

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Power of the Kingdom

by Dan Trygg

“...my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

“I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the talk of those who are arrogant but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.” 1 Corinthians 4:19-20

“For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such people as these.” 2 Timothy 3:2-5

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21

“For the kingdom of God is not in speech, rather in power.” This passage illustrates how important it is to look carefully at the context, when interpreting a verse or statement. It would be easy to expand or conflate this statement to support a number of different ideas. It could be used to support the importance of *signs and wonders, miracles*, as evidence for the gospel. It could be used to support the importance of accompanying manifestations of power, in the way of *strong emotion or the expression of supernatural gifts of the Spirit*, as a necessary “sign of the kingdom”. It could also be used to support the need for follow-through, emphasizing *the need for obedience, not just talk*. This would put the onus, and focus, on the *people*, not on the *power of God*. Whatever aspects of validity each of these views may contain in general, I think it is quite clear that Paul is focusing on something *else in this context*. While the activity of the kingdom of God may be in evidence where some of these things occur, I believe Paul is arguing for something very different in this context. The kingdom of God is not equivalent to where miracles, manifestations of spiritual gifts, or disciplined self-effort occurs, ...or as the result of moving and persuasive preaching. **The kingdom of God is where the reign and rule of God is breaking forth in establishing His will in the lives of people. Its power is most clearly and unequivocally seen where lives are radically changed to look like Jesus**, ...where people who *were* self-serving, and cared little about God, *encounter truth and power that produces a dramatic change of focus*. They become people who love God, are filled with joy and the fruit of the Spirit, and willingly live to serve other people and share what they have discovered with them. **This is the kingdom of God, where people freely give their allegiance and love to Him, and eagerly live and give to do His will.**

Again, the context clearly bears this out. **Jews demanded miraculous signs, and Greeks** (those who were non-Jews) **expected strong rhetorical preaching and argument** (1:22). **Paul determined that he was not going to accommodate either of these expectations. He was going to simply share the good news about the cross of Christ** (2:2). **To the Jews, this was a stumbling block**, even offensive; **to the Greeks, this was foolishness** (1:23). **But there were always some who were drawn by the Holy Spirit to this crazy message.** To them, the message of the cross came to be seen as the wisdom and power of God (1:24), ...**they understood it, and yielded their lives to God as their King.** When they did that, **the Holy Spirit birthed something new in them, and they began to experience a new power, a new desire at work within them, moving them toward obedience. This was the kingdom of God, ...the reign of God..., at work within them!** This dynamic of the Spirit within them opened the way for the hidden wisdom of God to now be revealed (2:7-10). **The Spirit is given to reveal to us the things God has freely made available to us in Christ** (2:12).

Then, however, things become a bit complicated. **A natural, “soulish”, or “mind-based” person** does not *receive* or *welcome* the things of the Spirit of God, because they seem foolish to him (2:14). Often this person is thought of as strictly a non-Christian, ...but this could also refer to an orientation-of-the-mind, that is set on natural, everyday life, life lived by the principles and wisdom of this natural world (cf. James 3:15; Jude 1:19). Such a person is not open to the things of the Spirit, because he is “natural-minded” instead of “super-naturally-minded”. He does not *expect*, or *look for* the Spirit to work, and so he is left to his own strength, abilities, and understanding. If this is a Christian, he or she does not *respond* to the Spirit when He suggests something that appears foolish, or does not make good sense. **A spiritual person, by contrast, is assessing things spiritually, because he or she has the Spirit revealing things to him or her** (2:15,16). Consequently, the perspective of Christ is available to this person through the Spirit. The Spirit can reveal things that no one has ever seen or heard about before, or which no one has even imagined, ...but things that God *could* and *would* do for those who love Him. *God has solutions, direction and provision that we would never imagine, or come up with on our own.* Those who are led by the Spirit will not be easily understood by others, because

others do not have the insights or direction of the Spirit that these people do. Many of those in the Corinthian church represented a third type of person, ... **a fleshly person**. This is someone who, while professing Christ, **was living in a “fleshly orientation”, instead of focusing on following the leading of the Spirit**. Paul compiled a list of what kinds of attitudes and behaviors this fleshly orientation produces in Galatians 5:19-21. They range from sensual pleasures and excesses, to emotional disruption and disorder, spiritual corruption and idolatry, and relational strife and attempts to manipulate and control others. The Corinthian church exhibited all of these same behaviors and attitudes. While the “soulish” person does what “makes sense” to him or her, *the “fleshly” person seems to have little self-control, and lives to please and aggrandize him or herself, and lashes out at those who interfere with their quest for self-fulfillment* (1 Cor. 3:1-3). **Every church community will have people who have these three orientations within their lives. In fact, we all deal with some aspects of all three of these dynamics to some degree.** We are supposed to be growing past a strictly “natural” worldview, or a selfish, “fleshly” orientation. **We should be growing more in the Spirit, coming more and more into alignment with the will, leading and resources of God for living our lives.**

