

Jesus is _____ .

A handful of studies are being produced to coincide with the “Jesus is...” mission. The real aim of these studies is to help us *listen* to the point of view of other people and learn how to share the good news and truth about Jesus into other people’s lives. Each study will have the following four components.

- 1) **A Story.** We’ll introduce the theme of the study with a short story to explore one true or false perspective of Jesus.
- 2) **Listen.** Proverbs 18:13 says, *“To answer before listening - that is folly and shame.”* We want to step into the shoes of the other person before launching back with an answer. We will take a moment to consider how real their perspective is and why it sounds good to them.
- 3) **Test It.** Proverbs 18:17 says, *“In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines.”* How true is that! It may only take one or two questions to highlight pitfalls in a person’s worldview.
- 4) **Gospel Solution.** Psalm 119:105 says, *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”* We want to land on what the bible says about this topic. Jesus is at the centre of everything and so we need to know what difference a right and true understanding of Jesus and his work makes to every and any worldview.
- 5) **Pray.** Some points will be offered to assist us in bringing our concerns to God about his mission.

These studies will be published separately as they are finalised. The topics will cover Jesus is: ‘one way among many’; ‘irrelevant’; ‘trustworthy’; and ‘alive and risen’.

Study 4 - Jesus is... alive!

A Story

"If you want me to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, then why didn't He appear before a high court judge or someone important?"

This was the objection that Bob blurted out during a Christianity Explored course.

At one level this skeptic has a point. Why are the key moments of Jesus' life observed by relative nobodies, especially as far as the first century is concerned?

Shepherds at Jesus' birth – seasonal workers employed for the spring lambing season, like modern day backpackers or gypsies who move around following the work.

Women at the empty tomb – Far from objective and astute detectives. In this era, the testimony of women were of little value and had ambiguous legal status.

Neither women nor shepherds were permitted to give evidence in a first century court. If God had been planning on the resurrection, why not plan on revealing the evidence to important people?

LISTEN

- 1) Do you sometimes wish the Bible's evidence was more convincing? What would you wish to be better?

2) In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that if the resurrection was phoney, then we're all fools for following Jesus. Why do you think Jesus didn't appear risen before Pontius Pilate, Herod or Caiaphas the High Priest? Would you wish that he did?

3) What other explanations have you heard to explain the absence of a corpse of Jesus?

TEST IT

4) If the disciples were to invent the resurrection story then why would they record women as the first witnesses to the event? This evidence is referred to as the 'criterion of embarrassment' where embarrassing inclusions in historic records add to their validity.

5) Many religious leaders have come and gone in the history of the world but none has had the same universal and long running impact as Jesus. Is it reasonable to conceive such a multicultural and multigenerational conspiracy?

6) John Dickson lists 4 pieces of historical evidence that, combined together, produce very strong evidence for the resurrection:

a) **Jesus' tomb was corpse-less.** The resurrection was proclaimed in the very city where the tomb was known to be. Anyone who wanted to shoot down this propaganda could produce a corpse. The tomb of Jesus did not become a holy site in the years immediately after his death while other religious leaders had tombs active with religious homage. Even the Jewish leaders came up with a different explanation for the empty tomb rather than showing that the tomb was not empty. See Matthew 28:11-15.

b) **Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.** The historian, Josephus, wrote of certain requirements in court and especially demands the absence of female testimony. As previously mentioned, this fact is too embarrassing to be invented. It's makes sense that it was not invented but what actually happened.

c) **Similarities and dissimilarities in the accounts.** The different accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) agree in profound ways. The day, the women as first witnesses, about confusion and doubt among the disciples. The differences in the reports highlight the uniqueness of their reports. If they were identical, you could conclude that they collaborated on their story. If they were radically different then you could conclude they were not trustworthy. But neither is true.

d) **Transformation of the disciples.** What caused a group of uneducated Jews to become so passionate about their leader after his death that produced a world-wide following despite heavy persecution and martyrdom? They were Jews who were raised to believe the descendants of Abraham were the blessed race and that worshiping someone as God was absolute blasphemy? But in the weeks and months following the death of Jesus, they preached, proclaimed, exhorted and debated people into belief that Jesus had risen from the dead and He is the LORD! And that He is LORD of all the nations. They travelled abroad to take the gospel to all nations. You can follow each one of their stories to see how their lives were transformed by the belief of the resurrection.

THE GOSPEL SOLUTION

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the

tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

7) Look at each of the reactions to the empty tomb from the passage and discuss how each person responded. Do they seem like credible reactions?

8) John was the unnamed disciple in this passage. While Jesus did not appear to great leaders of the world to prove the resurrection, he appeared to entrusted men and women who would spread the good news. Notice in the following passage how John emphasises the eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and resurrection (eternal life).

1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete

9) Remember the wisdom of Jesus on this topic when he said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ” (Luke 16:31)

On the topic of this final study, no matter what a person concludes, everyone ought to consider how, “historically speaking, it looks as though a man who said he would rise from the dead, did.” (John Dickson, Simply Christianity)

Pray

- Praise God for the resurrection which testifies to the completed work of Christ on the cross, provides a historic account to be tested, and speaks to us of eternal life and our own resurrection from the dead.
- Ask God to help you to understand clearer any areas of faith that you find hard to believe or hard to grasp.
- Ask God to help you live this life in response to the resurrection and not just believe it in theory.
- Pray for people in your life that need to know the great hope of the resurrection.
- Pray for those preaching on Sunday.
- Pray for opportunities to hear who people think Jesus is.