

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Calling of the Kingdom of God

by Dan Trygg

“...they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. ³ And Moses went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴ “‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. ⁵ Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’” These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.’

“So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which Yahweh had commanded him. ⁸ And all the people answered together and said, ‘All that Yahweh has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to Yahweh.”

Exodus 19:2-8

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to our God a kingdom and priests; and they will reign upon the earth.’”

Revelation 5:9-10

The NT refers to the Kingdom of God over 150 times, while it mentions “eternal life” on only 43 occasions. Yet the emphasis of our gospel preaching today is far and away about “obtaining eternal life”. Jesus only taught about “eternal life” on 2 occasions recorded by Matthew, once recorded by Mark, and only once does Jesus mention it in Luke. By contrast, the “Kingdom of God” is mentioned 110 times by these gospel writers. It was the apostle John, who recorded Jesus teaching about “eternal life” on 15 occasions in his gospel, and utilized the term an additional half dozen times in his first epistle. The book of Acts mentions “eternal life” twice, while it refers to the “Kingdom of God” eight times. Clearly, NT gospel preaching was more about responding to the Kingdom of God than it was an offer of forgiveness and “pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by-when-you-die”. In fact, even the term “eternal life” has been misconstrued in church history. It literally means “age-type life”, referring to obtaining the “life of the age to come [the Kingdom of God] now”. It means obtaining “life of the Kingdom”, ...the powerful, pure, empowered life of God’s reign and authority..., as *the means for living* as victorious “Kingdom people” in the here and now. This is almost unrecognized as a possibility by most churchgoers today.

What is the background for this concept, “the Kingdom of God”?

The first time it surfaces in biblical history is Exodus 19. God had delivered the children of Israel from bondage to the Egyptians, led them through the wilderness, the Red Sea, and to Mount Sinai. As he went up to meet with God on the mountain, **Yahweh called to Moses, commissioning him to present to the children of Israel the offer of a covenant with Him.** The form and language God used would have been instantly recognizable to the Israelites as a widely-used treaty form. **God followed the familiar form of a covenant between a king and his subjects.** According to the form of a Hittite suzerainty treaty, **He reminded them of His benevolent acts on their behalf:** “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself” (Ex. 19:4). **Then, He extended to them the offer of a covenant:** *If* they would obey His voice and keep His covenant, *then* they would be His unique possession from all the nations, for all the earth belongs to Him. They would be to Him a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation (a people set-apart and dedicated to Him).

This is a very important passage to understand God and His purpose for His people.

First, God presents Himself as a King. For God to present Himself as a King was huge advance in His self-revelation. **He had revealed Himself to the patriarchs as God Almighty** (Gen. 17:1). *Nothing* was too difficult for Him. He could protect, provide, and even work miracles on behalf of His servants. **Then, when He rescued the Israelites from Egypt, He revealed that He was Yahweh, a covenant-keeping God** (Ex. 6:1-8), who was dependable, faithful, and would fulfill His promises. Now, **by presenting Himself as a King, He is expanding His self-revelation to include being God of a nation, ...not just of an individual, or a family-group.**

Second, by using the Hittite suzerainty treaty form, He communicated that He is a benevolent King. This was a key distinctive of this treaty form. It always began with a rehearsal of the king’s benevolent acts toward those he seeks to make a covenant with. Other treaty formats emphasized the threatening might of the king who seeks to bring a vassal under his authority. The Hittite form was unique in introducing a treaty offer with a reminder of benevolent actions already taken on behalf of those invited to a covenant.

Third, a king, in that time, was an absolute ruler over his domain. There were two key responses that a king required from those under his authority, ...obedience and loyalty. We see these requirements reflected in the language of this covenant offer to the people of Israel: (a.) **Obedience** – “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My

covenant...” Note that there are *two separate aspects of obedience referred to here*: the keeping of the expressed covenant agreement, and the ongoing willing obedience of the King’s direction, which is open to change. It is *not* enough to keep the minimal terms of the covenant. The King requires obedience to *any command or direction* that has yet to be encountered or spelled out in the covenant agreement. **(b.) Loyalty** – “...you shall be to me a holy nation.” The word “holy” means “dedicated, consecrated, set-apart”. They were to be a people dedicated exclusively to Yahweh.

