

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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How Are *You* Preparing The Way For The Lord?

by Dan Trygg

“...it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way, ³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight...”” Mark 1:2,3

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; ⁷⁷ to give to His people knowledge of salvation in forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God...” Luke 1:77-78

We talked last week about the ministry of John the Baptist, how he had been sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus. His role had been spoken of by the prophets hundreds of years before the events actually came to pass. **His life and ministry was the *specific historical fulfillment* of these prophecies.** Then, I happened to be reading Luke 1 this week, which recounted the unusual birth of John. After his birth, his father, Zacharias prophesied over him, announcing again what his mission would be. I was struck by the wording of the declaration he spoke. Even though it was, strictly speaking, about the future life of John, I felt as though the Holy Spirit was saying to me that **there was also a broader, more general application of these same words that could appropriately be made to all of us.** The question that the Lord brought to my mind was, **“How are you preparing the way for the Lord?”**

John the Baptist was a literal prophet, a *mouthpiece* for God. He received *direct revelation* from God, a specific message to the people of his time. **The word, “prophet” generally referred to a specific gifting or calling from God.** Such a person was given a communication from God which he was to faithfully and precisely deliver. Usually, it was a specific message to an individual, or to a particular circumstance. **There is, however, also a *broader usage* of this word. It could also refer to someone who was a *spokesperson* for someone, ...in this case, one who *preaches or proclaims God’s message* to people in general terms.** In a broad sense, we are all to be spokespeople for God. We all represent God to other people, by word or deed. The question is, **“Are we faithfully representing God? Are we clearly and accurately portraying and communicating His heart and message to other people?”**

In Luke 10, **Jesus sent out 70 of His followers, specifically appointing them to visit the places He Himself was soon to be coming to.** (He had sent the 12 out earlier – Lk. 9:1-5.) They were to pray for God to raise up laborers for the spiritual harvest, and they were to preach, heal and cast out demons. Their message was that the Kingdom of God has come near. **All of this was to prime people for when Jesus would come. The advance work that they did would prepare the villagers for the Lord’s coming.** Again, it was similar to John the Baptist’s ministry, in a more general way. **They were to do what Jesus did, teach what He would teach, live as He would live.** By this, they were to prepare the way for the Lord, so when He came the people would have some understanding of what He was all about, and what kinds of things to expect of Him. **The interest of the townspeople they ministered to would be piqued. Their hearts and expectations would be open and inclined toward Him.** They would anticipate His coming. Their awareness of God, and their level of faith would be aroused.

Isn’t that what we are *all* supposed to do? Aren’t we *all* supposed to be ambassadors of Christ, representing Him before a watching world, God appealing through us to those around us (II Cor. 5:18-20)? Aren’t we *all* supposed to do what Jesus did, ...talk and act like *He* would talk and act..., so that others will see His goodness and love through us, and be drawn to Him? Aren’t we supposed to be lights in the darkness, drawing attention to the power of Jesus to change lives? Aren’t we supposed to be refreshing, ...like a drink of cold water for those thirsty and weary from life’s dryness and frustrations? **Aren’t we supposed to be good advertising for Jesus? Shouldn’t people see something in us that is positive, attractive and valuable? Shouldn’t it pique their interest? Shouldn’t our lives be preparing the way for the Lord?**

As John the Baptist was preaching, he called people to a repentance that was *real*, ...deep and genuine. It was not enough to repeat a bunch of religious words, or perform some religious rituals. John said that **true repentance would produce tangible, visible change.** He said, **“Bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance.”** He warned against that attitude of entitlement, where people think they are OK with God, because they came from a religious family, or attended religious services, or offered required sacrifices, or contributed token amounts of money to fulfill a minimal sense of obligation. None of that stuff matters. **What God wants is your *heart*, ...the true, rock-bottom *center* of your being.** **If you have truly given God your heart, then *all that you have and are have also been yielded to Him.*** Your entire purpose for life has changed. Before, God had been a marginal thought in your life, now He is the Center, the Source, the Hope, Reason and Purpose for why you are here, and what you live for. If He has your heart, He has your calendar or planner, as well. If He has your heart, He has your pocketbook or checkbook, too. If He has your heart, you have given Him the keys to your car, your house, your present and future plans. **If you have**

