

ORIGINAL

Jesus

What he really did
and why it really matters

Original Jesus

UK edition

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Introduction

I can still feel the crushing disappointment.

I was eight years old, sitting in my classroom, drawing a truck. This involved looking at the model truck on the table, and drawing what I saw. It seemed so simple.

But as I looked at my efforts, I realised it wasn't simple at all. What was on my paper looked nothing like what was on the table.

There were two options for why it had gone wrong. Either it was my fault; or it was, somehow, the truck's fault.

I blamed the truck.

I got a new sheet of paper, and started to draw my mum. I'd seen her every day of my life. How hard could it be?

Ten minutes later, I surveyed my masterpiece. My mum looked worryingly like a bad drawing of a truck.

On the plus side, it was better than my brother could do—though he was much younger than me, and was still drawing our parents with their arms coming out of their heads. And I did have some bits right. Mum has a head in real life, and she did in my drawing (even if it looked like a truck wheel). And she has four limbs, and so did my drawing (though one of her legs also resembled a truck wheel).

I had to face the reality. I was rubbish at art.

The real thing

In the end, there was only one positive point from the whole experience. I didn't really need a picture of my mum—because I had the real thing. And no drawing, even if Marie Childs (the art queen of my class) had drawn it, could capture who my mum was; could display her love or care or generosity, her smile or laugh or frown.

No sketch, however good, can tell you everything about a person. It can never fully capture the original. That's why we don't marry a portrait or make friends with a photo. We don't treat people as though they can be summed up by a quick sketch.

Except Jesus.

The general thinking is that we should view Jesus as an image—not on paper, but in our minds. Most of us have taken a quick glance at Jesus at some point in our lives—perhaps as our parents talked about him, or in church at Christmas, or from a book we once read—and we've got a rough mental sketch of him. Perhaps your sketch has been built up carefully over the years; or maybe it was drawn years ago, and you haven't looked at Jesus since. Perhaps your view of him is as a good teacher; or a religious rule-keeper; or a story for children. Whatever works best for you.

That's how I viewed Jesus for years. I had an image of Jesus that worked for me. When he stopped being what I wanted, I re-drew him into a different Jesus, to fit in with how I wanted to live. It was easy and it worked.

But then I found the Original.

Meeting the Original

It turned out that Original Jesus—the one who lived in human history, who walked, talked, ate, slept, cried—was far better than any image I'd been offered, even in church. He was more interesting, more controversial, more unpredictable, more relevant, more, well, real.

And that meant that, in mistaking my mental sketch for the real thing, I'd been missing out.

So this book is about Original Jesus. He may well be very different to the "Jesus" you thought you knew, or who you've left behind at some stage. But he's real.

In each chapter, we'll look at a popular image of Jesus, and see how the original compares. And each chapter is in two main parts. First, **▶ What he really did**—what Jesus actually said and did. In each of these sections, you'll see some words in **this kind of text**. These are words taken straight out of the Bible* and are the really important ones. Those in normal text are written by me, just to help you grasp what was going on.

And then second, in **▶ Why he really matters**, we'll see what difference the things Jesus said and did 2,000 years ago make to our lives, hopes and futures today.

Let's meet Jesus—the Original.

* I use sentences from the Bible to show what really happened in human history. If you want to know why, you might like to flick to "Yes, but... isn't this all made up?" at the end of the book on page 55.

1. Good teacher

Who was your favourite teacher? I don't mean the one you liked because you could get away with anything. I mean the one who helped you by explaining things in a way which meant that the completely confusing became crystal clear.

Mrs Mayner, my first geography teacher at secondary school, was someone who helped me understand the world around me. For instance, she explained rain—why it falls, where it falls, when it falls. And sometimes she would predict rain—she had an amazing ability to look outside at 9.30am and correctly forecast that it would be wet at lunch.

But what Mrs Mayner couldn't do was control the rain. That's more than any geography teacher, anywhere at any time, has ever been able to do. Explain, yes. Predict, possibly. Control, never.

So Mrs Mayner was great in the classroom. In a storm, though, there wouldn't be much she could do. And in a sinking boat in a storm, there's not much anyone can do...

▶ What he really did

By the time he was thirty, Jesus of Nazareth, an ex-carpenter from a backwater town in northern Israel, was getting a reputation. He travelled from town to town, teaching and healing. He talked about God, about heaven, about life and death. Everyone came to hear his teaching. He had become a local celebrity.

Everywhere Jesus went, twelve of his closest friends—his disciples—went, too. Some of them had been fishermen, and there was also an ex-tax collector, a guerrilla fighter and a thief.

