

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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

Intentional Preparation to Avoid Disaster

by Dan Trygg

“And the Pharisees, going out [of the synagogue], immediately were giving counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. ⁷ And Jesus withdrew with His disciples toward the sea; and a great multitude from Galilee followed, both from Judea, ⁸ and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and from the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, ...a great number of people, hearing of all that He was doing, were coming to Him. ⁹ And He spoke to His disciples in order that a small boat might stand ready for Him because of the crowd, in order that they might not press hard upon Him; ¹⁰ for He healed many, with the result that whosoever had afflictions were falling upon Him in order to touch Him. ¹¹ And the unclean spirits, whenever they were beholding Him, they were falling down before Him and were crying out, saying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ ¹² And He many times He censured them in order that they might not to make Him known.”

Mark 3:6-12

We cannot imagine what life must have been like for Jesus during the time of His public ministry. Earlier, Mark had told us how intense the demands upon Jesus could be. In chapter one, we saw that when He had cast out the demon in the synagogue, and then healed Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, people flocked to Peter’s house, and the Lord ministered to people until late into the night. The next morning, they were lining up again, looking for Jesus to heal their sick, and He was led to leave town in order to bring the message of the Kingdom to other places. Then, when He healed a leper, He sternly warned him to not speak to anyone. He was to go straight to Jerusalem to be examined by a priest, so that he could confirm his healing and be readmitted to society. Nevertheless, the man was so excited about his healing that he went and widely told his story throughout the region, so that **Jesus could not even openly enter into a town, because the crowds trying to get to Him were becoming so large.** In chapter 2, when He tried to come back to Peter’s house for a few days, word of His arrival leaked out, and the crowds filled the house, so that no one could get in or out. **The desperation and excitement of the people were so great that some men actually tore the roof off the house in order to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus!** After healing the man, Jesus immediately left the house and went down by the seashore, where there was more room. Later, having called a tax collector to follow Him, He found Himself in conflict with the Pharisees, first over the company He kept, then over the issue of eating on a “fast day”. **When He challenged the Pharisees’ legalistic understanding of the Sabbath, they became determined to find a way to destroy Him. Who would have thought that preaching the gospel would create such a stir?** Times have not changed. People *still* get excited when God is clearly at work, ...or when their beliefs are challenged.

What did Jesus do in the face of all this uproar? He began to take some very systematic measures to avoid unnecessary conflict, burnout or disaster. If we pick up the story in Mark 3:6,7, we see the Lord’s opponents join forces to plan to destroy Him. What did He do? **Did Jesus attempt to expose His enemies, or engage in conflict with them? No. He simply left.** He *withdrew* from the synagogue to go out into the open spaces, where He would be less vulnerable to arrest or attack, or some kind of trumped up charges. **This was not the time to confront. It was a time to move away from the brewing conflict.** He left the synagogue leaders in their synagogue. That was where their power base was. That was the place of their identity and respect. They were not about to step aside for Him, even if He was wildly popular. So, **He left them their building and familiar surroundings, ...and took the people with Him!** He went out to the seashore. There were no buildings there, at all, but there was *plenty of room!* This is an important lesson to us. Oftentimes when there is a fresh move of God, people can become divided in their perceptions. Jesus’ model, which was also followed by Paul (e.g., Acts 13:44-46; 14:5,6), was to go where He had the opportunity to proclaim the message and to minister. **When opposition arose, in every single case, Jesus and His followers chose to leave, rather than to try to stay where they were not welcome** (Matt. 10:23). There is *no example* of a bitter fight over a synagogue or any religious building or site. **The Christians always moved away from the conflict, and devoted themselves to doing the ministry, however simple or plain the surroundings might have been.**

Actually, Mark records that **Jesus repeatedly withdrew from unhealthy situations.** In this gospel account, it is amazing to see how often Jesus was on the move. He was almost always going from one place to another. **There are more than twenty times in this short gospel where Jesus left to get away from conflict or overly-intense ministry situations** (1:37,38; 2:1-13; 3:7,13; 4:1,35,36; 5:21; 6:1,3-6,30-32,46; 7:17,24,31; 8:10,13; 9:2,30; 10:1; 11:19; 14:12-17,34).

