

Prepare the Way

Mark 1:1-8

Introduction

The author of the gospel according to Mark (thought to be John Mark, a companion of the apostle Peter) began his account with the public ministry of John the Baptist. Designed to be read aloud, Mark's gripping narrative invites his audience to ponder the significance of the facts he is presenting and to respond in a personal way to the gospel message. In this opening passage, Mark establishes the identity of Jesus and traces the beginning of the gospel to the promises of God as proclaimed through Israel's prophets. How does John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah? How should we respond to the gospel message? How shall we respond as a people who know the power of God to free all people from sin and death through Jesus Christ?

For Study and Discussion

- 1) Read verse 1 carefully. This single verse at the start of the Gospel account is packed with meaning and sets the stage for the rest of the book.
 - a. According to Mark, the gospel is about Jesus. Who does he say Jesus is?
 - b. Read Hebrews 1:1-4 and John 19:7. What meaning does the title "Son of God" hold for the Jews? What is so offensive about Jesus claiming this title for himself that the Jewish religious leaders demanded that he be crucified?
 - c. How is knowing Jesus' true identity the key to a correct understanding of the gospel?
- 2) Read verses 2-5.
 - a. Although Mark quoted scripture "as it is written in Isaiah the prophet", he actually combined two quotations from Malachi 3:1 (verse 2), followed by Isaiah 40:3 (verse 3). By doing so, he followed an ancient convention of introducing a combined citation using its most important source, in this case Isaiah.
 - i. What Old Testament prophecy did John the Baptist fulfill?
 - ii. What was his role? Consider also Malachi 4:5-6, Matthew 17:10-13, and Luke 1:13-17.
 - b. It is thought that baptism as a washing in water with a spiritual significance had its roots in the Old Testament and pre-Christian Jewish practices.
 - i. What kind of baptism did John the Baptist preach?
 - ii. Baptism with water is a physical cleansing that reflects a spiritual change in heart of the one being baptised. What is this heart-felt change for the people who heard John's message?
 - iii. How did the people respond to John's preaching? What does this say about the spiritual needs of the people to whom John was preaching?

- iv. How did John's ministry prepare the people to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah?
 - c. As one who has heard and understood the gospel and has been reconciled to God through your faith in Jesus Christ, how can you prepare others to believe and be saved? Consider 2 Corinthians 5:17-20.
- 3) Read verses 6-8. Israel's prophets, including Isaiah and Malachi, had consistently called Israel to repentance in order that they might know God's gracious forgiveness and thus be reconciled to him.
- a. John the Baptist, like all of Israel's prophets, was only God's messenger.
 - i. How would you summarise the specific message that John brought to God's people?
 - ii. Is this message consistent with what Jesus and the disciples preached? Consider Mark 1:14-15 and Acts 2:38. Is this the gospel message that you proclaim to others?
 - b. John says that one who is more powerful than him will baptise with the Holy Spirit. How is baptism with the Holy Spirit different from baptism with water? Consider Ezekiel 36:25-28, Romans 8:1-2, and 1 Corinthians 3:16.
 - c. At the moment we believed in Jesus and accepted him as our saviour, we have been baptised with the Holy Spirit. How has the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you transformed you and the way you live your life? Consider Romans 8:11-13 and Hebrews 10:22.

Discipleship Pointers

- The gospel (good news) is about Jesus who is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God. Let us always remember who we have believed in.
- God has a plan of salvation for the world that He has been revealing and faithfully carrying out throughout history. Let us be confident in the hope that we hold on to, because our hope is not based on our works but on God's promise.
- As sinners redeemed by God, let us be God's messengers, bringing the gospel to those who have not heard the good news, preparing them to believe in Jesus.
- As believers who have been baptised with the Holy Spirit, let us respond by living out our transformed life in Christ, relying on the power of the Spirit who dwells in us.

Family/Group Moments

Reflect on the following questions individually and share your responses:

- How did God prepare you to believe in Jesus?
- How may God be using you to prepare others to believe in Jesus?
- How is God preparing you for the day when Jesus will come again?