

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Giving Birth To A Movement

“...upon this rock I will build My church.”

Matthew 16:18

“If perfection was through the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not to be designated according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being transferred, out of necessity also a transfer of law comes to be.”

Hebrews 7:11,12

“...the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things among you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? ...Do you not know that those who perform temple service (Levites) eat out from the temple, and those who serve at the altar (priests) share together in what is sacrificed on the altar? In the same way also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

I Cor. 9:10,11,13,14

One of the early scenes appearing in each of the synoptic gospel accounts is the call of the disciples.

In each case it *appears* that Jesus walks up to complete strangers, and calls them to follow Him. The response is abrupt and dramatic. **They stop whatever it is they are doing, and leave to go with Jesus.** Peter and Andrew are casting nets; they immediately leave the nets and the boats and follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18-20). James and John are mending nets with their father and the hired servants, when Jesus comes along. Again, they immediately put down what they are doing and come after Jesus, leaving their father and the servants undoubtedly somewhat dumbfounded (Mk. 1:19,20). Several days later, passing by the tax office of the prosperous Levi (Matthew), in the midst of a busy business day Jesus called him to follow; and he, too, left everything, ...his desk, records, and waiting clients..., in order to follow Him (Mk. 2:1,13,14).

The point of these brief accounts is *not* to impress us with the “spookiness” of Jesus’ persona, ...i.e., that He could come up to total strangers and get them to leave everything to follow Him. No. In fact, we find out from John’s account that these men *had* been following Jesus for some time, ...that they had spent time with Him, had traveled with Him, and had done ministry activities with Him as His representatives before this call ever took place (Jn. 1-4; cf. Matt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14). The point of these accounts is that they describe Jesus’ invitation to these men to a *deeper level of commitment*, ...one that would require their *full attention*, ...a commitment to intensive training and leadership. So, almost from the beginning of our exposure to the story of Jesus’ ministry, we are given the model of the disciples’ abandonment of their former employment as a normative expectation for those who would be leaders and spokespeople in the years to follow.

This point is driven home even *more* emphatically in Luke 5, when we see Jesus *re-issue* the call to the earliest four, who had evidently felt uncomfortable with the arrangement, and returned to their former livelihoods. After the miraculous catch of fish, they are convicted for their lack of faith, and the Lord, in restoring them to their calling, says, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men” (vs. 10). Certainly, in their case, to be able to be actively involved as part of what Jesus was going to do in ministry *presupposed* that these men needed to be freed up from their everyday employment to be trained by the Master. This was an especially important prerequisite for those chosen from among all the disciples to become *apostles*, because *they needed to be able to travel* with Jesus as part of His team (Mk. 3:13-19). Jesus Himself had given up carpentering to pursue His ministry full time, now He was requiring His most intimate and trusted leaders to also do the same. Though not specifically spelled out, **it would seem that *this was necessary and expedient in order to be free to move about, to invest the great quantity of time required for their training, and to be able to be free to give themselves to serve others* in preaching, teaching and attending to needs.**

How did they live? How were their needs and expenses met? Through private contributions (Lk. 8:1-3). **What did Jesus teach these men concerning this issue? (1.) That “the laborer is worthy of his wages”** (Lk. 10:7) and **(2.) that God would care for their needs through people.** He specifically sent them out in teams, with no extra provisions, so that they would learn these lessons (Lk. 9:1-6,10; 10:1-24), and later on He reminded them of what they had learned (Lk. 22:35).

Why is this so important? Because Jesus was establishing precedents that were later accepted and followed as normative. The understanding of the early church was that elders/shepherds should be supported so that they could be free to attend to the flock. David Bercot wrote a book called *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* It is described as “A New Look at Today’s Evangelical Church in the Light of Early Christianity”. It is a readable account of many of the teachings commonly believed by the Christians in the period from 90-199

A.D. In a chapter entitled “Why They Succeeded Where We Often Fail”, Bercot writes, “Although we use many of the same names for church leaders as did the early Christians --such as elders and deacons-- our church government differs considerably from theirs in *substance*. Instead of a *sole* professional pastor, the *entire body of elders were full-time pastors* in the early churches. ...Unless the congregation was simply too small to support them, **elders were simply expected to free themselves from any secular jobs. By doing so, they could devote their full attention to the flock.** ...Imagine the benefit to the early Christians of being shepherded by bodies of elders whose sole concern was the spiritual well-being of their congregations. With so many full-time pastors, each member of the congregation undoubtedly received close, personal attention” (selected portions from pp. 44,46,47). Bercot’s commentary on the effectiveness of multiple leadership touches on the genius of the very thing Jesus was attempting to get established, ...a plan which had a solid, well-established OT foundation.

