



Who is Jesus?

Leaders' Notes



Guessing games

These make light-hearted starters. They can be presented on PowerPoint or on flash cards. Here are the shortened quotes as on the PowerPoint with the full quotes afterwards.

Game 1: Who is Jesus? What have people said?

1. On the eve of Passover, they hanged Yeshu. He practised black magic and led Israel astray.
The Talmud - Jewish Holy book 2nd century AD
2. Jesus is/was one of the prophets. Some of his followers; Muslims
3. When I was growing up I was religious in a passionate way. Jesus Christ was like a movie star, my favourite idol of all. Madonna, pop star
4. "I knew there had to be more important things than tennis or money. So I thought I'd give Jesus a chance... What Christianity has offered me is peace of mind and the understanding that it's not a big deal if you get beat." Andre Agassi, tennis star
5. I know men and I tell you, Jesus is more than a man. Comparison is impossible between him and any other human who ever lived, because he was the Son of God.
Napoleon Bonaparte, military ruler
6. Jesus was a great teacher/good man. Many people today
7. Choose between
 - a lunatic / a poached egg
 - the devil of hell
 - this was and is the Son of God Professor C S Lewis
8. Hardly anyone who hears the full story of Jesus & learns the true facts of his life & teaching ... walks away with a shrug of the shoulders, dismissing him as unimportant. They know instinctively that they are dealing with a most remarkable greatness.
Eugene Peterson, pastor, teacher, writer

➤ Is C S Lewis right? Was Jesus mad, bad or real?

This quote is one you could make a real talking point if appropriate with your group, especially after you have looked at what Jesus said about himself. We can be so used to what Jesus said ourselves that we do not see how crazy it would look to a newcomer.

Extra / full quotes

"I knew there had to be more important things than tennis or money. So I thought I'd give Jesus a chance. There are only two directions in life – one that leads to helping others and one that leads to selfish purposes. I wasn't on my way to helping others. What Christianity has offered me is peace of mind and the understanding that it's not a big deal if you get beat." Andre Agassi

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level of a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell; you must take your choice. Either this was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But don't come up with any patronising nonsense about his being a great moral teacher. He hasn't left us that option." Professor C S Lewis

"If Jesus Christ were to come today, people would not crucify him. They would ask him to dinner and hear what he had to say, and make fun of it." Thomas Carlyle – Scottish writer 19th century

"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of a human and only God can fill it." John Stott.
This is a paraphrase of Augustine, one of the early Church fathers who wrote "Thou hast formed us for thyself and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."

Game 2: What did Jesus say about himself? Was he weird or wonderful? True/false game

Some of us can be so familiar with what Jesus said, that we do not see how crazy some of his comments would sound to a newcomer.

This can be done as a true/false game. The two lists will need to be mixed together of course as on the PowerPoint.

True list (you can adapt this)

- Before Abraham was born, I am.
John 8:58
- I came down from heaven to do what God wants me to do.
John 6:38
- He who has seen me has seen the Father
John 14:9
- If you obey my teaching you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.
John 8:31
- I am the bread that gives life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.
John 6:35
- I am the light of the world
John 8:12
- I am the resurrection and the life
John 11:25



False list (include anything which might be topical for them)

- I am an astronaut from another planet
- I rob from the rich to give to the poor
- I am just Incredible
- I am the Wonder of the Universe
- I am the Lord of the Rings
- I am a poached egg
- I am only interested in good people

What did Jesus' closest friends say about him? This has not been done as a game

His cousin John who was the same age:

"He is far greater than I am for **he existed long before me.**" John 1:15

"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." John 1:29

Nathanael, a disciple, during his **first conversation** with Jesus

"Teacher you are the **Son of God**; you are the King of Israel." John 1.43-51

Jesus asked what people were saying about him -

They answered "Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Elijah, and still others say you are Jeremiah or **one of the prophets**.....Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matthew 16.13-17

Peter: "You have the words that give life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One from God." John 6.68

Disciples: We can see now that you know all things. **You can answer a person's question even before it is asked.** This makes us believe that you came from God. John 16:30

Thomas: "I will not believe until I see the nail marks... My Lord and my God!"