When Jesus went out to the seashore, we find that a great multitude of people followed Him, ...folks not only from Galilee, but all the surrounding areas in every direction. Mark notes that **they had heard of all that He was doing, so they came in search of healing and deliverance for themselves and their loved ones.** The areas listed represent all the land that had once been under Israel’s control, during the time of David and Solomon. These people

had traveled 15, 30, and some even over 100 miles, on foot, in order to find Jesus, and to be healed by Him. **If the local people who lived in Capernaum had been desperate and determined enough to tear off the roof of Peter's house,** these people were even *more* committed and invested to gaining access to Jesus. **To what extremes might these pilgrims be willing to go? Jesus recognized this, and took steps to protect His personal safety.** He spoke to His disciples, asking them to have a small boat ready, so that if the crowd became too unruly, He could preach to the crowd from a little ways out from the shore. It does not appear that He used this boat on *this* particular occasion, but He did follow this plan at other times (Mk. 4:1; Lk. 5:3). **From the description of the crowd's frantic behavior, it is quite understandable why such precautions might be necessary, "whosoever had afflictions were falling upon Him in order to touch Him"**. It is one thing if it were one person at a time, but when there is a crowd, and *multiple* people were "falling upon" Him at the same time, things could turn ugly and He could get trampled by the crowd.

In a final effort to fend off a potential disaster, Jesus had to deal with the demonic spirits, who were falling down before Him when they saw Him, and were crying out, and saying, "You are the Son of God!" On the surface, this may seem to be a good thing, a supportive testimony to who He was. The problem was, however, that this was not the time or place for such proclamations. These demons were not helping Jesus' cause, their disruptive outbursts were detracting from whatever teaching He may have been doing. **Not only were they a rude disruption of the meeting, their loud "confessions" were potentially dangerous. Jesus knew that if it were thought that He was an insurrectionist, He could quickly be arrested as a threat to Roman rule.** The title, "Son of God", was a Messianic title, a description given to the Davidic king (Psa. 2). These demons could quickly draw the wrong kind of attention to what He was doing, and His ministry would be shut down prematurely. Jesus did not need the testimony of demons. He desired to let the works speak for themselves (Jn. 5:36; 10:37,38). Thus we see that **Jesus quickly censured the demons, commanding them not to speak.** I think the Greek is instructive here. It says "many times He censured them". I know from experience that when you command a demon to hold its tongue or be quiet, it will often immediately comply. But a short while later it will try to speak again, and you will have to tell it again to be silent. Could it be that this is what the language is referring to?

These are three examples where Jesus took action to avoid potential danger or disaster. Are there areas where the Scriptures instruct us to take action to avoid potential problems or disaster in our lives? Yes.

Avoid foolish arguments. In Titus 3:9, Paul instructs us to avoid foolish controversies, debatable questions, quarrels and disputes, even about religious issues, because they are unprofitable and worthless. What are we to do with someone who is divisive, or who always wants to pull us into such controversies? In vs. 10, Paul counsels us to "reject a divisive person after one or two warnings". The word for "reject" means to "beg off from; excuse yourself from; decline; avoid or reject". In other words, you explain that this topic is *not* a matter that you *desire* to talk about, and change the subject. If he persists, tell him that you are *unwilling* to talk about this issue. If he continues to try to steer the conversation there, *excuse yourself and leave*. Note what Paul tells us about such a person in the following verse. This is a serious matter. It comes up again in I Timothy 1:3,4 and II Timothy 2:23. It is clear from these passages that *people choose to divert their attention from obeying the truth by filling their minds with debatable issues*. Sometimes it is merely an unhealthy distraction, at other times it is an excuse to keep from dealing with facing God's will. We don't have to *argue* the truth. We can gently *state* what the Bible says, then *pray* that God turn their minds and hearts.

Avoid worldly and empty chatter. In II Timothy 2:16 warns us about this unprofitable speech, that it leads to further ungodliness. A closer look at the original language is enlightening. The word, "worldly", literally means "profane, common, godless". It is the opposite of speech that is marked by respect for God and people. It is speech that is disrespectful, dishonoring to people and God, treating them abusively or without any concern for valuing or respecting their person, their preferences or their emotions. It is speech that is *defiling* to people, leaving them downgraded or devalued. The word for "empty" means "useless, unprofitable; without force, meaning or value; without significant content". This is talking about stupid or trivial stuff, just to have something to talk about. Paul tells us to avoid this, because it will lead to a further lack of devotion and irreverence toward God. If we want to have Him reveal Himself to us, and work more in our lives, we must respect Him. He won't come where He is disrespected.

Avoid fleshly lusts. I Peter 2:11 tells us that these strong desires of the flesh "wage war against the soul". This last part means that our strong fleshly desires are easily recruited by the enemy to fight against our own selves, our very life purpose. We are to "abstain from" them or "keep them at a distance". We can't let them run our lives, or they will ruin us. In II Timothy 2:22, we are told to "flee youthful lusts". We are to "flee immorality" (I Cor. 6:18). We must avoid it like the plague. We must *run* from it. We are also to "flee" from materialism (II Tim. 6:9-11).

Just as Jesus took measures to avoid danger and disaster, we are to keep ourselves from these traps.