

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 22, 2009

Deciding to Serve the King

by Dan Trygg

“And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God,¹⁵ and saying, ‘The time has been fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’¹⁶ And as He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen.¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’¹⁸ And they immediately left the nets and followed Him.¹⁹ And going on a little farther, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets.²⁰ And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.” Mark 1:14-20

Although we know from John’s gospel that Jesus had been actively ministering for about a year, He had been away from His home town, and from the region of His childhood, Galilee, for most of that time. Aside from the short trip to Cana, where He performed His first miraculous sign (Jn. 2:1-11), and a brief visit to Capernaum (2:12), it appears that He was traveling and ministering in Judea. John the Baptist had also been ministering there, in the wilderness of Judea, when Jesus was baptized. More recently, however, **John had moved to Aenon, near Salim.** The location is somewhat uncertain, but what is clear is that John had been moving from South to North along the Jordan. This Aenon may have been as far north as Mt. Gilboa, where the eastern end of the valley of Jezreel dips down toward the Jordan. He would have been on the western side of the Jordan, near the main highway which goes from the sea of Galilee to Jericho. **Although on the Samaritan side of the Jordan, this was considered part of Perea.** Samaria was on the upper plateau to the west of the Jordan valley. **Perea was under the control of Herod Antipas, who arrested John for criticizing his incestuous marriage with Herodias.** She not only was his niece, but he had stolen her away from his brother, Phillip (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). **Mark’s account of Jesus’ ministry begins after John was arrested.**

As soon as John was off the scene, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming a message quite similar to what John had preached. John had proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was “at hand”, or “on the verge” or “impending”. John had warned the people to get ready and prepare the way for the Lord’s coming. People were to repent and make their commitment to God known by their confession of sin and by being baptized as if they were new converts. **Jesus preached that “the time has been fulfilled” and the Kingdom of God was “at hand”. He also exhorted the crowds to “repent”, to change their perspective about reality, and to “trust in the good news”.** What “good news”? That the Kingdom of God was impending. What did *that* mean? Jesus would give further definition to it as He developed His ministry, but to the average Jew it probably stirred feelings of nationalism, that the King of Israel, the Messiah, was about to appear and free them from their Roman oppressors. That was the misperception that the Jews were enamored of in their day. What would be the misperception of our time? Would it be that if we believed in Jesus, everything will “go well”? Would it be that if we trusted in God, and gave our money in church, that God will multiply our money and make us rich? Or, do we think that simply “believing in Jesus” will get us forgiveness of sin and a free pass into heaven? Do these sound like things you have heard, or maybe even believed? Are these teachings borne out by Jesus’ ministry and the teachings of Scripture, or are these words that are misrepresentations of His message? Or, if they accurately reflect what Jesus *said*, are they correctly *understood*? Are we thinking Jesus was saying something that is different than what He actually *meant*? These are important questions to consider. This is not an issue we can afford to take lightly. **The consequences of misperceiving what Jesus meant are incredibly heavy.**

So, **what does the phrase, “Kingdom of God”, mean?** On the surface, it means God’s Kingdom, the area of His dominion. **The Kingdom of God is where God is honored and obeyed as King.** Of course, **if He is the King, what does that make the rest of us? His subjects.** We are the ones He rules over. Jesus clearly stated what the Kingdom of God means in the prayer He taught His followers, “Your Kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). **What does that mean for you? Instant and absolute obedience to the King.** It means honoring the King and carrying out His values, practices, and priorities in everything you do. It means *living to do His will.* It means acting in a way that demonstrates Him, His purposes, His character and His ways. Is that what you *want*? **Are you ready for that, to sign up to serve the King of Heaven at all times, and in every part of your life?** If that is true of your heart’s desires, if that is *really* what you *want*, then Jesus’ message would be good news to you. “But,” you say, “I don’t know if I can do that. I don’t know if I can be obedient like that.” Trust me, you *can’t*, ...not in your own strength anyway. If God made it possible for you to become obedient like that, is that what you *want*? *Would you choose to serve Him, and carry out His will for your life, if you could?* You see, that is what Jesus was preaching. He was preaching the *opportunity* to participate in the Kingdom of God. In the phrase, “the time has been fulfilled”, the

word for time means “season”, “opportunity”, or “time of crisis” has been completed. In other words, **Jesus was recruiting people who wanted to be servants of the King.**

