



## **Get to Know Jesus**

### **Discipleship Studies – Session Two – What does HISTORY tell us about Jesus?**

From the First Session Introduction - *So, you want to get to know Jesus! That's a very good thing to desire. And you know what? I have the sense that the feeling is mutual because Jesus wants to get to know you too! The prophet Jeremiah wrote the words of God himself when God said, "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." Jesus isn't a "hide and seek" God...at least not in the way you remember the game! In the case of Jesus, he doesn't hide. In fact, Jesus is doing everything he can to get your attention. So, let's get to know Jesus!*

Think about HISTORY – if you had to pick ONE PERIOD in history (besides NOW) in which to live, which one would you choose? Why?

Who is your favorite person in history? What is your favorite story from history?

What time in history was the best (in your opinion)? The worst?

Who is your favorite character from history? Why?

Besides Jesus (don't cheat now) who is one of your "heroes" from history? Who is a villain?

### **Introduction to this Session**

What is History and why is it important in our quest to get to know Jesus? History has told us where things and people HAVE been. History takes the theoretical and places it firmly within our frame of reference. For example, I can tell you that there is something deadly about the bubonic plague. I can tell you how it is spread and what potential damage it does to the human body. I can tell you, as well, about how it most likely can kill a person. All that information is well and good but until I can show you a specific case in HISTORY, you are dealing only in the realm of possibility...not reality. Well, you know about the deadliness of the plague because HISTORY tells us about how it decimated the planet. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century HISTORY tells us that it killed approximately 100 to 200 million people. It was called the "black death" and was feared in the then known world. It isn't a theory or a metaphor or some scientific fabrication...it happened! HISTORY tells us!

The same is true for Jesus – some people do think that Jesus is a “fantasy”...something a group of people made up to fill some human fear, emptiness, or need for meaning and purpose in life. The problem is this – JESUS WAS REAL! He is recorded to have LIVED in history. Jesus isn’t a phantom, a figment of imagination or an ideal...Jesus is a person. Jesus was (and is) alive! AND we can know about Jesus from what history tells us.

NOW – hang in there...we have to cover a HUGE concept prior to delving into the Jesus of history:



**Revelation** – the ONLY way we know who God is due to the fact that God REVEALS himself.

God revealed himself – simply read the FIRST major story in the bible, about creation (Genesis 1-3). Notice this – Adam and Eve are NOT surprised or fearful that God is walking in their midst. Yep, you read that right. In every other story of the bible, when someone confronts the divine there are the subsequent words, “DO NOT FEAR.” God’s presence was so commonplace in the garden that Adam and Eve are NOT surprised when God shows up.

Your faith is the AFTERMATH of God – God reveals himself to us for one reason – a response of trust and love and relationship.

To take our ideas of God and hold them as if they corresponded to the reality of God is thus to construct a conceptual idol built from the materials of our mind...in other words, we worship and follow God NOT ideas about God.

All the revelations of who God is throughout history should lead to TRANSFORMATION not just information.

There is a story in the book of Exodus (read it now, Exodus 33:20 and following) when God reveals himself to Moses - “Behold there is a place by me where you shall stand...while my glory passes by...you shall see my back.” We always see where God HAS been...that’s the beauty of HISTORY. God is not a concept, remember that! Think about God saying to you, “look at where I just was...” and understand that just as God was in HISTORY, God is NOW living with us and we see that God IN JESUS!

Jesus isn’t a belief system or a bunch of doctrines – JESUS IS ALIVE!

And if God is real then we can have a RELATIONSHIP with God. We can know Jesus intimately and personally. So, what do we know about Jesus FROM HISTORY? Let’s go...





There was a Jesus in history...yep, Jesus was born, grew up, lived, ate, conversed, was most likely happy and sad, angry and peaceful...he had a life just like you and me! There was an historical Jesus...our Jesus isn't made up. Jesus isn't a myth, a legend, or a fairy tale character. Jesus acted, taught, had relationships, and significant as well as boring ole life events. Jesus lived in an actual world, at a certain part of the world...it had many of things that you and me take for granted because it too was real. Jesus slept, ate, hugged, had conversations...he had an actual life just like we do.

We need to understand that there was actually a Jesus of Nazareth. He lived in a specific place in what we would call the Middle East. He had a specific personality...he acted on his passions as we all do...he had a job...he had friends...Jesus was NOT a phantom or a myth. You and me need to be very clear that Jesus stands at the center of our faith and life as disciples. Jesus also was a Jew. Don't forget that...Jesus was not the "founder" of a faith system...yes, Jesus was God, born into our world to turn us to him not some sort of dogmatic religious system.

It is SO IMPORTANT to all of us as Jesus followers that Jesus was an actual historical figure. We don't follow a myth or a phantom or a fairy tale. Because Jesus is HISTORICAL we can get to know Jesus just like we can any historical figure. In fact, there has been MORE WRITTEN about Jesus as an historical figure than any other person in history. We have less evidence for about 90% of all figures from the ancient world. To begin with, we have less evidence for every single other early first century Jewish prophet, preacher or Messianic claimant. Theudas, the Egyptian, Onias, the Samaritan Prophet, Hillel, Shammai, Athronges - all of these are mentioned in one or, at best, two sources, all decades or even centuries after the fact.

Even for NON-followers of Jesus, he is still a remarkably important historical figure. The impact his life and death changed and continue to impact the world. Even though many people today are challenging traditional understandings of Jesus (e.g. The Da Vinci Code, The Gospel of Judas, The Jesus Tomb), you need to know NOW that you can intelligently and truthfully answer all challenges and questions regarding the historical person of Jesus. Jesus existed! In fact, this is what I challenge you (as I have challenged myself) to answer this question: "if the gospels were ALL YOU HAD, would there be enough of Jesus to say, 'I'm following Him'." Is the figure of Jesus compelling enough for you without all the "explanations" of the rest of the New Testament? That is WHY we are going after the historical Jesus!



