

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Kingdom Reality or Social Construct?

“Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also was seated at the feet of the Lord, listening to His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.’ ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but of *one* thing is there a need, for Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.’”

Luke 10:38-42

“...you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

I Peter 1:18-19

“The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, ...abundantly.”

John 10:10

“Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but you may take-away a full reward.” II John 1:8

I had an interesting phone call this morning from a young black man from Minnesota who is currently in Arkansas, going to school. Whatever prejudice or racial bias he had encountered here did not at all prepare him for the much more rigid and oppressive realities of race relations in the deep South. The other day, another young black fellow took him aside and told him he has to be more careful about his interactions with whites. It is *dangerous!* On the other end of the spectrum, I am trying to work with a young woman of color from the South, and I am sure she is having some difficulty processing how to interact with this old white guy! It is outside the norm of her experience, or of the patterns of life she grew up with. Later this morning, I am to meet with a couple of women from outstate Minnesota, who are dealing with entrenched teachings regarding the place of women in the church. The group they have been fellowshiping with have very clear and strongly-held convictions about how women are not to teach in church, or what their relationships are to be like with their husbands. Unfortunately, their beliefs are *not* derived from a clear, informed understanding of the biblical text. They are more a representation of a traditionalist cultural viewpoint, than an accurate understanding of the text. Interestingly, my morning study today brought me to Luke 10:38-42, where one young woman dared to stand up to the social norms of her time, and Jesus defended her.

Part of my discussion with my friend from Arkansas began with an observation he made about time. He had come to realize that **our concepts of time, as divided into calendar months, numbered years, hours and minutes were just social constructs.** Outside of the *objective realities* of a day and night cycle, and a yearly seasonal cycle, most of our ways of discussing time are very *arbitrary*. Earlier this week, another friend mentioned how until the last 150-200 years, people rarely thought of time in terms of hours and minutes. Time was thought of in terms of a portion of the day. “Hours” could be longer or shorter, by today’s “60 minutes” measurements, depending on the length of the daylight at a particular season of the year. It wasn’t until the production and distribution of affordable mechanical clocks became widespread, that the artificial concept of time as we know it today became more accepted. Even until recently, differences over when to change over to “daylight savings time”, were decisions made on a local level, and not everyone complied with them. With the advent of factories, and labor laws that limited work schedules, ...or contracts that determined pay to be calculated by the hour, rather than the day or the “piece”..., the centrality of our “clock-oriented” constructs became established in American culture. **In truth, however, most of the people who ever lived on this planet did not know about or follow such an artificial way of thinking about time.** Even today, different cultural groups and life-settings have little interest in our compulsivity regarding time and schedules. They remain “event-oriented”, rather than “clock-oriented”.

The concept of “race” itself is a relatively recent development in human history. It wasn’t until the 19th century that a biological basis of “race” was proposed and became commonly held. Before that time, “*race*” had more to do with one’s ethnic heritage or background than with any physical characteristics. With the advent and expansion of British and American slave trade, “race” took on new significance as a way to distinguish those who were in power from those who were being sold as commodities. Interestingly, the word “slave” originated about 1300, when Germanic people conquered Slavonic tribes in Europe and sold them to Arabs during the Middle Ages. The first “racial” grouping by the British slavers were the Irish during the early 1600’s. Soon, however, they were replaced by blacks being kidnapped by or sold to the British and American slave traders. In the late 1600’s and 1700’s, laws were being written to exclude Indians and black slaves from obtaining rights or legal freedoms. **It was not until the late 1700’s that physical characteristics began to be used as a basis for defining “race”.** It was none other than Thomas Jefferson who, in 1781, became one of the first prominent American politicians to propose that “blacks are inferior to the whites”. The advancement of evolutionary theory, amid the implicit need to justify the

mistreatment of one group of people by those in power, promoted and supported the belief in racial categorization based upon physical characteristics. In reality, this categorization is patently *artificial* and *arbitrary*. ***It is a social construct, without merit, devised by evil, greedy men to separate and divide the human family. It is an idea, a belief, that has created alienation, oppression, abuse of power, murder and untold sorrow.***

