

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Understanding What God Is Doing

by Dan Trygg

“But you,’ He asked them, ‘who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered, ‘God’s Messiah!’²¹ But He strictly warned and instructed them to tell this to no one,²² saying, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.’”
Luke 9:20-22

“Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished.’³² For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon,³³ and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.’³⁴ But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.”
Luke 18:31-34

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.”
Zechariah 9:9-11

“And Jesus cried out and said, ‘The one believing in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me.’⁴⁵ He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me.⁴⁶ I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone believing in Me might not remain in darkness.⁴⁷ If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.”
John 12:44-47

At Caesarea Philippi, Peter confessed the truth that God had revealed to him about Jesus. He was none other than the Christ, ...the Messiah of God, ...the King of Israel. And Jesus commended him for this proclamation, ...but then immediately told His disciples to reveal this truth to no one. Why? Because He had come to be a king unlike what they had expected or hoped for. His mission was very different than what they were imagining. He had not come to reign, at this point. *He had come to die.*

This was a shocking statement, ...incomprehensible to them. Peter’s reaction was probably no different than that of the other disciples: “God forbid it, Lord! This will never happen to You!” Jesus immediately shut down such kind of talk and thinking. “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to Me, because you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of people” (Matt. 16:22,23). The disciples had no idea what God was up to. They had no grasp of the real purpose and plan of Jesus’ ministry and calling. Their idea of what the king of Israel was to do was limited only to an earthly, political, and military perspective. They did not grasp the much larger purpose of God. *He was intending to bring salvation to all the nations of the world*, not just to the nation of Israel.

This incident is recorded in the other synoptic gospels as well (Mk. 8:27-33; Lk. 9:18-22), along with two other occasions where He reinforced this message. Just after the transfiguration on the mountain (Matt. 17:22-23; Mk. 9:30-32; Lk. 9:43-45), and again on the way to Jerusalem for the final Passover (Matt. 20:17-19; Mk. 10:32-34; Lk. 18:31-34), Jesus warned them that He would be delivered over to people who would *mock Him, scourge Him, and kill Him, but on the third day He would rise again*. He said that it was necessary for all the things written through the prophets about the Son of Man to be fulfilled in this way (Lk. 18:31). In each of these episodes, the disciples could not grasp what He was saying, ...and they even were afraid to ask (Lk. 9:45).

The gospel of John is less direct, but *this same message is proclaimed throughout*. Jesus is described as the Lamb who would take away the sin of the world (1:29), alluding to Jesus being a sin offering, or Passover Lamb. In the next chapter, Jesus refers to His body, when He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19-22). In chapter 3, He compares Himself to the bronze serpent on the pole in the wilderness, saying that He, too, would “be lifted up”, so that anyone who looks to Him and believes might be saved (3:14,15; cf. 8:28), ...an allusion to the cross. In chapter 6, He speaks of people eating His flesh and drinking His blood. In chapter 10, He calls Himself the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (10:11-18). Even the night before the Triumphal Entry, when Mary anointed Him with precious oil of nard, He mentioned that she anointed Him before His burial (12:7; cf. Matt. 25:12). **Clearly, Jesus saw that His pathway was to lead to the cross. It was necessary for Him to die.**

As they approached Bethphage, Jesus sent two disciples to fetch a donkey and her colt. Apparently, He had made arrangements to have them ready, because they were out in the street, instead of inside the courtyard of the house. When the owners of the colt asked them what they were doing, they said what Jesus had instructed them to say, “The Lord has need of them.” When they responded in this manner, the owners permitted them to take the colt and his mother. **When they brought the colt to Jesus, they put their garments on it, and He sat upon it.** Bethphage was

near the summit of the Mount of Olives, just on the eastern side. So it was not far for the colt to reach the summit, and begin the downhill trek toward the holy city. **The disciples led the colt and its mother down the hill. As they went, people were laying their coats down in the roadway, while others were cutting leafy branches from the trees nearby.**

The disciples did not even really understand the significance of what Jesus was doing, by riding into Jerusalem on a colt (Jn. 12:16). **They were literally fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9!** And, as the verse, written some 550 years earlier, described, **the crowds of pilgrims began cheering and rejoicing over Jesus.** They began praising God and calling out, “Hosanna”, ...which means “Save us, please!” **Notice that they were directing this exclamation to Jesus, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”, as well as to God, “Hosanna in the highest”** (cf. Psa. 148:1). “Save us, please, O king! Save us, please, O God!” They also were crying out the words of Psalm 118:25,26, “Please Yahweh, save us please (hosanna)! Please, Yahweh, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Yahweh!”

