



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The Chosen: A TV Series for Such a time as This

**Guest(s):** Dallas Jenkins

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

**Roger Marsh:** Greetings and welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and Family Talk is the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Here at Family Talk, we strive to encourage and equip families to walk out their faith at home, at work, at school, even in their communities. Your prayers and financial contributions allow us to continue our mission. Thank you so much for your prayers and your financial support.

Today's broadcast of Family Talk was recorded at the 2021 National Religious Broadcasters Convention in Dallas, Texas. It features a conversation between our co-host, Dr. Tim Clinton and writer, director and film producer Dallas Jenkins. Now Dallas has been producing and directing for almost two decades, but his most recent and most successful project is one that you're probably well aware of. It's the incredible crowdfunded TV series called *The Chosen*.

*The Chosen* is the first ever multi-series TV show about the life of Christ. To date it has been viewed nearly, are you ready for this? 200 million times and has received very positive reviews from both film critics and fans alike. Today Dr. Clinton will discuss with Dallas Jenkins the incredible story behind the making of *The Chosen* and why he believes people have been so drawn to this TV show about the greatest story ever told.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Dallas, it's pretty exciting to be here at National Religious Broadcasters event. And hey, to see a lot of what's happening with you and *The Chosen*. I saw a set outside. What in the world's going on?

**Dallas Jenkins:** That's a really good question. I'm still trying to make sense of it all myself because this was birthed out of my biggest career failure. I mean, I had done a movie that had bombed at the box office. I didn't know if I had a future at all. I did a short film for my church's Christmas Eve service about the birth of Christ that ended up going viral and financing season one of *The Chosen*. Now we're in the middle of season two. I wish I had time to think about it for a second, but I

feel like right now I'm just trying to do my best to follow and listen, God and everything else is taken care of itself.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, it's more than impressive. *The Chosen's* the largest, most successful crowdsourced fundraising campaign for a film production ever. About \$10 million have been raised to date. You mentioned season one and two-

Dallas Jenkins: The 10 million was for season one.

Dr. Tim Clinton: For season one.

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah. So since then it's been-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Season two. Now season three is being funded, right?

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah. So season three, we're a little over halfway funded for that. And yeah, season two we've finished producing and it's being released now.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Stepping back, you had mentioned you were at a place in your life where you thought, "Maybe this is kind of over me" and then something happened. Take us way back because there's always backwater and then, but God-

Dallas Jenkins: Yes. Yeah, we call it the "I was, but God and now." And the I was, was January of 2017. I had been making movies for about 15 years, had had some success, but it was all kind of outside the Hollywood system a little bit, independently done. And finally I got a chance to make a movie with some of the biggest producers in Hollywood. They financed it. They produced it. They were excited about it. The movie tested through the roof and they were saying, "Look, we want to make multiple movies with you over the next 10 years."

I mean, I was a director with a very bright future. And then the movie came out in January of 2017 and in the first couple hours you can see what the numbers are and what they're going to be, and it was a total bomb. I'm home alone at three o'clock in the afternoon on a Friday with my wife and we're crying and we're praying and confused going, "All this seems so God ordained." And this movie itself is a God honoring project. It's the gospel and it's produced by Hollywood. Isn't this amazing? And then it just failed. And all of these companies backed out.

I suddenly was a director with no future and that's where God more than ever in my life intruded and in the best way possible. And laid something on my wife's heart really pointed us to the story of the feeding of the 5,000 in the gospels. A story we've read hundreds of times, but what we noticed about this story this time around that I hadn't really thought of before was that the hunger that those people were facing, the 5,000 people depending on how you want to count how many people were there, but they were desperate and hungry.

So hungry that Jesus said, "If I send these people home to get food, they'll faint along the way." That's how hungry they were. Well, the hunger was actually a

result of Jesus. Jesus was the one who had been talking for three days. He was responsible for that actual hunger, which led them to the place where the only thing left was a miracle. And I believed that that's what God was telling us was that sometimes Jesus actually brings us to that place purposefully, that desperation and that hunger.

And I think what we had been thinking was, "Oh, because this movie failed because we're so desperate right now, God must not have been in this. But we got this reminder that, "No, no, God was actually part of this too," but we weren't sure what that meant. We weren't sure where the next step was until at four o'clock in the morning that night as I'm doing a 15-page memo about everything that I had done wrong, putting myself to blame for a lot of it. And I think I was right to do so, but I'm analyzing it all. And I get this Facebook message out of the blue. No hello. No heard about your movie. All the Facebook message said was from someone who I've never met, just a Facebook friend said, "Remember, your job is not to feed the 5,000. It's only to provide the loaves and fish."

