

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

by Dan Trygg

“To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:3

“But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.” Acts 8:12

“And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God” Acts 19:8

“...I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom...” Acts 20:25

“When they had set a day for Paul, ...he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets...” Acts 28:23

“And he was ³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ...” Acts 28:30-31

The first words of Jesus’ preaching in the NT have to do with the kingdom of God, ...and the last things He talked about with His disciples were also to instruct them of things concerning the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17; Acts 1:3). ***Jesus Himself preached “the gospel of the kingdom”*** (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), and referred to it that way Himself, saying “this *gospel of the kingdom* must be preached in all the inhabited world, unto a witness to all nations, and *then* the end will come.” ***The kingdom of God was spoken of by Jesus directly 95 times in the gospels, and it is referred to by others another half dozen times. Jesus sent His twelve disciples out to preach the kingdom of God, when they were in training, and later on in the same chapter, He tells another man to “proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God” (Lk. 9:2,60). Clearly, the apostolic teaching was also about the kingdom of God, and about Jesus as the promised King.*** (Remember, the word, “Christ” or “Messiah” was understood as the title of a king, the very charge Jesus was eventually accused of and crucified for [Lk. 23:2,3; John 19:19].) We see from Acts 8:12 that ***this was also the message that early Christians moving out from Jerusalem brought with them.*** They were preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and proclaiming Jesus as King. The other references from Acts clearly indicate that ***the apostle Paul had this same focus on the kingdom of God.*** Right up through to the conclusion of the book, ***Paul was preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus the Christ.***

This is a very important realization, because that is not typically the gospel that people are hearing today. That is not the way that Jesus is presented today, ...and how He is presented is critical to our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. That is *not* the framework of understanding that most of us have been given, or operate out of. That is *not* how we think, *nor* how we read the Bible. It has *not* been the focus of most church activities and traditions throughout the centuries, and it is *not* at the center of most people’s thinking about Jesus or the “good news” today. ***The backdrop and context of the “kingdom of God” has been minimized in our awareness, in spite of the fact that it was front and center in the preaching of Jesus, His apostles and the church in those first few centuries. The message we are preaching today has been subtly changed, and so our expectations and response to Jesus have also been changed.***

For example, what do you think of when you think of Jesus? Do you think, “Savior”? Do you realize that He is only referred to as “Savior” twice in the gospels, twice in Acts, once in Ephesians, once in Philippians, 4 times in the pastoral epistles, 5 times in 2 Peter, and once each in 1 John and Jude. Jesus is only referred to as “Savior” a total of 17 times in the NT! By contrast, He is referred to as “Christ” (King) over 500 times! “Eternal life” is only spoken of 30 times, ...it is not even a main theme! “Salvation” is spoken of about 40 times. The word, “Lord” occurs 605 times in the NT, but I didn’t have time to look up how many refer to Jesus. I think the point is becoming clear. We have been emphasizing certain ideas and themes, and minimizing other ideas and themes, ...and the gospel we have contrived and preach is often a misrepresentation of the message of the NT. We are presenting the “gospel of salvation” whereas Jesus, the apostles, and the early church was preaching the “gospel of the kingdom”.

You see, we have turned the gospel message into something that is all about us, instead of all about God. We are looking at this as though somehow we are still in charge, and that, because we “believe in Jesus”, then God will give us His blessings and His approval, ...but what God says in the gospel of the kingdom is that HE is the King. He is graciously offering us a chance to get involved with Him, and what He is doing. He has redeemed us from disaster and death, but we are freed and made alive so that we can serve Him. He is not here to serve us; we are here to serve Him. He will give us a fresh start, and give us the ability and opportunity to enter His service, but He is expecting us to join with Him, follow Him, obey Him and do His will. He has called us to deny ourselves out of

preference for *Him*. He calls us to make sacrifices in His service, just as He made sacrifices to bring about the opportunity for us to join Him. **The kingdom of God is the active working out of God's will, ...and He wants to do that *IN* you and *THROUGH* you.** And that means that there will be times where He will ask you to do something that you would find inconvenient or undesirable at that moment, but because you are one of His, and you have come to know and love Him, you choose to put aside your discomfort and obey Him. *That* is what the kingdom of God will look like in your life.

