

LENT RESOURCES 2018

Week 4 – Decision time

At this point in our journey with Jesus, the ending is revealed. The 12 disciples know that Jerusalem is a dangerous place for Jesus. They know that he has made enemies, and there are plots to kill him. They are afraid, but Jesus is determined. He knows what to expect. Talking about himself as the ‘Son of Man’, he says:

‘The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will sentence him to death. Then they will hand him over to the Gentiles. They will make fun of him and spit on him. They will whip him and kill him. Three days later he will rise from the dead!’ (Mark 10:33-35)

Jesus’ followers had a lot to learn. They found these words difficult to believe until they found themselves face to face with the risen Jesus, with the wounds in his hands and feet still visible from the crucifixion.

They still expected a king to overthrow the occupying Roman army. They wanted short term benefits. They couldn’t grasp that Jesus was starting a new kingdom that would go on forever. They didn’t understand that in Jesus’ kingdom there are very different priorities. People who expect to be last, like children and poor people, are those who are first in God’s kingdom (Mark 10:44). No wonder Jesus made enemies of the rich and powerful people!

READ: MARK CHAPTERS 10-12:40

Key verses

Jesus called them together. He said, "You know about those who are rulers of the Gentiles. They hold power over their people. Their high officials order them around. Don't be like that. Instead, anyone who wants to be important among you must be your servant. And anyone who wants to be first must be the slave of everyone. Even the Son of Man did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price for setting many people free."

Mark 10:42-45

THINK

1. Looking at the Bible readings in Mark's Gospel, what surprises you about the pecking order in Jesus' kingdom? Who is first and who is last?

2. Jesus saw that the rich young man loved money more than he loved God. What do people put first in their lives? What about you? What's the most important thing in your life?

3. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowds welcomed him as a hero. Days later, another crowd was calling for him to be crucified. How do the people you know respond to Jesus?

4. One of the men who came to Jesus with a question realised that to 'love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength' is very important. So is loving your neighbour as you love yourself' (Mark 12:33). What examples can you give of people living this way?

5. Does it surprise you that Jesus drove the traders out of the temple courtyard? When is it right to be angry? How should we act when we are angry?

LIFE LESSONS

1. Some prisoners' stories show how significant it can be to forgive and to be forgiven. Are there people you need to forgive or be forgiven by?

2. Jesus gives blind Bartimaeus his sight (Mark 10:46-52). One of the prisoners in the *40 Days of Hope* book, Stephen, began to explore who Jesus is by reading the Bible. He changed from being someone who was spiritually blind to a man who could see who Jesus is. Where are you on the journey from being spiritually blind to seeing?

3. When Daz, from this week's prisoner's story, was sent to prison he used his time to study the Bible. He found support from the people in his fiancée's church. How does your community support people in need, be they prisoners, or people in emotional or physical need?

4. Another prisoner, Jim, has found that it is possible to be in prison and to feel free inside. Have you found the freedom Jesus gives? What difference does it make to your life?

LOOK AHEAD

In the next week we will discover that actions speak louder than words. What we do shows what we believe. Ask God to help you understand yourself better as you take special notice of the way you act towards God and towards the people around you.

4

Incredible!

Daz became fascinated with violence from a young age. When his uncle took him to see a Millwall versus Manchester City football match, Daz remembers seeing fans ripping up seats and throwing them into the stands of rival supporters. Even though Daz was just a kid, he was gripped by these images, and years later he became a violent football thug himself. He thought that if people feared him he would have respect - something he craved.

When he decided that he needed to start carrying a knife, he bought five Stanley knives for him and his friends to take to a Millwall match. During a fight between rival fans, he used his knife to slash someone's face. On the train back to London, Daz and his friends were hyped up and buzzing as they talked about the violence they'd committed. But after a while the mood changed and it went quiet. Daz suddenly felt a sense of emptiness.

A date with God

When he began dating the girl who is now his wife, she started asking him to go to church. That really baffled him. He didn't believe in God, and thought that if God did exist, 'Why would he want to know a scumbag like me?' The only dealings Daz had had with a church before was when he stole the DJ equipment that they used for the youth club.

But his girlfriend kept asking him to come to church, and persuaded him to attend an Alpha course where he could learn the basics about Christianity and ask questions. Daz had told her, 'If I do the Alpha course, and I find out that there's no God, I don't ever want you to mention God to me again, and I will never ever come to church with you again.'

While the Alpha course was running, Daz continued to get into trouble. One night he stabbed someone and was charged with GBH. He was due to appear at Woolwich Crown Court at a later date.

Incredible force

By the end of the Alpha course, he still didn't believe in God but was asked if he wanted prayer to receive the Holy Spirit. Very reluctantly he went forward for prayer, and wasn't really listening to what was prayed for him. He was just about to open his eyes and turn around to his girlfriend to say, 'That's it. I told you it was a load of rubbish. God is not real...' when, all of a sudden, he felt this incredible force surging through his body. It was overpowering. It was exactly what he had needed. He had felt the presence of God in an unmistakable and powerful way.

For the next two weeks Daz felt like his life was transformed. He stopped carrying a knife and he felt an overwhelming sense of love. He no longer felt that something was missing in his life, and he felt like God had filled the emptiness in his heart.

Found guilty

But his past caught up with him. In 2007, Daz appeared at the Old Bailey and was found guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. He was subsequently locked up for four years. He was 19 years old.

In prison, he was blown away by the amount of support he received from people at his now-fiancée's church. He had a lot of time to study the Bible and think about God.

He was released in 2011, and in the summer of 2012 he married his fiancée. Their son was born in January 2014.

If you met Daz today, you would find it hard to believe that he was once a violent killer. He is tall and slim with cropped dark hair. He speaks articulately with a strong Cockney accent. And one of the first things you notice about him is that he has a calm and gentle spirit. Daz says, 'If God can change me he can change anyone. He has helped me rebuild my life, and I have a love in my heart that is indescribable.'

Daz's story is contributed by Paul Warwick. Used with permission.

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MARK 11:1-2,7-10

'Jesus sent out two of his disciples. He said to them, "Go to the village ahead of you. Just as you enter it, you will find a donkey's colt tied there. No one has ever ridden it. Untie it and bring it here..."

They brought the colt to Jesus. They threw their coats over it. Then he sat on it. Many people spread their coats on the road. Others spread branches they had cut in the fields.

Those in front and those in back shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Jesus arrived in Jerusalem as people were travelling there from all over the known world for the Passover celebrations. Passover reminded them how they had been set free from slavery in Egypt. Now they were living under Roman occupation and wanted a king to set them free. Jesus, riding on a donkey's colt, wasn't what they were expecting, but they welcomed him like a conquering king. In Daz's story, God wasn't what he expected either. What surprises you about Jesus when you read about him?



Prayer

God of surprises, I want to know you. Amen.



'My grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak.'

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

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