It is amazing how powerful an idea can be. A judgment, belief or agreed-upon social construct can change or control our lives. Many of these are without any rational or objective basis. For example, one ancient Jewish opinion, recorded in the Talmud, said that it is “better to burn the Torah than to teach it to a woman” (*y Sotah 3:19a*). Another, from the Mishnah records, “If ever a man gives his daughter knowledge of the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery” (*Mishnah Sotah 3:4*). These quotes represent a commonly held belief in first century Palestine. **Mary of Bethany dared to take the place of a disciple, and sit at the feet of Jesus, to hear His teachings.** (She was the Rosa Parks of Jesus’ women disciples!) **This would have been shocking to Jews of that day, yet Jesus made no attempt at censure or reproach. In fact, He defended her, affirmed and protected her choice to sit among the disciples and learn.** Sadly, so many sisters through the ages have not proudly followed her example. To choose to *not* learn is to give the power of knowledge, ideas and truth to others, who may not have your interests at heart. It is to allow the forces of darkness keep the “good old boys” power structures in place, keeping half the human family from developing their spiritual maturity and God’s calling on their lives. **People without knowledge are easily controlled.**

Jesus confronted many accepted social norms. Many beliefs were not actual teachings of the Law, but were traditions, social-constructs, that were human interpretations and applications of how people thought the Law should be applied. Jesus often by-passed others’ sense of propriety, in favor of mercy, justice or truth (Matt. 9:10-13; 12:1-13). **He rejected many interpretations as foolish, and out of step with God’s purpose** (Mk. 7:6-13).

Peter says that we have been redeemed from the vain, foolish or worthless ways of living that were handed down to us by previous generations. This is an important part of our salvation. *Finding freedom from beliefs and habit-patterns of living that came from our parents is an important aspect of spiritual growth.* **Jesus poured out His soul to death** (Isa. 53:12) so that we would find freedom from false beliefs and unproductive, ineffective living. **Unproductive? Ineffective? Yes.** These words imply *purpose*. **Our lives are supposed to produce something. They are to be effective for God.**

The idea of “redemption” was to be bought out of slavery to our old master, Satan, so that we could be free to serve God, who paid the price for our freedom. **Satan is an evil, abusive master.** Jesus said that he is a thief, who comes to steal, kill and destroy. **He is the one who is behind these destructive false beliefs, these social constructs that define people into roles that limit them, steal their potential, and keep them powerless.** Jesus came to set us free from those false beliefs. *He laid down His life so that we could walk in freedom, rather than bondage.* He didn’t lay down *His* life so that we would *waste ours* in front of the TV, or boozed-up in self-medication. He has a purpose for our lives. We can live in ways that are *effective*, or *ineffective*, ...*productive*, or *unproductive*. **Most of us have grown up in homes, families or cultural groups that have taught and modeled ways of living that are not constructive for God’s purposes. We have to recognize this, and learn new ways of living, ...ways that are healthy, and will produce growth and change in our lives.**

That price He paid? He bought us for Himself. We are *not* our own (I Cor. 6:20). We are *His*. **What kind of Master is He? He came to give us life, and to give it to us abundantly, ...overflowingly.** **The life He gives is to more than fill us. It is to fill us to the full and keep coming, so that the overflow of His life will spill out onto those around us.** We will find ourselves *wanting* to *share*, to *give*, to *serve*, to *help*, ...all because He becomes a fountain of life inside of us. As long as we obediently *give away* His grace, we will receive *more* to give. **Do you see yourself growing in your desire and capacity to give and serve? That should be the norm.** That should be what we expect from spiritual growth, a larger desire and capacity to help others. A deeper and abiding relationship with Jesus will produce greater or more effective fruitfulness in our lives (Jn. 15:5). **If you are not seeing this happen, press in after God in prayer. Throw open the doors of your heart and life, and ask Him to show you what needs to change.**

The apostle John warned of the danger of losing “the full reward”. This idea is found repeatedly in the NT. Jesus warned us to be watchful, and not to become lax and sloppy about our spiritual lives (Matt. 24:42-51; 25:1-30). **Those who become lazy, or do not stay focused on God and their spiritual walk, can be led astray and lose the true impact God intended for them to have.** Not only will *they* suffer loss, but the *potential* of what they could have accomplished will have been aborted. **Satan is working all the time to try to pick away at our effectiveness.** Don’t let him steal your reward. **Don’t allow him to defraud you of your relationship with Christ, day to day, ...or of the impact of what God would do through your life, if you would yield to Him.**

Do not allow the social constructs of society, or the ineffective habit-patterns of family, limit what is God’s desire for your life. Let God determine how much He can do with you, and don’t miss out on any of it!!