

*A course in
five sessions
...in preparation
for Easter.*

A long week

*Can Pilate keep
control?*

**RELIGION
AND THE
STATE**

Conspiracy?

The Romans allowed the Jewish authorities to rule over local matters to do with the religious beliefs of the Jews. This even extended to having a king who had to do what the Romans said, and to letting the Jewish religious leaders control the practice of the religion of the people.

*The city is
heavily policed
for the big
Jewish festival.*

*Caiaaphas under
fire... again!*

**Not another
one!**

Jesus could have been 'just another' preacher who had collected a following of disciples, and had taken the opportunity of the Passover festival week to establish His reputation and following. The five stories we look at have something to say about the Lord Jesus, something about His followers, and something about the tensions of Jerusalem then.

**TENSION
IN THE CITY**

The city of Jerusalem was a crowded and exciting place to be when Jesus came to it for the last week of His life. As it is today, it was a place where feelings could run high, and people held to very different views about things. It was a very tense time.

*Country people
come to town.*

OPPRESSION!

The Roman Empire controlled Jerusalem and the Holy Land, through troops, taxes, and an administration. The nearest parallel to this on British soil is the taking over of the Channel Islands by the Germans during the Second World War. There are many in Ireland who consider that this is what Britain is doing now to Northern Ireland.



The aim of the course.

To draw out from events in the last week in the life of the Lord Jesus the way in which He responds to people, and to affirm how He valued people and wanted to save them from those who exploited them.

The Bible stories show the conflict that is present in these situations. Usually we focus on that conflict and the response of the Lord Jesus. The purpose of these studies is to get people thinking about and responding to the experience of the disciples as they are part of this last week in the life of the Lord Jesus.

For this reason the fourth question is the key question to be asked in each session, and worked through with the group. The task that is set at the end is important too as it reinforces the value that Jesus was putting on the everyday people who followed Him or listened to Him.

The teaching method relies on three things taking place:

- i. A link being made between the events of the last week, and the events of today.
 - ii. The group working on two or more of the questions, of which question (d) is always one of them.
 - iii. The group completing the task set for them.
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Leading a group.

Why we teach through small groups.

It enables many people to take part and to make use of their experience of life and understanding of the issues.

It values the contribution that people make, and does not set up the idea that there is one expert who 'knows it all'.

It makes it possible for the leader to bring together the facts, ideas, and feelings, which are presented, recognising how these relate to each other.

People learn from each other in a climate that enables them to explain what they do not understand as well as what they do.

The group leader can control what takes place and direct the discussion towards the theme being followed.

Skills needed by the leader.

An ability to make people feel at ease, and contribute to the discussion.

To be able to listen and reflect back what is said in an encouraging way.

An ability to include those that are left out, and to prevent one or two taking it over.

Knowledge needed to lead.

Enough understanding of the gospel stories and their background to answer questions which might arise. It can be helpful to read the stories in all the gospels and not just in Luke. Check with someone who can help if you do not understand something before the sessions start.

How the Bible is presented.

Have the text of the Bible passage available each week. You can use Bibles, have it on an overhead projector slide, write it on a wall poster, or give each person a copy of the passage on a sheet of paper. In the meeting it can be read through, with everyone taking part, with just one person reading, or a prepared dramatic reading.

Prayer with the group.

Give some time each session to prayer, being as informal or formal as would best reflect the group who are taking part. It would be good to pray for each other, and for the church in relation to the theme being discussed.

An outline of a session.

