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# JESUS

**Recently** I was invited by an old friend to join him and six other men and climb Mount Rainier outside of Seattle, Washington—all 14,410 feet of it. I flew north and joined them, strapped on my crampons and backpack, hoisted my ice axe, and started climbing.

It was the hardest thing I have ever done.

This mountain is covered in ice, blanketed in glaciers, with crevasses hundreds of feet deep. Some people might try to convince you those are called *crevices*, but I'm telling you, those on Mount Rainier are *crevasses*, and they will kill a man. Toting dozens of pounds of clothing and gear up that mountain was exhausting, petrifying, and thrilling.

The main reason my old friend asked me to join him and the other guys on the climb was to talk about Jesus. See, these other

guys don't know Jesus, and he wanted me to tell them about Him. My old friend is a former Marine and he figured the best place to have good conversation about Jesus with a bunch of tough guys was on top of a freezing mountain. So, when I wasn't terrified of falling into a crevasse and dying, I told these men what I know about Jesus.

## Jesus?

Everyone has a reaction to Jesus. He isn't someone who can be ignored. Love Him or hate Him, you must respond to Him.

Here are some examples of how a few famous people thought of Jesus.

"I love the idea of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the beautiful stories about it, which I loved in Sunday school and I collected all the little stickers and put them in my book. But the reality is that organized religion doesn't seem to work. It turns people into hateful lemmings and it's not really compassionate."<sup>4</sup> —*Elton John*

"The example of Jesus suffering is a factor in the composition of my un-dying faith in non-violence. What then does Jesus mean to me? To me, He was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had."<sup>5</sup> —*Mahatma Gandhi*

"Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue with that; I'm right and I will be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now; I don't know which will go first—rock 'n' roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary."<sup>6</sup> —*John Lennon*

“I’m a Muslim, but I think Jesus would have a drink with me. He would be cool. He would talk to me.”<sup>7</sup> —*Mike Tyson*

So Jesus is a good idea even if His followers aren’t so great. Or maybe He is a fantastic example and a dynamic teacher. It could be that He is just a passing fad who will fade away. (It seems like two thousand years of popularity indicate that’s not the case.) Or maybe, regardless of our worldview, Jesus is a cool guy to hang out with. That’s what these guys thought.

How do *you* react to Jesus? We are all looking for someone or something to follow. What do you think about the idea of following Jesus?

## **Disturbance**

The reason Jesus elicits such powerful reactions is simple and profound: Jesus disturbs our lives. To disturb means “to interfere with the normal arrangement.”<sup>8</sup> People *have* to respond to Jesus because He shows up in their lives and starts to interfere. Jesus doesn’t leave things as they are; He both attracts people to Himself and meddles with their lives.

The Bible contains four biographies (also called “Gospels”) about the life of Jesus. In one of those biographies, the book of Mark, we see Jesus doing His disturbing work of simultaneously attracting people to Himself and meddling with their lives. Feel free to read this part of the Bible as I’ve printed it below, or get your hands on a Bible<sup>9</sup> and read these verses—and all following verses—from the pages of your own Bible (that way you can better explore the surrounding context).

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (Mark 1:14–20)

Jesus arrives on the scene with a message, an attractive message. It’s a message people can’t get enough of. He comes “proclaiming the gospel of God,” that is, the *good news* of God.

Most people in your context think that Christianity is all about advice—that it’s a list of “dos and don’ts.” They couldn’t be more wrong.

We react far differently to news than we do to advice. Imagine a young wife who, nine months earlier, sent her husband off to war. It’s been a devastating, frightening, and lonely nine months. But a good friend gives her some sound and helpful advice to help her through. The friend tells her, “Be patient. Stay busy. Find yourself a good hobby and some projects to fill your time until your husband comes home. Keep writing him those letters. Stay strong.”

How is the young wife going to react? She’ll likely appreciate the advice and try to absorb it. It will be a help of sorts, but the

advice doesn't produce joy or relief.

Imagine, though, the same young wife in the same situation. Imagine that same friend coming over, but instead of offering *good advice* she speaks *good news*: "Did you hear the news? The war is over! Your husband is coming home! He's coming back!"

How will that young wife respond? Will she break down and cry tears of relief? Will she run into her friend's arms, screaming and celebrating? One thing is certain, she will rejoice! People react differently to hearing good news than they do when hearing good advice. Advice gives people more work to do. Good news gives people freedom.

Jesus didn't come with advice for us to absorb and follow; He came with news. The word *gospel* means "good news." It is news that brings joy. The gospel is history-making, life-shaping, paradigm-shattering news. It is news about something done in history that changes you, that changes everything, forever. Jesus does something so radical, so violent, so dramatic, and it seals this good news and makes a way for us to join the Big Story.

It is this news that makes Jesus so attractive and that separates Him from all other religions. He didn't come dispensing advice on how to clean yourself up and make yourself better. He didn't offer a list of action items or set of instructions about things you must *do* to find God, freedom, rest, or peace. No. Jesus came saying that you can be known, loved, set free, forgiven, and made new.

This new life is open to anyone. Anyone can be made new, made clean, set free, given a relationship with the living God. And it is free. There is no earning it. It is yours, no strings attached. The gospel says all this has *been done*. There isn't any more doing to do. It's not advice, so don't treat the gospel like mere advice. Jesus

came, lived, died, and rose again to earn the way to God, freedom, rest, and peace for you.