And I thought, "Did my wife and I tell someone what we'd been praying about and reading all day long?" We hadn't told anybody and so I go, I said, "What are you doing up at four in the morning first of all?" And he says, "Well, I'm in Romania, I'm on a different time zone." I said, "Can I ask you why you shared that with me?" And he goes, "Oh no, no, that wasn't me. That was God that told me to tell you that." He had been walking home from a grocery store in Romania, looked up the box office results for my movie, saw that it hadn't done well and he said God just laid it as explicitly on his heart as possible. "Tell Dallas, it's not your job to feed the 5,000. It's only to provide the loaves and fish."

And this gentleman, named Alex said, "Wait a minute. I barely know this guy. You really want me to do this? It's a little bit presumptuous." And the guy was just like, "Tell him." So he sends me this Facebook message. He didn't expect to hear from me within 10 seconds, but I did. And that moment changed my life. That moment I can look at who I was before then and who I've been since then because when I was informed of this concept, it's not your job to feed the 5,000. It's only to provide the loaves and fish. I believed it. I really clung to that.

And I realized that my job is solely to make the best loaves and fish that I can. And that when you present them to God and He deems them worthy of acceptance, the transaction's over. What He does with that is up to Him. And if you can really get to a place in your life where you're focused solely on pleasing God and doing what He calls you to do and what He does with it is not your business. Where you're at in five years is not your business. It becomes a superpower. And I got to a place where I genuinely didn't care if I never ever made another movie, I was willing to have an uncertain future. I was willing to say, "Okay, God, whatever you want from me I'll do."

And it's a scary place to be, but for me it's where I found the most joy. And that's where I became willing to do a short film for my church, which felt like a big step down from a Hollywood production on my friend's farm in Illinois 20

minutes from my house. But that short film is what ultimately generated the \$10 million in crowdfunding that shattered the all-time crowdfunding record. And now that the show is into season two and it's in every country in the world, all of these things all were rooted in and birthed out of my biggest failure.

And I think when I got to that place where I said, "Okay, God, I'm willing to do anything. I'm willing to not even make movies if that's what you want." I think He said, "All right, now you're ready for *The Chosen*." And that's where I am today. I'm a broken surrendered man perfectly happy to do whatever God wants. And it doesn't matter to me if it's successful or not.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So, for all those people out there probably turning the dial up a little bit saying, "What in the world are they talking about?" Let's step back. Maybe they haven't heard about or seen the series *The Chosen*. Tell our listeners what it's all about.

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Okay, we got the backwater story here how it came about. What is it?

Dallas Jenkins: So the short film I did for my church was about the birth of Christ, but from the perspective of the shepherds. So the beginning of the short film starts with the shepherds that morning taking their sheep to Bethlehem to the marketplace presenting their lambs for sacrifice. When it got to the point in the story of the Bible where the angels appear and the shepherds go and meet the Christ child, that moment became so impactful for people because they knew the backstory. Because they heard about some of these people, these shepherds and who they were. The things that aren't necessarily included in scripture.

And so, it while I was doing it, I thought, "Boy, there's really something there. What if we did more of this?" And that's where I came up with the idea for this multi-season show about the life of Christ where, yes, it's rooted in scripture. We start with the stories from scripture, but we're going to give cultural context. We're going to give historical context. So when you see most Jesus movies, they go from Bible verse to Bible verse, miracle to miracle, which is how the gospels are. Because the gospels are essentially designed to be Jesus' greatest hits to prove that He's the Son of God.

But what we wanted to do is give you some of this backstory. And so that's the conceit of the show, which is we're going to be seven seasons, we're two seasons into it right now rooted in the scripture. But yes, we do add to these stories in a way that I believe in what our viewers are telling us actually brings you back to scripture. We hear from people every single day, "I'm reading my Bible more than ever now." And I think there's probably a listener right now who's thinking, "Wait a minute. If there's stuff that's not in scripture, how can I trust it? I'm a Bible believer and I want to read the Bible. I don't need anything more." And I understand that.