In chapter 3, Paul uses a word picture to describe how **we are all to be participating in “building upon” the “foundation of Christ” which has been laid down**, ...both in our individual lives and as a team of co-laborers in the body of Christ. We are all “building” or “tearing down”. **Whatever we do, we will be accountable for. All that we invest our lives to accomplish will be “tested by fire”. If we built for eternity, it will survive the fire;** if we invested simply for this temporal life, **or if we built poorly, what we built will be destroyed by the fire**, and we will be left with nothing. We may ourselves be “saved”, but we will have suffered loss, ...the loss of all we did that was wasted, and all we could have accomplished, if we had been wise and followed the Spirit’s leading.

Paul applied this word picture to himself and Apollos, another person who had ministered in Corinth. He said that **they were servants, ...stewards of the mysteries of God. They had a job to do, and they would eventually be evaluated for what they did and how they lived.** No one is better than another, we are all given our role and assignment for God. He challenges them not to get puffed up. **No one can claim to have anything that was not given to them. God is the One who supplied it, ...even if they worked for it. In the end, they will be accountable to Him.** In their case, many of them chose to live somewhat self-indulgent lives. They lived in comfort, with everything they wanted. By contrast, **Paul and the other apostles had chosen to live lives that others thought were extreme and foolish.** They thought of themselves as wise, but Paul and the others were looked on as fools. While they were in comfort, honor and at ease, Paul and the other apostles experienced hardship, struggle, hard labor, and were homeless. The apostles were mistreated, persecuted and treated with disrespect. Why were they choosing to live this way? **They were making these sacrifices and taking these risks to get the gospel out, ...and Paul had come as far as Corinth. He was their spiritual father**, ...and while others among them were arrogant and trying to turn them against him..., **that was an undeniable, indisputable fact!** He was the one who first brought them the gospel, and introduced them to Christ. He urged them to remember how he and Apollos, and the others of his team chose to live, so that they *could* bring the gospel to them. **He exhorted them to live as he did, ...to follow His example in daily living in and for Christ, ...but also to be willing to make sacrifices in this present time to invest in building up the lives of people for the kingdom of God.** He was planning to come to them before long for a visit. *Then*, he would see what these arrogant, divisive people were all about. **He wouldn’t measure them by their words, but by what they had done. The kingdom of God is not just talk, it is power, ...power that is expressed in action, in growth, in change, in maturity, in service, in work, in fruit, in results.**

In 2 Timothy 3:2-5, Paul wrote that “in the last days, difficult times will come...” **The “difficult times” Paul prophesied about will be the result of people who are “holding to a form of religion, but are denying its power”.** How sad! People going through the motions, but they never *expect anything* from God, and may even be *rejecting* His promptings. Thus, they never experience *anything* from that religion! It is empty, lifeless, powerless. Well, let me tell you, the kingdom of God is not like that! **The kingdom of God is not just empty meetings, and pretty or emotional words. The kingdom of God is where God’s work gets done! The Spirit of God is available to lead you into the kingdom of God, ...more and more, day by day.** But, be ready, ...He will ask you to do things that make no sense to other people. He will ask you to do things, that appear to bring you nothing in return. He will ask you to invest in people who show little promise, ...or who have messed up in life. He may ask you to change your plans, or to get involved in things you never expected to. He will ask you to get healthy. He will want you at your best, so that you can be most effective and productive for Him. **You will never make a bad investment in the kingdom, if you are listening to Him. And, He will give you all you need, in order to do all that He would like you to do.** Remember, the kingdom of God is not just *you*, ...you are called to join a much bigger team. There are way more resources available than what you can see. And **He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all you could ask or imagine by that kingdom-power that is already operating within you – through the Holy Spirit who is in you right now.**