

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Sorting Things in Light of the Kingdom

by Dan Trygg

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, ⁵⁰ and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ Have you understood all these things?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes.’ ⁵² And Jesus said to them, ‘On account of this every scribe being-discipled in the kingdom of heaven is similar to a person, a master of a household, who throws-out out-from his storeroom, things new and old.’”

Matthew 13:47-52

“Go therefore and ‘discipline’ all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

“For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

1 Corinthians 1:18,20-21

Jesus had just finished delivering His parables about the kingdom of God to the crowd gathered on the beach, and privately to His disciples. He had likened the kingdom to (1.) a farmer sowing his seed on four different kinds of soil, looking for a good crop; (2.) a wheat field where “impostor wheat” is sown by an enemy among the good wheat seeds, so that the weeds must grow up together with the wheat, and be sorted out at the harvest (again, *fruitfulness* is the goal); (3.) a mustard seed, which starts out very small, but grows to become as large as a tree and offers refuge to the birds; (4.) leaven, which when a small portion is put into a large batch of dough, spreads, permeates and expands throughout, until the whole batch has been leavened; (5.) a treasure hidden in a field which was so valuable that a man discovering it eagerly sells all that he has to buy the field so he can rightfully obtain the treasure; (6.) an incredibly rare and valuable pearl which a pearl merchant on his travels discovers and eagerly goes home to sell everything he possesses in order to secure this once in a lifetime opportunity; (7.) a dragnet, which indiscriminately captures all the fish and sea creatures in an area, so that the fishermen must sort out the “keepers” from those which are useless; and, finally, (8.) He said that a learned person, a so-called “scribe” or “expert-in-the-law”, who, ...being “disciplined” or trained in the kingdom..., is like the master of a household who must clean out his storeroom. He “throws out” both things that are new and things that are old. These are things that once had been perceived as valuable, but are now seen as things to be discarded.

The first two parables illustrate God’s desire and expectation that the people of His kingdom will produce “good fruit” in abundance. The second couplet is about the expansive, permeating growth of the kingdom. It may start small, but it spreads out rapidly in every direction. **The third parallel set of word pictures communicates how precious it is to be a part of God’s rule and reign on the earth.** Those who really grasp what it is God is offering to them would gladly give up any and everything else to join with Him. **Finally, the last couplet of parables demonstrates the need to sort things out, to evaluate things, in light of a larger purpose or truth, ...the reality and purpose of the reign and rule of God!**

The parable of the dragnet illustrates that all are accountable to God, whether they want to join His kingdom or not. A dragnet is a large net that would be weighted at the bottom, and had floats set out at intervals along the top. It required two or more boats to set it out and pull it in. Once in place, it would be like a wall of netting suspended in the water. When the fishermen dragged it in toward the shore, it would capture anything in its path. So, once it was pulled onto the shore, the fishermen would have to remove whatever was caught in the net. They would sort the good fish, the ones that were desirable for food, and especially for sale, from those that were undesirable. They would put the “good fish” into containers to bring home with them, and the “bad fish” would be left on the beach to die and rot. What a vivid illustration! A number of Jesus’ disciples were fishermen. They would have gone through this process many, many times. You can be sure that after hearing Jesus’ application, they would never think about it the same way, again!

Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a dragnet. It too, will capture all kinds of people. But there will be a great sorting out at the end of the age. (Jesus revisits this theme from the second parable. A future judgment *is* coming.) “At the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:49-50). **God is telling us that this is the way things will be. We do not have a choice about the fact that there will be a future judgment.** Like a dragnet comes unbidden and relentless, the kingdom of God will come, whether we are ready for it, or not. **We do, however, have choices in the “here and now” that will affect the future “there and then” outcome. Our choices have to do with how our hearts and lives will be evaluated.** Just like the parable of the tares, there will be many people who are somehow associated with or “caught up by” the kingdom of God, but they are not all “keepers”. People will be evaluated by God’s standard,

whether they have fulfilled His purpose. Are they people who have been responsive to Him and righteous toward others? If not, they will be consigned to the “furnace of fire”, because they have been rebellious toward God and have not lived their lives to honor Him and help others.

God offers forgiveness and a new life to those who are willing to lay down their old selves and past lives to start living fresh for Him. That is the key, however. Are you willing to follow Him as your King? That is what a disciple is, one who actively follows someone. God is not looking for “decisions”, or church memberships. He is looking for those who are willing to *live for Him* and *bear much fruit* by the power of His Spirit living within them.