We have made it a very private, personal thing, ...but the truth is that God is recruiting people to join His army! It is not a “private thing” at all! It is a corporate thing. **It is not a *me*-centered thing; it is a God-centered thing. It is not a *me*-centered thing; it is a *we*-centered thing.** We are recruited to join a team, a community, a group of other serious-minded followers of Christ. If you read the NT, the norm is that people are “added to the church”. The “church” was nothing like what most of us have seen and experienced. It was people called out by God to help one another grow in their faith and help each other through life's challenges, as we seek God's will together. They met each other in personal, interactive gatherings where they learned together, shared together, and prayed together. **By definition, the “gospel of the kingdom” cannot be an individual calling.** The kingdom is bigger, broader and entails much more than our individual lives. **We are recruited to join something larger than ourselves, ...something that we are being called upon to invest in and partner with.** If we are going to follow Jesus, then we must recognize that He will call us into relationship with other Christians, for the purpose of learning from them, and building them up, and developing relationships that will be mutually encouraging.

The “gospel of the kingdom” also reminds us of the context of our calling. We were born into this world system, a spiritual system that is heavily influenced and controlled by the enemy (Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). This is an important insight into our circumstances. There are two kingdoms described here, the natural world of brokenness, with sin, evil and decay (Rom. 8:18-23), ...and also a malevolent spiritual kingdom that influences, deceives and manipulates this natural environment (Eph. 6:11,12; Rev. 12:9). There is the world system, and then there is the “present evil age” that is entrenched here (Gal. 1:4). There is the natural world of human beings, as well, who are deceived and influenced by the spiritual powers that are at work in this world. These two realms overlap, and the enemy has great influence, but people still have some measure of control and self-determination, limited as it is. **Into this dark and lifeless overlap of humanity and corrupt spiritual power the kingdom of God has come to set people free,** and into a life-infusing relationship with Him through Jesus the King. **The good news of the kingdom is the invitation and opportunity to respond to the grace of God, made available through Jesus, to find life and freedom from the dominion of darkness, and the deception of this world** (Eph. 2:4-9; Col. 1:13). Genesis 3 records the deception and fall of humanity by the devil. The reality of his influence here is alluded to throughout the scriptures. **The “gospel of the kingdom” addresses this by revealing God's purpose to liberate planet earth from the enemy's control.** The good news of the kingdom of God is that He has defeated the enemy and his minions through Christ's work on the cross. **He invites us to join Him in the freedom struggle, both *within our own minds and lives*, and *also in the world around us* as we move forward with the advance of the kingdom under the leadership of our King.**

We definitely need a change of perception. We need to “repent” and come to a change of mind and perspective. **We have been given a gospel that does not look much like the gospel that Jesus was preaching, and the fruit of our “gospel preaching” has not been producing what we can read about in the NT.** We have developed a misguided, misdirected, soft-pedaled gospel, ...a “good news” that is about something other than the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul wrote, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!”⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!¹⁰ For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.” (Gal 1:8-10). **In our zeal for more “converts” to Christ, we lowered the standard and expectation of what being a follower of Christ is all about.** We preach a “gospel of forgiveness”, or a “gospel of social action”, or a “gospel of entitled rights and privileges from God”, or a “gospel of self-fulfillment, or a “gospel of ‘being right’”, or a “gospel of religious performances”. We want “easy-believe-ism” where we accept God's grace, but we disregard His purpose, His standards or His calling to arms. **God is calling us to join up with Him in His kingdom purpose. He is calling us to become serious and committed followers of Christ.** He is calling us to become radically committed to discovering and following the leading of the Holy Spirit. **He is calling us to work through the difficulties of working with others, so that we can be effective in building up and supporting one another, and so that people will see the love and power of God at work in our interactions with each other.**