

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Message of Palm Sunday

by Dan Trygg

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. ²⁷ Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify Your name.”
John 12:23-28

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and compassion, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be held on to, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of humanity. And being found in human form, ⁸ He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”
Philippians 2:1-9

There is the powerful backdrop of the events of Palm Sunday, but **what was it that Jesus had to say?** What was it that He Himself expressed by His actions, and required of those who would follow Him? **What was HE thinking of, and wanting to communicate to those who were following Him?** In the midst of all the noise, the tumult, the singing, the prayers and praises, ...**what were the thoughts of Jesus, and the message that God desired to pass along to those of us who are serious about following Him?**

We are all familiar with the story of Palm Sunday. It was the Sunday before Passover, just six days before. Jesus had sent His disciples ahead of Him to secure a colt, the foal of a donkey, that was tied in the street. Apparently, He had made these arrangements ahead of time, and they brought the young donkey, which had never been ridden before, to Jesus. The disciples put their cloaks on the back of the beast, and hoisted Jesus up onto it. Then, they made their way down the western slope of the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem. The disciples did not see the significance of this, at the time, but it was in direct fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, “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.”

As they came down the hillside, people recognized Him and began to sing, “Save us, Son of David!”, and they also spread their cloaks in the roadway before the donkey. Others were cutting leafy branches from the trees, and were placing them in the path. People were praising God, shouting and singing. They were exclaiming, “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (“Hosanna” means “Save now!”) The roadway and hillside were full of throngs of pilgrims, and the crowds made so much noise that even the ground shook! The entire city was alerted to Jesus’ coming. It was powerful! It was noisy! It was euphoric!

What was Jesus thinking at this time? Where were His thoughts? He said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (Jn. 12:23), but what did *that* statement mean *to Him*? **And what was the lesson He wanted His disciples to remember?** While most people were thinking that this triumphal entry was what Jesus was talking about, ...He was *not*. When He said, “For this purpose I came to this hour,” ...what “hour” was He talking about? **It was *not* the triumphal entry He was thinking about. He was thinking something that was “troubling” to His soul. Something difficult, dreadful, ...but at the very heart of the reason He came.** The “glorification” He was speaking of was not about noise, parades, crowds, or the adulation of people. **The “glorification” He was speaking of was not going to be fulfilled until the next week had played out.** This triumphal entry was just the beginning of the final days of His ministry. **He had come to reveal the Father’s glory, ...a glory that consisted of grace and truth, ...a glory that would demonstrate the Father’s love in a way that would boggle the imagination** (Jn. 1:14; Rom. 5:6-8).

We can begin to understand where Jesus’ thoughts were when we look at what He said to Andrew and Philip. They had come to Him all excited about the potential of expanding His ministry in a new direction. Some Greeks had come to them, wanting to see Jesus. They were apparently proselytes, so-called “God-fearers”, Gentiles who were interested in the God of Israel, many of whom believed, but who had not yet made the commitment to become Jews. They had traveled a long distance to come to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. They certainly would have heard about Jesus, because the city was in an uproar over the noise and commotion. They may have witnessed the triumphal entry with their own eyes. Because of all this, they wanted to talk with Jesus for themselves. Andrew and Peter saw this as a positive development, but Jesus seems to have been preoccupied with something else. **The real growth of**

the Kingdom of God would not happen by parades, noisy crowds, or gathering the interest of outsiders. Jesus saw that this was a key moment of decision. It was time for the Son of Man to be “glorified”.

