

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: January 18, 2009

## Prepare The Way

by Dan Trygg

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup> As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; <sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.’’” <sup>4</sup> John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.”

Mark 1:1-7

Although there is no authorship identification in the text, early church tradition strongly asserts that John Mark was the author of the second gospel. He was the son of a woman named Mary, whose home later became a well-known meeting place of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). There is a strong likelihood that this was also the location of the upper room where Jesus and his apostles celebrated the last supper. Possibly this was the same location where the disciples gathered after Jesus' death, and where the resurrected Christ first appeared to the group. It was the place where they later waited for 10 days for the Holy Spirit to come to them, following Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 1:12,13), the household from which the tongue-speaking disciples poured out into the street on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-12). If this is so, then we would expect that **the owners were fairly well to do**. After all, the description of the room is that there was a “large upstairs room” (Lk. 22:12), big enough to accommodate not only Jesus and the twelve, but also to contain a group of 120 individuals (Acts 1:15)! Another bit of supporting evidence is the story of the young man who, on the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest, “was accompanying Jesus” (Mk. 14:51). He was wearing only a linen garment, and when the guards tried to seize him, he slipped out of the garment and ran away naked. This is such a vivid, and apparently random, recollection, that most scholars think that the young man must have been Mark himself. If so, this brief reference confirms the relative wealth of his family, since *linen* under garments were a luxury which the common person could not afford. **All of this information gives credibility to Mark as the author. Although a young man, he had been in the midst of the company of Jesus and His apostles from early on. He had been exposed to many of the events, locations and personalities of Jesus' ministry and early church history in Jerusalem, and during the expansion of the Christian movement.** He was also the cousin of Barnabus (Col. 4:10; Acts 4:36,37). Since Barnabus is referred to as a Levite, Mark's family must also have been from this tribe of Israel. Levites had not been given farmland, as other tribal families in Israel. They were to be dedicated to God as temple servants, scribes, teachers of the Law and occasionally judges. His family would have been well educated and very devoted to God and the study of the OT scriptures. He accompanied Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey, but he left part way through because he became homesick (Acts. 13:1-13). Because of this, Paul was unwilling to take him along for a second journey, so Barnabus and Mark revisited the churches they had started on Cyprus, while Paul took Silas and revisited the churches in Asia (Acts 15:36-41). Years later, however, Mark is listed as part of Paul's apostolic team (Philem.1:14; Col. 4:10), and in another letter Paul spoke fondly of Mark, even requesting his company, stating that Mark was especially helpful to him (II Tim. 4:11). **Tradition says that he also had become a personal attendant to, and interpreter for, the apostle Peter during the latter part of his ministry at Rome.** Peter even refers to him as “my son, Mark” (I Pet. 5:13), referring either to the fact that he had led the younger man to Christ, or indicating the fond affection he had for him. In any case, Mark would have had abundant opportunity to listen to Peter's stories and recollections of that time. **Tradition also indicates that it was during this time with Peter that Mark wrote this gospel.** It is clear, from the writing, that the author was a Palestinian Jew who was personally acquainted with the places he described in such accurate and vivid detail. His repeated explanation of Aramaic terms, and his sentence structure, reflect the fact that Aramaic was his primary language, which would fit Mark's background.

**Mark was probably writing to the Roman Christians, who preferred quick-moving narratives, rather than long teaching discourses or sermons.** So, we see the use of stylistic techniques, such the frequent use of the word “immediately” (46 times) and the use of participles (“-ing” verbs), which tend to keep the story moving and make it seem more intense and vivid. He also uses the “historical present”, keeping the verbs in the present tense, even though the story happened in the past. By doing this, he is able to effectively pull us into the action.

**Mark begins with a simple introduction, “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ”.** We have to define some terms. **The word “gospel” means “good news” or “glad tidings”.** Not all news was “good news”. From the very

first sentence, Mark draws the reader into his telling of the story of Jesus. **This is not just some interesting or curious story, this is “good news”, “glad tidings”, something you would be happy to hear about**, a positive message about some exciting developments that can benefit you. **Secondly, it is the “beginning” of this positive story. This is how it all started. There is more to tell, and it will take some time.** Already, Mark introduces movement. By starting at the “beginning”, he initiates movement along a path toward a goal, the telling of the good news story. **Finally, it is the story about Jesus Christ. The word, “Christ” is a title. It means “anointed one”, and was a title for the King of the Jews.** (Lk.23:2). It was the Greek translation for the Hebrew word, “Messiah”.