Jesus told us what was involved in making a disciple. He said that as we were going about, we ought to “disciple-ize” all nations. How? By baptizing them and teaching them to do all that He said. The “baptizing” part stands for the repenting and starting fresh beginning of the Christian life. **Baptism** was a symbolic laying down into death to one’s former life, as one laid down and was buried in the water, ...and a rising to new life, as the person comes up from the water. It was at once both *a break with one’s old life*, as well as *a consecration of one’s future life* as a person dedicated to God. **The second part, the “teaching them to do all that I said” aspect, covers three main ideas. (1.) a disciple is a learner.** He or she must see that *one of their primary responsibilities is to learn*. It is impossible to be a growing, faithful disciple and not be applying yourself to learning more about God and what He expects from you. **(2.) a disciple is a doer.** Being a disciple is not primarily an intellectual process. The mind must be instructed so that the will can be engaged and the person put into action. *What Jesus wants is obedience, not simply intellectual agreement.* What good is it to *know* the truth, if you do not *live by it*? Are you a faithful servant for correctly *understanding* what God wants done, if you do not *do it*? Of course not! **(3.) a disciple cannot be selective. He or she must be obedient in all things.** Jesus is not OK with compartmentalized lives. Those who have a “religious compartment”, where they go to church and keep religious rituals and disciplines, but are still living in contradiction with what the Bible clearly teaches, are *not* faithful disciples. Jesus would call them “hypocrites”, or pretenders. The Lord is not pleased with those who want to “play church”. In fact, they make Him sick to His stomach (Rev. 3:16). He told us clearly that **He wants followers who are active learners, people who will obey Him in all His will.**

Finally, one inescapable conclusion of Matt. 28:18-20 is that obedient followers who are carrying out all that Jesus said will also somehow become teacher/trainers of others. Part of what He *said* was to “disciple-ize” all nations. We must begin to see ourselves not only as *learners*, ready to *do* His will, but also as *trainers* of others. We need to prepare ourselves to teach others, ...*and begin to do it*. Now, some will object, “My spiritual gift is not teaching.” We are not talking about an unusual gifting and empowering by the Holy Spirit to teach. **We are talking about the everyday responsibility of speaking truth in love to those around us, ...testifying of our own experiences..., so that they learn to follow Jesus.** *This is clearly taught as a function that we all are to participate in* (Deut. 6:4-9; Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; II Tim. 2:2; Eph. 4:15).

That brings us back to the verse from Matt. 13:52, “...every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasury things new and old”. What is Jesus saying?

The word translated as “scribe” literally meant “lettered” or “learned.” They were educated people. In the Jewish culture of the first century, a scribe was someone who had devoted his life to learning the OT scriptures. Usually they were teachers and interpreters of the Law. **When such a person became a follower of Jesus, however, they still needed to be “disciple-ized”. They needed to be able to integrate their new understanding of Jesus into their lives.** A scribe already had a lot of valuable things “stored up”, knowing the OT Scriptures. **But, even an educated person still needed to be taught accurately the things concerning Jesus** (cf. Acts 18:24-28), so that he or she could utilize both the new insights and understandings along with the valuable fruits of their former studies to be an effective teacher/trainer to others. Not everything we were taught in school, or came to believe in our own studies, is necessarily accurate. In fact, according to Paul’s experience, **sometimes that “scribal training” could get in the way.** Scribes were not just taught the scriptures, **they were often taught rabbinical traditions and methods of interpretation that actually obscured the truth.** Moreover, the investment of time and expense in that kind of education often fostered **an attitude of superiority and pride that made it more difficult to be teachable**, or to accept the plain declarations of God at face value. Paul said that the plain message of the cross became a stumbling block to many of those who had been trained as Jewish scribes. In light of that, **a closer look at what Jesus is saying in Matthew 13, is that a scribe or educated person is like a master of a household who goes through his storeroom and “throws out” what needs to be tossed**, ...things that were not true, or things that were questionable or speculative. It doesn’t matter if these are old teachings or novel, faddish ideas. **They need to be evaluated and “sorted out” based upon the truth that is in Jesus.** As these people became more competent in their understanding, and more mature in their walk, they would also begin to teach and train others, and it was imperative to base their teachings on what was sound. Paul saw himself as a “steward of the mysteries of God”, and a steward was required to be trustworthy (1 Cor. 4:1,2).

We might need to do some “spring cleaning”, some “kingdom sorting”, of our own! Be prepared to toss out or set aside the beliefs, opinions or practices that do not make you more effective in following Jesus, or in helping others to do so.