

Christmas and the Church

Prepare the Way

Mark 1:1 – 8

I. Intro

- A. This holiday season, messages on relationship between Christmas and the church of Jesus Christ
- B. Church is body of believers – therefore, relationship between Christmas and us personally which makes up the body of believers
- C. Approaching Christmas always a busy time – shopping, decorating, some planning on traveling, some expecting guests coming in, Christmas programs, parties; not only busy time for every person but also busy time for the church; very easy to lose real reason for Christmas in all that busyness
- D. **Illustration:** Many TV specials during this time of year; one of those specials played every year “A Charlie Brown Christmas”; whole program about Charlie Brown looking in all the wrong places for true meaning of Christmas – is it putting on Christmas play or finding the right Christmas tree; at the end of the show, of course, he recites the Christmas story from scripture realizing the reason for the season is the birth of the Savior
- E. That’s absolutely true, the whole reason behind Christmas season is/should be about the birth of our Lord which I believe also brings me to what should be our purpose as body of believers (the church) during the Christmas season
- F. **READ Mark 1:1 – 8**
- G. **Question:** What was John the Baptist’s purpose/mission on this earth? Prepare the way for the Lord, for coming of Christ, the Messiah
- H. I propose that the purpose for every believer, for the church (body of Christ), especially during the Christmas season is to prepare the way for the Lord because Jesus IS coming again; just as Jesus came to this earth the first time as an infant child, so He will return again in majesty and glory and power as the King of kings and Lord of lords
 - i. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.
- I. I also propose that every believer, for the church (body of Christ), are also to prepare the way because God still working and active in the world and

the world needs to know that – main way that God still works and is active is through His church

i. **2 Corinthians 5:20 (NIV)** ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

J. **Answer the question for us as the church today, how are we to prepare the way for the Lord in this world and during this holiday season?**

II. **1 – Start at the Beginning and Speak Out**

A. Look how Mark began his Gospel, his account of Jesus' life and ministry – **v. 1: *The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ***

B. Many probably already know meaning of word *gospel*; Greek – *euangelion* – good message, also where we get word *evangelism* from

C. Webster definition: *the message concerning Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation; something accepted or promoted as infallible truth or as a guiding principle or doctrine*

D. If the church is going to make an impact on the world today, it has to get back to the basics – it has to start back at the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking out promoting the acceptance of God's infallible truth as its guiding principle

E. **Question:** How do we do this? Same way the early 1st century church did

i. **Acts 2:42-45 (NIV)**

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

ii. **Acts 4:13 (NIV)**

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (**Question:** What do people in this community notice about you and me?)

iii. **Acts 4:32-34 (NIV)**

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. ...

iv. **Acts 5:12 (NIV)**

¹² The apostles **regularly** performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. ...

v. **Last chapter of Acts, Paul was imprisoned (under house arrest) in Rome: Acts 28:31 (NIV)**

³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

vi. **REFER v. 4**

- F. **That's how we get back to the basics – go back to the beginning of the Gospel, promoting the infallible truth of salvation through believing in Christ as the Son of God, the Savior of the world**

III. 2 – Receive All who God Puts in our Path

- A. **REFER v. 5 – *The whole Judean countryside ... all the people of Jerusalem*; a lot of people – estimates show population of Jerusalem in 1st century was about 600,000, add to that the outlying countryside**

- B. **Population of Mt. Vernon/Ailey – 2,801 (2017); population of Montgomery County – 9,031 (2017); wouldn't know what to think if all 9,000 were being reached and showing up here for church**

- C. **Question: Does the Bible give any exceptions as to people who we should receive in the church? Yes – those who would disrupt, cause division, spread false teachings**

i. **Romans 16:17-18 (NIV)**

¹⁷ I urge you, brothers, to **watch out for those who cause divisions** and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.

Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. ...

ii. **1 Corinthians 12:25 (NIV)**

²⁵ ... there should be no division in the body, ... its parts should have equal concern for each other.

iii. **Ephesians 4:25 (NIV)**

²⁵ Therefore each of you **must put off falsehood** and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for **we are all members of one body.**

iv. **What Paul told the believers in Ephesus: Acts 20:28-30 (NIV) ²⁸ **Keep****

watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, **savage wolves will come in**

among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number

men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

v. **Titus 1:10-11 (NIV)**

¹⁰ For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. ¹¹ They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach--and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

D. **Question:** Those are the ones we should NOT tolerate in the church, but who should we welcome in the church?

E. **Matthew 28:19 (NIV)** ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of ALL nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

IV. **3 – Humility and Sacrifice**

A. **REFER v. 6, 7**

B. No where in scripture do we have any indication John the Baptist had a physical home – lived in the wilderness; no indication he had a family, only disciples that followed him; no indication he had any other means of financial support

C. John the Baptist lived a very simple, basic life depending on nothing but what God provided so he could be devoted to God's call on his life

D. John the Baptist was a man of great humility – v. 7, and a man who sacrificed everything in order to obey the Lord; many times he adamantly said, *I am not the Christ*; John 3:30 (NIV) ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.

E. **Jesus said: Matthew 23:12 (NIV)** ¹² For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

F. **Paul's words: Romans 12:1 (NIV)** ¹ [*We are*] to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--...

G. **Then Paul says: Romans 12:3-5 (NIV)** ³ ... Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. ⁴ Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

H. **James 4:10 (NIV)** ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

V. Close

- A. **Question:** So what relationship do we see first between the church and Christmas? The church, we the people who make up the church, are to be about preparing the way of the Lord
- B. We do that through: getting back to basic, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking out proclaiming its infallible truth; receive and accept all God puts in our pathway; do this all with humility and sacrificially
- C. Today, know that Christmas is all about Jesus; the Gospel has been presented, do you believe it, or do you need to accept and believe it?