

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Why Are We Here?

by Dan Trygg

“Let me sing now for my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved concerning His vineyard. My Well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. ² He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. ³ And now, ... ⁴ ‘What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?’ ... ⁷ For the vineyard of Yahweh of hosts is the house of Israel, ... His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.” Isaiah 5:1-4,7

“Brethren, join in following my example... ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” Phillipians 3:17-19

These two passages happened to come up in my daily reading recently. **They contain the opposite extremes of a spectrum.** *On the one side* was ancient Israel, who, although God had prepared everything for them to do well and righteously in life, gave themselves to pursue vanity and evil. *On the other end* of the spectrum, we have the apostle Paul and other serious Christians, who *were putting aside wasteful and unproductive things* in order to discover more of God and live more effectively for Christ. Then, Paul alludes to *others*, some even claiming to be Christians, who seem to be serving their appetites more than God. They appear to be more like the Israelites of Isaiah’s time than people living for the Kingdom of God.

In Isaiah 5, the prophet sings a love song to God, about His vineyard, the nation of Israel. The words for “sing”, “song”, “beloved” are words used in the Song of Solomon. *That* was a love song, ... the “song of songs”. Instead of a song of delight, as that one was, Isaiah’s rendition would have been more of a country western style tragedy. Here **God had done everything He possibly could do for His people, but in the end, they ignored and turned against Him. He expected them to be loyal to Him and “produce good fruit”, the fruit of righteousness and justice. Instead, they betrayed Him and produced the worthless and bad fruits of injustice, bloodshed and abuse.** What were they doing? Instead of loving God and drawing near to Him, they were focused on attaining material wealth and greedy prosperity. They cavorted in drunkenness, wild parties, music and entertainment. --*They did not perceive what the Lord was doing around them, anymore, or His attempts to communicate with them.* They would experience disaster because they lacked knowledge of God and truth.-- Their experimentation with sin started out like “spider-web strings of deceit” (fine, nearly-invisible *snares*-strings), but ended up being like the thick ropes used by beasts of burden to pull heavy loads (the oppressive consequences of sin), ... a powerful picture of the entrapment and bondage of addiction! --*Their perception of truth and goodness became so clouded and twisted* that they began to call what was good evil, and what was evil was thought to be good.-- They had become wise in their own eyes, and were *unteachable*.

By contrast, Paul had given up anything and everything for the sake of knowing God, and being useful to Him. Even the things he had striven to accomplish in order to become recognized as a religious teacher, ... his study, his training and the credentials recognized by other people..., he chose to *set aside* for the sake of intimacy with Christ. **There was no amount of self-effort or discipline that could earn acceptance with God, or obtain a righteousness that could be compared with what Christ offered as a gift,** to those who would trust and believe in Him. In order to know God, however, and have the righteousness that comes by faith, he had to abandon, disregard and reject all his confidence in his own strivings. **He had to take all those things he had once taken pride in and count them as nothing, ... as rubbish..., so that all his hope and confidence were solely in Christ.** Beyond that, he counted *everything* to be *loss*, to be *as nothing*, for the surpassing value of truly knowing Christ, to be found in Him, to know the power of His resurrection, ... to even share in His sufferings and be made like Him in His death, so that he might share in His resurrection. Paul’s entrance into Life was the same as what Jesus had preached to His followers, “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself (his *natural* self, his *self-life in this world*), take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Lk. 9:23). Paul *did* what Jesus had taught. **We all come to God in Christ the same way: We come empty, void of any self-pride, or self-righteousness. We all come into the Kingdom as equals. We come in empty, standing only in the grace provided by Christ.**

Paul went on to say, however, that *this* was also the way to maturity, ... to count all else as unimportant, as insignificant, ... to disregard and be willing to jettison *anything and everything* that might keep us ineffective in our pursuit of intimacy with God and fruitfulness in His service. Does it make sense that we would give it all up to *find* Christ, ... and then, having found Him, to *put Him on the back shelf* in order to gain the pleasures and obtain the

accolades of this world? **Paul remained surrendered to Christ, yielded to Him and committed to His will.** He *continued* to count all things as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ, and being useful for Him. He said, “But one thing I do, overlooking (disregarding) the things *behind me*, I extend myself toward the things *before me*, ...I pursue toward the goal for the prize of the *upward calling* of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14). In other words, **he put no value in the things of his past life, or the values of this present world. He overlooked those things, choosing instead to pursue the things of God.** He went on to say that **whoever are mature ones in Christ will have this same focus.** Those following a different agenda, but who want Christ, will find that God will reveal to them the same mindset that Paul embraced. We are to be imitating Paul’s example, as well as that of other people like him (3:17).

