

"Make Way for Jesus"

<u>Occasion</u>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 6 July 2003 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Mark 1:1-13
<u>Reading</u>	Mark 1:1-15
<u>Hymns</u>	366, 41, 59 from Mission Praise
<u>Songs</u>	219, 457, 206, 52 from Mission Praise
<u>Author/Speaker</u>	Paul Rydon

If I asked you to imagine one event which would change the world forever,
I wonder what you would come up with.

I am currently reading a Tom Clancy novel.

An incident in Israel provides the opportunity to thrust a peace treaty on the
Middle East

and the momentum to see it through
and to get it agreed and signed.

To him and his fictional characters this is the most important event the world has ever
witnessed

and the Fowler,
the novelist's president of the USA
believes that he will go down in the annals of history
as the man who achieved the impossible
and changed the world for ever.

But I put it to you that as we read these verses in our Bibles this evening
we stand at the turning point in the entire history of mankind.

God is about to liberate his people from the tyranny of sin.

In the watered down values of our post-modern society,
this concept is anathema to most people we rub shoulders with each day.

Some of you may have noticed that I had a close encounter with my barber this week
and as a result I have considerably less hair than I had before,

but as I sat in the barber's chair we got talking.

He told me that his was a position of doubt.

That he really didn't know what to believe any more
given the materialism,

humanism
and naturalism all around him.

There was no way that I could have talked to this guy about freedom from sin in his own life.

First I had to tackle the question of reality.

One day I may have the opportunity to show him that Jesus is the answer to his doubts,
but I probably don't have enough hair.

Yet the coming of Christ made an unbelievable impact on the world.

Though as I travel more I do see that that impact is not so present in the Asian world as it is in the West.

In the East,

they do not count their years from the birth of Christ.

Buddhist countries have a different start date.

Taiwan counts its years from 1911,

the birth of the Republic of China.

And even in the West,

there is a strong pressure to use the term Common Era

rather than Anno Domini

and to remove the influence of Christianity

even though in its place comes increasing crime,

lawlessness,

violence,

cruelty to children

and an abuse of men and women.

But the coming of Christ did so much more than change the face of the world,
it heralded in the kingdom of God

and that is what the Gospel of Mark is all about.

Mark opens his Gospel with the words;

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1)

And beginning with Isaiah he dives into his subject with gusto.

Mark anchors his gospel in the prophets.

The prophets prophesied John

and John prophesied Jesus.

Contrast this with Matthew and Luke who anchor their gospels in history.

Matthew roots his gospel in Jewish history

and presents to the Jewish reader the Kingly Messiah.

Luke roots his gospel in secular history

and presents to the Gentile reader the Son of Man.

Johns roots his gospel in the eternal purposes of God

and presents Jesus to the Christian world,

and anyone else who will listen,

as the Son of God.

But Mark roots his gospel in prophecy

and presents the people's Messiah,

the Servant, the man of energy and compassion.

Hence he is a man in a hurry.

It is generally held that Mark is presenting Peter's gospel.

Peter ended up in Rome after a lifetime of itinerant ministry
in which he would have preached and taught all that he had learnt from
Jesus
in his 3½ years of ministry.
And he had a wealth of knowledge and experience to pass on.

Mark, also referred to as John Mark, was a younger man
and we first meet him as the young man who fled naked when the disciples
deserted Christ on his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51)
His mother's house in Jerusalem was probably both the setting of the Lord's Supper
and the meeting place of the early church.

Mark, served with the apostle Paul,
then with Barnabus
and later became a great support to Peter
and whilst he receives few accolades,
seems to have been one of those guys whose supportive servant role is
invaluable in the building of the Church of Christ on earth
and the Kingdom of God in heaven.

Mark's gospel is one of action,
the people's Messiah is out there amongst them.
Endlessly ministering to their needs;
filled with compassion at their plight;
willing to be interrupted
and moved with emotion
as he identifies with their dilemmas
and their problems.

And so in the thirteen verses which form our portion for this evening,
we have but the prologue to this Man of action
this Man of the people.

The prophets down through the ages
have all foretold of the coming of the Messiah
who will become the saviour of his people.

But they also hinted of a forerunner,
one who would come ahead of Christ
and herald in the Kingdom of God.

And so Mark chooses just two simple prophecies to make the point.

