

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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What Can We Receive From Heaven?

by Dan Trygg

“No one is able to receive a single thing if ever it might not be having been given to him or her from heaven.” John 3:27

“What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

1 Corinthians 4:7

“Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect (complete) and brought to full measure in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern (intense exertion) for you.”

Colossians 4:12-13

Do you believe that God is at work in your life? Do you want Him to work out His full purpose in your life? Are you expecting that? Are you seeking Him for that?

When John the Baptist heard that Jesus' ministry was expanding and growing even beyond his own, he was able to bless what God was doing, even though it meant that his ministry was shifting out of the limelight. **John wanted to applaud and support what God was choosing to lift up and use**, even though it meant that he was going to fade into the background. **That takes a certain level of trust in God's sovereignty and His good purpose. John was willing to become less, if it meant that Jesus would become more.**

John's words are a very broad, blanket statement. It is based in a profound belief that God is in control, and that He is capable of working through every circumstance to accomplish His purpose. As Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations 3:37,38, “Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? ³⁸ Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?” **Nothing, nothing, can come to pass, unless God expressly permits it.** While that sounds pretty absolute, and could seem to open up all kinds of theological problems, it is important to read the verses that immediately precede this declaration. They say that God permits things that He does not approve of. So, **while God is in overarching control and oversight, there are things that He permits that He does not want people to do.** But He still allows for some of these, ...and other things, He puts a stop to. God has not shared with us how this all works. He has just given us glimpses of the mere “edges” or “fringes” of His ways (Job 26:14).

John the Baptist's words, however, clearly indicate a belief that God is the One who lifts up a person, or humbles him, ...He exalts one person, and puts down another (Psa. 75:6,7). That could merely be an intellectual truth that we may know, ...or it may be something we believe and take comfort in, ...or it may even be a revelation that we grab hold of in faith and begin to bring before the throne of God. Just in that last sentence, **there are three very different responses to the truth of God's sovereignty.** There is **simply knowledge** that we believe in intellectually, but we do not embrace or pursue. Then, there is **a passive acceptance** that accepts that truth enough to be emotionally comforted by it, ...one which yields to the unknown mystery of God's will, but is not moved to action. Finally, there is **an active faith** that hears that truth and assertively seeks, pursues and expects God's activity in your life. It is the kind of faith that Jacob exemplified when he wrestled with the angel and refused to let him go, unless he blessed him (Gen. 32:24-28).

Knowledge is not enough. It is not the same as faith. James says faith without action is empty, dead, ineffective (2:17). The demons know the truth. They know the reality of God better than you and I do. But they are not trusting in Him. In fact, they shudder at what they know, but are unwilling or unable to change the direction of their lives. For many people, the knowledge that God is sovereign, and that He can provide resources, opportunities, abilities, empowerment and effectiveness is just information. It does not affect how they live. They can give verbal expression to this truth, but they do not live as if it were real.

Passive acceptance is not enough, either. Some people hear that a person can receive nothing unless it has been given them from God, and their response is passive. They turn that information into emotional appeasement, as acceptance that their experience up until now is all that God intends for them. They do not embrace this revelation as a challenge to seek God for what He may desire to give them. Instead, they *assume* that what they have is all that God intends for them. John the Baptist's comment may sound as though this is what he was doing, but it was not. John had sought God out and had received the counsel and direction from Him regarding his ministry. John had received the word of God in the wilderness, and trusted in Him enough to act on that word. He had stationed himself at the fords of the Jordan and preached the message God had given him to declare. He had experienced God lift up and expand his ministry until people from Judea, Jerusalem and those from the district around the Jordan came out to listen to him. He had seen God turn his ministry into an effective, far-reaching, powerful influence for revival among the people of God. But God also had revealed to him that his place of significance and popularity were for a greater

purpose than himself. He was sent to prepare the way for One coming after him, ...One who would be much greater than he was, ...One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John was sent, and propelled into public view, so that he could point out Jesus to the people. Once that was done, it was only appropriate that he would become less significant, and Jesus would become more important. John's comment was not simply passive acceptance, it was the obedience of faith. He was responding to the further revelation of God, and continued to promote Jesus.

