

## STUDY 2

# God Prepares Jesus for Ministry

### 1. What is the difference between repentance and remorse, and did Judas repent or was he just remorseful?

The basic meaning of the Greek word used by Mark for repentance is to 'change one's mind'. Genuine repentance leads to a change of action which is the emphasis of the Hebrew word used in the Old Testament which means 'turn'. Putting the two together, a Biblical definition of repentance would be *a change of mind leading to a change of actions.*

Remorse is not the same as repentance. It means 'feeling sorry' or 'deep regret' emphasising the *emotional* aspect. A remorseful person may not actually repent. Their feelings may be superficial and short lived. A repentant person will certainly feel remorse but having had a change of mind and taken action to put things right, will leave behind destructive feelings of guilt and **'forget the things that lie behind and move on.'** (*Philippians 3:13-14*).

Did Judas repent? This is an interesting question. He did change his mind, realising that he had betrayed innocent blood. He also took action and returned the thirty pieces of silver. But his betrayal of Jesus could not be undone. He was consumed with remorse and hanged himself, as recorded by Matthew (*Matthew 27:5*). So he did 'repent' but he allowed his strong feelings of remorse and self loathing to dominate his actions.

The apostle Paul, in his previous life as Saul, was a persecutor of Christians and some of them were imprisoned and died. His was a true and full repentance because as well as a change of mind and heart, he began to do precisely the opposite - evangelising, leading people to Christ and planting churches. He 'turned around'. Had Judas done similarly, that would have been true repentance.

It is important for pastors especially to have a good understanding of this subject. There are two extremes. People may be very superficial in their repentance (see the *Parable of the Sower* in **Study 5**), where some brought forth no fruit in contrast to others who brought forth a good crop. The other extreme is that people may be consumed by strong emotions of self-condemnation and feelings of guilt. If these are not properly dealt with, people may carry an unnecessary burden of guilt which holds them back in their walk with God. Such people need to understand that sins once repented of, confessed and appropriate restitution made, can and should be put out of mind.

### 2. The gospel brings transformation. God begins with individuals on the inside.

#### a. How does this contrast with the work of politicians and economists?

Very many politicians and economists start out genuinely well-meaning, although sometimes their experience of power brings temptations which lead to corruption. (They need our prayers.) Politicians begin with the material and social causes of what is wrong with the world, such as poverty, lack of education, injustice and discrimination. Their work is important for the well-being of society and the remedying of its ills. Honourable politicians passing good laws, backed up by fair law enforcement

and an impartial justice system, make the world a better place to live and it is good when Christians join these professions acting as *'salt and light of the world'*. Sadly such a situation does not always exist. When it does, there is a restraint on the influence of evil. However, even good laws cannot bring about moral change.

The starting point with the gospel is different. The gospel addresses the need of the human heart and a person's relationship with God. God is in the business of changing hearts. He shows us how to live and gives us the help we need. Jesus used the expression *"born again"* to help us understand the notion of being changed. The gospel message is an invitation to come under the rule of God in the Kingdom of God with a new life in Christ. The gospel offers far more than a *ticket to Heaven*.

Those who have come under the rule of God will want to discover their particular call and the *'good works'* that have been prepared for them (*Ephesians 2:10*). For some this might be public service or business (which generates employment opportunities and income generation). It could be education, or health care, or nurturing a family. There are multitudes of possibilities. But these things would all be an outworking of a basic obedience to God and a desire to serve Him.

**b. Sometimes politicians start out really well and with good intentions but get corrupted. What do you think is happening?**

People go wrong for two main reasons. Firstly, on the inside, the human heart is by nature selfish and prone to sin. Secondly, on the outside, living in the world gives opportunities for temptation, (see Genesis chapters 3 and 4). Politicians certainly have more opportunities to be tempted than most people. The more power a person has, the more opportunities there are for misusing it for selfish reasons. This is especially true in a country where there is serious poverty and deprivation. In democratic societies, politicians should be held to account. The call of God's kingdom people is to be salt and light to the world, transforming the world into a better place. We are transformed to become transformers. This is something Matthew included in his Gospel (*Matthew 5:13-16*) which contains more of Jesus' teaching than Mark.

**c. What is it about the preparation of Jesus for His ministry that contributed to His staying on course?**

Having received the Spirit, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness before beginning His ministry. During this time He was tempted by Satan to misuse His power for selfish reasons. He refused to be enticed by these temptations. In this way He proved to God, His Father, Satan the accuser and to Himself that He was ready to take on the responsibility before Him. The gospels do not record other instances of temptation but Jesus did say of His experience in Gethsemane that He could have called on angels to rescue Him. Had He yielded for His own benefit, He would have failed in His mission. He told His disciples that if they wanted to follow Him in discipleship, they should be willing to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Him. Any presentation of the gospel that promises a trouble-free life is a misrepresentation of the truth. There is inevitably pressure from the world, the flesh and the devil.

When appointing leaders, Paul emphasised character qualifications. He advised Timothy not to appoint new converts to positions of leadership. The reason was presumably that they had not yet had sufficient experience of life to develop the proven characters necessary to withstand the pressures and

temptations of ministry (see *1 Timothy 3:6*). This is not to say that someone cannot have a sense of call to ministry at an early age but it may be several years before such a person is recognised, appointed and released to begin.

