

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Showing Forth the Greatness of God

by Dan Trygg

“O Lord Yahweh, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours?”
Deuteronomy 3:24

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”
1 Peter 2:9-10

God has had a very clear and consistent purpose in mind for choosing to recruit people into a covenant relationship with Him. In both the old and new testament record of God's revealed thoughts and actions, He has acted to call out individuals, families and even nations to become “His people.” **He has done *very great and powerful things* on their behalf. He *showed His personal nature* by interacting with them to address very specific individual needs and concerns. He *made covenant promises* with them, and showed that He was faithful to remember and do what He said He would do.** He is a reliable, covenant-keeping God. He also showed His mighty power by delivering His people from the oppressions of slavery in Egypt. Through miraculous acts and frightful plagues, He compelled the king of one of the greatest nations of that day to let His people walk out of the land, unhindered. When Pharaoh went back on his word, and tried to re-enslave the Israelites, God did incredible things to protect His people, and obliterated those who opposed Him. **What was His purpose? *To clearly reveal who He is, and to plainly expose other so-called gods and religious belief systems as fraudulent and void of any real power. Why? So that those who are captivated by false religion could see the reality of the one, true God, Creator and Redeemer.*** Those under the darkness of superstition and ignorance could know truth and learn to live in ways that are healthy and bring life. **His purpose was to reveal something of His glory, wisdom and goodness, so that others would know of Him and choose to honor and follow Him.**

When He brought the Israelites to Mount Sinai, *it was not just for them, but to make known to all nations what kind of Being He is, ...holy, just, powerful, mighty, and a God who offers forgiveness and covenant love.* His wise teachings were given for the good of *that* nation, and for *any people* who would choose to embrace and follow them. They have stood the test of time as producing *physical health, social stability, and civil justice and fairness* for those who follow them. Moses recorded God's words and actions for future generations to learn from.

A key aspect of God's strategy for spreading the word about who He is, and to invite others to come, was to appoint the nation of Israel to become a special people, a people dedicated to serving Him and keeping His instructions, so that others could see the goodness and wisdom of His ways. When God invited them to make a covenant with Him, *He reminded them of what He had done for them, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 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; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Ex. 19:4-6). **God's redemptive act, His deliverance from slavery in Egypt, was the basis for them to consider making a covenant with Him.** His primary appeal to them was that He was *good, and to be His was to live under His care and protection.* **It was a free decision to make for every individual.** If they made that decision, they acknowledged God as their Leader and King. **That decision entailed choosing a lifestyle of obedience to Him.** If they would walk with God as their King, and follow His directions for life, then He would embrace them as His own in a special way. They would be set apart to and for Him, and He would care for them in a unique way, as well. **Note that God intended to make a “kingdom of priests” of those who would respond.** A kingdom is the reign and rule of a king, the “king's dominion”. The focus is not just on making God their “boss”, however. **He wanted to make them to be a kingdom of “priests”.** **What does that mean? *Priests are intermediaries between God and other people.*** They bring the needs and appeals of the people to God, and they bring the teachings and forgiveness of God to the people. **As people choosing to live under God's leadership and instruction, God would use them to set forth a visible picture and appeal to outsiders,** so that they could know something about who God is, and what it means to serve Him. Their lives and words were to function as a bridge to God for outsiders, and as a way for Him to appeal to them. **The nation was to show forth the excellencies of God to other peoples.**

Of course, even though the people made the covenant with God, they soon failed to honor their part. Instead of them winning others to God, the history of Israel sadly showed the tendency of half-hearted religious people

to wander away from God. **They did not make Yahweh appealing to others.** Instead, they abandoned Yahweh for other religions. **Throughout OT history, however, there was always a remnant who stayed true to God.** The Lord often heard the cries of *their* hearts for revival, and used *their* lives to reveal the truth to others. **In the end, it is *their* testimony that has endured.** No one reads about the gods of the Canaanites today, but the book of Yahweh, the Bible, is still the most published, purchased and read book in the world.

