**Jesus the Game Changer Church Campaign**

**Week 1 Sermon Outline**

**JESUS**

In 2016, Skienna and Ward released the book “Who’s Bigger” looking at who is the most influential person in human history.

The outcome of their research was of all the people of history, recent and not, was that the most influential person to have ever lived was Jesus of Nazareth. This is surprising when you consider what little Jesus left at the end of His time here on earth.

Author and pastor, John Ortberg, made the point that at the time of Jesus’ death, no one was less likely to be remembered or be more influential than Jesus of Nazareth.

Consider what Jesus left at the end of His ministry:

* He didn’t own any property.
* He didn’t write any books.
* He didn’t start any organisations. Remember, Jesus didn’t start the church while He was still on earth.
* He didn’t hold any political positions.
* He had few followers (Acts 1:15 refers to Peter addressing about 120 believers in the upper room)
* Very limited travel in His lifetime, and He was limited to a small region.

**Yet today, Jesus is the most influential person in human history.**

Here are four key issues to consider when thinking about the person of Jesus, and His influence.

**Firstly – Jesus was a person in history**

There are still those who question whether Jesus actually lived.

How do we know that Jesus was a real person who lived? The best explanation of the historical data and records prove that Jesus was a real person in history.

Information such as…

* We have pieces of writings about Jesus going back to just a couple of decades after Jesus’ life; people who were writing about this individual in history.
* Stories of Jesus written very close to when these events actually occurred. For other historical figures alike Julius Caesar, who conquered much of Gaul and this success is described in the writings on Gallic War. This occurred in AD 58-50, the oldest copy in existence is dated around AD 900, a span of time of around 1000 years and there are few manuscripts in existence. For the life of Jesus and the books of the New Testament, the span of time is very short, as little as 25 years and there are literally thousands of copies or partial copies in existence.
* Others who were not followers of Jesus, who also recorded the events of that time, being ancient writers and historians like…
	+ Tacitus – a Roman senator and historian of the Roman Empire AD 58-120.
	+ Josephus – a Jewish scholar and historian AD 37-100.
	+ Pliny (the younger) – a Roman senator AD 62-115.

If Jesus was not an actual person in history, why would these Roman and Jewish writers have referred to Jesus and His followers in the early church?

**Secondly – What we know of Jesus was from those who wanted to write His story**

Those who tell the life story of Jesus, of all He said and did, were those who were close to Him and were eyewitnesses to His life.

Their motivation being to let people know of the remarkable person of Jesus of Nazareth.

* Luke, who we know was a physician, gave us his explanation of why he wrote his account of Jesus (refer to Luke 1:1-4). Luke does the same when he writes about Paul and the early church (refer to Acts 1:1-2).
* John gives his explanation for why he wrote his account of Jesus (John’s gospel) (refer to John 20:30-31 and John 21:24).

**Thirdly – Those who followed Jesus gave their lives for what they believed**

Some have suggested that Jesus’ followers either at the beginning or a couple of centuries later, added the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. There are those who want to suggest that Jesus was a great teacher, but really just another ordinary individual, and it was the church who invented the miraculous stories and the extraordinary tale of His death and resurrection.

* Many believe that if Jesus did exist in history, there is no possibility that He died and rose again three days later.
* **First option: His followers made the story up**
	+ Of the eleven disciples left at the time of Jesus’ death, only one (John) died a natural death.
	+ A question one must ask is whether all ten disciples would have lived a life suffering persecution and then lost their lives as martyrs for something they knew was a lie?
	+ The late Charles Colson suggested that Watergate demonstrated to him the truth of the resurrection. Colson was an attorney working in the Nixon Whitehouse and part of the Watergate conspiracy. He went to jail as a result of these actions. In the process of the Watergate investigation and his time in jail, Colson came to personal faith in Jesus and went on to establish the international ministry, Prison Fellowship. He wrote the following about what the Watergate experience taught him:

“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because twelve men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled twelve of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me two apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

* **Second option: That the followers of Jesus, many years later, invented the resurrection and added this to the stories of Jesus’ life. The aim of this being to build the legend of Jesus**
	+ A problem with this is referred to 1 Corinthians 15:1-5.
	+ We know the timing of this letter to the church at Corinth due to a reference in Acts 18:12. This places Paul in Corinth during the specific years that Galileo was Proconsul in Corinth. Galileo can be dated accurately as AD July 51-52. The letter to Corinth was written within a couple of years of this date, believed to be around AD 55.
	+ When Paul writes, he quotes what seems to be a poem or agreed statement in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. This is a statement that Jesus was born, died and rose again and this was agreed in the church from the very earliest of times.
	+ The clear evidence is that the belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus was the foundational belief of the church from the very beginning.

**Fourthly – Jesus did not start an ideological movement to change society, He changed lives one person at a time**

Jesus the Game Changer as a series, looks at the impact that the life and teaching of Jesus has had on foundational values of western nations.

This can lead to the assumption that these ideas changed the world and brought in sweeping societal shifts in belief, behaviour and ethics.

This would be a false assumption. While Jesus’ teaching changed societies, lives are only changed one person at a time.

Not only is Jesus’ impact on one person at a time, it was often influencing people who were not looking for Jesus or for a change. Take these three examples:

**First Example**

**St Paul**– He was a prominent Jew and Pharisee, with the best teaching and family background who was persecuting the followers of Jesus. Paul spoke to Agrippa of his obsession to persecute the followers of Jesus (refer to Acts 26: 9-11). Yet on his way to Damascus, Jesus interrupted Paul’s journey and his life (refer to Acts 9:1-6). The outcome was a life revolutionised by Jesus and the birth of perhaps the world’s greatest missionary.

**Second Example**

In the 4th Century a brilliant young academic had decided against his mother’s faith and followed a hedonistic life in Milan as an academic. **Augustine** had a mistress from the age of fifteen and moved to Milan to teach and enjoy every aspect of life that he could. Yet he could not run from God who pursued him. In his garden, in a state of angst, he heard a voice say “take up and read”. He had the Bible and read from the book of Romans and it began a change that would see Augustine become one of the great leaders of the church at that time. He became the Bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa, and one of the greatest minds the church has seen.

**Third Example**

In episode one of Jesus the Game Changer, they tell the story of Australian academic and economist **Professor Ian Harper**. Ian’s wife had chosen to follow Jesus and wanted to take their children to church. Ian was not keen but eventually relented and attended Glen Waverly Anglican Church in Melbourne with his wife. The rector, John Harrower, noticed Ian and his lack of enthusiasm for attending church and asked him one day at the end of the service, “How long are you going to keep attending when you don’t believe a word we say?” In the interaction Ian said to John, “If you can explain this in a way I can understand, I’ll listen.” That started regular meetings between Ian and John, the end result was Ian sitting in church one Christmas morning and coming to the place where he knew this was true. He was not looking for faith and belief, but an exploration with John led him to the place where he could no longer deny the veracity of what he was looking at.

Jesus has always changed the world one person at a time. Those who have followed Jesus, like Paul, Augustine and Ian Harper, have gone on to change their worlds.

What we want to do over this six-week series is to demonstrate how the life and teaching of Jesus has changed the world, but not lose sight of the fact that what Jesus does is change one person at a time, and what Jesus wants to do is to change your life when you are ready.