

TALKING POINTS 2

Day 7 (Exodus 1:7 - 2:10)

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, hundreds of other people were also travelling in the same direction. Like Jesus and his disciples, they were on their way to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem.

To understand about this feast of Passover, we have to go back to the stories of the Israelites (Abraham's family).

When Pharaoh gave Joseph's family land in Egypt, the family made that area their home and stayed there after the famine was over. Gradually more and more children came along and so the family grew and grew. But, as the years went by, the Egyptians forgot how Joseph had saved them from famine; they forgot that Pharaoh had given the land to Joseph's family. Instead they worried about how big the Israelite family was getting - they thought that the Israelites might try to take over Egypt.

To make sure this couldn't come true Pharaoh made the Israelites his slaves and forced them to build huge cities for him (perhaps even some pyramids). Life became very hard, but the families went on growing, just as God had promised Abraham long ago. So Pharaoh made an even more terrible law: He ordered that all boy babies were to be killed.

This rule was not always obeyed, however. One of the babies who survived was baby Moses. I am sure you know the story (Exodus 2:1-10). We can't stop to tell the whole story about Moses now, but when he was grown up, he was part of God's rescue plan. He went to Pharaoh to ask him to let the Israelites leave Egypt. When Pharaoh refused, the Egyptians suffered terribly. Moses warned Pharaoh that the tenth and last plague was going to be the worst of all: the first born child in every family would die.

To escape this punishment, the Israelites had to show that they trusted God. They had to mark the top and sides of their front door with splashes of the blood from a perfect lamb which had been killed. Then on the night that this terrible punishment would come, they were to pack up everything up and, then, dressed and ready to leave Egypt, each family must eat a special last supper. (If you have time, act out this meal.)

That night the eldest in every Egyptian family died, but those who trusted God were kept safe. Ever since then the Israelites (Jews) have celebrated the fact that death 'passed over' their houses. This 'Passover' is what Jesus was going to celebrate in Jerusalem.

God is looking after us today also. Think of some ways to celebrate that.

Day 8 (John 12:1-17)

Like many other people, Jesus' disciples prepared the special Passover meal in the normal way (Matthew 26:17-19). But everything else that happened that night for Jesus and his friends was different.

The first difference involved washing! In these virus days, we are told all the time that we must wash our hands. And I am sure you are always asked if you have washed your hands before supper. In those days, however, when visitors arrived for a meal a slave would welcome them by washing their *feet*. The roads were untarred and the open sandals people wore let dust in. So their *feet* were dirtier than their *hands*!

(Check your feet now! You might think of washing one another's feet before you talk further.)

On the night of this special meal, the disciples had been arguing about which one of them was the most important person. As a result, no-one wanted to act like a slave and wash anyone else's dirty feet. So Jesus did it. He took off his travelling clothes, wrapped a towel round him, took a big jug of water and went round the group, gently washing and drying their feet.

Although their feet must have felt much better, the disciples were really embarrassed. They knew that Jesus was a special messenger from God. They knew that they should be looking after him, not letting him look after them! Peter even tried to stop Jesus, but Jesus insisted.

Why?

Well, Jesus knew that this was the last meal they would have together. He knew he was going to be arrested and killed, and he wanted to make sure that his followers learnt two important last lessons:

First, they needed to realise that those who follow Jesus must look after one another. His followers weren't ever to think they were better than others. Instead they were to serve each other with much love, just as Jesus had served them.

Second, his followers were being taught about being clean. No, not about having clean hands and feet and ears and about brushing their teeth – not that kind of clean. There is another kind of cleanness: a cleanness which comes when God cleans up the mess inside us. You know how, even when we try not to do wrong things, we do them. When Jesus wanted his followers to be clean, he was reminding them (and us) that we can't be friends with God unless we ask him to help us stay clean inside. When God forgives us, we can start again and be more like Jesus.

Let's tell God we are sorry about the bad things we do and let's ask him to clean us up inside now.

Day 9 (Matthew 26:26-30)

When Jesus shared this special Passover meal with his friends, he didn't just want them to remember the past - how God had rescued his people freed them from slavery and led them out of Egypt into the land he had promised to Abraham. Jesus wanted the meal to celebrate something which was going to happen. It was a kind of picture of what was going to happen.

(Stop at this point and take turns to act out eating something. The others must guess what it is eg licking an ice cream cone.)

The picture Jesus gave wasn't acted out with imaginary food like that. Instead, he used real bread and wine to help his friends see what was going to happen. Can you work out from the verses given what the bread was a picture of? And what did the wine suggest?

Maybe you are wondering why a new celebration was needed? Well, after his people had been freed from Egypt, God had made a solemn promise to Moses that he would be with his people. In return, God's people had promised to listen to him. But the people had broken that promise over and over again. Instead of punishing them or wiping them out, God chose to send his son Jesus to take the punishment for all the wrongs that had ever/ would ever be done. This is why Jesus died – he took the punishment so everyone could be friends with God again.