The opportunity had come for them to make a decision, ...not a decision about what they *thought* in their heads, but a decision about *the active direction of their lives.*

They had an *opportunity for amnesty*, for forgiveness and cleansing from their past failures and disobedience, and **they had a chance to join the God squad, the company of those who were dedicated to living for the King.**

The essence of what both the Baptist and Jesus were doing was that *they were calling out a people.* They were calling out a people who wanted to serve God. Jesus had been already doing this for an entire year before John was arrested. John had kickstarted this part of Jesus’ ministry by referring some of his own disciples to Jesus. Then, in John 4:1, we learn that Jesus was making and baptizing *more disciples* than John was. **The objective of the ministry work was to “make disciples”, ...active, learning, obedient followers of the King.** We saw how Jesus had been *spending serious time* with them, how He was molding and shaping them through these discussions and teachings (Jn. 3:22). We saw that He was soon *involving them in the ministry work* itself, e.g. having them baptize (Jn. 4:2).

Now, in Mark 1:16-20, we see Jesus begin to ramp up His disciple-making strategy. He invites some of His followers, Peter, Andrew, James and John, to enter training to “become fishers of people”. These were the same men who were first introduced to Him through their connection with John the Baptist. They had already been following Him all over the Judean countryside, as He was going about preaching and teaching. We find out from this passage that they were fishermen. They were middle class people who had a means of supporting themselves. They were not serfs or slaves tied to the estate of some nobleman, ...nor were they unemployed day-laborers, dependent upon others to hire them for the day in order to provide for their households. They were, like Jesus, business people, accustomed to working long, hard hours, but ones who had a measure of flexibility and independence regarding when, or if, they went to work. In the case of James and John, their family business was large enough to support some hired servants, in addition to the needs of their own household. This kind of fishing was not just casting a line into the water. It was serious commercial fishing, requiring boats, nets for casting and dragging, and other tackle and equipment. **These men had invested heavily in their businesses, both in time, money, and years of know how.** They had established themselves in a relatively competitive business environment, finding fishing areas of consistent supply, as well as reliable outlets for the sale of their fish. **This had been their life, their livelihood, even their identities for their entire lives. Now Jesus is calling them to leave all of this in order to follow Him.**

We have no idea how these men were able to spend as much time with Jesus as they already had, but it is clear that **Jesus was asking for a deeper commitment. Jesus’ words to them were literally, “Come on after Me, and I will make you to become fishermen of people.”** Note that Jesus did not just call them to follow *Him* around. There was purpose in His call. **He was inviting them to come with Him so that He might effectively train them.** These guys were already deeply motivated, excited and dedicated to Jesus, as is evident by their presence in His Judean ministry. They were not just some Johnny-come-lately’s who wanted a chance to learn from the Master. These fellows had shown their commitment and determination by their presence and deepening involvement over time. **They had proven themselves to be quality men, men of commitment and purpose. Jesus picked the most promising of those who were following Him.** Note that this training was not going to be accomplished overnight. It was going to take more than just learning some information, or taking a series of classes. There was a process involved. The process involved following Him, learning from Him. **They were to watch Him, ask questions, learn both theory and technique from interaction with Him, and from their own stumbling efforts.** He was the Master, and they were to be apprentice-pupils. There was definitely going to be a hands-on, learn-by-doing aspect to this training. **These men had to be willing to try.** They had to be willing to put their level of comfort aside in order to learn new skills, and in order to see God at work. **They had to be willing to risk.** They had to risk embarrassment, failure, feeling inadequacy and frustration. **To their credit, they immediately left everything to follow Him.**

Never let it be forgotten that **the goal is to make disciples. We are to be catching people, calling out people, coming alongside people, and recruiting people who will be devote themselves to serving the King with whole-hearted obedience.** This goal has *not* changed. We are the fruit of the faithful, persistent obedience of those first disciples, and the many others who follow their example (II Tim. 2:2). The strategy has *not* changed either. Follow Him. He *will* teach you to become a catcher of people for the Kingdom of God. If that’s what happens if we follow Him, then what does it mean if we are *not* becoming “fishers of men”? Have we somewhere stopped following Him?