- a. Use a room where everyone can see each other's faces, and where it is possible for them to sit comfortably. You should be in a place in the room where you can see the door, in case there are interruptions.
 - b. Explain that the course only works if everyone takes part, sharing their thinking and experiences. They are not expected to be experts, because there are none.
 - c. Set out the theme of the course, explaining that you are going to look at this last difficult week in the life of the Lord Jesus, and to see what it must have been like to be one of His followers when it seems as if He was a marked man. Let them know the five passages to be used at the start of the course.
 - d. Explain the method you are going to use, which is to:
 - i. Take a Bible passage each week.
 - ii. Make links between that 'long week' and events of today.
 - iii. Answer questions which have been set for the course.
 - iv. To re-write a key verse in the passage set.
 - e. Begin the session with the reading from the Bible. Highlight one point to get the discussion started. (See the individual session notes). Encourage people to tell a story that relates to this.
 - f. Allow others to respond to the story, or to add to it. Then affirm what has been said and how it relates to the passage.
 - g. Select one question from the session notes to move the discussion on. Build on their responses from the Biblical passage, taking opportunity to direct it so that the theme is kept to. Make sure that question (d) is discussed, and see if they can link it to events today.
 - h. Have a brief break and then get them to work on the 'Task for the Group'. It may be useful to split them into smaller group of three or four first of all, and then for them to bring their suggestions back to the group. The end product should be a poster that can be shown to others (for instance, the church on Sunday), or kept as evidence of the development of the course.
 - i. Remind them of the theme for the next session. Ask them to come with stories, press cuttings, or photographs which could illustrate the theme.
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1. The entry into Jerusalem.

Luke 19 28 - 40

Bible passage.

As this is a longer passage it would not be suitable for a wall poster, and probably not for an overhead projector slide. It could be typed up on a separate sheet of paper for all to have.

Point to highlight.

The idea of celebration could be used, together with the welcome that is given to a king when entering a city. The state opening of parliament, or even the coronation could be referred to. A reminder of the visit of royalty to a local event could set the stories going.

Evidence of Jesus valuing His disciples.

He got them to bring the donkey - to do things for Him.

He received their acclaim - to speak out about Him.

He spoke up for them to the Pharisees - 'if they keep quiet...'

Questions for the group to think about.

When He rode in on the donkey, whose authority was He challenging?

Does He challenge any authorities now?

What would have made people take Jesus seriously then?

Is it the same today?

What would have made people dismiss Him as not being worth listening to?

Are these the reasons why they do it now?

What did it feel like to be one of His disciples on that day?

What did they mean when they called out (v.38) 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.' ?

What attitude did Jesus show towards his disciples?

Task for the group.

Put verse 40 into everyday language : "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet the stones will cry out."

2. The clearing out of the temple. Luke 19⁴⁵ - 48

Bible passage.

This shorter passage could be written up on a wall poster or put on an overhead projector slide. The wall poster would mean that it was visible to everyone, and is helpful in some groups to stop people opting out of the group by burying themselves in the passage.

Point to highlight.

People often think of the church as 'always wanting money'. This could be used to highlight the link here between trade and worship. The charge made at some cathedrals for entry by tourists could also be a starting point. Explain the way in which offerings had to be perfect to be offered in the temple.

Evidence of Jesus valuing His disciples.

The link here is that the sellers of offerings and the money changers were exploiting people. You needed special money to buy offerings, and if you bought them in the temple then it was sure that the priest would accept the offering as all right to be offered. It was open to abuse, and was creating another barrier between the people and God. This strong action of Jesus was to show that people were more important than making money, and that they ought to be able to go to the temple without being taken advantage of.

Questions for the group to think about.

When He cleared out the temple, whose authority was He challenging?
Does He ever challenge the same authority now.

How would the tradesmen and bystanders have reacted to Him doing this?
Is trade and religion ever mixed up today?

What claim was Jesus making by His words and actions?
Is that a claim He would make today?

What would it have felt like to be one of His disciples on this occasion?

Why were the teachers of the law and leaders reacting so strongly?

Why did the people 'hang on His words'?

Task for the group:

Put verse 46 into everyday language: 'My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.'

3. The last Passover.

Luke 22 14 - 20

Bible passage.

This passage lends itself to someone reading the narrative and someone else speaking the words of the Lord Jesus. It might be helpful to have a typed out copy of the text for everyone to have as well.