Jesus then stated a fundamental principle of Kingdom growth: ***Multiplied growth comes from death to self.*** “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” **Healthy growth of the Kingdom of God can only happen as the people of God are willing to die to themselves, and follow the example of Jesus.** Jesus said, “The one loving his or her natural life, natural identity and self, destroys it utterly/ruins it. The one disregarding his or her natural life, natural identity and self in this world will protect it for age-type life.” You see, this was the choice being presented. ***Jesus calls us to come and die to our natural selves, so that we might find His life.*** The false gospel, the false Messiah, tells us that we ought to protect and preserve our own selves, so that we can have our good lives here. The Messiah they are looking to was a worldly leader, one who would use worldly methods to try to gain worldly power. It was the choice that would be before the crowd five days later: Jesus the Son of *the* Abba (the true God) versus Jesus Barabbas (the son of *a* father). Jesus the Suffering Servant or Jesus the political rebel and insurrectionist. Jesus who would voluntarily give up His privileges and His life, or Jesus who would stand up and fight for privileges and a life for himself. ***God’s Kingdom powerfully expands by those who are willing to give up themselves and lay down their pride, self-exaltation, and self-determination to become absolute servants of God,*** ...ready and willing to give themselves up for any and every one God would call them to serve. The world’s kingdom opposes this kind of message and teaching. The world advocates pride, self-determination, self-protection, self-promotion and self-actualization. **We can try to expand the Kingdom by the power and means of this world, but what we will produce and create will not look like Jesus, ...and we will not look like Jesus, either.**

Jesus drives the point home: “If ever anyone might serve Me, let him be-following ME...” **He tells us what He wants: He wants people who will follow Him.** What did He say earlier in His ministry? “If ever anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross according to each day, and let him be-following Me” (Lk. 9:23). Do you think that this earlier teaching may have come back to the disciples when Jesus spoke of the principle of Kingdom growth on Palm Sunday? You can be *sure* it did! It was a radical, powerful, unsettling, and self-stripping thing to say. It was a *memorable* teaching. **Jesus calls us to die, ...to die in Him, with Him, and for Him. New life comes only as old self is put aside, rejected and buried.** Only when we can put aside self-interest, self-protection and self-promotion, can we be fully available for the Spirit of God to direct to do the Father’s will.

In the OT there was a word picture used to describe those who were resistant to God’s will. ***They were called “stiff-necked”.*** They were unwilling to yield submissively to accept the yoke of their master. They would rear up and *resist* the yoke. The master’s work could not be accomplished until the yoke was in place, ...and even then, an animal could be obstinate and resistant. They could go out of the way, ...go out of the pathway the master intended for them, and go off in their own direction. **Jesus is asking us to follow HIM.** He is saying, “Take MY YOKE upon you and *learn from Me*, for I am meek and humble of heart.” **Jesus WILLINGLY took the yoke, and He calls us to do the same, ...to choose to come after Him, ...to follow Him.**

The apostle Paul describes the heart and manner of Jesus. **He calls us to think as Jesus thought** (it is a verb, not the noun “mind”), who being in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be held on to, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave (yes, “slave”, not “servant”). Being in the likeness of humankind, **He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to the point of death,** ...even death on a cross.” In other words, *there was no limit* to Jesus’ willingness to give up His privileges and serve others. We are to think as Jesus did. **Jesus humbled Himself, ...He yielded Himself in subjection to those in authority over Him. He didn’t fight them, ...He didn’t speak against them, ...He didn’t resist them.** He willingly endured even mistreatment by people in authority, counseling His followers to put away their swords. **Why? Because His Kingdom is not of this world. It will not be advanced by the methodology of the world.** The power of the age to come is released as we voluntarily and compliantly operate within the requirements and laws of the world system, and radically lay down our natural-lives in obedient service to the leading of the Spirit. If the world system demands that we break the commandments of God, or worship other gods, then, yes, we must obey God rather than people. Our fight is not with the world system. It is not with people. It is not with governments. **We overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus); the word of our personal testimony (our personal-faith-commitment); and by choosing to not love our natural-lives (selves), even to the point of death** (Rev. 12:11).

The glory of God is revealed when we choose to disregard self-interest, self-pride and self-glory in order to follow Jesus in radical obedience. This is not for the faint of heart, ...it is for the *dead* of heart, ...to those who have chosen to *give* their hearts to Another, ...to Jesus. Are you willing to *follow* Him, ...to *think like* Him, ...to *empty yourself of privileges and rights*, as He did, ...to *be willing to lay your life down* as He did, by the power of the Spirit rising up within you? He will enable you to bend your neck to bear His yoke when He calls you to. **Shall we say, “Father, save us from this hour?”** God has *brought us* to such an hour as this! **“Father, glorify Your name!”**