

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Faithful Disciplers

by Dan Trygg

“He spoke another parable to them, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.’”

Matthew 13:33

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to hold-firmly-to all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

Matthew 28:18-20

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

II Timothy 2:2

These passages describe the heart of Jesus’ strategy for spreading the Kingdom of God throughout the world. Remember, the enemy had been firmly entrenched here on planet earth for at least 4,000 years of recorded history, before Jesus showed up on the scene. **Although God had been working with the Jews for almost two millennia, they had only a minor impact on the world scene.** There were a number of curious onlookers, people who were drawn to some of what they saw or heard regarding the God of Israel, but very few outsiders took the plunge to become full-fledged followers of Yahweh. Most people on the planet knew very little about God’s dealing with the people of Israel, and often they were prejudiced *against* them. **The Jewish people, for their part, did little to reach out to their Gentile neighbors. The emphasis in their lives was *separation*.** They saw themselves as God’s holy people, but, instead of *reaching out* to their neighbors, they tried to remain *separated from* them. **Most of the lessons of the OT reinforced their need to be separated in order to successfully keep God’s commandments, without compromise.** Whenever they started to mix with their unbelieving neighbors, they soon began to dabble in their pagan practices. It did not take long for virtually the entire society to be lured away after idolatry and immorality.

The main difference between OT and NT believers was *the changed heart*. In the OT period, people agreed to follow God, but their hearts remained unchanged (Dt. 29:4). **OT believers were not “born from above” as is now possible under the New Covenant. Consequently, they were *sinful people trying to act righteously*,** by “keeping the rules”. The Law gave them no power to change their lives. OT history is replete with failure. It is a testimonial to the fact that sinful people tend to gravitate toward sinful behavior. They express outwardly what they *are* inwardly, by nature. **The essence of the New Covenant was the promise of a changed heart, and the indwelling power to live differently** (Dt. 30:1-6; Ezk. 11:15-20; 36:24-27; Jer. 24:7; 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13; 10:14-25). As God causes people who trust in Jesus to be “born from above”, they can experience a new dynamic for living (Jn. 3:1-8). God creates within them a new inner self that is “righteous, holy and true”, born from His very *sperma* (Eph. 4:24; I Jn. 3:1-9), ...a self that *wants to* do the will of God, and is utterly *unable to sin!* **In spite of this new nature living inside the Christian, the experiential battle between the sinful flesh and the new spirit-led inner self rages on.** *Learning to* trust what God says He has done within you, ...*learning to* put aside the old self and its evil practices in order to put on the new spirit-led life..., is an experiential faith struggle. **The radical, explosive and triumphant testimonies of early church Christians, believers during times of revival, and of many of those who seriously press after God, confirm the reality of what the NT teaches. Sadly, so often Christians settle for less.** Tragically, the church often looks no different than the world. Why? Because they are *not* following hard after Jesus. They are *not* serious-minded, active disciples. Their nonchalant manner takes them only to a very surface experience of what God would have for them. **They are not impassioned to live for God. They are not looking for real change, real life or real transforming power, ...so they find none.** This is critical, for if we do not have real *disciples*, how can we have *effective disciple-making?*

Disciple-making? What is “disciple-making”? Jesus charged His apostles to “disciple all the nations”. “Disciple” means to “make active followers”. This is the main task of the church. We are to “make disciples”. What does this mean? According to Jesus’ own words, *we make disciples by “baptizing into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”.* What does that mean? Baptism “into” someone’s name meant that you identified totally with that person, and you were committing your life and your allegiance to that person as your King. When we observe what the disciples did in the book of Acts, we see that they baptized into the name of Jesus. Baptism was a word picture of death and cleansing from the old, and rising up unto a new life and purpose. **We also make disciples as we are “going-about”.** This word covers both the idea of “as we live our lives” and the notion of “departing, going on a journey”. Both ideas fit, and are important, complementary notions. **It is saying that we make disciples “along the way”, as we live in our day-to-day activities.** Making disciples is not an activity that is

