

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Analyzing the Time

by Dan Trygg

“And He was also saying to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, “A shower is coming,” and so it turns out. ⁵⁵ And when a south wind is blowing, you say, “It will be a hot day,” and it turns out that way. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?’”

Luke 12:54-56

“Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command.”

1 Chronicles 12:32

“But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; ¹² and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ And they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’”

John 20:11-13

I happened across Luke 12:54-56 in my daily reading today, and it struck me how **we always need to be evaluating what is happening around us. What is God’s agenda? What is He doing? What about the enemy?** Can we see what he is up to? What about our own humanness? **How does our natural world view, or our expectations, hold us back from recognizing the significance of what is happening around us?**

There are many examples of significant shifts that took place in biblical history. In some cases, men and women of God recognized what was going on, and made adjustments to be in tune with the activity of God. In other cases, people were *resistant to God*, and did not give heed to His corrections, and experienced disaster.

For example, the men of Issachar recognized that God was raising David up to become the next king of Israel, so they abandoned the forsaken dynasty of Saul and joined David’s forces. The writer of Chronicles recorded that they were “men who understood the times” and knew “what Israel should do.” The leaders also convinced their men to shift their loyalties to David, as well. **God was doing a *new thing*. Those who were in tune with Him *adjusted to this new direction*. Others remained resistant to change. They wanted God to continue to bless the *old ways*, the old arrangements, the old alliances, the old power structures, ...but God was doing something completely different.**

I have also been reading in Jeremiah. There the prophet is trying to reach a stubborn, obstinate people. They, too, were wanting to live in the past. God was about to judge the entire nation, because the old power structures had become corrupt, and was full of injustice. **The religious norms had become formalistic and empty. People were going through the motions, but their daily lives were *contradictory to God’s covenant*.** Even though God was on the move, they were not interested in change. **They were unwilling to believe that God would disregard the religious activities they had grown up with, ...the religious norms of their lives...** and move in unexpected ways. In their case, the change was going to be very severe, ...they were going to be uprooted from their place, and forced to be relocated. None of this was desirable, or comfortable, ...but it *was* necessary. God had made up His mind. Those who were unwilling to respond to the leading of God were lost along the way.

In Jesus’ ministry, many did not acknowledge or respond to what God was doing through Him. The people of Nazareth rejected Him, not being able to look past the Jesus they *expected*, the Jesus they were *familiar with*, to see the Spirit-filled Son of Man that God was operating through. Very few believed in Him, and as a result, they did not experience much of His miraculous ministry there. **The Pharisees and chief priests,** saw Him as a threat to the *status quo*, which meant that He was rocking the power structure which they enjoyed. Even though they thought of themselves as religious and godly men, they actively opposed Jesus, and even plotted to kill Him. Even on the morning of Jesus’ resurrection, **the disciples of the Lord** did not understand what happened. Even though Jesus had been trying to prepare them for months, it was not making sense to them. Their expectations blocked their minds from being able to take in what Jesus was telling them. NOT ONE of the disciples was actually expecting Him to rise from the dead. NOT ONE! Even though, Jesus had talked about how it was necessary for the Christ to be mistreated, suffer and die, and then to rise from the dead, ...these words did not make sense to them, so they went in one ear and out another. In John 20, Mary Magdalene was actually *talking to* the risen Christ, and *did not recognize Him*, ...because she was not *expecting* Him!

In the early church, again people were *resistant to change*. They huddled together in Jerusalem, even though God’s mandate was to disciple the nations. **It took a *persecution* to pry them loose from the comfortable and familiar, and propel them out to pursue their calling.** When God began to reach out to non-Jews, there was resistance. Those who had been religious leaders advocated for a thorough conversion to Judaism. **The religious**

understanding of their past *limited their ability to recognize* the implications of the New Covenant, or the activity of God taking place all around them. **Ultimately, that became the test, “What is God doing?”**

