

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: November 6, 2011

Keep the End in Focus

by Dan Trygg

“...make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own things and work with your hands...”

1Thessalonians 4:11

“...I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

1Timothy 2:1-4

“...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19,20

We who believe in Jesus need to be people of purpose. **One of the significant differences that came with knowing and following the God of the Bible was the notion that *life has meaning, purpose and direction*.** Other religions have focused on a cyclical view of life. **The idea of a larger purpose or direction is largely foreign to most other faiths.** Remember the movie, *The Lion King*? One of the recurring themes taught and celebrated therein was “the circle of life”. This is very much a dominant aspect of the belief system of the pagan world. We come on the scene, we grow up, we go through the stages of life, and then we die. **They believe we are just one part of the recurring cosmic drama of the changing of the seasons, the cycle of birth, death, rebirth.** Many non-Christian people believe in reincarnation, the belief that they themselves repeatedly cycle through life after life, ...living, dying, reborn as someone (or *something*) else. There is an endless struggle between evil and good. It has always been that way, and always will be. Good and evil are merely two sides of reality, like the two sides of a coin. Sometimes one side comes up, but eventually, as you keep tossing the coin, you will see that things even out. In a sense, neither side is better or worse. They just are what they are. We can expect evil. There is not much we can do about it. Eventually, things will even out and times will get better. Even as things get better, however, remember that the “down side” of the cycle is coming, so don’t get too excited.

There is a lot about this kind of thinking that seems to fit with our experience, so it has appealed to many. **One of the results of this view of reality, however, is a sense of fatalism and powerlessness.** If life is just cycle after cycle of good versus bad, fat versus lean, life versus death, there is little I can do to change all that. I am just an insignificant grain of sand on a seashore of relentless waves, ...pounded, then coming to rest, ...washed out to sea, then washed up on the beach. I cannot control the sea. I am at the mercy of forces way beyond my control, so I might as well learn to be content where I am. **The pagan religions generally either try to appease the gods, to get them to show mercy, ...or they develop a hapless resignation that “this is life”, and accept what comes.** They may live in the moment, celebrate the sensual pleasures of life, but they have little sense of destiny or purpose.

By contrast, the Creator gave humankind a mission, right from the beginning. We were to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, tame it, cultivate it and care for it (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). We were to master and utilize the forces of nature for our benefit, and for the productiveness of the planet. **Our input *could* make a difference. We were *not* simply at the mercy of the world around us. We *could* bring productive change.** Sin, of course, made this more difficult, but God has not rescinded His original commission.

This clear sense of purpose and destiny was underscored by God’s covenant to Abram in Genesis 12. There, God offered to use Abram to bring blessing to all the families of the earth. **This did not come without cost to Abram, however. In order to receive this possibility, Abram had to leave the comfortable life that he knew.** In his case, it meant that he literally had to move to another country, to a land he knew nothing about. He had to leave friends and family in order to pursue the calling God offered to him. We know nothing of the details of what Abram left behind, but we know that he was over 70 years old, and was fairly well-to-do, being a sheik or chieftain of a group that included 318 men who were trained for war (Gen. 14:14). It would be no stretch of the imagination to assume that his immediate clan was over 1,000 people. While Abram’s contemporaries were enjoying their “golden years”, this man of faith *left* his familiar grazing lands and treaty arrangements (...if he had even *been* a nomadic shepherd, as he *came to be* in Canaan – We don’t know, for sure). **He did so because of a promise, ...the potential of a greater future, a hope that by his choices he could benefit many others.** When you think of it, Abram did not really need anything for himself. He was comfortable. He was a prosperous chief, head of a respectably-sized tribe of herdsman. He had wealth, prestige, and relative power. He lacked for nothing. This was not enough, however. He had no children, no sense of destiny or purpose, no way to be remembered or leave his mark upon the world. That was where God met

him. He said that He would make a great nation of Abram, and would make his name great. He would give him blessings, and *cause him to be a blessing*. In fact, all the nations on earth could be blessed because of Abram.

