



They were right: Jesus was indeed no ordinary man. He was and is and always will be the Son of God. The centurion and his men realised it at the end. They knew what they had seen: the death of the Son of God. They did not yet know that in three days God would raise him back to life.

These four people lived nearly two thousand years ago. They were very different people with very different experiences of life. They had only one thing in common but that one thing mattered more than anything else: they encountered Jesus and that encounter changed them.

We all know people like them today – the man who stops at nothing to make a few dollars; the woman desperately seeking love in yet another relationship; the image-conscious political leader; the tough uniformed officer; the men with a hard job stifling their feelings with drink and gambling.

And still today Jesus can meet them: Jesus can meet us and answer all our needs. We can ignore Jesus or we can let him meet us in that deep place within us which longs for meaning and fulfilment. Like those people so long ago we have a choice. We can choose Jesus and we can let him change us. We can trust him and trust the power of his death and rising. We can accept what he offers us – forgiveness for our past and a new beginning. And we can let him take us to eternal life.



The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." Luke 23: 36-37

But the death of Jesus was like no other death. Creation itself could not ignore it.

It was now about the six hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. Luke 23: 44-46

The hardened executors and their officer had seen nothing like this. They had heard Jesus forgive them; they had witnessed the way he endured his suffering; now they saw the remarkable signs that accompanied his death. They knew this was no ordinary man.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" Matthew 27: 54

The verses in this leaflet come from the New International Version of the Bible.

If you would like to find out more about Jesus, you can read about him in the Bible. Copies are available from Bible Society bookstores and other bookshops. You could also contact your local Christian pastor/minister or the person who gave you this card.



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LIFE CHANGING ENCOUNTERS



THE LITTLE MAN WITH THE BIG MONEY PROBLEM



Nobody liked Zacchaeus, the local money shark. He was a traitor for a start, cooperating with the Roman occupying forces as their tax agent. Bribery and fraud were his tools of trade – that was until Jesus turned up in Jericho, Zacchaeus' home town.

He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up sycamore fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All of the people saw this and began to mutter... Luke 19:1-7b

There were plenty of respectable people among the leading citizens of Jericho. Why didn't Jesus visit one of them? Why would Jesus choose to mix with a swindler like Zacchaeus? Didn't Jesus know what sort of a shady character he was?

But Zacchaeus was willing to let Jesus into his life. And that changed Zacchaeus for ever.

Zacchaeus stood up and said the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out at anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Luke 19 :8

THE CURIOUS WOMAN WITH THE MESSED UP LIFE



Good men didn't talk to strange women, especially if the man was a Jew and the woman was from Samaria. But Jesus was different. Race, gender and status didn't matter to him at all. So at a well by a dusty road in Samaria, Jesus struck up a remarkable conversation.

When a Samaritan woman came to drink water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" John 4:7, 9

Jesus could see that this woman had deep needs far greater than physical thirst for ordinary water. She had spiritual thirst so Jesus changed the drift of the conversation.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?..."

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'"

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

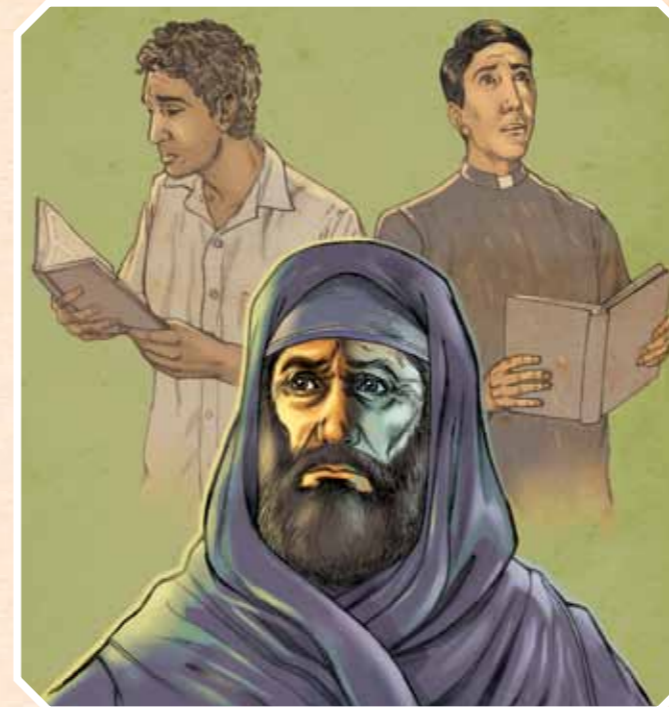
"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband..." John 4: 10-18

Amazed at Jesus' insight into her life, the woman rushed back home and called the townsfolk to see the man "who told me everything I ever did". Could this man have come from God, she wondered?

She was right. Jesus had indeed come from God: in fact he was God and that was why he alone could offer her the water which gives eternal life. The townsfolk could see it too.

THE NERVOUS TEACHER WHO CAME TO JESUS BY NIGHT



Jesus was not politically correct. If you were a prominent Jew, like Nicodemus, it was not the done thing to show an interest in Jesus

let alone be seen talking to him! But Nicodemus wanted to find out for himself, so he looked for Jesus under cover of darkness.

He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"Can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" John 3: 2-5, 9

Jesus explained that he was not talking of physical rebirth but spiritual rebirth. To accept Jesus as the Son of God and to follow his way is like being born again. It is an entirely new life. Jesus explained this to Nicodemus in what has become since then one of the best known sentences in the Bible.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

This experience changed Nicodemus. He began to see Jesus in a new way. As a council member he would later be present at the events which led to the false trial of Jesus and the passing of the undeserved death sentence. But he was not the same man he used to be. After Jesus' death he found his courage. He was one of the two men who dared to claim the body of Jesus and reverently bury him.

THE ARMY OFFICER WHO SAW JESUS DIE

Crucifixion was a cruel death. Carrying out the grisly execution was an unpleasant business. But it was common under Roman rule. The execution party and their officer, the centurion, had become hardened to it. They did their job. They gambled and drank grog to pass the time.

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23: 33-34

While Jesus' friends wept, others were more heartless. The Jewish leaders, thinking they had got rid of a threat to their authority, mocked Jesus. So did the soldiers after they had drunk too much.