What was He doing? He was doing the *unexpected!* He was working with *unexpected people, in unexpected places, in unexpected ways.* He reached Samaritans! ...then Gentiles! He was working with people who were religiously *unclean, ...pagans, ...people who knew nothing* about the God of Israel! He was opening unexpected doors of opportunity. **Furthermore, He was raising up *unexpected spokespeople to bring the gospel* to these new places.** In the old way of thinking, those who were Judean Jews, people who were ethnically and culturally “pure” were the most esteemed and desirable for leadership. In the Kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit was calling people from every conceivable background, and raising them up for ministry. In a very short time, the entire face of the church was transformed. **Instead of being primarily a Jewish religion, the Church became predominately comprised of Gentiles.** Instead of centering tightly around Jerusalem, churches spread to the four corners of the known world. The Jesus movement became a cosmopolitan influence. **Within 40 years of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple.** (Those who were resistant to change perished in Jerusalem. Those who took heed to the warnings from God fled to new places and escaped.) **There was *no going back to the familiar*, the traditional, the old ways. *It was full speed ahead with bringing the gospel to new places, using new people as messengers of God.***

What are we to learn from this? The future does *not* lie in the past. God is always on the move, doing new things, reaching new people in new ways. When the church gets stuck in nostalgic patterns, old methods and former ways of doing things, it is easy to *miss* what God is currently doing. We are so busy singing and preaching to ourselves, rehearsing and defending the familiar, that *we do not recognize* the current activity of God. **Every denomination is a memorial to a past revival.** At one time, they had discovered an important truth, or had utilized a strategic method that brought growth. **Over generations, however, virtually every denomination has stultified in its past traditions and distinctives. The same could be said for most church buildings, ...a sign of at least past life.**

In Luke 12, Jesus admonishes us to “analyze the present time”. The Greek actually says, “You know to test-out the face of the earth and the sky, but how is it that you do not know to test-out the present-time?” Jesus referred to a commonly-accepted observation that had become proverbial. In Israel, when the wind blew in from the west, from off the Mediterranean Sea, it almost always meant that a storm would soon follow. In the same way, when the wind was from the south, from the dry, desert region that lay in that direction, it inevitably brought hot air with it. Someone observed these patterns, and it was proven to be a reliable predictor of the weather. **Someone was an observer, an examiner and tester of phenomena. Jesus challenges us to do the same.** He asks why is it that we don’t observe and test-out to discover what is happening in our time or season of opportunity? This has many applications, but in the area of the expansion of the Kingdom of God, **we are to be observing where and how God is working in our day. We are to test-out-by-experimentation to discover the fresh, effective movement of God.**

This statement of Jesus has two key corollaries: (1.) Times, seasons and opportunities *change.* This means that, no matter how much we *like* what we came up on in Christ, some of the approaches, methods, and practices will no longer be effective in a new day, among new people. If we stubbornly hold onto “our way”, we will become out of step with the movement of God in our day. Our lives and ministry efforts will become ineffective, simply because we are trying to address a need that no longer is prevalent, or no longer can be addressed in ways that worked in the past. **(2.) We can *learn to observe, test-out and discover what the opportunity is in our time, and how God desires to work.*** This is a restatement of Jesus’ own *modus operandi*. He was always watching to see what the Father was doing, so He could join in when He saw His activity in the lives of people around Him. **The key here is *not to impose our methodology on what God is doing, but to adjust our methods to what we see is effective.*** This is where the old, traditionalist mindset can cripple the movement of the Holy Spirit. We try to fit people into our methods, instead of adjusting our methods to fit what God is doing in the people He is drawing to Himself. **We need to learn to become aware and adept at recognizing the hand of God at work around us.**

A great illustration of this is going fishing. We may go one time, and find that a certain lure or bait is very effective. We think we have found the secret to all good fishing, but when we go the next time, we find that the fish are not biting on that lure or bait like they did the first time. Nevertheless, we remember that outstanding experience we had before, and we stubbornly persist in using our “trusty lure”. Meanwhile, other more seasoned fishermen have learned to discover what the fish are biting on TODAY. They adjust their methods to suit the fish, ... they use a lure or bait that is like what the fish are hungry for THAT DAY. As a result, they have more success than we will, with our “old trusty, tried-and-true” lure or method. Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people” (Matt. 4:19). **Jesus advises us to “test-out-to-discover our opportunity”. What is going to work today?** This illustration is only one-dimensional. The advance of God’s Kingdom is much more complicated than simply catching fish. **Nevertheless, we can’t live on *past successes.* We must find our Kingdom opportunity for *today.***