**The next two verses serve both to further define the nature of this good news and to introduce the next major part of this story, the appearance of John the Baptist.** Mark does this by quoting two scripture verses, the first from Malachi 3:1, and the second from Isaiah 40:3.

(You will notice that Mark only references the Isaiah passage, seeming to lump Malachi’s verse in with the Isaiah passage. This was not an uncommon practice by Jewish authors of the day. In a case where they would cite a passage from a minor prophet (like Malachi) and a major prophet (like Isaiah), they would often only mention the name of the major prophet. It was not that they did not know who wrote the other passage, their purpose was entirely different than ours. We expect an author to cite references. All they were attempting to do is to show that they were quoting from the prophets. In this case, Mark was showing that the “good news” of Jesus Christ took place as the prophets had indicated. The beginning of verse 2 literally is, “according as it had been written...”. Mark’s point is that these events happened just like God had revealed through His prophets centuries in advance.)

**Malachi had said that God would send His messenger to prepare the way before *He Himself* showed up.**

**The Isaiah passage was actually used by John the Baptist to describe his own ministry (Jn.1:19-23). In its context in Isaiah, it is prefixed by a call to comfort God’s people, a call that her hard service has ended (vss. 1,2), and it was time to prepare for God’s coming. *God’s glory would be revealed, and people would see it* (vs. 5). This was certain, because the mouth of the Lord had spoken. People may fade and pass away like grass, but God’s word stands forever (vss. 6-8). Notice especially vs. 9 of Isa. 40, “Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, *bearer of good news*, lift your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, *bearer of good news*; lift it up, do not fear, **say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’**” Wow! Is that a proof text for Jesus’ coming, or what?! That’s what Mark was drawing people’s attention to. Note the following two verses as well, “***God will come with might***”, and “His recompense is with Him”, and, “Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.” – **So descriptive of Jesus’ ministry! He was God in human flesh, come to reveal the glory of the Father’s heart, His grace and truth** (Jn. 1:14). John had come to be the bearer of the good news, “*Here is your God!*”**

**The key to understanding John’s ministry is wrapped up in these two citations.** He had come “according as” the prophets had said. **He had come to “prepare the way for the Lord”.** It was a practice in those New Testament times that *whenever a king or the Emperor would plan to come through an area, he would send notice ahead by messengers to prepare the way for the king. This meant that the people were to stop whatever else they were doing and fix the roads.* These were gravel and stone roads. Erosion was an ongoing problem, and they did not have heavy equipment like we do. Maintaining roads was a big problem, and required lots of manual labor. So, the people would be called out to clear the way for their master in the wilderness. It meant removing fallen trees, rock slides, boulders or rocks that obstructed the way, and to fill in holes and wash outs, so as to make the way smooth for their king.

**Isaiah had said that “a voice crying in the wilderness” would call for a clearing of the way for Yahweh, a making smooth in the desert a highway for God, and “then the glory of Yahweh will be revealed”.** John showed up in the wilderness, at the fords of the Jordan, where people would *have to* pass by, proclaiming to the pilgrims that ***God was coming, and they were to make ready for His coming by preparing their hearts for him by repentance, confession and baptism.***

This is a key lesson for us. **We can either make our hearts open and easy for God to access, or we can let them be cluttered, eroded and obstructed by the weathering that happens through living in this world.** Note that *in the normal course of life*, our lives *will* get littered, cluttered, blocked and complicated by the influences around us, as well as by the desires and anxieties of our own flesh. **It takes *conscious effort* to prepare to meet with God. We can either show Him that we are interested in getting to know Him, ...by preparing the way for Him, ...by putting *aside* the things that are offensive to Him and making an effort to align our lives to what is important to Him, ...by confessing our faults and acknowledging our need for His help, ...or we can ignore Him, fill our hearts with obstacles and distractions that compete with His voice, and wonder why He doesn’t visit us, or why we can’t seem to hear His voice. People tend to blame God for His silence, but they do nothing to prepare their hearts and unstop their ears!** What can you do to “prepare the way for the Lord” in *your* life?