One from Malachi, the last prophet before John the Baptist,
'See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then
suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come' (Malachi 3:1) ;

and one from Isaiah, the greatest of the prophets'

“A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare a way for the Lord: Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.’ (Isaiah 40:3-4)

- words immortalised in Handel’s ‘Messiah’

That’s what the prophets said

and here is the man,

the forerunner,

the messenger, baptising in the wilderness of Judea.

His name was John,

and if we go to Luke’s gospel we shall find a detailed account of the birth of this very special man. (Luke 1:5-80)

But Mark is in a hurry to introduce us to the people’s Messiah.

So John comes preaching a baptism of repentance of sins.

John’s gospel was of necessity incomplete,

for he was the forerunner of the One who could and would forgive sin.

John preached repentance.

He demanded that those who came to be baptised

should repent of their evil deeds before he baptised them.

In Luke’s account many asked him what they should do

and he gave them simple instructions on how to live honest,

upright lives,

but he was scathing, as Jesus was after him,

of those who considered themselves holy,

but in actuality were merely religious humbugs.

Some wondered whether John himself was the long awaited Messiah,

but John was emphatic on this point.

John was a prophet.

The last it seems of the Old Testament prophets.

He dressed like them,

in camel hair and a leather belt

He was an ascetic.

He ate locusts and wild honey.

And he spoke with all the authority of one sent from God,

but he emphatically was *not* the Christ.

Quite where John got the idea of baptism from is not clear.

Most commentators assume that it was a Jewish initiation custom

or purification rite,

but neither here, nor anywhere else in the New Testament,

are we given instructions on how to do it,

and as a result,

the Church has been arguing over modes of baptism ever since.

Conversion is when we repent and receive new life in Christ;
Spirit Baptism is when The Father sends his Spirit to indwell and empower his
new Child;
And Water baptism is the outward sign that this has happened.

So as John is baptising his repentant disciples,
Jesus appears and demands baptism too.

Matthew tells us that John protests (Matthew 3:14).

How could the Holy One of God need to repent and be baptised?

But Jesus wishes to identify with the sinful humanity whom he has come to save
and to demonstrate total obedience to his heavenly Father.

John acquiesces.

It is the initiation of the people's Messiah to his ministry.

And so as Jesus comes up out of the river,

the Holy Spirit descends on him in the form of a dove

and the heavens open to send forth the Father's voice

'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' (Mark 1:10-11)

Here we have one of our first lessons on the Trinity.

The Father,

the Son

and the Spirit working together in perfect unity.

God is not a single entity.

He has chosen to reveal himself to us as three persons.

Each has his own role, yet they work together as one God.

This is what enraged the Jewish leaders of Christ's day,

that Jesus consistently claimed equality with his Father in heaven,

even though he had accepted a subordinate role while on earth
to identify with fallen mankind.

And that is why they crucified him for blasphemy.

But here we have all three persons of the Godhead announcing the beginning of the
ministry of Christ on earth.

But before He can start, there is one thing that has to be done.

If Jesus is to identify with fallen humanity,

then he must also square up to man's deadliest enemy.

For every one of us is tempted by Satan on a daily basis.

So, driven by the Spirit of God Jesus heads off into the wilderness to face his enemy
and ours for forty days.

The other gospels tell us what happened,

but Mark is in a hurry and merely records that Jesus was attended by
many angels.

If Jesus was identifying with us,

then I guess we too can presume that when we are tempted,

we too will be attended by angels to help us to stand
against the fiery darts of the evil one.

And so in the first verses of next week's portion Jesus sets out to meet the people
and to present to them his great message
that the Kingdom of God has come to earth.

John was sent to make ready the way for Jesus
to come into the world of men
and meet us on our ground.

The challenge to all of us today is are we willing to make way,
or have we already made way
for Christ to enter our world.

Not only in the global sense of the world at large,
but into the little world of our own space -
the private world that we and only we inhabit.

Have you made way for him there?

Have you made way for him in the innermost thoughts of your mind
in your lifestyle,
in your behaviour
in your response to him
and your relations with those around you
and with the world at large?

How much have you made way for the Son of God to have his way in every
part of your private life,
your family life
and your public and corporate lives.

Does he mean everything to you?

If you have accepted Christ as the Lord of your life,
have you thought of being baptised
demonstrating to yourself,
your fellows
and to God
that you have made a change of heart,
submitted to Christ
and been filled with the holy Spirit
and you wish to make way for Jesus from this point forward.

May God bless each one of you as you continue to make way for Jesus.

Amen.

Paul Rydon
6 July 2003