

Breathe

Module: The Person of Jesus

Lesson 2: “The Historical Jesus”

Objectives:

Students will be able to

- identify non-Biblical evidence of Jesus’ existence
- present evidence that Jesus was a real, historical person
- apply implications of Jesus’ declarations to their Christian walk

Materials Needed:

- Bibles
- Paper and pens for opening activity
- Large sheets of paper and markers
- Youtube Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v544LLaKNeA> (3:03 run time)
- 1 copy of Appendix A
- optional: small candies (as rewards for Minds On activity)

Pre-lesson preparation:

- Have the paper and markers ready for the opening activity
- Preload the Youtube video and ensure it will play on your computer/screen

Minds On: (15 minutes)

Game: I remember what happened...

Begin tonight's lesson by playing a game called "I remember what happened..." based on the board game Balderdash. The object of the game is to a) figure out what really happened on the date in question, and b) to try to convince others that something else happened on that date. After reading the date statement, the students must write down a brief statement of what happened on that date. They should make their answer brief, creative, and historical sounding, so that it sounds believable. Start by giving each student 4 pieces of paper and a pencil. Do this one question at a time. If a student actually knows the right answer, have them write it down.

Once the students write down their answer, gather the slips of paper and rehearse all answers, making sure you can read them convincingly to try to fool the students. Read all of the answers that were given, including the real answer. Then, have the students vote for what they believe is the real answer. Give a candy or "points" to those who choose the right answer. The reader "wins" if no one picks the correct answer.

If you have 10 or more students, break into two groups to keep the game a manageable duration. Use a student volunteer or leader to perform the role of the "reader", and give them a copy of the dates below.

- August 8th, 1961. Essex, England (U2 guitarist The Edge was born.)
- In 1591, what did Sir John Harington do? (He invented the flush toilet and installed one in Queen Elizabeth's palace.)
- November 7th, 1885, Craigellachie, British Columbia (The Last Spike of the Canadian Pacific Railway was driven into the ground.)
- What happened at Agincourt? (King Henry V won a decisive battle against the French.)
- December 6th, 1917, Halifax (An explosion occurred in Halifax harbor killing almost 2,000 people. The explosion triggered a tsunami 60 feet high.)
- April 2, 1975, Toronto (CN Tower was completed.)

Prompt:

Over the course of human history there have been numerous events that we continue to remember. One event stands out from all the rest. The birth of Jesus remains the pinnacle event of human history. Our calendars are based on his birth. Countless people are killed every day because they call themselves Christians. Jesus' mere existence has been debated for the last two thousand years.

In this lesson we are going to consider whether or not Jesus was a real person. Did he really live on this planet or was his life just a myth created to help us live our lives?

Action: (45 minutes)

Large Group: Video

Prompt:

The video you are about to watch was released by the Atheist Experience. It is a response to a caller's question of whether it is possible to prove that Jesus is not real.

Show the YouTube video listed above. The video contains some language that may be foreign to students. For instance, at one point Jesus is referred to as a "zombie" (He was dead and then started walking around again). This will be confusing to some students. Encourage students to do one of two things when something is said that they don't understand: say "stop" or write it down. You can then help walk them through the ideas either by stopping the video or by asking for questions once the video has completed.

Think/Pair/Share:

Once the video is finished, ask students to think for a moment and write down what were their initial thoughts on the video. Give the students a minute or two to consider answers. Have them pair up with a partner, and share those thoughts. After students have shared in

pairs, depending on your group, ask if some students would like to share their answer with the whole group.

Prompt:

The video brings up a good question: Can we prove that Jesus really existed? What evidence do we have, outside of the Bible, that Jesus was real? To answer this question we are going to read the accounts of a few historians who wrote about Jesus. These historians were not followers of Jesus and, therefore, their accounts are unbiased.

Ask for 3 volunteers to read the historical accounts found in Appendix A (at the end of this lesson).

Prompt:

There is plenty of historical evidence that Jesus was a real person. However, the video stated that the bigger question is whether or not Jesus did everything he said he did. Jesus made some bold statements about who he was. Authors such as C.S. Lewis have come up with three possible explanations for Jesus. Either he was a liar, a lunatic or he was Lord.

Ask for 3 more volunteers to read the following Biblical passages.

- John 14:6
- John 6:36
- Matthew 7:21-23

Prompt:

Jesus made some bold statements about who he was. The liar, lunatic and Lord argument is essentially that Jesus was either lying, he was crazy, or he was who he said he was (The Son of God). One question that arises from this is 'do you think a person would willingly die for something they were lying about?'

Consolidate/Debrief: (5 minutes)

Breathe In

Begin by sharing with your students your own reasons for believing that Jesus is Lord. Then have students spend, a couple of minutes considering their own response. Do they accept Jesus as Lord? Perhaps some of your students are at the point to make that decision now. If a student doesn't accept that Jesus is Lord, encourage them to consider what is standing in the way. Remember, coming to God is a process, and it is important to not rush people before they are ready. It may be necessary for you to plan to follow up with students in the coming days to help them wrestle with their own doubts and questions. Get out your calendar and book time to talk with these students.

Breathe Out

Conclude this lesson by having the students consider what it means to them that Jesus was a real, historical person. How will it change the way they act tomorrow? What will it mean when they get to school? What will it mean if they get mad at their parents or brothers and sisters? How should our actions change knowing that Jesus was a real, flesh and blood person?

Encourage students to identify one specific thing they will do in response to the reality that Jesus is Lord. It could be something like how they respond to their parents. It could be the choice to not engage in something they know they shouldn't do. Encourage them to make a goal that is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and has a time limit.

Josephus

Josephus was a first century historian who lived from about 37 AD to 100 AD. He wrote the following account:

About this time came Jesus, a wise man, if indeed it is appropriate to call him a man. For he was a performer of paradoxical feats, a teacher of people who accept the unusual with pleasure, and he won over many of the Jews and also many Greeks. He was the Christ. When Pilate, upon the accusation of the first men amongst us, condemned him to be crucified, those who had formerly loved him did not cease to follow him, for he appeared to them on the third day, living again, as the divine prophets foretold, along with a myriad of other marvellous things concerning him. And the tribe of the Christians, so named after him, has not disappeared to this day.

Tacitus

Tacitus was a Roman Senator and historian who wrote about the great fire in Rome.

Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.

Lucian of Samosata

Lucian was a 2nd century satirist who wrote, albeit as a joke, about early Christians.

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day - the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed upon them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.