Sadly, however, there are some, in fact many, who live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Paul is not talking about unbelievers, but people who profess to believe in Jesus! This is why he is so emotionally moved. They had come to *see* that Jesus had died for them, and they *professed* to believe in Him. **BUT, they are living lifestyles that deny His Lordship.** The end of their pathway is ruin, destruction, or waste. It is hard from this verse to tell if they are eternally lost, or if Paul is simply mourning the tragic wastefulness of lives spent so unproductively. It is not good, in either case. “*Their god is their belly*”, meaning that **the true thing they are worshiping is their own physical appetites. They live lives of gluttony, pleasure, luxury and self-indulgence.** “and their glory (delight, the thing they value) is in their shame” – **they are living for, focusing on and delighting in things they should be ashamed of.** Their mindset is on earthly things. **They are living for “the here and now”.** They are living to get ahead, to get *more*, to *have pleasure* in sensual experiences. **They are not truly living for God; they are living for pleasure.** The really sad thing is that **most of them are oblivious to the inconsistency of their lives.** Often *they surround themselves with people who believe and think as they do.* **They are not evaluating their walk by the scriptures, or by the example of people like Paul, or the mature people of faith who walk like him. They are evaluating themselves by others like themselves. They are being deceived, and many don’t even know it.**

It’s not that God wants us to shun all pleasure, or reasonable prosperity. He is the One who created the ability to experience pleasure. He doesn’t want Christians to be glum, negative, judgmental people. In I Timothy 4:1-4, Paul takes such legalists to task and warns of those who would forbid marriage, or demand abstinence from certain foods “that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth. **For everything created by God is good, and nothing should be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.**” Same thing with wealth. **Having wealth is not a problem, if a rich person is not trusting in the uncertainty of riches, but on God.** He is the One who gives us *the ability* to make wealth (Deut. 8:16-18; I Chron. 29:11-18). **He is the One who supplies the abundance of all things for us to enjoy** (I Tim. 6:17). Those who receive an abundance are to be *stewards*, managers of the resources God entrusts to them. They are answerable *to Him* for what they do (Lk. 16:9-13). **Rich people are to do good with their resources, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share** (I Tim. 6:17-19). But *the love of money* is a root of all sorts of evils, and *coveting after wealth* is idolatry (I Tim. 6:10; Eph. 5:5). Nevertheless, **God wants to enable us to support ourselves, and have extra to help others** (Eph. 4:28; II Cor. 9:8).

So, what is the problem? It comes down to “Why am I here?” Four times in I Corinthians, Paul stated the principle, “All things are lawful...” (6:12; 10:23). But those are just *partial statements*. Twice he said, “**All things are lawful, but not all things are advantageous.**” *Advantageous?* Advantageous for *what?* **Paul clearly understood that he had a job to do. He was not here simply for his own pleasure, or his self-gratification. He had a calling, a responsibility before God, ...as we all do! We have the freedom to enjoy the blessings of this world, as long as they do not interfere with our purpose for being here.** And in another instance, he said, “All things are lawful, but I will not be *mastered* by anything.” **I will not give anyone or anything the legal authority or ability to dominate or control me. Why? Because I do not simply live for myself. I have been bought with a price, ...the redemption price of Jesus’ sacrifice for me. I am to glorify God with my life and my body** (I Cor. 6:20). Finally, in 10:23, Paul writes, “All things are lawful, but not all things *edify* (or build up).” **I have a responsibility to build up other Christians, to help them grow and mature.** So, no matter what I do, even to the extent of what I eat, drink, or whatever else it might be, **I am to do everything to the glory of God** (10:31). I especially ought to live in such a way as to not just seek my own profit or benefit, but to draw other people to come to know God and be saved (vs. 33).

The ancient Israelites of Isaiah’s time had turned things around. They were totally focused on *self-glory, self-gratification.* **It was all about them.** Those who served their appetites from Paul’s day were headed down that same path. **They weren’t serving God. By contrast, Paul himself, and those who followed his example, were walking the way of the cross.** They knew they were bought with a price, and embraced their new identity as servants of Christ. Like Jesus, **they were willing to make sacrifices to bring good news and genuine love to others.** They were willing to give of their own resources to *demonstrate Jesus’ heart.* They knew they were saved by grace, and they were grateful. **Those truly following Jesus choose to live as ones whose lives are all about God.**