber*, i.e., imbibor, drinker

## CH 1. THE EXECUTIVE

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Success is always exciting; we never grow tired of asking what and how. What, then, were the principal elements in his [Jesus'] power over men? How was it that the boy from a country village became the greatest leader?

First of all he had the voice and manner of the leader—the personal magnetism which begets loyalty and commands respect. The beginnings of it were present in him even as a boy. John [the Baptist] felt them. On the day when John looked up from the river where he was baptizing converts and saw Jesus standing on the bank, he drew back in protest. "I have need to be baptized of thee," he exclaimed, "and comest thou to me?" The lesser man recognized the greater instinctively. We speak of personal magnetism as though there were something mysterious about it—a magic quality bestowed on one in a thousand and denied to all the rest. This is not true. The essential element in personal magnetism is a consuming sincerity—an overwhelming faith in the importance of the work one has to do. . . .

Most of us go through the world mentally divided against ourselves. We wonder whether we are in the right jobs, whether we are making the right investments, whether, after all, anything is as important as it seems to be. Our enemies are those of our own being and creation. Instinctively we wait for a commanding voice, for one who shall say authoritatively, "I have the truth. This way lies happiness and salvation." There was in Jesus supremely that quality of conviction.

...

. . . Still later we have yet more striking proof of the power that supreme conviction can carry. At this date He had become so large a public influence as to threaten the peace of the rulers, and they sent a

detachment of soldiers to arrest him. They were stern men, presumably immune to sentiment [closed to emotion]. They returned, after a while, empty-handed.

“What’s the matter?” their commander demanded angrily. “Why didn’t you bring him in?”

And they, smarting [stinging] under their failure and hardly knowing how to explain it, could make only a surly excuse.

“You’ll have to send someone else,” they said. “We don’t want to go against him. *Never man so spake.*”

They were armed; he had no defense but his manner and tone, but these were enough. In any crowd and under any circumstances the leader stands out. By the power of his faith in himself he commands, and men instinctively obey.

This blazing conviction was the first and greatest element in the success of Jesus. The second was his wonderful power to pick men, and to recognize hidden capacities in them. It must have amazed Nicodemus when he learned the names of the twelve whom the young teacher had chosen to be his associates. What a list! Not a single well-known person on it. Nobody who had ever made a success of anything. A haphazard collection of fishermen and small-town businessmen, and one tax collector—a member of the most hated element in the community. What a crowd!

*Nicodemus: an early follower of Jesus*

...

Having gathered together his organization, there remained for Jesus the tremendous task of training it. And herein lay the third great element in his success—his vast unending patience. . . .

The Bible presents an interesting collection of contrasts in this matter of executive ability. Samson had almost all the attributes of leadership. He was physically powerful and handsome; he had the great courage to which men always respond. No man was every given a finer opportunity to free his countrymen from the oppressors and build up a great place of power for himself. Yet Samson failed miserably. He could do wonders singlehanded, but he could not organize.

## CH. 4. HIS METHOD.

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Surely no one will consider us lacking in reverence if we say that every one of the “principles of modern salesmanship” on which businessmen so much pride themselves are brilliantly exemplified in Jesus’ talk and work. . . .

Jesus taught all this without ever teaching it. Every one of his conversations, every contact between his mind and others, is worthy of the attentive study of any sales manager. Passing along the shores of a lake one day, he saw two of the men whom he wanted as disciples. *Their* minds were in motion; their hands were busy with their nets; their conversation was about conditions in the fishing trade, and the prospects of a good market for the day’s catch. To have broken in on such thinking with the offer of employment as preachers of a new religion would have been to confuse them and invite a sure rebuff. What was Jesus’ approach?

“Come with me,” he said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

Fishers . . . that was a word they could understand. . . fishers of men . . . that was a new idea. . . . what was he driving at . . . fishers of men . . . it sounded interesting . . . well, what is it, anyway?\*

He sat on a hillside overlooking a fertile country. Many of the crowd who gathered around him were farmers with their wives and sons and daughters. He wanted their interest and attention; it was important to make them understand, at the very outset, that what he had to say was nothing vague or theoretical but of direct and immediate application to their daily lives.

“A sower went forth to sow,” he began, “and when he sowed some seeds fell by the wayside and the fowls came and devoured them up. . . .” Were they interested . . . *were* they? Every man of them had gone through that experience . . . the thievish crows . . . many a good day’s work *they* had spoiled. . . . So this Teacher knew something about the troubles that

*fowls: ducks, geese, etc.*

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\* Ellipses in these paragraphs in Barton original.

farmers had to put up with, did he? Fair enough . . . let's hear what he has to say. . . ."