Point to highlight.

The way in which we like to eat with friends, and the special meals we have to mark special occasions. A special meal which happened at the church when someone was leaving would be a good example. From such a story could come comment on the way in which we show our love for people in events like these.

Evidence of Jesus valuing His disciples.

'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you.'

His gift of the bread and the cup, as special for them, on this occasion.

The explanation of a new covenant 'poured out for you.'

Questions for the group to think about.

What was so 'new' about this promise He was making?
Does He still make that promise to us today?

Had He spoken about suffering and death before?
Does this influence how we look at suffering and pain?

Why did He explain it only to the close disciples at this time?
Is it still something that is limited today?

What must it have felt like to be a disciple present on this occasion?

What did He mean when he said (v.18) 'I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'?

f. How did Jesus feel about His disciples at this Passover meal?

Task for the group.

Put verse 19 into everyday language: "...do this in remembrance of me."

4. The testing in the garden. Luke 22³⁹⁻⁴⁶

Bible passage.

This could be read with one person taking the narrative and one person being the Lord Jesus. It could also be read around if people are comfortable with that.

Point to highlight.

At times of extreme difficulty we often want to get away from situations. Sometimes we pray in a way we have never prayed before. People may have stories about how they have responded to very testing situations. Beware that they do not go on too long, or that one person dominates it.

Evidence of Jesus valuing His disciples.

He suggested that they pray for themselves, as He knew a difficult time was ahead. The same story in Matthew 26. vv. 38 and 40. tells us He asked them to watch with Him.

He wanted them with Him at this time.

Questions for the group to think about.

What temptation did Jesus think His disciples would face?
Is this a present day temptation?

Why did the angel come and help Jesus on this occasion?
Does God come to us in special ways when we are up against things?

What made the disciples go to sleep?

How would you have felt if you were present with Jesus that night?

What did Jesus mean when He asked 'take this cup from me?'

Why did Jesus want His disciples with Him that night?

Task for the group.

Put verse 42 into everyday language: "Yet not my will but yours be done."

5. The rejection of the Lord Jesus. Luke 23¹³⁻²⁵

Bible passage.

This is a little complicated to read as a dramatic reading. It could be worthwhile reading it out loud and then having a time of quiet while people read it again for themselves. Sometimes asking the question 'did anything come across in a fresh way?' about a familiar passage helps the group to think about it in a new way.

Point to highlight.

The political situation is important to point out, as is the tradition of releasing someone at a time of festival. The King of Thailand set a British person free recently on the occasion of his birthday. All of this raises issues about justice and mercy.

Evidence of Jesus valuing His disciples.

There is no reference to this in this passage. He involved them right up until the time of His arrest, and appears to them as soon as the resurrection has taken place. He kept coming back to them in those days until He ascended to heaven. But here He is on His own.

Questions for the group to think about.

How possible was it for the disciples to be near Jesus throughout His trial?

Was Jesus treated differently from any other politically sensitive arrested person at that time?

Why did the crowd shout for Barabbas, knowing him to be a criminal?

What would it have felt like to be a disciple in the crowd?

Why was Pilate going to punish Jesus although he thought Him innocent?
(v.16)

What attitude did Jesus show towards those who were trying Him?

Task for the group.

List what the disciples had learned and gained from Jesus up until this time.

We will be looking at the last week in the life of the Lord Jesus through five stories from the Gospel of Luke. The stories show the conflict that is present in rather different situations. Usually we focus on that conflict and the response of the Lord Jesus. The purpose of these studies is for us to think about and respond to the experience of the disciples as they are part of this last week in the life of our Lord. In our groups we will try to apply this to the life that God has called us to.

Our learning relies on four things taking place:

That people in the groups participate and share their understanding and experiences.

A link is made between the events of the last week, and the events of today.

The group works on two or more of the questions, of which the fourth question is always one.

The group completes the task set for them.