They were expecting Jesus to be a Savior, of some kind. What do you suppose they were thinking? **What kind of Savior were they hoping for? They were looking for a military and political Messiah.** They were hoping that Jesus would be the One to deliver them from their Roman overlords. **They were Jewish nationalists.** They were looking for a national resurgence, deliverance from their enemies, and prosperity for their nation. **They could not imagine that God might have a different plan, ...that He might have a much broader scope for His salvation than merely the freedom and resurgence of their nation. They could not have grasped that God was going to do something that would bring salvation to ALL NATIONS, ...a non-political, spiritual Kingdom that will extend to the ends of the earth.**

What had Zechariah prophesied? The king Zechariah envisioned would cut off the war chariots, and weapons of war. **The king he envisioned would not bring war to the nations; He would speak peace to the nations!** If they thought for a moment about the nature of Jesus’ entourage coming into the city, the entire message was one of peace, not war. He came in humility, on a powerless, unimpressive, vulnerable donkey’s colt, ...not on a trained, seasoned, powerful war horse! His approach to the city was an appeal for peace. If they had only connected this passage with another prophetic passage, they might have remembered that **Isaiah had also described the son of David as the “Prince of Peace”. There will be no end to the increase of His government (lit., ‘dominion), or of peace. The zeal of Yahweh will bring this about** (Isa. 9:6,7).

The king Zechariah had envisioned was righteous and “having salvation” (the Greek Septuagint translation says, “He is righteous and *saving*”). **What else is associated with this king?** “...because of the blood of My covenant with you, I will set free your prisoners from the waterless pit (grave).” The details are not spelled out, but **what is clear in Zechariah’s prophecy is that blood will be shed, and a covenant will be made. The result of this blood and covenant is that people will be set free from the grave!**

Jesus is the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy. He is the righteous, humble king, who comes to save. He came riding into Jerusalem as an expression of vulnerability, offering a salvation that would soon be purchased with His own blood. He calls His followers to peace, not war. His kingdom is spreading across the globe, not by the power of armies and military might, ...or by power politics. **His kingdom spreads as people recognize Him as their King, and put aside their dreams of power and might. As they deny themselves, and follow Him to the cross, ...to the way of humility, self-sacrifice and service..., the life of Jesus is released within them and is made visible through their lives.** The blood of the covenant is Jesus’ blood. Through Him we can be set free from the grave, as He Himself rose victoriously. **The battle for the souls of men and women is won through humility and love, not by the imposition of human power. It is won by the demonstration of the Spirit in power in the transformed lives of people.**

Jesus said that the person who saw Him saw the Father who sent Him. The one who believes in Him believes in the Father who sent Him. **It was the Father’s plan to send Jesus to come as Light into this world, so that those who believe in Him would no longer be lost in darkness, or remain in darkness. Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to save it.**

This is what He wants to do with us, His people. He wants to transform us, by the inner life of His Spirit. **He has shone His light into our hearts, so that we can become the light of the world by the way we live. He desires to make us like Himself so that when people see us, they will see the Spirit who lives inside of us.** He established a new covenant by His blood, writing His law upon our hearts by the Spirit, so that we are able to live as His servants. **We must put aside those fleshly ways of thinking, and learn to see things and people as Jesus did.** We are to be like Jesus, bringing salvation with us. **If we are “good news” by how we act, people will respond to us, and may even want to listen to our message.** Christ’s kingdom *will reach* to the ends of the earth. The zeal of Yahweh will bring this to pass. We can be part of that movement, or we can become obstacles to the work of the Spirit. **We are not here to reign, or to judge; we are here to die to self, and reveal the life of Jesus through love, so that others might be saved.**

The disciples, and the people of Jesus’ day could not perceive what God was doing. His vision and purpose were much larger than they understood. **How about you? Can you look past human eyes to see what God is doing?**