From that day on, instead of looking back, the special meal would remind his people that God rescues us from a far more terrible enemy than Pharaoh; he rescues all his people from evil. We call that new celebration 'The Last Supper' or 'Communion'. When we get together for that meal, we remember that Jesus loves us – so much that he died in our place.

During this special meal we copy what Jesus did when he met with his disciples for the last time: we share bread and wine together with others who love him. Jesus told us to do this often and, as we eat and drink together, we must remember to thank him for everything he did for us.

So Easter is the later version of Passover: God's rescue mission. Start celebrating now!

Day 10 (Luke 22: 39-53)

After the meal Jesus and his disciples went out to a nearby garden called Gethsemane. The disciples were very sleepy, but Jesus prayed very deeply. He knew that the things that were going to happen to him would be terrible. As a man he was scared and he needed God's help to get through it. He loved us so much he wanted to suffer so we didn't have to.

Sadly only eleven disciples went out to the garden with him. The twelfth disciple, Judas, had gone off to meet with those who wanted to kill Jesus. They made a bargain: Judas would get 30 pieces of silver, if he took them to Jesus at a time when he could be captured. Now Judas saw his chance – the garden was the perfect place for this!

While Jesus was praying, Judas led a whole crowd of temple soldiers into the garden. Imagine how scary it must have been for the disciples to wake up and hear the tramping of so many loud feet and to see torches flaming in the darkness. Jesus was the only calm one. God gave him the strength to face everything without panic.

After Judas had stepped forward and kissed Jesus, the soldiers knew who to arrest and so they grabbed Jesus roughly. One of the disciples was so angry that he pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the men. However, Jesus knew that everything that was happening to him was part of God's plan so he told his friends not to use swords. Then he reached out and healed the man's ear. Even while he was suffering, Jesus was concerned for others.

Jesus' friends didn't really understand what was happening and most of them ran away into the darkness then, scared that they might also be arrested.

There are two key things we can learn from Jesus in this story. First we see that he prayed for strength. Then we see that, even when he was being unfairly arrested, he went on caring for others. Do we do that?

Day 11 (Good Friday)

Some of your children know how the law works. Others however may not so I suggest you start off by accusing them of something they didn't do – like taking a bar of chocolate from your cupboard. Tell them to give it back and, when they can't, accuse them of having eaten it. You know your children and how far to let this scenario run.

Jesus was accused of being a troublemaker and of being someone who didn't serve God. This was unfair – just as it was unfair to accuse you of taking the chocolate. But those who hated Jesus because of his message from God were determined to get him punished. They didn't care that they were being unfair.

This meant that Jesus was very badly treated after his arrest. Even though it was the middle of the night, he was dragged off to be tried in a court at the temple. When they thought they had enough evidence to present, they dragged Jesus off to be tried again by the Roman Governor, Pilate. Only the governor could give the order that Jesus must be put to death.

By the end of all this, Jesus must have been exhausted and probably didn't look much like a king. He hadn't had any sleep; he had been bullied by the soldiers; he'd been asked lots of questions; he'd even been beaten with a terrible whip that they used in those days. Pilate tried to get the crowd to let him go free, but they would not agree. I think this must have made Jesus very sad. He had healed so many people and shown such love, but now this crowd was shouting out to Pilate to 'Crucify him'. When Pilate tried to do a prisoner swap, they asked him to free a known murderer rather than Jesus.

So Pilate gave in to the crowd. He announced that Jesus must be crucified.

Jesus was so tired that he couldn't even manage to carry his own cross the whole way. The soldiers forced an African man who was watching to carry it for him.

Then they nailed Jesus to the cross with big nails through his hands and feet, pulled the cross upright and left him to die.

It was a terrible way to die, but Jesus didn't ever complain. He did this all so that we could be friends with God. How can we ever thank him enough?

Day 12

There is nothing much written in the Bible about the day after Jesus died. It must have been the most terrible day for his friends.

For three years they had spent every day with him. They had left their jobs and their families probably so they could follow him. And now he was dead. They were sad that he had suffered and they were worried about what would happen to them.

Some of them felt terrible that they had run away, leaving Jesus to suffer on his own. Peter felt especially bad because he had lied about knowing Jesus. He had been so scared that he would be arrested that he had told people that he didn't even know Jesus!

The only thing they could do was to lock themselves in the room where they had had that last special supper. I expect they spent the time talking softly, sharing memories of Jesus. But all the time they were worried that the soldiers would come to arrest them also. They thought everything was over.

The women who had seen Jesus die were also heartbroken. Mary, Jesus' mother, had been there too. Imagine how she must have cried. The only thing they could do was to organise to go and clean up Jesus' body. He had bled on the cross and they didn't want him to be buried like that. They were pleased that two of Jesus' friends had managed to organise with Pilate to get Jesus' body so that they would be able to have a proper burial. (Often the bodies of criminals were just thrown into a big pit.)

I am sure that, as they talked, they wondered why God hadn't rescued Jesus. They probably felt that God's plans had gone wrong and that would have made them wonder if God really was so great.

But all this time God was at work. He was preparing the greatest surprise ever. That's what Easter Sunday is all about.