And I'm a Bible believer too and I think that's what is causing people to respond so well to the show, which is that even the content that doesn't come from

scripture, it comes from history or culture, or comes from some artistic imagination is rooted in this foundational principle. I never want to contradict the character or intentions of Jesus or the gospels. And this show will never be a replacement for scripture. We say that right up front. So that's the key. And so I think when people watch the show, they're going to watch a show that feels like a historical drama like anything you'd watch on Netflix or on television, but it is rooted in the truths of God's Word.

And when you get to those Bible stories after you've seen some of this backstory, it makes those moments even more impactful and it draws you back to God's Word. And this is a family show. This is Family Talk. And what we're hearing from parents is, "My eight-year-old watches the show. My 10-year-old watches the show."

Dr. Tim Clinton: There's something about the authenticity of it. We had Rabbi Jason Sobel on the program that long ago talking about the life of Christ. He mentioned *The Chosen*.

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah. He's one of our primary Bible and cultural consultants.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, as he stepped back and looked at the life of Christ how it moved him personally and what an engaging conversation. I see that coming to life in film. Let's talk about media and arts just for a moment. Because if we don't take back the media and arts, we lose basically. You guys are stepping into this bringing this alive and it's like people can't help ... You can't help, but encounter Christ and that's the gift here. What are two of the most moving scenes or pieces that you've produced so far?

Dallas Jenkins: Well, that's a good question. I listened to what the audience tells us. I know that in season one, there are two moments that I think stand out for people the most and one of them is in the very episode. We see Mary Magdalene. We're introduced to her before she encountered Christ. So, in the Bible all it says is Mary Magdalene and several other women were following Jesus helping finance his ministry. And when they mentioned Mary, they said she had seven demons cast out of her, but they don't talk about what happened before that. We don't know that story.

So, we introduce you to Mary Magdalene. And there's a moment when she encounters Christ and how He claims her as His. I think as believers, we oftentimes have to remember that our sin nature, it's not enough to say, "All right, I never want to sin again. I'm going to say no to this, no to that, no to that." We have to replace it with something or we have to replace it with someone. And that's that moment that we see in episode one of season one where Mary's demons are replaced by the God of the universe. And that was a key moment, an impactful moment for people who could identify.

And that's the key with this show is when you see Jesus through the eyes of those who actually met Him and if you can actually identify with them, then you can also identify with the answer. You can identify with their struggles. You can

identify with the solution to their struggles, which is of course the Savior. And so that's the key is I want to put you into the eyes and ears and sandals of the people who actually walked with Jesus which leads us to I think one of the other key moments of season one which has blessed a lot of people is the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus at night. John 3, the most famous chapter in the Bible. Which again, we give you that backstory.

We give you the context of who Nicodemus was. How could a Pharisee, a teacher of teachers most of whom did not believe Jesus was the Son of God, believed He was actually a threat? What would have caused him to actually believe, would have wanted to meet with Jesus? But yet under cover of night because he needed to keep it secret. So we give you that backstory. And then we show that scene, famous scene from scripture, which now has more resonance when some of the backstory and cultural context. And the moment when Jesus delivers the greatest truth of all time, which is God loved the world and gave His Son.

That moment when it hits Nicodemus and he realizes that he's standing on holy ground that he's facing... Yes, I think those are two of the ... probably those two are on the Mount Rushmore of moments from *The Chosen* so far that people have commented on and saying, "That drew me closer to Christ. That made me so ..." I loved what you said earlier about Jesus dwelling among us. We talk about the word Emmanuel, which is typically a Christmas term, but that's what this show is. The show is Emmanuel, God with us. Because we sometimes forget that the God of the Universe is not only to be revered which is a good thing but He's also to be dwelt with. He's also to be communicated with. We have a direct access to the creator of the universe and that's what I think this show is ultimately about.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You mentioned Mary Magdalene. One of my favorite scenes in scripture is when Mary goes to the tomb, the Lord asked her, "Who are you seeking?" And, "My Lord, where have they taken Him? Where have you placed Him? And He says her name. Mary.

Dallas Jenkins: She couldn't see Him at first, but it's when He calls her name that she now knows exactly He is.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And He knows my name and He sees me in those troubled moments. That's coming alive on screen here. What do you think makes *The Chosen* more unique as compared to say other pieces of work that have been done on film?

