

LENT RESOURCES 2018

Week 6 – Death defeated

Since the first Easter 2,000 years ago, Christians have mourned Jesus' death and celebrated his resurrection in the days known as Holy Week. We have seen how Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem to the shouts of 'Hosanna'. Without knowing the importance of her actions, a woman poured expensive perfume on his head, symbolically preparing his body for burial.

Jesus used bread and wine to help all his followers through history to remember his death and resurrection. He had done no wrong, but he was arrested, tried and sentenced. Crowds cried out for his execution.

He was tortured and crucified, nailed to a cross.

When he died, something deeply symbolic took place. 'The temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom' (Mark 15:38). This was a huge curtain – too high for human hands to tear apart. It hung in front of the Holy of Holies – separating people from God's presence in the temple. When it was torn in two, it opened the way to God. That's what happened when Jesus died. Now, because of Jesus, we can all approach God.

The Roman commander who saw Jesus die would have seen many deaths. He knew that this death was different and said, 'This man was surely the Son of God!' (Mark 15:39).

But Jesus' death was not the end of the story. At the end of this six-week journey with Jesus, we celebrate his resurrection. He has risen from the dead! He lives! But this Sunday the church marks Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey and watches with him in anticipation of his darkest hour;

READ: MARK CHAPTERS 14:53-16:20

Key verses

The crowd took Jesus to the high priest. All the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law came together. Not too far away, Peter followed Jesus. He went right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards. He warmed himself at the fire.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for something to use against Jesus. They wanted to put him to death. But they did not find any proof. Many witnesses lied about him. But their stories did not agree.

Then some of them stood up. Here is what those false witnesses said about him. "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made by human hands. In three days I will build another temple, not made by human hands.'" But what they said did not agree.

Then the high priest stood up in front of them. He asked Jesus, "Aren't you going to answer? What are these charges these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent. He gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah? Are you the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting

at the right hand of the Mighty One. You will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven."

The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard him say a very evil thing against God. What do you think?"

They all found him guilty and said he must die. Then some began to spit at him. They blindfolded him. They hit him with their fists. They said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

Mark 14:53-65

THINK

1. Jesus' closest friends deserted him. On the cross, Jesus felt that his own Father in heaven had deserted him too. He went through this for us, so that we never have to be alone. Can you describe times when you have been alone, but have experienced God's presence with you?

2. Our six-week journey began with Jesus' baptism and ends with Jesus being arrested, tried and crucified. How has this story stirred you to follow him more faithfully?

3. Hebrews 10 explains what happened in the spiritual realm when Jesus died. It compares the Old Testament system of sacrifices with what Jesus did on the cross: 'Christ offered his body once and for all time' (Hebrews 10:10). How does this help us to understand the difference Jesus' death and resurrection has made?

4. Read Hebrews 10:22-25 and consider how we can help

each other to follow Jesus. Spend some time encouraging another believer.

LIFE LESSONS

1. Baptism is a way of showing that our old life has died and a new life has begun. Baptism isn't about a special place or special water, but about what God does. Talk about what it means to be baptised.

2. Ani (one of the prisoners in the book) has found that by reading the Bible he can become friends with Jesus. Reading the Bible saved the life of the prisoner in this week's prisoner's story. What is your experience of reading the Bible?

3. Being part of a Christian church or community is an important part of following Jesus. We can help one another to become more like Jesus. How do you find the help you need to grow as a Christian?

LOOK AHEAD

Our six-week journey with Jesus from the River Jordan to Jerusalem is complete. But it is not the end of the story. Jesus wants to walk with us through the whole of our lives and he has promised he is preparing a place for us to be with him forever. Death is not the end. The best is yet to come!

6

He died for you

In August 2006, I'd made the decision I had wanted to make for over three years. I was going to take my own life. I'd lost the will to live.

I was serving a life sentence for murder, the result of me 'losing it' during a drunken argument. I couldn't remember what had happened, which only compounded the dreadful remorse I felt on a daily basis.

It was 8.45pm, and I was in a cell in the segregation unit known to inmates as 'The Chokey'. At around 9pm, the day shift would hand over to their night time colleagues. Just 15 minutes to wait - no more pain, no more shame. Relief from the awful situation I was in.

Inner voice

But I was interrupted. It was as if a quiet voice spoke to me: 'Just read that Bible'. On the shelf was a Gideon New Testament and Psalms. Until then, it had been just a blue object in my cell. My mind answered immediately, 'What good is that going to do me?' Again the voice replied, 'Just read that Bible.' Again, my mind retaliated with, 'What's the point?'

But the inner quiet voice persisted: 'Just read that Bible.' I remember thinking that it would pass the time until the night shift took over.

I opened the book at the beginning. It was a list of

names - nothing inspirational there. I read on: 'So and so, the son of so and so' and so forth. Blah, blah, blah! But something was stirring inside me. I stumbled across a particular verse on the page: 'and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ'.

Tears

A massive realisation came over me. I remember exclaiming, 'Wow, he is real!' From then on I could not stop reading through the Gospel. I shed tears as I read the Beatitudes, but I still had no hope. Surely God couldn't accept me. I was past being forgiven.

I tried to put the book down, but could not. Something was urging me on. Then, at Luke 15:11-32, I found the parable of the lost son (see page 116). As I read, the tears started again - but with a difference. The hopelessness that had been always constant, disappeared. The wretchedness I suffered also went. Most of all, the idea I firmly believed that I was unworthy of forgiveness was taken from me.

The angry, frightened, desperate person I had become ceased to exist there and then. At verse 32, when Jesus' words spoke of the brother who was 'dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found', I was found indeed. I wept openly with joy. Suddenly, I had hope. I couldn't have told you what for, I just knew I had hope. I wanted to live; there wasn't any difficulty I wasn't ready to face. My words can't do justice to what was happening in and around me.

Alive!

I spent the rest of the evening reading Scripture. I was alive! I could pray! I was no longer alone. I was talking with Jesus. I couldn't see him, but he was there.

A few days later I was taken from the segregation unit and returned to one of the wings. I asked to see the chaplain. He was a bit wary of me, as some weeks previously I'd been a bit unpleasant. I told him what had happened. He asked if I would be going to chapel on Sunday, and I said yes. That Sunday, I went to the front and gave my life to Jesus at the altar.

Almost three years later, my life as a Christian is unrecognisable from the lost soul I was in that segregation cell. Not only has God transformed me, he has given me gifts; blessings that would fill a book. A life full of hope, love and peace. I am no longer useless but useful. Today I owe my life to Jesus - I know he gently spoke to me that night. Without him I have nothing; I am nothing.

In all of this, the Gideons supplied the Bible. Thank you, Gideons - your work in prisons makes such a difference. I'm proof.

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MARK 15:25-32

'It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. They wrote out the charge against him. It read,

THE KING OF THE JEWS.

They crucified with him two rebels against Rome. One was on his right and one was on his left. Those who passed by shouted at Jesus and made fun of him.

They shook their heads and said, "So you are going to destroy the temple and build it again in three days? Then come down from the cross! Save yourself!" In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law made fun of him among themselves. "He saved others," they said. "But he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross! When we see that, we will believe." Those who were being crucified with Jesus also made fun of him.'



SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Jesus hadn't committed any crime. He was not found guilty. The men crucified with him were being punished for the crimes they had committed. Luke, another of the Gospel writers, described how one of the men had a change of heart. He said, 'We are getting just what our actions call for. But this man hasn't done anything wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' (Luke 23:41-42).



Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for dying so I can be forgiven and live with you forever. Amen.



'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.'

JIM ELLIOT (1927-1957)