

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: April 20, 2008

Ministering to the Sick in Heart

by Dan Trygg

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

Luke 4:18,19

“Jesus answered, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick;’³² I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 5:31,32

What is it that we, as the church of Jesus Christ, are supposed to be about? What is supposed to be our main objective? That question could be answered in many different ways, and at many different levels. Without a doubt, the clearest expression of our marching orders would be Matthew 28:19,20, “Going, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to do all that I have commanded you...”. **This is the end product that we are working for: people identified with Jesus who are actively following Him in obedience in every area of life.**

If we step back, however, to the terms in which Jesus first used the word, “church”, it was in the context of warfare (Matt. 16:16-18). Peter’s open confession, “You are the Christ”, prompted the Master to commend him. This insight which Peter had received from the Father, and embraced with his heart, would become the bedrock upon which Jesus would build His called-out people, the church. He then added the significant declaration, “...and Hades’ gates will not be strong against it”. This was a declaration of intent. **The church, the called-out congregation of God’s people, was going to be on the assault, making raids against and laying siege to the fortified places of the enemy in this world.** Jesus’ word of encouragement is that **we will break through Satan’s fortifications, strongholds and barriers to break out and liberate those who have been held captive and oppressed by him.** This is an important part of the reality of the evangelistic-discipling enterprise. We are not to just be going out advertising our message, exposing people to our beliefs and preferences and letting them decide if they are interested or not. **We are commissioned to “take territory”. This is serious business. We are to be much more serious-minded, resolute and methodical than that. We are to figure out how to liberate as many people as we can.**

In the second world war, Germany had occupied France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, and other countries. Wherever it extended its control, the Third Reich imposed heavier taxation, strict curfews, and limitations to personal freedoms and civil rights. **In all of these countries, the oppression of the Nazis was felt and experienced by virtually everyone.** Food supplies became limited, prices rose, gas was rationed, dissidents were censored or arrested, people were dismissed from their jobs, property was confiscated. Jews, Gypsies, and other “undesirables” were systematically rounded up and removed into prison camps and detention centers, where they were forced to serve as slave labor, live under inhumane and deplorable conditions, and millions either died or were purposely executed. **Think of the vast disparity of experiences between the average middle class person in Paris, versus that of an interned Jew or Gypsy.** Can you imagine what the level of devastation was to a person whose entire family perished in the camps, who had been virtually starved, and had watched fellow prisoners beaten to death, or who perished in their arms? Can you imagine the hurt and resentment of those who had been betrayed by neighbors and co-workers into the hands of the Germans? Many citizens in Paris had little personal interaction with the German soldiers. War was real to them, too, but the level of personal destruction was much more limited in scale. **As you can imagine, after being liberated by the Allied Forces, the road to healing and recovery would be very different for people in these two very different scenarios.** In Paris, there may have been champagne served and parties. Within a few months, things would have stabilized and some semblance of normality would have returned. What those people needed was for jobs, and for the most part everything else would once again fall into place. For those liberated from the death camps, however, the road to recovery was very different. Aside from needing to recover from the physical trauma and health problems brought on by their trials, many had deep emotional wounds which seriously incapacitated them. They could never go back to their old neighborhoods. Post-traumatic stress and depression plagued them. Many never made the transition back to a normal everyday life. Even though the entire population of Europe was affected by the war, the experience of what that meant was vastly different, depending on who you were. **Many were under the oppression of the Third Reich, but the scarring and brokenness which some experienced was much, much deeper for some than others.**

All of this serves as an illustration for us to consider concerning the varying levels of oppression and brokenness which people coming to Christ may be recovering from. When we succeed in breaching the enemy's defenses, and we begin to liberate the prisoners, **we should not be surprised to find some of them emotionally and spiritually emaciated, sick, broken, vermin-infested, disoriented, and even tortured. People coming out of such brokenness will surely need to be nursed and cared for. They will need special grace and time to heal.** They will not necessarily be ready to join the ranks of the front-line forces for the kingdom of God right away. They may find it difficult to make the adjustments to life outside their former prison, at least in any short period of time. **They need their wounds dressed, and they will need to be cared for and rehabilitated, which can be a long and arduous process. Our expectations for their progress will have to be different than for those who are not so wounded.**

