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40 Days with Jesus

An invitation to know him better

Malcolm Duncan

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This book is dedicated to a number of people:

The late Maureen and Gilbert Hill – my great-aunt and great-uncle. They played a significant role in my conversion and I saw Jesus beautifully revealed in their lives.

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I want to offer a special word of thanks to my personal assistant, Maria Bond, without whom my job would be a great deal harder.

There is a great mood sweeping the church to make Jesus fit into our culture and our world. In our attempts to make him more palatable, I am convinced we are denuding his life and message of its power and beauty. While the words contained here are simple and straightforward, my prayer is that this little book will present the ministry and life of Jesus in a way that is true to the story of Scripture. It is written with the desire that those who are new to the faith or exploring it for the first time will meet the Jesus who changes lives and transforms destinies.

For those who already know and love Christ, it is my prayer that these words will deepen your love for him, remind you of his inestimable love for you and cause you to explore his life and its message with even greater passion and purpose.

The good things about this book are the results of the input of many people. The mistakes and shortcomings are mine and mine alone.

Introduction

This little book is a humble and flawed attempt to introduce you to some of the aspects of the character and the life of Jesus Christ. If someone else were writing it, they would no doubt use different verses and different passages. In fact, if I were writing it again, I could easily use a hundred different verses and passages. I could write a little book like this every year for the rest of my life and use a hundred different passages every single time. There's a simple reason for that (as I pick up in my first reflection): there is just no way to capture the wonder and the beauty of Jesus.

What I have given you are reflections on Jesus. I haven't set out to write a thorough systematic theology or a blow-by-blow account of who Jesus was. Instead, I have tried to keep my thoughts and reflections simple, straightforward, and devotional in nature. My aim is neither to fill your head with more and more ideas nor to cram as much theological truth into the short space you may have to read one of these reflections. Rather, I want to try to warm your heart towards Jesus. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity in whom we Christians believe, will draw you into a few moments of reflection on the life and the truth of Jesus Christ. Not only do I pray you will begin to read about Jesus; I also pray you will talk to him.

40 Days with Jesus is actually sixty-four small passages about Jesus made up of a total of 139 verses. There are many ways in which I could have divided the material, but I have chosen to do three things.

Firstly, I have taken some of the important truths about who Jesus is and what he has done and set them out in forty reflections. My hope is that as you read them, you'll discover for the first time – or you'll remember – just how central Jesus is to Christianity. I know it goes without saying, but you would be surprised how many people have forgotten that to be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't come to establish a religion; he came to change lives and to deal with the barriers that exist between God and us. He came to save the world. Unfortunately, we Christians are very good at boxing him in. He doesn't like boxes – they feel a little too much like tombs, and Jesus has a tendency to refuse to stay in those...

Secondly, I have written a short prayer that accompanies each reflection. I hope it will help you to go beyond the rush of reading a section too quickly. If the little prayer helps you to talk to God more deeply on your own, that is great. If it is the only prayer you use for the day you read the reflection, that's great too. Please do read these slowly and thoughtfully if you can. My reflections are illustrative, not exhaustive. I intend them to be an invitation to intimacy rather than a final word. You might not yet be a Christian. If not, I hope you meet the Jesus I have met – he is a wonderful friend! You might be a Christian already. If so, I hope your relationship with Jesus deepens. You might be reading *40 Days with Jesus* on your own – if so, I hope it is a special time

for you. You might be reading it as part of a small group or a church – if you are, I hope it sparks some wonderful discussions and perhaps even some worship.

Thirdly, because I firmly believe that Jesus can be found throughout the Bible, I am working on a volume to accompany *40 Days with Jesus* called *Jesus – Book by Book* which will take just one passage from each of the sixty-six books of the Bible and unpack something of the character and heart of Jesus that can be found in the book. Such an exercise could go in a hundred different directions for each book of the Bible, but I have had great fun choosing the themes for that volume. I hope you like them when it is finally published.

Whoever you are, however you are reading this little book, and whatever your reasons for doing so, may you meet Jesus in a way that will change your life forever.

Sola Deo Gloria.

Malcolm Duncan (Buckinghamshire, June 2014)

A Word About Language

Throughout the text of *40 Days with Jesus* you will notice that I have spelled the name “Satan” with a small “s”. This is intentional. It is not to convey that he is not a real person, but rather that his name is actually a transliteration of a word that means “accuser”. I choose not to give him the satisfaction of a capital “S”.

DAY 1

Beautiful Beyond Words

But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John 21:25

How do you fit the ocean into a thimble? How can you capture the beauty of the one you love in a snapshot? How do you explain the inexplicable?

Well, it is impossible.

Jesus Christ is quite simply the most beautiful, caring, and loving person you could ever meet. He is also the most breathtakingly honest friend you could ever have. Spend any time with him at all and you will recognize that his love disarms you. He leaves you realizing just how selfish, spiteful, and silly you can be, but he also leaves you with the most incredible gift – the gift of his love. Love that will undo you and then remake you. Love that will break you and then remodel you.

I have known him as my friend since 1986, and he has never let me down. I have failed him many times. I have hurt him, lied

to him, run away from him, and insulted him. When I think of the times I have been embarrassed by him or been afraid to tell other people about him, I blush. Yet what leaves me speechless is that he has never been embarrassed by me. He has never been afraid to defend me. He has never walked away from me. He just won't let me go. There aren't enough words in the universe to explain what he is like. I am not the first person to feel that way, and I certainly will not be the last.

One of Jesus' disciples was a man called John. John intrigues me. His name is attributed to five books in the Bible. Firstly, the Gospel of John, then three general epistles towards the end of the New Testament, and finally the very last book of the Bible – the book of Revelation. John was the only one of the twelve apostles to die a natural death. The story goes that he settled down in Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey) and lived out his years there. Some suggest that he would often be carried on a stretcher to the gatherings of his fellow Christians and they would ask him to tell them stories about Jesus.

John certainly had a way with words. His images of light, life, hope, joy, and purpose dance from the pages of the New Testament like the notes of a symphony. You can hear the depth of his relationship with Jesus through his language. He gives us pictures of Jesus turning water into wine, healing an official's son, healing a man who could not walk, feeding thousands, walking on water, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead. Each time he tells us such a story, he shows us something about Jesus. Jesus brings a new kingdom of joy and purpose, he has overcome sickness and fear, he shows us the right path to walk, he is the

bread and wine of our lives, he is sovereign over creation, he restores our spiritual sight, and he brings us back to life.

Yet John knows that all the books in the world could not explain the kindness and the power and the holiness and the specialness of Jesus. Jesus is more than a point of study or explanation for John. Jesus is John's friend. Jesus is John's Saviour. Jesus has brought God to John. It is little wonder John cannot explain Jesus to us.

I can't either, but I hope – no, I *pray* that you will read these words and that you will discover that, however beautiful you think Jesus is, he is actually far more beautiful than that. However much you think you know him, I pray that you will realize just how much *more* there is to know of him. Perhaps most of all, I pray that you will not simply “study” Jesus as you read these words; I pray that you will meet him and that he will do something in your heart so that you will never, ever be the same again.

He really is beautiful beyond words.

Prayer

Lord,

Help me to see you with new eyes.

Let me encounter you as I read these pages.

Whisper my name.

Challenge my assumptions.

Break my preconceptions.

Help me to meet you in a fresh, new, and living way.

Move me beyond the familiar and into the unknown.

40 DAYS WITH JESUS

*Undo me with your love.
Challenge me with your holiness.
Transform me with your power.
Draw me with your beauty.
Breathe upon me by your Spirit.
Amen.*