Bercot goes on to point out, however, that “an elder didn’t leave his secular occupation *in exchange for a middle-class salary* from the congregation. **It was considered heretical for a congregation to pay any salary to its overseers or elders**” (pg. 47). **How do we reconcile the emphasis on “releasing many leaders”, with the belief that it was “wrong for a congregation to hire them”?** It would seem that Jesus’ example, and that of the other apostles, reveals a simple, effective model: let people *contribute* to their support.

Jesus stated very clearly that the laborer is worthy of his wages (Lk. 10:7). Because this was spoken in the context of people teaching and preaching the Good News, **the connection between spiritual labor and material support is obvious.** The apostle Paul picked up on this, and stated the principle clearly in several settings (Rom. 15:26,27; I Cor. 9:11; Gal. 6:6; I Tim. 5:17,18). It is important to note that **Paul saw this as similar, at least in principle, to the Levitical system of the tithe. He used that OT precedent to defend the “right” or “authority” which Jesus had given to those who are devoted to preaching the Word to justly be supported for their labor.** In fact, it is *this* apostle who most vehemently and clearly defends its theological and practical basis, even though he himself chose to *not* make use of this “right”. **He is the one who reminds those of us who would pursue this calling that “the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel”** (I Cor. 9:14). The prescription and burden of this verse is directed to the preacher-teacher, only secondarily to the people he or she ministers to. **Jesus gave us His prescription. We ought to follow that as normative.**

We must, like those first apostles, learn to trust God to supply our needs. God will work through *people* to do that, but Paul does not give us a specific verse to use to tell *others* how they are to support us.

The writer to the Hebrews does make a more direct connection for us as givers, however. Whereas Paul only used the system of the Levites and the tithe (utilized to support them) as one of several *comparisons*, **the author of Hebrews makes a stronger link to actually transfer the principles of that system over from the Levites to the people of the New Covenant who do the kinds of things Levites did, ...things that require that people be freed up from other employment in order to be more fully devoted to perform.** The logic of the case the author makes is that just as the Levitical system was incomplete and needed to be replaced by another, totally different kind of priesthood, one “according to the order of Melchizedek”, in the same way all the dependent sub-parts of that system would also be changed under the regime of the new kind of priest. All of those OT teachings and principles are not just irrelevant, *passé* minutia, however. **According to Jesus’ own words, He came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it** (Matt. 5:17). **Since He is the new high priest, He is the one who will inform us as to how the change of priesthood effects a change of law** (Heb. 7:12; cf. I Cor. 9:14). Just as He became a greater high priest, even though He was not from the tribe of Levi, or from the family of Aaron, ...and the entire Levitical priesthood symbolically paid tithes to Him when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:4-10), so now those tithes offered to God are to be distributed according to the principles of the *New Covenant*. No longer are they to be limited to the tribe of Levi, but **the tithes are now to be used to support the New Covenant servants who do the kinds of things Levites did, i.e., teach and shepherd the people of God.**

What Jesus was doing, by calling His apostles to leave their jobs, was establishing the foundation for a movement that would reach far beyond first century Palestine. He was calling upon, and liberating, the principles of the OT tithe in order to be able liberate one out of every ten families to be devoted more fully to care for the needs of the flock of God. **If we would give ourselves to implement the principles Jesus established, we would see, once again, the effectiveness and genius of the plan which God had in his mind for the spiritual health of His people, and the spread of His message across the globe.** It will require us to depart from the practices and traditions we are surrounded by, and to give the Lord the “first part of our income” (Prov. 3:9,10), but if we do this much, I believe we will see some awesome results.