What does “Historical Jesus” mean? It means that Jesus actually existed! And if you want to know of the historical Jesus, the four gospels in the bible are the place where a person begins and ends his/her search. Even so, it is important to remember that ancient biographies were not primarily interested in communicating history but rather in communicating the significance of essence of a historical figure. That is not to say that they did not contain historical information or that they were not based on historical information, but this information took a backseat to the particular essence of the historical figure that the author was seeking to communicate. What implications does this have for the historicity of ancient biographies then? This means that ancient biographies left out a good deal of information about their subject. They often took liberties with chronology, speeches, and details in their subjects’ lives in order to highlight a particular truth about them.

These things are certainly true of the Jesus stories in the gospels. The chronology of events in Jesus’ life differs significantly from gospel to gospel. At times gospel writers alter the specific wording of things Jesus said to emphasize the unique perspective they are trying to communicate. Even the details of particular stories differ from gospel to gospel. We must remember that are gospels are not “exact historical representations” of Jesus and they were never intended to be! They are theological biased presentations of Jesus, that were written to communicate particular truths about who he was and his significance. The authors of the gospels were not objective historians just recording the facts but were Jesus followers who were seeking to introduce their readers (audiences actually for the gospels were first READ out loud) to their Lord Jesus...the one they loved and followed.

Now, there are some popular “takes” on Jesus. Some think Jesus is a New Age Guru...some a Hippie Revolutionary...others a Cynical Peasant, Wandering Wordsmith, Preacher of liberal values, or a Supernatural Superman.

One thing that you need to know is that serious followers of Jesus need to ask serious questions about Jesus. And you know what? Jesus can stand up to any and all questions!

One of my favorite scholars once wrote, “if Jesus never existed, or if he was quite different from what the Gospels and the church’s worship affirms him to have been, then we are indeed living in cloud-cookoo land.”



So, who is Jesus? What was His training? In other words, how do we get as close to the historical Jesus as possible? What did He believe? Where did He live? What was His daily life like?

Now, it’s your turn. Open your bible. Pick one of the gospels...there are four. One is a “Jewish take” on Jesus. Another is a perspective from a young person who was raised in the Roman world. Another is a well-educated and networked Doctor who may have known Jesus’ mom, Mary. The last story is

written by one of Jesus' closest friends. First of all, I must say that it would be BEST to read all four gospels. But for now, concentrate on one and make some personal notes on Jesus. Ask yourself (if you take on this assignment), "what can I learn about Jesus from this?" Write down who you think Jesus is from what you read.

Remember, in order to KNOW Jesus, you cannot just talk about what Jesus did, what stories he told, what miracles he performed or how he died and rose. All those are ACTIONS of Jesus. Yes, actions do reveal the person (as Jesus said himself, "a tree is known by its fruit). Even so, the key is to get to know Jesus. So, just as if you were going to meet a potential new friend, read the gospels (even ONE if you have only a specific amount of time). While you read, take notes:

*Imagine – what is Jesus like in this section of the story? What does his face look like? What can I learn about Jesus from what I'm reading? What can I ask Jesus about this story when we talk?*

*For example, there's this story about a woman who is caught messing around with another guy. Men catch her (we always wonder, "what happened to the guy she was messing around with?") and drag her before Jesus...they toss her on the ground and get ready to hammer her to death with rocks. The story goes that Jesus stops them...he gets on the ground and writes a few things, says a few words and the story comes to a miraculous end. Read it yourself in John, chapter 8.*

*Now, close your eyes and put yourself in the story. Stand where the crowd is standing and look at Jesus as a passive observer. What do you see in Jesus' eyes? What's his body language? If you had to describe Jesus from this one event, how would you describe him? What is the tone of Jesus' voice? Harsh? Loving? Calm? Agitated? How is Jesus interacting with the crowd? How is he treating the woman? What do you discover about Jesus in how he treats hostility? How he treats the broken and shamed? What is Jesus writing on the ground in your imagination? Why is that important? When Jesus says what he does to the crowd, what is the expression on the woman's face? What does that tell you about Jesus? What can you pick up about Jesus from his body language? Again, if you had to describe who Jesus was and is from that ONE scenario, what would you say? How would you introduce Jesus to someone if that one scene, one circumstance was your only exposure to Jesus?*

That's ONE example. Do that same thing with an entire gospel you chose. Take notes as you go along in the story. Remember, you are noting NOT what Jesus says or does...you are noting what you learn about Jesus...who he is! GET to know Jesus! Remember?

Last but not least – you are just scratching the surface on getting to know Jesus. I've been married to my wife, Vicky for almost 25 years and I'm still learning more about her. Do you recall this section of the gospel of John, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of disciples, which are not recorded in this book...Jesus did many other things as well? If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." It's as if the writer, just to wrap things up, adds "Oh yeah, I left a ton of stuff out." You'll never get to the end of getting to know Jesus.



# Final Thoughts

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Here's your final assignment - the BEST WAY you can get to know Jesus by talking to Jesus.

So, ask Jesus to help you get to know him – NOW!

Say, “I want to get to know you Jesus.” Say it at least five times in a row. Say it repeatedly throughout the day today.

And know that in order to get to know Jesus:

- You're going to have to talk to Jesus
- You're going to have to spend time with Jesus
- You're going to have to listen to Jesus
- You're going to have to be vulnerable with Jesus
- You're going to have to ask Jesus questions and then listen

Next Study will focus on what the actions of Jesus tell us about him – what do those activities tell us about the Jesus we love and serve? That is Session Three!