

Week 2 – Authority established

Jesus grew up in a Middle-Eastern town called Nazareth. You can still visit it in modern-day Israel. He was known as a carpenter's son. His baptism was the turning point in his life. That's when his identity as God's Son was revealed. From then on he travelled throughout the country preaching, teaching and healing people, showing people what God is like.

He chose a group of 12 followers (disciples) and showed them how they could live God's way and trust him for everything. He is still calling people to follow him today and he promises to be with us always and everywhere.

Jesus gave his followers his authority to do the things he had been doing. He invites his modern-day followers to co-operate with him too. He even says we will do the work he did (John 14:12).

But not everyone accepted Jesus. They couldn't accept that he was sent by God. They were amazed at his teaching, but they didn't put their faith in him. Their lack of faith limited what Jesus could do among them.

READ: MARK CHAPTERS 4-6

Key verses

'He called the 12 disciples to him. Then he began to send them out two by two. He gave them authority to drive out evil spirits.'

Here is what he told them to do. "Take only a walking stick for your trip. Do not take bread or a bag. Take no money in your belts. Wear sandals. But do not take extra clothes. When you are invited into a house, stay there until you leave town. Some places may not welcome you or listen to you. If they don't, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet. That will be a witness against the people living there."

They went out. And they preached that people should turn away from their sins. They drove out many demons. They poured olive oil on many sick people and healed them.'

Mark 6:7-13

THINK

1. First, discuss any questions you have about what you have read so far.
2. What have you learned about Jesus? What surprises you about him?
3. Jesus got up early to pray, and he taught his followers a simple pattern for prayer. When and where do you pray?
4. Reading through Mark's Gospel, Jesus meets many different people: Simon's mother-in-law, who is sick;

a man with a skin disease, who was probably an outcast from society as a result; a paralysed man lowered through a roof on a mat to meet him; tax collectors, sinners and religious people at Levi's house. Which of the people Jesus meets do you identify with?

5. In Mark chapters 4-6, Jesus shows his authority by stopping a storm, feeding thousands of people, and walking on water. He gave his disciples authority and sent them out to preach as he had been doing. Do you talk to other people about Jesus and what it means to follow him? What is the reaction of the people you talk to?

LIFE LESSONS

1. What have you learned from the prison story for the past week?

2. Role models can play an important part in shaping our lives. Who are the good role models who have helped to shape your life?

3. Prayer has made a difference to the lives of prisoners and ex-prisoners. What is your experience of prayer?

4. An Alpha course, the shock of a custodial sentence, getting married... have been several different turning points for prisoners. Has there been a turning point in your life, when you have found hope? Give time to sharing these stories in the group, if you are following this course with others.

LOOK AHEAD

- During the next week, use the prayer Jesus taught his followers (Luke 11:2-4) as a pattern to write a prayer.
- In the coming week we will read how Jesus' true identity is revealed. Think about the way people in Nazareth, Jesus' home town, reacted to him. Will you be like them, or will you put your faith in Jesus?
- What is stopping you being wholehearted as a follower of Jesus? Will you trust him to give you everything you need?
- If you are already a follower of Jesus, pray for the people you know who are not yet his followers. Ask God to speak to them and reveal himself to them.
- Pray too for yourself. Ask for God's help and his peace.

2

Back to basics

Hopelessness gripped me the moment I was put into prison as a young man. I tried hard to outwardly cover my fear and anxiety, but inside I was crumbling. I felt numb, resigned and accepting of my incarceration, but my outer bravado masked the inner turmoil I was feeling.

Nights were when I felt most alone. Lost in my own thoughts, I would lie awake for hours imagining life outside - meals I would eat, walks I could go on, friends I could talk to - but soon the cries of other prisoners would jolt me back to reality. I started to sleep with my head under a pillow to drown out the noise of the heroin addicts throwing all they could against their cell doors, while screaming for a fix that was never coming.

Doubt and deals

The pillow drowned out the exterior noise, but it also drove me deeper into my interior self; sending me back and forth between the dream of beautiful things and the nightmare of being locked up.

I don't know quite when it happened, but eventually I started to pray - like an inner mental dialogue with a creator I hoped might be listening. I would do deals with him; make promises; ask for help - I was focused almost entirely on myself.

Then the doubt crept in that maybe I had just developed an imaginary friend. Was I going mad? Was I just talking

to myself? Questions, anxiety and fear slipped in; the long nights slowly passed in mental turmoil until, eventually, I would slip into a deep blackness somewhere under my pillow. Every morning I would wake up feeling exhausted and drained, trying to shake off the fears of the night by engaging in the monotony of the day. It became cyclical - every night under my pillow, the dialogue would continue. Yet this 'god' I had apparently made up never seemed to help.

Unlikely peace

One night, I was alone in my cell and the sleeplessness and anxiety were overwhelming. There was no peace, only a storm in my head. But then it happened. This time, I spoke out loud: 'God, if you are real, come and give me peace.'

I wasn't expecting much, but something really did happen that night. A presence entered my cell - a warmth that quickly turned into more. The waves of unrest started to settle, the fears began to disappear and for a moment, I felt like I was a child being held in the arms of a parent. The peace came quickly and in such an unlikely place. I knew that this wasn't just in my head. It was the God of heaven himself, sending his Spirit to bring me tranquillity, comfort and peace.

That night I slept - I really slept. And I woke up knowing that I had encountered the peace of God in my prison cell.

Today, I visit prisons in my role as the international director of 24-7 Prayer in Great Britain. 24-7 Prayer helps

prisoners to encounter God in prayer – and we believe that these God-encounters can bring life transformation.

Brian Heasley is the International Prayer Director for 24-7 Prayer in Great Britain. You can read more of Brian's story in his book *Gatecrashing* (Edinburgh: Muddy Pearl, 2014). Story supplied by 24-7 Prayer. Used with permission.



LUKE 10: 1-6, 8-9

After this the Lord appointed 72 others. He sent them out two by two ahead of him. They went to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is huge, but the workers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals. And don't greet anyone on the road.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'May this house be blessed with peace.' If someone there works to bring peace, your blessing of peace will rest on them. If not, it will return to you....

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is given to you. Heal the sick people who are there. Tell them, 'God's kingdom has come near to you.'



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs. That way they could encourage each other. But they were not to rely on their own strength or preparation. Instead, they went with a simple message, doing what they had seen Jesus do. What can we learn and put into practice in our lives today?



Prayer

Heavenly Father, I want to be someone who helps other people to know Jesus. Show me how. Amen.



'You will call out to me for help.
And I will answer you.
You will cry out.
And I will say, "Here I am."'

ISAIAH 58:9



'Sometimes I think, "I won't talk about his message anymore.
I'll never speak in his name again."
But then your message burns in my heart.
It's like a fire deep inside my bones.
I'm tired of holding it in.
In fact, I can't.'

JEREMIAH 20:9

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