John the disciple: "When he appears – we shall see him as he is." 1 John 3:2

This last verse implies that although John spent 3 years with Jesus, he felt there was much he did not know about him. He probably wrote this letter before he received the visions which are recorded in Revelation. It is worth looking at Revelation 19:11-16.

The Egyptian Pharaohs and the Roman Emperors tried to convince people that they were gods. Jesus' disciples and family spontaneously acknowledged him as God, although for some of them it took longer for them to come to terms with this than for others.

Reference information to help answer those more difficult questions!

Did Jesus exist?

No one today seriously doubts whether Jesus existed as a historical character. Both Roman and Jewish historians refer to him. The quote from the Talmud is very helpful in this respect. It represents the view of the Jewish authorities who were Jesus' enemies. People who don't exist don't acquire enemies. It is more reliable in some ways than the quote which is often taken from Josephus. The latter is almost too Christian, considering that Josephus himself was definitely not a Christian and it has led to speculation that the text has been edited. Those leading groups where the youngsters have recently outgrown believing in Father Christmas may need to discuss the differences.

The Talmud - Jewish holy book 2nd century AD

This has a number of hostile references to Jesus. It says that he was the "son of an adulteress" and claims that his father was a Roman soldier. This quote reflects Mark 3:22-30. As the Jewish day started at sunset, it was indeed on the eve of Passover that Jesus died.

"On the eve of Passover, they hanged Yeshu. He practised black magic and led Israel astray."

Mara bar Serapion in AD73 wrote:

"For what advantage did the Jews gain by the death of their wise king?"

Josephus - AD93.

Josephus was a Jewish writer, born in Jerusalem around the time Jesus was killed. He wrote a vast history of the Jewish people and served in the court of the Roman Emperor.

"Now, around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man – if it is lawful to call him a man. He did amazing works and was a teacher of those people that receive the truth gladly. He won over many, both Jews and Gentiles. He was the Messiah. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that had loved him did not abandon him. He appeared to them alive again the third day, for the prophets of God had foretold these and a thousand other incredible things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

Elsewhere in his book, Josephus refers to the stoning of the apostle James, "the brother of Jesus who was called the Messiah".

Tacitus – Roman historian - 110AD

When he recalled the events following the Fire of Rome in 64, he wrote

"To stop the rumour, [that he had started the fire himself] Nero falsely accused and executed with the most exquisite punishments the people called Christians, who were notorious for their abominations. Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate."

Pliny – Roman Governor 112 AD

"Christ is worshipped as a god."



New Testament documents

It has been firmly established by biblical archaeologists that most if not all of the New Testament documents were written in the first century and probably before 80 AD. This means that there was not enough of a gap for myths and legends to have grown up around the character of Jesus as too many eye witnesses were still living when they were written. 1 Corinthians was written by Paul about 54 AD, only 20 years after Jesus, and discusses the resurrection.

There are 4 accounts of Jesus' life which help to give us a picture of him. How do we know these are reliable?

All the gospels draw heavily from first-hand memories. Books were rare in this culture so people were much more used to memorizing facts, stories, and important sayings. They were all written less than 50 years after the events happened.

Matthew

Disciple – eye witness. He wrote for the Jews to show that Jesus was the Messiah. His book was written somewhere between 25-45 years after Jesus was here.

Mark

He was a young man at the time of Jesus' ministry. He is possibly mentioned in the book anonymously. He was a companion of Peter who was a disciple and therefore an eye witness. They probably wrote the book together. It was written around 58-65 AD, so about 30 years after Jesus.

Luke

He was a doctor and did a good deal of research for his book. He was writing for the gentiles, around 65-70 AD.

John

He was a disciple so he was an eye witness. He wrote his book after the others, around 70 AD and included material which the others do not mention. The teaching here has greater depth. It is a very spiritual book.

Notes: Brenda Lord

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