

IS JESUS REAL?

Conversation between Noel, Richard, and Celia

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Richard: I'm Richard Fox and this is Messages of hope. Today we'll be discussing if Jesus is real or just a good story.

Noel: I have a story, a true story, about a young lad who was hearing the Christmas Story for the first time, and he said to his teacher, "Miss, why would Mary call her son after a swear word?" The only context he must have heard the name "Jesus Christ" in was his dad swearing at home.

Celia: For me I guess it was Jesus was this, almost like a fairy tale type, like Goldilocks and the three bears. You'd have Jesus as one of these stories. It was this concept of a person. So, is he a fairy tale, or is he real?

Richard: There's lots of evidence that Jesus actually existed, lots of historical evidence, a lot of stories written by his followers, or even people that just lived during that time have written a lot of historical accounts about Jesus.

Celia: Not just the Bible?

Richard: Not just the Bible, lots of different accounts, and there's just as much evidence that Jesus existed as there is for a lot of other historical figures. Even the main faiths, like the Muslim faith and the Jewish faith, they believe that Jesus existed. They might believe in a different interpretation on who he is, but there are accounts that they believe that he existed, as well.

Noel: That was never a problem for me, to believe that Jesus existed, but for me there was no connection between his existence and mine, so I saw him as a historical figure, not as a fairy tale, but a historical figure around whom a lot of mythology had been built. There's a real person called Jesus somewhere, but that the church lived by myths and legends, and those myths and legends were used to keep people under control, or to get money off them or something, very cynically.

Celia: How did that change for you?

Noel: The thing that changed for me was meeting people for whom Jesus not just was, but *is*. I met people who had a deep, personal relationship with him.

Richard: What evidence gave you the impression that they believed in Jesus or had this wonderful, personal relationship with him?

Noel: You could see it, just in their relationships, in their joy, in the way in which they prayed to him, and spoke of him. It was a real connection. They read the Bible, and in that reading of the Bible they understood that Jesus was speaking to them, with them. I'd never come across anything like that before. He was not just a figure in history, but a real figure, active in their lives now. It blew me away, confronted me dreadfully with my historical view of him, now seeing this real person in action in the lives of others.

When have you had an encounter with Jesus? We'd love to hear your story and the impact it had on your life. You can share your story on the Messages of hope Facebook page.

Celia: The people that I notice now, some of my friends, they have this real connection with this person, Jesus. It's part of their lives, it's part of their whole family life, it's their centre, and for me, who grew up as going to church and Sunday school, where Jesus is up in the clouds somewhere, this entity that's not really connected with you, to suddenly now realise that Jesus is not up in the clouds. He's much closer. I don't know that I fully have that understanding or relationship with him yet, but I'm certainly on the journey of it, and I'm certainly trying to have that connection with him and talk to him.

Richard: What encouragement or advice have people given you?

Celia: People used to tell me, "Read the Bible, that's God's word," and I just thought, "I don't really need to read the Bible. I know the Bible stories, I know those sorts of things," but this year, for the first time, I actually did do a Bible study, and for me it just all seemed to connect and click, and since doing that I can actually see the character of Jesus, or the character of God, in terms of what kind of a person he was, what kind of things he did, what kind of responses he gave to people, and he seems a lot more real now that I'm actually drilling down into this Bible.

Richard: That's what it was like for me, in terms of Jesus becoming real, was reading those stories about him, reaching out to people, people with blindness, who were outcast from society, who no one else wanted to be around. He stepped out into their worlds, even people with leprosy; a highly contagious disease. He went there because of the compassion and love he had for people?

Celia: He also broke a lot of rules, didn't he?

Richard: True.

Celia: That, for me, is really important, the fact that he did things when he wasn't supposed to, he healed people he wasn't supposed to heal. He didn't just follow the set of rules that the religion had in those times. He actually was a real person for real people.

Richard: He shared love, I think, love and compassion. And he taught love and compassion, he taught mercy and kindness, and grace and generosity, and he lived it, as well. He lived it. He didn't just speak about it or perform miracles, he did it, and for me, reading that story, an account of him going to the cross and dying on the cross for me just opened my eyes up to not just who he was back then, but who he is now.

Celia: I think that's a really important thing when you're trying to get to understand who Jesus is: it's not just this trying to describe Jesus, it's who he is for us, a personal thing ...

Richard: And the promises he has.

Celia: Yeah. It's not an easy thing to come to, because, as I said, I'm still on that journey, but I see him in other people, and that's what I want.

Noel: It's interesting, before, when you were speaking about him you used the word God and Jesus interchangeably, and I think that's really significant, because I've come to see that the Bible teaches us that in the face of Jesus you see the face of God. I remember having a conversation with a bloke on the plane once, where you have all sorts of interesting conversations: he came to the position that he believed there probably was a god, but we could never really know what that god was really like, and I said to him, "Have you ever considered Jesus? Because, Jesus is God become one of us. Jesus is God in human flesh and blood, so if we need to know God, we need to know Jesus."

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