. . . With his very first sentence he put himself in step with them [his audience]; it was invariably a thought in line with their own thinking, easy for even the dullest to understand, and shrewdly calculated to awaken an appetite for more.

## CH. 5. HIS ADVERTISEMENTS.

. . .  
Let us begin by asking why he was so successful in mastering public attention and why, in contrast, his churches are less so? The answer is twofold. In the first place he recognized the basic principle that all good advertising is news. He was never trite or commonplace; he had no routine. If there had been newspapers in those days, no city editor could have said, "No need to visit him today; he will be doing just what he did last Sunday." Reporters would have followed him every single hour, for it was impossible to predict what he would say or do; every action and word were news.

. . .  
. . . If he were to live again, in these modern days, he would find a way to make them [his works] known—to be advertised by his service, not merely his sermons. One thing is certain: he would not neglect the marketplace. Few of his sermons were delivered in synagogues. For the most part he was in the crowded places, the Temple Court, the city squares, the centers where goods were bought and sold. I emphasized this fact once to a group of preachers.

"You mean that we ought to do street preaching," one of them exclaimed.

But street preaching is not at all analogous to what Jesus did. The cities in which he worked were both small and leisurely; the market was a gathering place where everybody came at some time—the transfer place for all merchandise and for ideas. Where will you find such a marketplace in these modern days? A corner of Fifth Avenue? A block on Broadway? Only a tiny fraction of the city's people pass any given point in the downtown district [of New York City] on any given day. A man might stand and preach for years at Fifth Avenue and Thirtieth Street, and only one in a hundred thousand would ever know that he lived.

No; the present day marketplace is the newspaper and the magazine. Printed columns are the modern thoroughfares; published advertisements are the crossroads where the sellers and the buyers meet. Any issue of a national magazine is a world's fair; a bazaar filled with the products of the world's work. Clothes and clocks and candlesticks; soup and soap and cigarettes; lingerie and limousines—the best of all of them are there, proclaimed by their makers in persuasive tones. That every other voice should be raised in such great marketplaces, and the voice of Jesus of Nazareth be still—this is a vital omission which he would find a way to correct. He would be a national advertiser today, I am sure, as he was the great advertiser of his own day. To the minds of those who hurry through the bristling pages, he too would send his call:

What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose  
his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

This would be his challenge in every newspaper and magazine, and with it would be coupled an invitation to share in the joyous enterprise of his work.

. . .  
. . . Every advertising man ought to study the parables of Jesus in the same fashion, schooling himself in their language and learning these four big elements of their power.

**1.** First of all they are marvelously condensed, as all good advertising must be. Charles A. Dana once issued an assignment to a new reporter on the *New York Sun*, directing him to confine his article to a column. The reporter protested that the story was too big to be compressed into so small a space.

*Charles Dana: editor of the New York Sun in the late 1800s*

"Get a copy of the Bible and read the first chapter of Genesis," said Dana. "You'll be surprised to find that the whole story of the creation of the world can be told in 600 words."

. . . How often you must read and read before you discover just what it is that the advertiser wants you to do. Jesus had no introductions. A single sentence grips your attention; three or four more tell the story; one or two more and the application is driven home. When he wanted a new disciple he said simply “Follow me.” When he sought to explain the deepest philosophic mystery—the personality and character of God—he said, “A king made a banquet and invited many guests. God is that king and you are the guests; the Kingdom of Heaven is happiness—a banquet to be enjoyed.” . . .

**2.** His language was marvelously simple—a second great essential. There is hardly a sentence in his teaching which a child cannot understand. His illustrations were all drawn from the commonest experiences of life; “a sower went forth to sow”; “a certain man had two sons”; “a man built his house on the sands”; “the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed.” The absence of adjectives is striking. . . .

Jesus used few qualifying words and no long ones We referred a minute ago to those three literary masterpieces, The Lord’s Prayer, the Twenty-Third Psalm, The Gettysburg Address. Recall their phraseology:

Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name

\* \* \*

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want

\* \* \*

Four score and seven years ago

\* \* \*

Not a single three-syllable word; hardly any two-syllable words. All the greatest things in human life are one-syllable things—love, joy, hope, home, child, wife, trust, faith, God—and the great advertisements, generally speaking, are those in which the most small words are found.