Faith hears the revelation that "a person can receive nothing unless it has been given to him or her from heaven" as a **call and invitation to embrace that insight, and to pursue all that God has in mind for that person.** This truth does not simply get filed away as theological trivia. Nor does it become a fatalistic rationalization to accept the level of life and spiritual experience that he or she has known up until this time. Instead, **this statement becomes a faith-challenge, a call to pursue God for more.** Faith reasons that "If a person can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven, ...well, what would the Father in heaven want to give me, if I ask Him to work out His will in my life?" Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the confidence of things that are yet unseen (Heb. 11:1). Faith is trust not only in the sovereignty of God, but also the goodness of God. The writer to the Hebrews said, "Apart from faith it is impossible to be pleasing to Him, for it is necessary for the one coming to God to believe that He is, and that He becomes a rewarder to the ones diligently-seeking Him out" (11:6).

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, Paul reminds us that **everything we have has been "received"**. What we have and enjoy right now are things that have been granted to us. **God is the Creator and Owner of everything. He distributes things to people, and He is the One who gives us life, strength, and the ability to earn a living.** Everything comes from Him. He has already been doing this for us, even when we were unaware of His activity in our lives. David expressed it this way, "Yours, Yahweh, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty, for everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to You. Yours, Yahweh, is the kingdom, and You are exalted as head over all. ¹² Riches and honor come from You, and You are the ruler of everything. In Your hand are power and might, and it is in Your hand to make great and to give strength to all" (1 Chron. 29:11,12). God can provide needed resources. **He also has placed us in the circumstances and setting in life where we can bear fruit for Him** (Jn. 15:16). **He can open doors of opportunity for effective service for His kingdom** (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:2; Rev. 3:8). He can give us the spiritual gifts and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the kingdom.

Why don't we experience more? Does the scripture explain what may be lacking or amiss? Is there something we are to do differently? These are good and important questions. **I think we often simply just settle for "what is". We do what we know how to do, ...and we do it some more. We do what is familiar.**

But taking a cue from our verse from John, **could it be that we do not experience or receive more because we are not asking and expecting more?** If a person can receive only what has been given him or her from heaven, then **where should we look to first? It would seem that we ought to approach heaven's throne first.** James wrote, "You have not because you ask not..." (4:2). **Maybe we are not receiving what the Father would love to give us, simply because we are not asking. Or maybe we are asking, but not really expecting,** so when God gives us a new opportunity or a new insight, we are not recognizing it, or stepping into it. **Even here, in a matter of prayer, we can end up going through the motions, and simply settle for what we have been experiencing.** Again, this does not sound like the faith of the man who wrestled with God and prevailed. He said, "I will not let You go until you bless me!" Are we seeking God with that same kind of determination and intensity? I think of the prayers of John Knox, "Give me Scotland *or I die!*" Or, of Moses, "God, if You will not forgive Your people, *then blot me out of Your book of life!*" (Ex. 32:32). Epaphras, in Colossians 4:12 was a man like that. The NASB version says that "he was always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand complete, and brought to full measure in all the will of God." The word that is translated as "laboring earnestly" is the Greek word, "agōnizomai". He wrestled with strong-wrestling and determination, having deep concern (lit., intense exertion) on behalf of them. **We can pray a surface prayer that is expecting little to nothing, ...or we can dutifully pray, and accept what is, ...or we can wrestle in faith and intense determination because we truly trust and expect that God will hear and will reward those who diligently seek Him!**

A person can receive nothing, unless it has been given to him or her from heaven. A church community can receive nothing unless it has been given to them from heaven. Do you believe that? What does that mean to you? Do you want *all* that God intends for you? Do you want *all* that God intends for this body of believers? Do you think that there is *more* that God would like to do *in* your life, and *with* your life? Do you think He has *more* in mind for this body of believers?

Knowing that this *might be* true is not enough. Even *being intellectually convinced* that this is God's desire will not bring it about. Certainly, *being passive* will not call down the fire from heaven, or bring into being the plan and purpose of God. **We must embrace the hope and promise with faith, and pursue God with intensity, determination and resolve. We must not let go until He gives us what we seek: to be brought to full measure in all the will of God for us.**