Dallas Jenkins: Well, I grew up as a strong believer. I mean, I grew up in a Christian home. I've seen all of the Jesus movies and mini-series, and some of them are wonderful. Some of them not so much, but one of the things that I always felt was lacking when I watched them was Jesus always felt so formal and emotionally distant. He was typically a European guy in these movies who spoke King James English. And it wasn't someone that I felt had the tenderness or ... I hope you understand what I mean when I say this, the charisma.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The warmth.

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah, the warmth, the engagement that I think-

Dr. Tim Clinton: The dynamic that's-

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah, yeah. He doesn't seem like someone I would follow and I always thought that was lacking. And I thought, "The Jesus that I feel like I know or at least that I want to know, the Jesus that I read about in scripture, thousands of people were flocking to Him. Children loved Him." I didn't see that in most of these Bible projects. And because also the Bible projects tended to go miracle to miracle. I never got to know the people who were being impacted by Jesus. And so there was this kind of emotional distance when you watch it. And I think what is unique about *The Chosen* and what people tell us all the time is that because we're seeing the backstories of these people, and we're seeing the humanity of these people. When you can realize that these were human beings like us, I think we forget that.

I think we sometimes deify them in many ways. You see them treated as saints. You see them as paintings. And what we're doing is we're saying, "These were real human beings. They had families. They had struggles. They were financially struggling. They had the same struggles and sins and vices that we do." And they walked with the Creator of the universe. And so we can do that too. And I think that's what this show is doing for people is they always say, "The show feels authentic. The show feels like real human beings." And I'm guessing you felt that when you watched it is, "Huh, this feels like something I can see and feel and touch. It doesn't feel like a glossed over flannelgraph Sunday school telling of this story. This feels real."

And that's what I would say is probably the biggest difference with this show is it feels very real. And I think it's for me as someone who grew up with these projects, it's a reaction to those in many ways. It's a "I want you to be there" and I didn't always feel that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You do feel that when you watch this, when you engage it. You know I've had the privilege of having a conversation with Randall Wallace.

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah, of course.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Another friend of mine is Michael Landon Jr. You know Michael, but Michael's a good friend. And they talked about screen and what they try to accomplish. I remember asking Randall, he said, "Tim, it's really about what's the cry of that soul? We're trying to meet that deep need and bring it to life." Here you've got this story, again, the greatest story ever told. He has set eternity in our hearts and I think that's the emotional connection, but you bring it to life in such a unique way that it's alive in our way of understanding.

Dallas Jenkins: And I think one of the things that Randall Wallace does so beautifully and Michael Landon Jr as well is they're tapping into that deep need and they're

giving answers to that deep need. And that's what any good storyteller does. What I think is happening with *The Chosen* and I think what's happening with most projects that resonate with people is sometimes it hits a need that they're not even aware of. And what we're seeing all over the world is people from all different faith traditions, including people who don't have a faith tradition, people who aren't believers, but who are resonating with this show and they're saying, "I didn't even know that I could relate with Jesus in this way."

And this show is breaking down religious walls and barriers most of which were constructed after Jesus was here. But when you are focused solely on Jesus and I like to use the term that's from scripture the scales being removed from your eyes. Because Saul after he encountered Jesus and Ananias came in and removed the scales from his eyes and he was able to see. And that really is my heart's cry. I want *The Chosen* to remove the scales from your eyes. And sometimes those scales are put there by religion. And I want you to be able to see Jesus unvarnished, direct with no cultural barriers, no religious barriers. We're going to see Jesus for who He is and that's what's happening around the world.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And the relationship with Him that can be had, the Gospel. Tell us about your statements upfront, what you want to make sure people know. It is about that message.

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah. Well, this show is a failure if it doesn't ultimately point you to Jesus and to the Bible. This show is not a replacement for scripture. Jonathan Roumie who plays Jesus is not Jesus. I am not the author of the Bible. I am the creator of a show that is rooted in scripture, but is ultimately a TV show. And it's made by flawed human beings. A lot of our cast and crew aren't even believers. I mean, this is a collection of people who are just here to ... We're trying to make a show that's going to ultimately point you to the savior of the universe. And if it doesn't do that, then there's no point.

But what I'm trying to do is I think what's plastered on the walls of each of us involved is we want to reach a billion people with the authentic Jesus. And the authentic Jesus like I said-

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a calling.

