

Series -

Date/s -

21 Jan 2018

Topic - Vision Sunday: Prepare The Way (Part 2)

Speaker/s -

Pastor Ernie Song

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "The Lion And The Lamb", "Great Are You Lord", "Be Enthroned", "Worthy Of It All" or "I Will Exalt".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Have a greater awareness of the near-ness of Christ's return.
2. Be committed to prepare the way for God to come into our lives. Let us Repent, Be Restored & Bear Fruit

Word [45 min]**Part 2 of Vision Sunday**

This sermon is Part 2 of the Vision Sunday message: Preparing The Way. Last Sunday, SP Lionel Goh preached Part 1 of the message. To briefly recap: 2018 is a year of preparation and prayer for RiverLife Church. The key bible passage for Part 1 was Isaiah 40:1-11. SP Lionel spoke about how we can prepare the way for the Lord by:

1. Creating space for God to come and renew our hearts for Him;
2. Being empowered by Him to reach out to the needy in our communities; and
3. Having His passion and power for missionary works in the world.

A historical background to the silent years

Pastor Ernie started off his sermon by giving a historical background to the "silent years" between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Between the two testaments, there was a period of 400 years that God was silent and did not speak to Israel. During this period, a number of critical historical events happened to Israel.

1. Alexander the Great conquered Israel (336 BC). Alexander the Great had a vision to unify the whole world under Greek culture (this is known as hellenisation). Israel was also subject to his hellenisation efforts. As a result, the Jews started to lose their Jewish culture and language and instead began to assimilate Greek culture and language.
2. The Pentateuch* was translated into Greek (250 BC). Due to the hellenisation efforts of Alexander the Great, many Jews could no longer read nor speak their native Hebrew tongue. As such, the Pentateuch (their holy scripture) had to be translated from Hebrew to Greek. The Greek translation of the Pentateuch is known as the Septuagint.

**The Pentateuch is the first 5 books of our Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and*

Deuteronomy.

3. The Abomination of Desolation rules Israel (168 BC). After the rule of Alexander the Great, Israel was ruled by another king: Antiochus IV. He committed atrocious sins such as stealing the temple treasures, and building an altar to himself and placing it in the Holy of Holies of God's temple. To top it all off, he committed the ultimate blasphemy against Israel by sacrificing a pig in God's temple to the Greek god Zeus. He also forced the hellenisation process upon Israel and banned the Jews from practicing Jewish law. Because of this, pagan practices began to creep into Judaism.
4. The rise of the Maccabees (167 BC). During the time of Antiochus IV, a Jewish rebel group known as the Maccabees rose up and revolted. Their aim was to reduce the effects of hellenisation and reassert Judaism. The Maccabees is important because out of this group was birthed the Jewish sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
5. The rule of Herod the Great (40 BC). During this period, Israel was ruled by king Herod. Herod was a very insecure king who killed his own family members to prevent them from usurping the throne. He was given the title "King of the Jews". This is why when Jesus, the promised King of the Jews in the Jewish scriptures, was born, Herod felt so threatened that he slaughtered all the male babies to try and be rid of Jesus.

After giving this historical background of what took place during the silent years, Pastor Ernie went on to describe the social hierarchy and living conditions of the time. The Jews lived in a very unforgiving social environment where they were obliged to pay heavy taxes and were looked down upon by other nations. Added to this the fact that God had not spoken to His people for 400 years, it was indeed a very trying time for the Jews. There was, however, an anticipation among them that the prophesied Messiah would come soon.

How is this significant to RiverLife Church?

What can we learn from the 400 silent years? It is that *when God is silent, it does not mean that He is inactive*. God was setting the stage for Jesus' coming.