The passing down of the covenant revolved around these same promises. Isaac would also become a great nation. He, and his son Jacob, were both told that all the families in the earth would be blessed through them (Gen. 26:4; 28:13,14). **God's plan has always been to make His people a blessing to others.** Israel was to become a light to all the nations (Isa. 49:6; Acts 13:47). When you think about it, *almost all of the heroes of the Bible saw beyond their own personal comforts and well-being and chose to become a blessing to others.*

This always carries a cost. You cannot be a blessing to others if you are just living unto yourself. To be a blessing to others, you must invest yourself in some way that will benefit other people. The world system tells us to "look out for number one", but God directs us to "...look out not only for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil. 2:4).

Jesus called us to settle for nothing less than to be a blessing to all nations. He commanded us to "disciple all nations". He said that people would "glorify God" when they see our good works. Paul picks up on this theme in his letter to Titus, "I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for people" (Tit 3:8).

It is important to remember that we who have aligned ourselves with Jesus are part of a world-encompassing movement. The goal He gave us is to reach the ends of the earth, and to make obedient followers of people from every people group on the planet. *That is to be our overriding priority, our chief concern.* Paul said that he chose to die to his self-interests every day, for the sake of the work of sharing the gospel. He admonished the Corinthians, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.' Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame" (1Co 15:33-34). **In Paul's mind, the commission to reach all people was so real, so urgent, and so "do-able" that there was no time to mess around.** To be dabbling in sin is to waste your life, to be unproductive in regards to Christ. He saw that every one of us had an important part to play in accomplishing the mission. The fact that in 67 A.D., just 37 years after Pentecost, there were still people who had not heard the gospel was "shameful". **If everyone got serious about their walk with God, and were faithful to disciple others to train others, it would only take a relatively short amount of time to reach the entire world.** I don't know if Paul worked out the mathematics, but it is true that it would have taken only a few decades to win the entire world of that time. This is no less true today, even as our world population approaches 7 billion people. **The problem is that people do not follow through. They stall out, or drop out, along the way.**

At the top of this study are a couple of passages about living a peaceful, quiet life, attending to our own affairs, and working with our own hands. This sounds like it is OK to just work, pay bills and quietly be devoted to God. This is *not* what Paul is advocating, however. In the first passage, the apostle commends the Thessalonian Christians for the depth of their love and commitment (I Thess. 1:2-5). They received the word with all seriousness, treating as it really is, as the word of God (2:13). Because of their devotion and hard work, the gospel message had "sounded forth" in Macedonia, Achaia, and beyond. This was only in a matter of *months*, ... a couple of years, at the very most. The "quiet life" Paul was advocating had nothing to do with lack of zeal for Christ, or actively serving Him. No. **The "quiet life" he was referring to was a reference to being responsible to work hard to care for one's own responsibilities, so that you would live a life that others would respect.** They were not to be "rabble rousers" or "party animals", they were to live responsibly. They were not to be slackers, beggars or thieves. They were to work to provide enough for their own needs, and extra to help others, as well (Eph. 4:28). They were to operate in a manner that others would find commendable. In other words, **they were to become good examples in the way they conducted their affairs. Their lifestyles should complement the gospel message, not detract from it.**

The same is true for the passage from I Timothy 2. The "tranquil and quiet life" he mentioned there was a life characterized by godliness (literally, "good-devoted-ness") and dignity (the Greek refers to a life that "earns reverence and respect in the eyes of others"). In other words, **they showed their faith by the way they lived. They "walked the talk".** Note the next couple of verses, "this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth". Paul told us to pray for our leaders, so we could live quiet and tranquil lives. Probably **Paul was encouraging us to pray for political and social stability, so we could share our faith without disruption. Once again, the overall mission was never far from his mind. It was about being a blessing to others by sharing our faith with them.**

There are several people in our little network who have recently finished school, or found new jobs. For some, it has been a long and difficult road, and they have worked hard to get where they are today. It is tremendous that they have accomplished what they have, and can see some tangible rewards, but **it is easy to lose sight of the bigger mission.** These successes are milestones in their lives, not destinations. God has a much larger plan. **He wants you to be a blessing to others. He wants to reach the world through you and me! Keep the end in focus.**