When Jesus described His mission, in Lk. 4:18,19, He was thinking of those who were especially downcast and broken. This went against the common wisdom of the spiritual elite of His day, as well as those of our day. They had disdain for the poor, captive, blind or oppressed. They believed that somehow their state in life was a judgment of God on their sins, or those of their parents (cf. Jn. 9:1,2). Instead of compassion, and a desire to help, they avoided any contact with these "sinners". Yet **Jesus said that God's Spirit was upon Him especially to liberate these most heavily weighed down by the burdens of their existence.** In Luke 5:27-39, we discover that the Lord had personally called a despised tax collector to follow Him. Moreover, He even went to the man's house for a dinner party, keeping company with the most notorious sinners of the town! When the religious notables of His time were grumbling at Jesus' disciples about this, the Lord overheard them. He responded to them, **"It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."**

Now, we tend to think we understand what Jesus was saying, but I believe our perception of what He was saying only scratches the surface. We are put off by the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and we tend to paint a heroic picture of the person who would go into the "den of iniquity" to rescue a sinner from the error of his ways. But, why do we think this is so *heroic*? Isn't it because we, too, tend to disdain the "sinners" of our times, and see them as "unclean", and even tend to think of them as being under the judgment of God? We think it is a wonderful thing to go into a bar and spread a few "gospel seeds", and quickly make our exit. **How different our mindset is from Jesus! He loved these people! He loved them as they were, where they were.** He loved them enough to go and hang out with them, on *their* turf! **He did not see them as despised sinners, rebels under judgment. He saw them as sick and broken, ...people who needed a doctor, not a judge.** We have been given a "preaching-oriented" way of viewing ministry, so we hear Jesus words, "I come to call ...sinners to repentance" as a proclamation and decision *event*, rather than seeing that Jesus is "inviting/summoning ...sinners to a change of mind/worldview". Repentance (change of worldview) is the end point of Jesus' statement. **The dawning of a new understanding of life and relationships happens as the patient is cared for by the physician and his friends.** Grace wins the heart, and opens the mind. Repentance comes through unexpected friendships and undeserved service. It comes through a process.

Jesus' statement justifying His behavior is especially insightful. He said, "The ones being whole/sound/healthy do not have need of a doctor, rather the ones having evil/unsoundness/unhealthiness/injury." This is not primarily moral evil, though it carries over into that. This is personal brokenness that Jesus is describing. Actually, the Greek is a little bit more awkward than can be easily translated. The word translated as evil or unsound is actually an adverb, not a noun. It is combined with a participial phrase, "the ones having/possessing/receiving". In other words, **these are people who have received ill, sick or evil treatment in their lives, and now possess the scars or infections of that hurtful treatment.** This perspective of hurting and broken people is very similar to what Matthew describes in 9:36. He records that Jesus was looking over the multitudes and "felt compassion for them, because they were distressed (harassed; picked-on-until-bloody) and downcast (thrown-down-on-their-backs-with-their-feet-up-in-the-air: stuck) like sheep without a shepherd." This is the context for the statement that "the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." See, we read that, and we think of the evangelist, the harvester, but we skip over the task of the shepherd. A harvester's job is kind of glamorous. He doesn't necessarily do the hard work of plowing, planting, weeding, tending to the crop. He is not in the process day-to-day. He shows up with his crew of workers when everything is mature, and he brings in the fruit. This is a time of great abundance and celebration. It is always fun and exciting when he comes around. But, the bulk of the work happens *before* and *after* the harvester comes. Interestingly, Jesus' comment isn't just about harvesters. It is about "workers". This encompasses the entire process. **Jesus wants us to ask God for spiritual physicians and shepherds who will bind up the wounds of the broken and nurse them back to health. He wants us to have plenty of grace and patience for those who are recovering from horrendous mistreatment and injury. Let grace summon them to repentance.**