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah. And what pleases me the most or what is my heart's cry is when I hear from parents who are saying, "You know what? My teenager watches a show with me now and my six-year-old," which I didn't expect and I didn't think the show was for kids because this show is actually quite complex and it's storytelling. It's an adult show. It's not inappropriate, but it's an adult-themed show. And yet they're saying, "My 12-year-old had a birthday party and made it a Chosen-themed birthday party and they all dressed up in Bible era costumes."

I'm like what more could I want than that is to see parents go, "I now have a tool in my toolkit in introducing my children to Jesus." And that I've got this show that's engaging them. And now they're saying, "Is that in the Bible? Is that



scene from the Bible?" And they're to say, "This part is from the Bible, this part isn't. Let's look into the God's Word and see what it says about it." Now they're engaging more than ever. And that's-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Two more things I want to ask you, Dallas and one is your talent participating. Have you seen any stories come out of it? How can you participate and not encounter the message of the cross?

Dallas Jenkins: It's really interesting. Jonathan Roumie, again, who plays Jesus who I mentioned is the first to tell you he's not Jesus of course. And these actors are not actually the people that they're portraying, but something has happened multiple times on set. I'd say at least a dozen times where there's a scene where Jesus is asking someone to follow Him or Jesus is healing someone's disease. Or Jesus is saying things that we know are from scripture. And these actors will have these profound emotional experiences and reactions that aren't in the script that they didn't plan for, that they don't even fully understand. And they'll say to me like, "I'm sorry, I couldn't get through this."

Dr. Tim Clinton: It kind of gives me chills seriously.

Dallas Jenkins: No, they'll say, "I couldn't get through that scene without crying. I don't know what it was." And I'm like I'm able to actually share with them. Some of them will say, "Well, I know exactly what it was." I said when you're faced with the choice to follow or not follow. I know this is just a scene, but these are words of scripture. And I believe that this actually happened. And several of them are saying, "Yeah, I didn't know some of this stuff and I'm reading the Bible. Is this is true and where's this coming from?"

And yeah, we've had at least a dozen significantly emotional profound moments of actors telling me, "I don't even know where that came from." And we don't want to over-spiritualize the moment itself. Because again, I want to say this repeatedly. This is not the Bible and Jonathan is not Jesus. But I think when you're faced with something and you're faced especially with scripture, God gets past all of those barriers, including the barriers of film cameras, and scripts and crew standing around. And He's piercing your heart and I think that that's something that's happened multiple times on our sets.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow, we will pray that God will continue to work. And there's a great fidelity to the greatest story ever told. Dallas, let's close this way. A lot of people are going to be saying, "I've never even seen it. How do I watch this thing? How do I get involved in the series, streaming app, whatever?"

Dallas Jenkins: Yeah. So, *The Chosen* isn't actually on Netflix or your traditional television networks. We did this all completely outside the system, which the good news about that is we're beholden to nobody. We don't have to follow Hollywood's rules about how we do this. But if you want to see the show, you just go to wherever you get your phone apps. So, Google Play, App Store, whatever and you look up *The Chosen*. We're easy to find. You download it to your phone. Now I know you're thinking, "I don't want to watch a show on my phone." Well,

it connects directly to your streaming device. So if you've got Roku, Apple TV, Fire Stick, Chromecast, whatever, it'll connect directly from your phone so you can watch it on your TV.

Now, if you're old school and you'd prefer to just watch it on DVD, we've got that as well. So I don't want to get people a bunch of websites because they'll forget them anyway. But if you just look up *The Chosen*, we're very easy to find and you can get the DVDs if that's what you prefer. But the show is completely free if you want to watch it on the app, on your television through the app. No sign up, no subscription, no email address, no nothing. Completely free and easy to access.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest again today is American film and television director, writer, film producer Dallas Jenkins. And we've been talking the whole broadcast about *The Chosen*. Man, may God continue to lead you guys and bless this for His glory.

Dallas Jenkins: Thank you so much.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a delightful interview. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, their family, our team here. We salute you guys and thank you for joining us.

Dallas Jenkins: Thank you for having me.

Roger Marsh: An incredible testimony of God's faithfulness from writer, director, and producer Dallas Jenkins on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We hope that you've been encouraged by Dallas' story. And that you've been reminded of the importance of obeying God and then trusting Him with the outcome.

By the way, if you want to learn more about Dallas Jenkins or *The Chosen* TV series, visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). And while you're there, you can also listen to any part of the program that you might've missed. Again, that's [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast).

Roger Marsh: Thanks again for listening today and be sure to join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.