Nobody else has ever spoken this way, arriving on the scene and offering *news* of a new life instead of *advice* on how to achieve a better life. Founders of other religions and worldviews ask you to do something—to perform and obey—to bring your doing to the table in order to enjoy the benefits of karma, nirvana, inner peace, a better future, salvation, or whatever the benefit might be. Christianity is the one faith whose founder tells us not to bring Him our doing, but our *need*.

## **The Search for a True Story**

But there is more to this story. It is not enough to merely say that Jesus brings true news and good news. No, we must know His story—how His existence, arrival, teaching, and deeds fit within human history.

Jesus is part of a much larger story, an epic story. This story has all the makings of the best, truest stories—conflict, tension, and drama. It comes with that essential, “Uh-oh, how will this be resolved?” ingredient that all the best books and movies have.

When Jesus shows up in Mark 1, He says, “The time is fulfilled” (v. 15). What is fulfilled? What time? See, God has been doing something throughout all of history, through this Big Story told in the Bible, and Jesus is the apex and fulfillment of that story. All the “uh-oh” moments are resolved in Jesus Christ.

Each one of us has a story that we believe, one we use to make sense of our lives and our world. Some of us draw our stories from family legacy while others try to escape the story of their family. Some live the stories of pursuing success, fame, or wealth. Some

of us want to live the story of a hero but are stuck in what seems like a boring story. Some of us fit our lives into a story taught by a religion or a philosopher or thinker we admire. Some of us attach ourselves to the dominant storyline of the city we live in, chasing pleasure in Las Vegas or power in Washington, D.C.<sup>10</sup> We may not even be aware of it or ever have even thought of it in those terms, but it is true. We can't live without a sense of story. The best way I know to get this across is to again share a quote from the Introduction:

The same impulse that makes us want our books to have a plot makes us want our lives to have a plot. We need to feel that we are getting somewhere, making progress. There is something in us that is not satisfied with a merely psychological explanation of our lives. It doesn't do justice to our conviction that we are on some kind of journey or quest, that there must be some deeper meaning to our lives than whether we feel good about ourselves. Only people who have lost the sense of adventure, mystery, and romance worry about their self-esteem. And at that point what they need is not a good therapist, but a good story. Or more precisely, the central question for us should not be, "What personality dynamics explain my behavior?" but rather, "What sort of story am I in?"<sup>11</sup>

There is only one true story that can make sense of all we encounter in this broken and beautiful world. I call this the Big Story. It's the story of the Scriptures. I am going to lay all my cards on the table and state clearly what Jesus tells us, what the Scriptures tell us, and what I have come to believe: You cannot be free



until you come under the reign of the Scriptures, until you accept and live into the Big Story. For those of you who don't believe this story, I'm not asking you to accept it right now. What I am asking is for you to consider this story, to examine it and try it on. Explore and see if this story is true. I want you to test the Big Story against whatever story you're using right now to make sense out of your life.

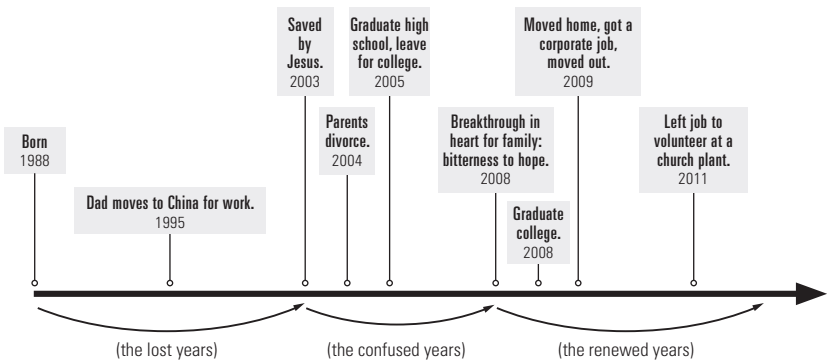
### **Your Story and Starting in the Middle**

Some of the best stories are ones that don't start at the beginning. They jump in at the middle and draw us in by introducing the best characters and the most dramatic moments without revealing the beginning or the ending just yet. Jesus is the most important character in our stories. His life dramatically shapes our stories. There is no happy ending (or happy middle) without Jesus being the main character in our story, the leading man, the driving force.

And so, in one sense, this book starts in the middle of the story so that you can meet the main character and begin to know Him and trust Him. I want to give away the climax, the most important and dramatic part of this story, but this story needs a beginning, so we will go there next. Because every great story needs not only a great main character, but a strong start. Let's take the first step of our climb up the mountain, and begin Act 1.

**STORY CONTRAST (JESUS VS. \_\_\_\_\_):** At the center of the Big Story stands Jesus, whose love both disturbs us and frees us. What, or who, stands at the center of the stories people around you believe? In what ways does having Jesus at the center of the story make for a better story?

**ACTION STEP:** Draw your life story. Get out a piece of paper, draw a line across the center of the page, and graph the most significant moments of your life. Aim to graph about ten significant moments, like in the example below.<sup>12</sup> What patterns do you notice? Who or what has most significantly shaped your story? How does your story fit within the Big Story?



**RECOMMENDED READING:** Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (Dutton, 2009). My friend Eric bought about one thousand copies of this book, and he gives copies away to everyone he can. You'd like my friend Eric, and you'd like this book.