In some cultures, Christian leadership is seen as a means for achieving status and privilege; but it is not. Such people are easily enticed and fall short.

### **3. What are the advantages of on-the-job training and is it sufficient on its own?**

On-the-job training has two major advantages. Firstly, it is relevant, practical and related to the actual work of the ministry. This is how Paul trained the leaders at Ephesus, following the pattern set by Jesus (see *Acts 20*). He set them an example and a pattern to follow and no doubt corrected and advised them. Of course, on-the-job training is only as good as the person providing it. It works well when the mentor sees it as part of his or her role to nurture new leaders and sets aside time to do this, as indeed Jesus did. This is an additional commitment and depends on a good relationship. Even trainees who have studied for academic qualifications usually go on to some sort of probationary period with practical supervision. A possible downside is that insecure leaders, wishing to hold on to their ministries, may not always be fully committed to helping someone to do what they do (and possibly eventually do it even better). That is a short-sighted view and leaves a problem in relation to succession.

The second advantage is that the trainee does not have to go away from home, leaving behind family and church responsibilities.

Depending on the nature of the ministry and level of responsibility, attending a Bible school, Bible college or a theological college may be very helpful. It provides an opportunity for in depth study without the intrusion of other responsibilities, and access to experienced teachers and resources such as a library. Formal accreditation may also be useful.

Formal training may, for some, be too theoretical and over-academic and therefore too remote from the actual work of the ministry itself. But good formal training will always have a practical edge to it and it provides the opportunity to learn to reflect on practice and open up new ways of looking at things. Larger churches may have special Bible teaching classes and hold special teaching events with visiting speakers.

All leaders should become life-long learners and develop the habit of prayerful study and reflection. It is good to get together with other leaders to pray, learn from and stimulate each other. Leadership training is a big subject and much depends on opportunities available. There is a lot of material available on the Internet (although not all reliable and balanced). See Michael Eaton's and Sovereign World Trust's iBtr website.

### **4. Do we need John the Baptist ministries today?**

Not in the quite the same way. John's particular contribution was to prepare the people of Israel for the coming Messiah and, in particular, a call to repentance. The message of the gospel includes a call to repent. When the Philippian jailer asked "***What shall I do to be saved?***" Paul's response was, "***Repent and believe!***" Baptism is the outward demonstration that someone has repented.

In many different ways God prepares people to receive the good news of Jesus through their experience of life and various influences. You might like to consider what some of these influences are. The word *pre-evangelism* is sometimes used to describe activities that help to prepare people to receive Christ, particularly addressing misconceptions and unhelpful ideas. The Jewish people already understood a great deal about God from their Old Testament scriptures, festivals and the sacrifices. People in other cultures today know far less and are less prepared to make a decision to follow Christ. When Paul went to Athens (*Acts 17*) he spent a lot of time discussing and explaining to people what God was like. Some people need to see an example of a Christian lifestyle - God's people living righteously and truthfully, and caring for each other compassionately, forgiving each other when necessary. This is Christian witness just as much as words. Jesus said in John's Gospel, "**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...**" (*John 6:4*). This gives the impression of a process that takes time.

So there is a real sense in which the message of repentance preached by John the Baptist is very necessary today. At some point, every person needs to be confronted with his or her need to *repent*. This is a call to a radically different lifestyle of obedience to God. For some people, precisely what this means is something that becomes clear as time goes on, after making a decision to follow Jesus. So the *message* of John the Baptist is very much needed even if his particular *ministry* is not.

## **5. God chooses people to communicate the gospel. Which people?**

Every Christian can be equipped to share the gospel with others. Firstly our *lives* should be a demonstration of what it means to follow Jesus. Secondly, every Christian has a testimony or story of God in their lives. It's good to have a version to share and up-to-date testimonies are always fresh. Thirdly, Christians should be prepared and able to give an account of their faith to others, especially when asked (see *1 Peter 3:15*). Fourthly, there are some people who are especially good and gifted at explaining the gospel to others and the Holy Spirit helps them to be effective. These people should be recognised by the church and encouraged to do this. They have the gift of *evangelism* (see *Ephesians 4:11*).

It is perhaps worth mentioning that evangelists do not always make good pastors. The proclamation of the gospel is by its nature confrontational. People hearing the gospel when they come under conviction of sin may feel very uncomfortable until they have made a commitment. Evangelists are bold proclaimers. They don't mind confrontation. They want people to make a decision. When an evangelist is put in the role of pastor, it's not surprising that people sometimes move to another church! Pastors, as shepherds, lead with gentleness as they care for their sheep. Generally, they find it easier to comfort and encourage. Pastors need to have organisational skills too. Some people can combine both roles and respond according to the situation. Jesus did. But not all can. There are some churches where the gospel is preached and people become Christians, and yet they don't stay. One reason for this could be that the pastor is gifted as an 'evangelist' and he is not effectively caring for his church. In such a case other people should be released to fulfil that role.

All this points to the need for people to know their gifting and be free to express it. Paul had quite a lot to say on this in *1 Corinthians 12-14*.

## **6. What, for you, is the most striking point in this study and why?**

As with **Study 1**, answers will (of course) vary. Some of these could be followed up if time allows. People should be encouraged to think more deeply on what particularly speaks to them and it is good to pray into such things.