compartmentalized or relegated to a particular time in the week. It is to be going on all through life. We are to be advocating for Jesus at all times, and in every circumstance. **There is also a strong outward focus to bring the gospel *other places, ...outside of our own group, our own city, our own region or our own country*** (cf. Acts 1:8). There is a “go” emphasis to the “gospel” and the task of disciple-making. While OT believers were separatists, Jesus and His followers brought the message and the power of transformation to every class, group, race, or region imaginable. This is *part of the charge* given to us, “disciple *all nations*”. We can’t very well do that, if we stay at home. **Finally, we make disciples as we teach new followers of Christ to do all that Jesus commanded the apostles.** Unquestionably, Jesus was saying that we are to expect those who followed Him *to obey* His teachings. Not only are we to *expect* obedience, ...we are to *teach* it and *insist* on it. **How many of His teachings? Some? Those we like? Those that are easy or convenient? No. We are to teach disciples to firmly hold to ALL that Jesus commanded the apostles!** The standard is no less for *any* believer, regardless of age, race, gender, education, socio-economic status or background. **This is obviously not where we all start, ...but this is where we are all to be going.** This is the goal, the target, the objective, the end point of the discipleship process (cf. Eph. 4:13). As Jesus Himself said, “It is sufficient for the disciple to become *as his teacher*” (Matt. 10:24). **The purpose of being a disciple is to learn from and become like the one you follow.** This was Jesus’ expectation for *all* of His disciples, ...both the original apostles, and all who would be trained by *them*, and also for those who would later join the movement in the centuries that followed.

If we are to obey all that Jesus commanded the apostles, then we are also to “disciple the nations”, as He charged *them*. **The “discipleship responsibility” becomes ours, ...the responsibility of every Christian.** The parables of the Kingdom support this idea. In the parable of the sower, those represented by the good soil receive the seed (the Word) in an honest and good heart, understand it, hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance, some a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty (Matt. 13:23; Lk. 8:15). This is a picture of reproduction, ...of multiplication! **Jesus expects His people to multiply.** When a farmer planted a seed, he was not looking for a one-to-one return for his investment. In order to survive, or make a living, he needed to see a *multiplied* return. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven indicate that **Jesus expected His followers to start from a very small beginning and expand out to reach a large number of people.** The leaven will expand quietly, almost imperceptively, but it *would* expand and permeate the dough until the entire lump is affected. This is a great picture for what actually took place in early church history. **Because the church was relational, and centered in small home groups, when the numbers became too large for a single home, the group divided and a new home meeting was started somewhere else. In a short time, these groups permeated the neighborhoods across the city, and the church spread throughout the entire town.** If there was persecution, the believers were scattered and took their faith and home churches to new neighborhoods (Acts 8:1; 11:19-21). That is why the church could not be stopped, because there was no central leadership that could be eliminated and kill the movement. When leaders were arrested or killed, the people kept right on meeting, and the church continued to grow and expand. **Everyone knew what to do to continue to meet. They kept right on going about, baptizing, teaching what they had been given, and carrying out the charge Jesus gave, ...to obey all that He had commanded the apostles.** They did the best that they could, and God blessed them with growth.

Paul had been on the other side. He, as Saul, had been a persecutor of the church, before his conversion. He understood the unstoppable nature of the disciple-making church. *He* had tried to exterminate *them*. In the end, *Jesus* stopped *him* dead in his tracks, turned *his* life around, and appointed *him* to be an apostle to the Gentiles! **In his ministry, Paul often went into a city and preached at the synagogue. When the opposition became too strong, he would take the new believers elsewhere, starting a church in someone’s home.** He often had only a brief time to establish a pattern for meeting, and he would be forced to leave. The small gathering knew what to do, however, and purposefully set about to grow in their new faith, and to make disciples of their own. At times, Paul would come back to visit, or send his co-workers or write letters to offer guidance, but usually these churches were left to grow on their own. **His advice to Timothy, as he was nearing the end of his life was, “the things which you heard from me, entrust also to faithful people, whoever will be competent to teach others also.”** We have four generations here: Paul, Timothy, faithful teachers, the other recipients. Note, too, that **the goal is to pass on the teaching, to reproduce.** Timothy was to watch for those who would be faithful with this responsibility. **The future growth depends on people taking and passing along the message and disciple-training vision to others, ...others who will, in turn, look for people who will also pass along the message and training to others who will pass along...** If this is done well, a geometric progression will develop. *Multiplication* will happen, ...thirty, sixty and a hundred-fold. Home groups will develop, grow, divide and expand into other areas. People will step up, grow up, and train up others. **It all depends on finding the “faithful people” who will invest the effort to become adequate to teach others to teach others.**