Fourth, to be in covenant with God as King meant that you became His possession. The word for “possession” also meant “property”. Basically, when you made a covenant with a king, you gave up your right of self-determination to come under his care and leadership. You became his property, his resource to utilize as he saw fit. Because of our upbringing as Americans, we have a hard time with this. Yet this truth is taught throughout the scriptures. For example, when Christ “redeemed us”, he paid a ransom to free us from bondage and enslavement to sin, ...but the other side of this coin is that we have been purchased *by Him and for Him*. We were slaves to sin, but now we are slaves to God. We are not our own, ...we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

Fifth, God intended to make His people a kingdom of priests. This is an interesting word picture. To refer to us as a kingdom means that He reigns over us. He directs our steps and our placement in life. But **to call us a “kingdom of priests” refers to our role as mediators between God and people.** Priests were people dedicated to serve God on behalf of the people, and they were also to serve people on God’s behalf. They were to promote the interests and needs of the people before God; and they were to promote the interests and concerns of God before people. Israel was to be a “light to the nations” (Acts 13:47).

Sixth, they were to be a “set-apart nation”, a nation distinct from other people. Not only were they to be “holy” in the sense of having a covenant loyalty to God, but they were to be visibly distinctive from other people. **They were to be “set-apart”, in that they lived differently, and that distinctive walk and lifestyle was a key aspect of their priesthood.** They were to be good advertisement for God, His ways, and His wisdom.

God instructed Moses to bring this covenant invitation to the children of Israel, and they agreed to align with God as their King, keep His covenant and walk in His ways. They said, “All that Yahweh has spoken we will do!” **Then Moses brought the words of the people back to God.** In a very real sense, Moses was the mediator of this covenant, because he was the “go-between”, the facilitator of the communication between the parties. Tragically, however, the Israelites were not consistently successful in keeping their part of the covenant. **In history, because they did not remain faithful to keep the covenant, honor God as their King, continue to be devoted and loyal to Him, they did not fulfill God’s intent for them to be a kingdom of priestly impact.** They became selfish, ingrown, and neglected both their priestly calling and responsibility toward God, and toward other nations. ***It is interesting to see how this covenant encounter set the stage for the remainder of OT history, and provides a foundation for understanding the Kingdom of God revealed in the NT church.***

We see reflections of this Kingdom covenant from Exodus in 1 Peter 2:9 in reference to the church, the “called-out” people of God: “But you are a chosen race (*kind* of people), a royal (Kingdom) priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, in order that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” ***We are called to fulfill God’s original calling for a people who are aligned with and dedicated to Him. We are God’s people, ...a people that He has bought and paid for, ...a people He possesses and directs, ...a people who are living to be loyal and obedient to Him, ...a people who seek to do His will. Our Kingdom priesthood is more clearly delineated here as proclaiming God’s praises.*** He is the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous, wonderful and amazing light. As we are filled with wonder at His goodness, it is not hard at all to brag on Him, and speak His praises.

Then, as the apostle John begins his book of Revelation, he speaks of Jesus as “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood-- ⁶ and **He has made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father**-- to Him the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6). Note that Jesus rules *all* the kings of the earth. Even if they oppose Him, His authority is greater. Again, He has loosed us from our sins and made *us* a kingdom. **The reign and rule of God are operational in His people, ...especially those who are yielded to Him.** Part of this “Kingdom calling” is that we are priests to God.

Finally, from Revelation 5:9,10, **we are introduced to Jesus as the Lamb that was slain**, who is worthy to open the scroll that no one else could open, “**Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.** ¹⁰ **You have made them to our God a kingdom and priests; and they will reign upon the earth.**” We find out from this passage that the people of God here are from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. ***We were purchased with Jesus’ blood, and now are joined to be a kingdom to God and priests to serve Him, ...and we will reign with Him on the earth.***