

Mk. 1:1-8 “Preparing the Way”

For the Children: Have you ever seen the sport of “curling” on TV? It involves sliding a stone on ice, getting it to reach a target. Sweepers go with the stone, sweeping the ice with a broom to help the stone move in the right direction. In a way, that’s what John the Baptist was doing just before the Lord Jesus began His ministry. John was used by God to help God’s people get excited about the coming of the Messiah. He also pointed out their sins, so they would see their need for a Saviour – so they could be forgiven and cleansed. **Questions:** What is the “Gospel”? When did it begin? Why do many people refuse listen to this message or get excited about it today?

Introduction:

First Point: The Beginning of the Gospel

- 1) In the OT: Mark does not mention the birth of Christ, though he is talking about “the beginning” of the Gospel. He implies that the beginning is in the OT, because he quotes from it concerning the appearance of John the Baptist. There are many OT references to the Gospel, but Isaiah speaks specifically of the “good news” of a future salvation of the “poor and afflicted.” The bearer of that Gospel varies in Isaiah – the Church; the Messiah; foreigners; unspecified. Mark sees this also fulfilled in the messenger, John the Baptist
- 2) In John the Baptist: All the Gospel accounts give much attention to John’s arrival and/or ministry. In Mt. 11:11, Jesus said there was no man greater before John. The Jews sensed his importance, because he was the first prophet for about 300 years! His appearance in the wilderness also fulfilled prophecy in its own right. The people flocked to hear him and be baptized
- 3) In Christ: Though the birth of Christ is not mentioned in Mark, there is no doubt His coming is of the greatest importance. He is the great “Coming One,” the Messiah prophesied in the OT. See Is. 61:1 with Mt. 4:23. Mark states that the Gospel is “of” Him – not of Mark, or John the Baptist. He alone is *the* Son of God. Because His work continues on past the end of Mark’s account – on to the pouring-out of His Spirit, and further to His second coming, what Mark writes is only the “beginning” of the Gospel

Second Point: The Messenger Preparing for the Gospel

- 1) John as Messenger: John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ’s coming by acting as “messenger” (v. 2) and “herald” – the word “preached” in v. 4, 7, means “heralded.” Is. 40:3 foretold this role – though Mark adds a little from Mal. 3:1 to the quote; some say Ex. 23:20 may be in view as well. In the ancient world, a king touring his domain would often need the wilderness tracks to be smoothed and widened for the procession. Heralds would precede the king to announce his coming and make sure the way was cleared. So John announces the “Coming One” – an OT Messianic term (Dan. 7:13, Gen. 49:10, Mal. 3:1). He is much greater than John (v. 7). He would lead His people in a new “Exodus”; and He would baptize with the Spirit, not just with water! This is how John builds the expectations in preparation
- 2) The Prophet of the Wilderness: John appeared as a wilderness prophet, dressed as befits that environment and with a diet to match. This not only fulfilled OT verses like Is. 40:3, it also reminded the people of Elijah (2 Kgs: 1:8). Jesus even said John was the “Elijah to come” (Mk. 9:9-13) – though He meant in the same “spirit and power” as Elijah, not a literal reincarnation (Lk. 1:17, Jn. 1:21). John had a warning-message like Elijah: “Side with God, or suffer the wrath to come!” These parallels also helped prepare the way for the Christ
- 3) John the Baptizer: The warning is reinforced by John’s activities as a baptizer. His baptism was like the “washings” of the OT – it spoke of the need for cleansing because of sin. Israel’s sin needed to be confessed and repented of. John would not baptize those who refused to repent, but many others responded. This helped prepare Israel for the One who brought that forgiveness and cleansing. This message is as relevant today as it was then – the ancient Gospel must urgently be heeded, for the Christ comes with both judgement and salvation

Conclusion: