

When Jesus Went to Vegas

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Overview

Welcome to the new message series. If you are like me, several thoughts probably came to mind when you heard the series title. Vegas? Really? Those guys are crazy. But, what I love is the picture you get when you think about Jesus going to Vegas. The city we affectionately refer to as “Sin City” – a place full of sinful people searching for fulfillment in their lives through money, sex and power. That is the reality of what Jesus did when He left His throne in heaven and stepped on the earth as a man. Jesus never walked the streets of Vegas, but He did come to this earth full of sin and sinful people. When He got here, He did not live up to the expectations people had placed on Him. He caused quite a stir in the lives of so many people. He sparked a revolution that changed the earth forever. He offended the religious leaders. He loved the common people. He accepted the outcast. When Jesus went to Vegas, He changed lives. He wants to change our lives because He has come to our “Vegas”. This message series is going to uncover the radical nature of Jesus and, within our groups, we have the chance to rethink who Jesus is to us and how He fits into our lives.

Objectives

- To uncover the picture we have of who Jesus is to us.
- To see what it meant for Jesus to come to Vegas.
- To rethink who Jesus is and what He wants to do in our lives.

Special Announcements

- **CANDY DROP:** Thank you to everyone that brought candy to WNL last week and made the Easter Egg Hunts a huge success this weekend! You played a part in reaching out to our community.
- **GREATER IMPACT SERVICE PROJECTS:** Be sure to talk about the project your group has chosen and allow your group’s Greater Impact Coordinator the chance to communicate the details of your project.

Facilitators' Guide

1. When you first heard the message series title, "When Jesus Went to Vegas," what did you think?

- This is meant for people to openly share their opinions and initial thoughts of the message series. You should have an easy time getting people's opinions about the title of the series; most do not hesitate to share their thoughts. Keep this light-hearted and don't stay here too long. It could be humorous.
- There might be a few people that were offended by the title and suggestion that Jesus went to Sin City. Remind people that the series is more about Jesus than about Vegas. The picture it paints of the world 2,000 years ago is not much different than the world we live in today. Over the next four weeks, we will be discussing Jesus' life on this earth and the impact He has on our lives today.

2. What picture comes to most people's minds when they think of Jesus?

- This has the potential to be very humorous. I always think about the pictures I saw growing up of Jesus carrying a sheep through the open fields with his friends around Him. I think about kids sitting on His lap and Him smiling. I remember being in an Easter play as a kid and being the child that ran up to Jesus and sat on His lap. Jesus is just a nice guy that gets along with everyone and has friends wherever He goes. He has a beard and long hair and wears sandals, right?
- Some people might see Him as a King and ruler. Others may think of Him as a carpenter; an average man. Some people might remember the images from The Passion of the Christ movie. Depending upon someone's background, the images people have of Jesus will vary. Give everyone the chance to share on this question.

3. Based upon this weekend's message, describe the radical nature of Jesus.

- Think through the people Jesus spent His time with. Jesus, the Son of God, did not come to Vegas and hang out at church with all the religious leaders. He spent His time with the politicians and crooks and prostitutes. He welcomed the outcasts. Not only did He not hang out with the religious people, but He spent most of His time arguing with them about who He was and why He had come to Vegas.
- Think through the people that Jesus chose to be His closest friends and followers. These were the men that would take on the mission of the Church once Jesus left the earth and ascended to Heaven. Even after spending three years with Jesus, they still could not grasp the radical nature and mission Jesus came to fulfill.
- Jesus did not fit the mold that the Jewish people had for Him. He did not proclaim the Jewish religion as the one and only way to God. He proclaimed to be the one and only way to a relationship with God. He was not a proponent of all the religious ceremonies and traditions. His focus was on the people who didn't have a chance in the world.

- **Do you think the church has done a good job of representing the real Jesus? Why or why not?**
 - As a whole, I think the church has taken a radical, revolutionary Jesus and made Him soft and quiet. We have failed to paint the picture of who He spent His time with and how urgent He was about fulfilling His mission and touching lives. We soften the rough edges that Jesus had and make Him something of the past, not someone who can be a part of our lives today.
- 4. Read John 1:10-12. What did people think about Jesus when He came to Vegas?**
- The people did not recognize Jesus as the Christ, God's Son, the Creator, the Savior. He came to the world that He had created to be with the people made in His image, and they did not know Him. Even the Jews, people of His same race and religion, did not accept Him.
 - There were some who did receive Jesus and accept Him for who He said He was. They were the ones who were able to experience the fullness of the radical nature of Jesus.
- **How do you think most people would respond if Jesus came to earth today?**
 - If Jesus came to earth just the way He did 2,000 years ago, He would come to Vegas. He would hang out with the crooks, drunks, and prostitutes. He would offend those who claim to have this religion thing all figured out, just like He did the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He would love the outcasts in our society. He would care for the poor. He would walk into most churches and condemn the way they represent Him to a watching world. Overall, I think He would look like a crazy man causing an uproar and disturbance in our way of life.
- 5. Read Matthew 4:17. "Repent" in the original language means to rethink. Based on this week's discussion, what is one way you might rethink who Jesus is?**
- The original language of the New Testament was Greek. The word "repent" in Greek means to change the way you think about something. We all have an idea of who Jesus is and what He has to do with us. But, the majority of us have a softened view of how radical Jesus is and how He wants to change our lives.
 - For me, I think my image of Jesus paints Him as a nice guy who got along with everyone and didn't cause any trouble. But, in reality, Jesus did not come to Vegas to please people by being a nice guy; He came to stir things up and help people see that the way they live their lives is not up to them. That challenges me to live my life differently.
- 6. Read Matthew 10:38-39. What do you think these verses mean?**
- Some people may have no idea what these verses mean. Allow people to take a stab at the meaning of the verses and then clarify, if needed.
 - The reference to a cross in verse 38 needed no explanation for Jesus' listeners. The Jews of the time had seen thousands of their people crucified by the Roman government that ruled over them. They could visualize the gruesome image Jesus was painting here. If He were to say it today, He would make reference to the electric chair and the death penalty. Although we don't necessarily see those

images everyday in our society, we know that it is the highest penalty a person can receive. Jesus is saying that, as His followers, we must be willing to die. We must be willing to lay it on the line and give up our rights. We have to surrender our agendas and the dream we have for our lives and accept the agenda and dream that God has for us. We all have a dream of who we want to be and what we want to accomplish in our lives. But Jesus is saying, "You need to give your dream up and lose it in order to accept the dream I have for your life. And that dream will bring you more significance and purpose and fulfillment than you could ever imagine."

- **What do these verses teach us about the radical nature of following Jesus?**

- Jesus has placed a radical call on His followers. Following Him is not about staying comfortable with the status quo of our lives. He has called us to be radical and make a difference in our world. He wants us to rethink our lives and live them in such a way that it will cause others around us to rethink the way they are living. He wants us to model the way He lived on this earth.
- In the coming weeks, this series will continue to challenge us to rethink the way we live our lives based on who Jesus was when He came to Vegas.

7. How has Mountain Lake helped in changing the way you think about Jesus?

- Allow people to share their stories at this point. They may speak of minor changes or changes that have affected every aspect of their lives. The way we think about Jesus should have an effect on our family, relationships, job, finances, habits, etc. This happens because Jesus is relevant in our world and lives today, just as He was 2,000 years ago.
- Mountain Lake exists to help change the way people think about church and God. He is relevant and real and desires to be a part of our every day lives. He wants us to rethink who He is and how that changes the way we live our lives.
- End the evening by praying together and asking God to cause a revolution in our lives. Ask Him to change the way we think about Jesus and our approach to life.