One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake”. So they got into a boat and set out* across Lake Galilee, an inland sea about eight miles wide. Four of the disciples knew the waters well; they’d fished there for years. They could cross with their eyes closed—unless there was a storm.

As they sailed, Jesus fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!”

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. What had been mountains of waves was now a millpond. “Where is your faith?” Jesus asked his disciples.

A wave of relief swept over the boat. But it was followed by fear and amazement. The disciples asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

READ THE FULL STORY Luke 8 v 22-25

> Why he really matters

Jesus was such a good teacher that men and women were willing to leave their jobs behind to travel around with him. He was such a good teacher that, 2,000 years later and throughout the world, people still remember that he said: “Do to others what you would have them do to you” and: “Do not judge” and: “A tree is recognised by its fruit”. His wisdom is the most quoted in human history.

* Words straight from the Bible are in this kind of text.

But just for a moment, imagine if a good teacher—a man who could explain and sometimes even predict your life—was all Jesus was. If that image summed him up completely, by the end of that storm he would have been a drowned good teacher.

If the most interesting thing about Jesus was that he was a good teacher, there would have been twelve funerals around northern Israel the next week, as various mothers said: “I told him not to give up on the fishing/taxing/fighting/thieving. I told him not to follow that teacher, but he wouldn’t listen.”

And as they fought the waves swamping their boat, the disciples were expecting to attend their own funerals. Several of them were experienced fishermen. You didn’t fish if you were soft or got seasick. These were hard guys. But even they were panicking, because they knew they were sinking. All they had on their boat was a teacher—and a teacher is useless in a storm. They were going to die.

Undrowned

And then Original Jesus did something that no teacher has ever done.

He controlled the weather. Effortlessly and instantly. With a few words.

And then he coolly, calmly turned to his friends as they sat, drenched, distraught, but amazingly undrowned, and said: “Where is your faith?”—“Why didn’t you trust me to sort it out?”

Those twelve men got onto a boat with a teacher. They got off it with a man who was more than a teacher. They got off asking: “Who is this man?”

A simple answer

Actually, they should have known the answer to their own question. Both the Old Testament of the Bible (the bit written before these guys were born), and common sense, state that the answer to:

“Who can control the weather with a word?” is: “The one who made the weather with a word”.

There’s only one category big enough for a man who can tell wind to shut up, and order waves to behave. God.

That’s why the disciples were trembling at the end of their trip. They were beginning to realise that Jesus was, and is, a good teacher who explains life and predicts life—but that he’s so much more than that. He’s the one who made life; who controls life.

Here is God who is a man. A real man, who sleeps, has friends, walks and talks. Yet a real man who is really God.

The end of guessing

This is very exciting. Our own ideas about God have to be based on guesswork. It’s like me sitting down and trying to draw a picture of your mother—I might get her hair, her skin colour, height and so on right, or I might get them totally wrong. But either way, I can’t know, because I’ve never seen her.

So it is with our best efforts to work out who God might be—whether he’s there, what he’s like, what he thinks of us. We can only ever guess...

... unless he shows us.

And, on that boat, that’s exactly what he did. God had come to earth as a man, to show us who he is. To prove he exists. To let us know what he’s like. We can look at Jesus, and see God.

I don’t know how you imagine God, if you do at all. Maybe a powerful, distant being who has far better things to do than think about you or me. Maybe as a nice old man in the sky with a beard. Maybe a tyrant who hates fun.

Well, here’s the real God. He’s a surprising God. A God who gets involved. Who has power. Who helps people.

A God who became a man and stood on a boat in a storm and said: "STOP", and was instantly obeyed.

The guessing about him can stop. God has stood in this world and said: "Here I am".

The best teacher

If you've always thought of Jesus as a good teacher, you're absolutely right. He's the best teacher there is—on every subject there is. His words are not just good teaching, they're God teaching. He's more than a lifestyle coach—he's the life creator. Because he made everything, knows everything, and directs everything, his teaching is always true, and his advice is always right.

Jesus is a good teacher... a great teacher... and he's so much more, too. What he did on that boat makes him more interesting, more exciting, and worth taking more seriously than any other teacher. In Jesus, we meet God.

Next time you're caught in the rain, Mrs Mayner could explain the water cycle to you. She might even have warned you to take an umbrella. But she isn't controlling it.

Jesus is.

That's what the disciples were beginning to realise. The fear of the storm lay behind them. But the most terrifying part of the day still lay ahead...