

Preparing to Meet Jesus

Mark 1:1-8

Introduction

Read Mark 1:1-8

Background

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”

These opening words introduce not only the beginning of the gospel of Mark, but more specifically, the beginning of the good news of God’s work in the world through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. While Caesar Augustus had claimed divinity for himself, Mark was announcing that the true God, Jesus Christ, was in the world.

With Advent, we often focus on Christ’s first coming, but in reality, we ought to be reflecting on how the certainty of His first coming feeds our anticipation of His second coming. For, just as sure as He came into the world, He is going to come again. And as the people prepared the first time, so we need to be prepared for the appearing of Jesus the second time.

Exposition - What should the prospect of the appearing of Jesus compel us to do?

I) Hear God’s Word. (Vss. 2-3a)

Just as the Jews heard the words of Isaiah and anticipated the day when the Christ would appear, so we need to hear God’s word and anticipate the day when Christ appears again. If the first prophecy regarding His coming was true, we ought not doubt the truthfulness of the prophecies that remind us of His second coming.

When Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:10, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed,” we should not be slow or apathetic to hear and heed God’s word.

We ought to receive God’s Word in whatever situation of life that we find ourselves in, as the Israelites did in the “wilderness” where they found John the Baptist. We do not wait to hear, we ought to hear God’s word now! But we’ve seen this, right? We see and know people, in fact you might be this type of person right now, who says “I will get serious about Jesus once I have established my career. I’ll get serious about valuing Christ’s church when my children are older. I’ll get serious about the mission of God when I have more time. Now is just not the time.” See, that mentality fanaticizes about a time that is never going to come because the enemy of your soul has deceived you into believing that your lack of interest in spiritual things is not relate to your spiritual condition, but just to your schedule.

Yet, the prophecy that Mark 1:2-3a quotes from is to a people who were living in exile away from all of their creature comforts. They were fighting to survive after being dispersed into a foreign land by foreign powers. And it was right in the middle of all the chaos, in the middle of their wilderness, that God announced through His prophet, Isaiah, “Prepare yourself.”

Illustration – What good is a warning if we do not heed its message? Ride outs with the fire station in Shreveport – Burning Homes – Fire Alarms

Many of us are convinced that we have plenty of time and that we can ignore the warnings and the alarms because they are only testing the system. But we need to hear God's word now!

II) Receive God's Salvation. (Vss. 4-6)

As we move from the prophecy found in verses 2-3, we come to a fuller description of John the Baptist's ministry in the wilderness. He was preaching a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." In other words, he was declaring that now is the time to turn away from your sin to God for salvation. And this repentance was declared in the context of their baptism. Or to put it another way, baptism was the outward action that demonstrated the inner reality of their repentance. Without true repentance, which was a changing of the mind and a turning of their actions, baptism was nothing. Baptism "functioned as a visible indication of the inward act of repentance." (Stein)

John's message indicated that God was coming into the world to save sinners; people who needed to repent. He did not come to tell them that they were alright. He came to tell them that they were in need of a change. They needed to confess their sin. And isn't it something that God used a man like John to prepare his people for the coming of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was not cool. He preached with conviction. He spoke clearly about sin, which eventually resulted in his death. Oftentimes, God chooses to use the people who are not those living in the spotlight of popular culture but those who are crying out in the wilderness. We should not confuse coolness with calling.

And John's call was for the people to receive God's salvation which was coming. God was up to something in the world, and they need to be ready to receive it in faith with repentance.

III) Anticipate God's Greatness. (Vss. 7-8)

As Mark closes out his introduction of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, we are told something of difference between John and Jesus. While John was a great prophet, by his own confession, he was not worthy enough to untie Jesus' sandal, which would mean that he was even lower than a servant. John knew something of the greatness of the One that was coming. The distinction between the two is more clearly seen in the discussion of their baptisms.

While John would baptize with water, Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, which indicates that He came to fulfill the promises of passages like Joel 2:28-32, where God promised to fill His people with His Spirit as He saved them from their sins. There was no comparison between Jesus' baptism and John's baptism. Jesus was going to do the greater work of saving sinners!

Conclusion

If then, we consider John's ministry as a paradigm or a pattern for preparation, we can summarize how we prepare for Jesus' second appearing:

- 1) Hearing God's Word – Reading and believing all that Scripture teaches us.
- 2) Receiving God's Salvation – Repenting and believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin.
- 3) Anticipating God's Greatness – Realizing that Jesus is going to fulfill all that He has promised.

Are you prepared to meet Jesus? Are you hearing, receiving, and anticipating? My prayer is that you are!