**3.** Sincerity glistened like sunshine through every sentence he uttered; sincerity is the third essential. Many wealthy men have purchased newspapers with the idea of advancing their personal fortunes, or bring about some political action in which they have a private interest. Such newspapers almost invariably fail. No matter how much money is spent on them, no matter how zealously the secret of their ownership is guarded, the readers are conscious that something is wrong. They feel that the voice of the editor is not his own. The public has a sixth sense for detecting insincerity; they know instinctively when words ring true.

It was the way Jesus looked at men, and the life he led among them that gave his words transforming power. What he was and what he said were one and the same thing. . . .

. . .

**4.** Finally he knew the necessity for repetition and practiced it. . . .

It has been said that “reputation is repetition.” No important truth can be impressed upon the minds of any large number of people by being said only once. The thoughts which Jesus had to give the world were revolutionary, but they were few in number. “God is your father,” he said, “caring more for the welfare of every one of you than any human father can possibly care for his children. His Kingdom is happiness! His rule is love.” This is what he had to teach, but he knew the necessity of driving it home from every possible angle. So in one of his stories God is the shepherd searching the wilds for one wandering sheep; in another, the Father welcoming home a prodigal boy; in another a King who forgives his debtors large amounts and expects them to be forgiving in turn—*many* stories, *many* advertisements, but the same big Idea.

. . .

## **CH 6. THE FOUNDER OF MODERN BUSINESS.**

. . .

On one occasion, you recall, he stated his recipe for success. It was on the afternoon when [apostles] James and John came to ask him what promotion they might expect. They were two of the most energetic of the lot, called “Sons of Thunder” by the rest, being noisy and always in the midst of some sort of a

storm. They had joined the ranks because they liked him, but with no very definite idea of what it was all about; and now they wanted to know where the enterprise was heading, and just what there would be in it for them.

“Master, they said, “we want to ask what plans you have in mind for us. You’re going to need big men around you when you establish your kingdom; our ambition is to sit on either side of you, one on your right hand and the other on your left.”

Who can object to that attitude? If a man fails to look after himself, certainly no one will look after him. If you want a big place, go ask for it. That’s the way to get ahead.

Jesus answered with a sentence which sounds poetically absurd.

“Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister,” he said, “and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.”

A fine piece of rhetoric, now isn’t it? Be a good servant and you will be great; be the best possible servant and you will occupy the highest possible place. Nice idealistic talk but utterly impractical; nothing to take seriously in a common sense world. That is just what most men thought for some hundreds of years, and then, quite suddenly, Business woke up to a great discovery. You will hear that discovery proclaimed in every sales convention as something distinctly modern and up to date. It is emblazoned in the advertising pages of every magazine.

Look through these pages.

Here is the advertisement of an automobile company, one of the greatest in the world. And why is it greatest? On what does it base its claim to leadership? On its huge factories and financial strength? They are never mentioned. On its army of workmen or its high salaried executives? You might read its advertisements for years without suspecting that it had either. No. “We are great because of our service,” the advertisements cry. “We will crawl under your car oftener and get our backs dirtier than any of our competitors. Drive up to our service stations and ask for anything at all—it will be granted cheerfully. We serve; therefore we grow.”

...

So we have the main points of his business philosophy:

1. Whoever will be great must render service.
2. Whoever will find himself at the top must be willing to lose himself at the bottom.
3. The big rewards come to those who travel the second undemanded mile.

...

We have quoted some men of conspicuous success, but the same sound principles apply to every walk of life. Great progress will be made in the world when we rid ourselves of the idea that there is a difference between *work* and *religious work*. We have been taught that a man’s daily business activities are selfish, and that only the time which he devotes to church meetings and social service activities is consecrated [sacred/blessed]. Ask any ten people what Jesus meant by his “Father’s business,” and nine of them will answer “preaching.” To interpret the words in this narrow sense is to lose the real significance of his life. It was not to preach that he came into the world, nor to teach, nor to heal. These are all departments of his Father’s business, but the business itself is far larger, more inclusive. For if human life has any significance, it is this—that God has set going here an experiment to which all His resources are committed. He seeks to develop perfect human beings, superior to circumstance, victorious over Fate. No single kind of human talent or effort can be spared if the experiment is to succeed. The race must be fed and clothed and housed and transported, as well as preached to, and taught and healed. Thus *all* business is his Father’s business. All work is worship, all useful service prayer. And whoever works wholeheartedly at any worthy calling is a co-worker with the Almighty in the great enterprise which He has initiated but which he can never finish without the help of men.