



FAITH *Questions*

SESSION 2: WHY IS JESUS SO IMPORTANT TO CHRISTIANS?



Session Activities

Aim: To have participants think through their own beliefs about Jesus, why He matters, and why others might have other opinions about Him.

Leaders note: This session needs to be handled sensitively, as people can become very defensive when asked questions about something precious to them. Be aware that people may react against the questions you are asking, not because of what you are saying, but because of what they THINK you are saying.

INTRODUCING

- **BEFORE THE SESSION:** Download the JESUS FACTS? Sheet. Have a copy between each pair and have them sort through them. They are aiming to sort them into
 1. things widely believed about Jesus,
 2. things Christians believe about Jesus, and
 3. things handed down to us by tradition.
- Have the group feedback and, using the Leaders version of the JESUS FACTS? Sheet, discuss how the group went about dividing the different things.
- Were there any of the 'facts' cards that seemed strange, out of place, or that stood out to them for another reason?

EXPLORING

Short video exploring what we know vs. what we believe about Jesus and who He was.

'In Luke chapter 7, something strange happens. John, who baptized Jesus, who said widely and publicly that Jesus was sent by God, sent his disciples to ask Jesus a question. They asked, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for someone else?' In other words, are you who I thought, or was I wrong?

In answer to John, Jesus gives a somewhat cryptic answer. The Bible tells us that he says to tell John what they see;

- *The blind receive their sight*
- *The lame walk*
- *Those with skin diseases are healed*
- *The dead are raised*
- *The poor are told the good news.*

What sort of answer is this to a man in need of comfort? John is in prison because the king doesn't like him, how helpful is this answer to him? Jesus' answer tells John a lot,

BY telling John the events taking place around him, Jesus is letting John know that something special is happening, and that He is who John thought.

But it also tells us a lot about how we should read about Jesus. There is a temptation to separate what Jesus said from what he did. If someone tells us they think Jesus was a great moral teacher, this is what they are doing. IF we separate these two things we are missing some key things about Jesus, the way the Gospels were written, and the way we should be looking in at what happens.

I want you to imagine person walking around with one of those camping lights, that give off a gentle light all around them. As they move around they take that light with them and shine it on those they meet and interact with. Now imagine that person is Jesus, He takes that light everywhere and shares it with everyone He meets. The way He shares that light doesn't matter, it could be through his words or His actions, it could be comforting or uncomfortable for those He comes across, but they are always going to experience that light.

We can see how Jesus' actions are always in line with what he taught, they always show us new facets and perspectives on Him. They always give us new insight that we were missing. One of Jesus most famous miracles, the feeding of the

5000, has in its gospel telling direct references to Psalm 23 and shows Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The calming of the storm points further back in the Bible, to Jesus having power over creation the way that God did in the beginning when He created.

Far from being easily separable from one another, Jesus' teaching and miracles shine new light on to one another, and in doing so give us a clearer picture not only of Him, but also of what he came to do, to give life and life in all its fullness.

This is why He is so important to Christians, because when we read about Him we see what God intended for humanity in the beginning. And whilst we will fall short, we will try and follow His example to bring some goodness and wholeness into the world as we move through it. '

EXPANDING

Often in our talk about apologetics we can lean on the 'facts' that we have, but in the case of Jesus the facts we have are very few. At the same time, we can dismiss our experience of faith and our personal reasons for following him. This means that when we try and share our faith with others, we can run into obstacles as we rely on something we have little of, and ignore what we have a wealth of.

Split your group into smaller groups so that each person is able to contribute to the conversation. As a group ask them to list three reasons they think Jesus is so important. Emphasise that you are looking for their personal reason, rather than the 'correct' answer. Once they have done this, have them feedback centrally, and as they do so tally whether the reason is:

- a. To do with Jesus' life.
- b. To do with Jesus death
- c. To do with Jesus' resurrection.
- d. Other

Are your groups reasons in one particular area? Is there one of the areas that is missing? If you think it is worth exploring you could ask the group why that might be, or encourage them to see if they can think of a reason from the missing area.

If we know so little about Jesus, and if so much of what we 'know' is actually belief, why is he so important to Christians? How has someone who left so little 'factual' information had such a dramatic impact on world history?

There are several answers to that question, which follow on from one another;

1. Because of the impression he made on his early followers, and the way this made them rethink how they lived in the world.
2. Because of the way his early followers lived and drew others to him
3. Because of the way his early followers developed into a life-changing community which outlasted them.

You will notice that missing from the above reasons are the more theological reasons. That is intentional; theology can easily become abstract, and abstract ideas can easily become about perspective rather than truth. In a postmodern culture, where truth is relative, we need to point to the impact of our faith before we speak about the truth behind it. You may need to unpack some of these ideas for your group, but remember to keep it accessible and practical.

How does your group find this way of explaining Jesus' lasting impact? Is it a way of thinking about it that they have come across before? Are there answers that they would add in instead of the ones above?

Going Deeper:

Emphasising Jesus's life and teachings can be a really important part of the way we share faith in a contemporary culture. Using the bible stories below have your group think about how:

1. These might connect to people today,
 2. they might lead us to talk about Jesus's eternal impact on us.
- John 8:1-11, Jesus and the woman caught in adultery
 - Matthew 14:13-21, the feeding of the 5000
 - Matthew 5:3-12, the Beatitudes
 - Matthew 21:12-17, the Turning of the Tables in the Temple

Are there any common ideas that you can draw out of what has been discussed about these stories? What groups them together?

These stories have been selected as they connect with widely held ideas in contemporary culture. It is through these connection points that we can then talk about Jesus's death and resurrection, and the forgiveness that we receive through them. You may need to walk through some of these ideas clearly with the group, as often we feel that unless we are talking about Jesus' death we are not really talking about the good news He brings.

PRAYING

Have three words printed out on a sheet of a4 paper, one to each sheet. These words are



LIFE



DEATH



RESURRECTION

Give each participant a stone, candle, or some other way of marking their engagement with this prayer. Lay the paper out on a table and invite the participants to ponder which of those words is most important in their relationship with Jesus. When they have spent some time thinking about this, have them lay their marker down on that piece of paper.

Once all of the participants have done this, pray for the week ahead, that they would know Jesus' presence with them, that they would be reinvigorated in their faith, and that they would be reminded of why they follow Him.