truly given Him your heart, then you will *continue* to ask Him to guide, direct, interrupt and order your life to conform to His will and purpose. Can you honestly say that your heart belongs to God, but you won't take time to read His word, or you don't ask for His counsel or will in your life? Can you honestly say that your heart belongs to God, but you do not invest time and money in His Kingdom work? Can you honestly say that your heart belongs to God, but you have no concern or compassion for the poor, ...nothing that results in *action* (1 Jn. 3:17)? **Can you honestly say that your heart belongs to God, but you continue to live in situations that displease and dishonor Him? What is that?!** It is *not* honesty. It is *not* sincerity. It is *not* surrender. It is *not* obedience. It is self-deception. It is pretending. It is emotion without action. It is wishful thinking, but not purposeful application. It is *not* faith. Faith *acts*. If you read Hebrew 11, the "hall of faith", one of the clearest lessons to be learned from the lives of the men and women chronicled there is that ***faith produces action***. **If there is no action, ...no investment, no sacrifice, no risk, no discomfort, no movement..., then there is no genuine faith!** John the Baptist put it this way, "Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance... The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:8-9). **God is not playing! He has no time or patience for religious games or tom-foolery. He is looking for sincere followers, ones who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth** (Jn. 4:23,24). He has not wavered from what He wants or expects. **He still wants disciples to be active, obedient followers, ones who are willing to learn and do all that He intends** (Matt. 28:19,20).

Why is this so important? Because we are either preparing the way for others to come to Jesus, or we are driving them away. Our lives either complement and add credibility to our faith, or they detract from it. Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters" (Matt. 12:30). We will either leave people with a good experience, or we will leave them with a bad taste in their mouths. If they find out we claim to be Christians, they will *project* their experience of *us* onto their perceptions of *Him*. **Satan is always trying to plant hypocritical and fake people among the people of God, and he is always trying to get us to fall into sin, because he knows how damaging this can be to the cause of Christ.** Jesus said that the devil would sow "tares among the wheat" (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43). Tares were a noxious weed that, in its early stages, looks exactly like wheat. It becomes distinguishable when the plants come to maturity. The wheat has fat, healthy, nourishing kernels in its head, whereas the tares have only small, black, poisonous seeds in its head. Jesus says that the tares are the "children of the evil one" who are sown among the good seed, the children of God. The application is that **Satan will plant people among the people of God who are not genuine. At first blush, they may appear to be Christians, but after a while their "fruit" will become evident, ...sin, hypocrisy, division..., and it is poisonous!** Jude warned that there will be certain people who would "creep in unnoticed", irreverent people who turn the grace of God into a license to sin (1:4). They are "clouds without water..., autumn trees without fruit" (1:12). These are word pictures that describe the *promise* or *expectation* of rain or fruit, ...but nothing actually was there! Jude goes on to say, "they are grumblers, fault-finders, people following their own lusts. They speak arrogantly, or they use flattery if they think they can get some kind of selfish advantage" (1:16). I don't know about you, but I have known church people that are just like this! They are "mockers" (in the church!); they "cause divisions, are worldly-minded, and are devoid of the Spirit" (1:18,19). **These people do not have the Spirit, because they are not real Christians, at all. They may claim to be, but they are not.** Whether fake Christians, or believers living in bondage and immaturity, Satan exploits bad behavior to discredit the cause of Christ. **A tolerant mindset toward sin, and irreverent or worldly attitudes can spread like leaven in a church Body. They poison others, and lower the credibility of everyone's witness.**

What are we to do? Jude wrote, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God" (1:20,21). **We need to develop our walk with God. Do what you need to in order to grow in Christ.** Jesus had said that if we would abide in Him, we will bear much fruit, for apart from Him we can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). **Abiding in Him means maintaining an ongoing communication, a constant fellowship, with Him.** It means bringing your concerns to Him, and asking for His guidance, direction, and empowerment so that you can do His will. **Meditate on and celebrate God's love for you. Keep yourself rejoicing in His love. It keeps your emotions in good order, and helps you to focus on Him.** Satan wants us to feel distant from God, disconnected and rejected. That is a lie! The new and living way has been opened for us through Jesus' blood and flesh (Heb. 10:19-23), ...and it remains open *forever!* We can come freely to God. He is our Life! Be filled up with Him in joy. **Then, recognize that His vitality and blessings are given to us to share with others. Present yourself to God as His servant. Be ready to serve others in His name. He will bring opportunities to you.** They will come across your path (Eph. 2:10). If you are ready and willing to serve, opportunities will come to you. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. ...Let your light shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14,16). **By the quality, consistency and integrity of our lives we open the hearts of people toward God. Is your life preparing the way for the Lord in the hearts of those around you?**