RiverLife Church's emphasis for 2018 is "prepare the way for the Lord". Think: why would God give us this emphasis for 2018? Pastor Ernie suggested the following reasons:

1. God wants us to *prepare the way* so that He can reveal Himself (Isaiah 40:5), and people around us will see Him.
2. God is setting up the universal Church to *prepare the way* for the return of Christ. There are signs that Christ's imminent return is drawing nearer:
 - a. *Disasters*. Wars, disease, earthquakes, famines, etc, have been on the rise in the last 100 years.
 - b. *Cosmic disturbances*. Signs of the blood moon (Joel 2:31). An enormous volcanic eruption or a nuclear war (both which are possible in the near future) can affect the atmosphere, causing the moon to appear red.
 - c. *Deserters and Lawlessness*. Believers will desert the faith. The Church will be persecuted for standing against social norms (e.g., the LGBT agenda).

Considering the above signs, are we nearer to the return of Christ than we realise? To put it in another way: how would your life change if Jesus was coming back next week?

Let us prepare our lives for the return of Christ! Let us prepare the way for our Lord by repenting of our sins, restoring our lives to God, and bearing fruits.

Discussion Questions

1. **Looking back at the past week, how have we tried to “create space” for God in our lives, as SP Lionel encouraged us in his sermon on Preparing The Way (Part 1)?** [15 min]

Leader’s Notes: *This is a recap question and is meant to create a link between this week’s sermon and Part 1 of the Vision Sunday message.*

This is a good opportunity to encourage members who have yet to start practically applying SP Lionel’s message last week. Leaders can encourage members that it is always difficult to make a change to our lives, but as we continue pressing in and asking God for His help, we can make a change in our hearts and lives to draw nearer to God.

2. **What we learn from the historical events of the 400 silent years is that when God is silent, it does not mean that He is inactive. Was there a time in your life that you felt God was silent, but then He finally answered your prayers? How did that journey grow your faith?** [15 min]

Leader’s Notes: *A reflect and relate question for members to think about how, many times, God works in the background and we don’t feel His presence, yet He shows himself faithful in the end. Leaders can encourage members to share from their personal experiences on such occasions and how God had accomplished something they can be thankful for after the season of silence. The point of this question is to draw members’ attention to how God was faithful even during the period of silence. During a period of silence, our response should be to prepare and pray for a new season of breakthrough with God.*

Leaders can add on by sharing Hebrew 11:1, which gives a definition of what faith is: “Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, proof of things not seen.” (WEB). Leaders can encourage their members to stay faithful to what God has called them to, even if He seems silent.

3. **Let’s ask ourselves the question that Pastor Ernie posed: how would your life change if Jesus was coming back next week?** [15 min]

Leader’s Notes: *This is a response question. Members’ response to this question can be either on a personal level, or something that the cell group or the church can do together as a community. This is to get members to think practically and apply the sermon to their lives as challenged by Pastor Ernie to Repent, Be Restored & Bear Fruit*

The cell group can then break into smaller groups to pray for and encourage each other to follow through with the things they mentioned they would do.

Works [10 min]

Let’s pray:

1. Every RiverLifer will commit this year to preparing our hearts and lives for Christ’s return, by repenting and restoring our lives. Pray that we will bear fruits for His glory.

Announcements

1. Unlocking the Gospel of Mark Course

Sun, 28 Jan | 2.30pm – 5pm | Victory Chapel

Highly interactive & practical course, providing tools & handles to be able to read, understand, interpret & apply the gospel of Mark.

2. Alpha Course

Suns, 4 Mar – 20 May | 2pm – 4pm | Faith Chapel

Register online at <http://bit.ly/rlcalpha>. For enquiries, please contact Moses Sho at 65114146 or email him at mosessho@riverlife.org.sg.

3. Water Baptism Class

Sat, 3 Feb | 9.30am - 3.30pm | Faith Chapel

Register at the Information Counter by Sun, 28 Jan.

Baptism Service will be on 11 Mar.

Church Vision Statement:

“A vibrant family where sons and daughters mature and reveal the Father’s glory from generation to generation.”