When we come to the NT, we see that God's strategy has not changed. He still is calling out a people for Himself, a people who would comprise a Kingdom, **a people who would declare or display His excellencies before a watching world.** I have to say that **the world today is not paying much attention to words *alone*.** *Talking* is easy, *doing* is tough. People want to *see* something different, or they are not impressed. Why *should* they listen, if it seems that church people are no different than other people? (And, statistically, there is currently *not* much different between many church people and unchurched people!) **Jesus understood this well. It was the same in His day.** He told people, "If I do not *do* the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I *do* them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (Jn. 10:37-38). He was basically saying, "My *walk* matches My *talk*." Then, He told His followers that people would experientially-know that they were His disciples, if *they* loved *one another* as *He* loved *them* (Jn. 13:34,35), ...that is, if *their walk* matched *their talk*. **Jesus had taught His followers to check religious people out by the *fruit* of their lives** (Matt. 7:15-20; 12:33). **If the *fruit* of their lives does not match their *claim* to being godly, there is something wrong.**

Peter broke it down for the readers of his first epistle. Their joy in trial brings praise to God (1:6-8). If they call the Holy One their Father, then "be holy yourselves" and "don't be conformed to your former lusts, when you were ignorant" (1:14-16). Having souls that have been purified, "love one another fervently, from the heart" (1:22). "Putting aside all evil motives, deception, hypocrisy, envy or slander, long for the pure milk of the Word, that you might grow up in your salvation" (2:1,2). "Abstain from fleshly desires that wage war against the soul" and "live habitually in a beautiful way, so that even evildoers, when they see your good deeds, will glorify God" (2:11,12). "For the Lord's sake, submit to human authority, ...so that, by doing what is right, you might silence the ignorance of foolish people" (2:13-15). "Patiently endure unjust suffering, ...not returning name-calling or threats, but follow Jesus' example" (2:18-24). "Wives, live cooperatively with your husbands", and, "likewise, husbands live with your wives in an understanding way, ...giving them honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life" (3:1-7). "Turn away from evil, and do good" (3:11). "Keep a good conscience, so that people who desire to slander you may be put to shame, because of your good behavior in Christ" (3:16). "Purpose to no longer live for human lusts, but for the will of God, not living in sensuality, drunkenness or wild parties. People will be surprised that you don't run with them into these activities..." (4:2). "Be clear-headed and disciplined for prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for each other, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As you have received special gifts and abilities, use them to serve one another as good stewards of God's grace" (4:7-10). **Practical enough for you? Note throughout the *dual purpose*, ...to honor God and to display His life through ours to others.**

How am I supposed to do all this? First of all, you can't do it on your own! God never intended that you could or would be able to suck it up and do all this on your own. That is part of what the failures of Israel in the OT were meant to teach us. *Apart from a radical transformation of the heart, and the daily empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we are unable to make such sweeping and continuous change in our lives.* God saw that sin had corrupted the human heart, so that its motives and intents are evil and deceptive (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9). Even Moses understood that the Israelites would soon wander from the covenant commitments they had made. He had seen it for himself repeatedly, and he understood that it was because their hearts were still fleshly and unchanged (Deut. 29:4). **Secondly, God has made heart transformation a possibility.** It was an OT prophecy that God was going to make a new covenant, one that would change the hearts of people, and give them a new Spirit (Jer. 24:7; 31:31-34; Ezk. 11:19-21; 36:24-27). Jesus came to inaugurate this new covenant. By His shed blood, our sins were paid for, so they could be forgiven. His death for us removed any barrier of sin that stood between us and God. The Holy Spirit was called "the promise of the Father" because He is the one to fulfill the prophetic promise, and make us new. Those who believe are born from above, and become new creations in Christ. While we still have our old thought patterns and fleshly bodies to deal with, something *new* is working inside of us, creating *new desires* and giving us *the ability to change*. **Third, transformation happens as we learn to recognize God's teaching, leading and prompting and act according to what He is showing us** (Jn. 5:19). Paul puts it this way, "*work out your salvation* with fear and trembling, for *God is at work in you* both to will (the new desire) and to work (the new ability) for His good purpose" (Phil. 2:12,13) This is the growth edge for most of us, learning to tune in to the Holy Spirit, and responding to Him in obedience. This is a learning process. It often requires definite, conscious attentiveness on our part to become sensitive and cognizant of the Spirit's leading. **By transformed words and deeds we will most effectively show forth the greatness of God.**