

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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What Are You Willing to Give For The Kingdom?

by Dan Trygg

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Matthew 13:44-46

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’” Matthew 16:24-26

“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone into it forcefully-enters.” Luke 16:16

We have just witnessed an amazing thing. Our entire society, ...our entire way of life..., has been radically changed. In a week's time, people have jettisoned sports, concerts, religious and political gatherings, ...they have closed businesses, given up jobs, taken their kids out of school, ...they have stopped gathering in groups, going out to eat, letting their kids play together, ...they no longer go out to movies, or the theater, ...even Broadway in New York has shuttered their doors! The president said it is like we are at war. **These are “war-time concessions”, ...even beyond any war-time concessions we have ever seen in our country!** There has been *nothing* like it. **And it has all been done, for the most part, voluntarily!**

For most of us, it is all based upon some news we heard. Most of us have never *seen*, with our own eyes, what Covid-19 does, ...we don't personally know anyone who has it, ...nor has it touched our lives directly, ...yet, **we have believed the report and we have chosen to change virtually everything about the way we live.**

The motivation for all this change has been fear. The news we have been listening to has been *bad news*, negative and threatening. Yet, *we have believed* this news and *adjusted our lives* to this new reality we have become aware of. Because of the news we heard, **we had a change of perception (a repentance), and we adjusted our lives to our new understanding of reality. Our faith resulted in obedience to the new perspective we gained.** It hasn't been all that hard, yet, has it? The reality of our decisions has not had a chance to really set in, yet, ...but **for most of us it is going to mean loss, less, and sacrifice.** We are going to incur a short-term *loss*, and we will probably have to *live on less* for an extended period of time. **Yet, we are voluntarily making this sacrifice, because we believe it is to our advantage. It is in our best interest.** We are willing to put up with a little *temporary hardship*, because we believe it is for our *ultimate good*.

It is interesting, too, how quickly we have shared and promoted this understanding of reality to others. As we, as individuals and as a society, have come to believe the news, we have broadly and rapidly shared this information with as many people as possible, especially the people we care about. We have used news conferences, printed news media, radio, tv, word of mouth, and the internet to broadcast our view of this situation, and how to respond to it, to as many individuals and groups as we can. **Because of the perceived urgency, we have made use of every possible avenue to get the message out.** We have spared no expense, cut through all the red tape, removed all the barriers, suspended or broke into other programs, to proclaim the urgent message we have come to believe, ...even though we have never personally seen or known anyone who has been directly affected by what we are hearing about.

Jesus asked an important question. He asked, “What will a person give in exchange for his life?” We have witnessed the clear and decisive response to that question for most people. They are willing to give up almost anything. They are willing to give up job, income, convenience, habits, entertainments, social interaction with friends and colleagues, and personal freedoms, ...all in response to *faith*, ...faith in *bad news*, ...news of *possible* (not even *certain*) disaster, sickness, and death.

Actually, Jesus' question went a little deeper. The Greek word for “life” in that verse can also mean “soul or self”, and it can refer to more than this life in the here and now, ...it can refer to one's eternal destiny. “What will a person give in exchange for his *soul*?” What a question! **“What would it profit a person if he or she gained the whole world but forfeits his or her soul?”** Quite obviously, that would be no profit at all! That would be a terrible, tragic loss! That would be a *fool's bargain*! No one, in their right mind, would do such a thing!

If we were to take such dramatic steps as we have to preserve or safeguard our earthly lives, would we not do much, much more, if we clearly saw that an eternal destiny, ...our personal eternal destiny..., ...or the personal destinies of those we love and care about..., was somehow at stake? Of course!

But wait! Jesus was not just proclaiming *bad news*, He was proclaiming *good news*!

Instead of something to be *avoided* at all costs, imagine that there was something to be *gained* at all costs, ...something that was worth whatever price we might have to pay to obtain it. That is how Jesus presents the kingdom of God! Jesus presented two parables that had virtually the same message, namely that the kingdom of God is worth selling or giving up *everything* for. In **the parable of the treasure in the field**, a man was walking on the property that belonged to someone else, and happened upon some kind of object that was out of place. As he investigated further, he found that there was a substantial treasure buried there. Such treasures were not unheard of. Sometimes people would bury valuables in an out of the way place for safekeeping. This may have happened long before, in the face of a potential invasion by enemy forces. The man knew that if he were to take the treasure, he could be accused of stealing. And, if he talked about it, to see if rightfully belonged to someone else, others might take it. The only way to rightfully come into possession of the treasure was to buy the field. So, with joy at the prospect of his good fortune, he hastily covered up the treasure again, and sold everything he owned to raise enough money to buy that field. In **the parable of the pearl of great value**, a pearl merchant was scouting for valuable pearls. He visited his normal contacts, undoubtedly fisher folk and people who harvest oysters, and possibly other small-time pearl merchants. One day, he came across a highly valuable and unusual pearl. Whoever was selling it could also see that it was special, and of great value, but he had no idea how much value it really had to the right person. The price he was asking was very high, much higher than for typical pearls, ...but the pearl merchant knew that it was much more valuable than his associate thought. So, he went back home and sold everything he had in order to raise the money to buy that pearl. He went back and purchased the pearl and went on his way rejoicing at his good fortune.

The kingdom of God is like *that*! It is *so* valuable and precious that anyone who knew what it was worth would eagerly sell all they had, ...give up all they possessed..., in order to obtain it. Is *your* perception of the kingdom of God so clear and stark that *you* would give up all you have, all you possess, all that belongs to *you* in order to live in and operate as part of the reign and rule of God? Would you *joyfully* and *gleefully* put aside everything else to enter the kingdom? Maybe you are like the landowner who didn't even know that there was a treasure available to him, on his own property, ...or maybe you are like the first pearl merchant, who saw that the pearl was unusual and valuable, but sold it on the cheap, compared to what it was really worth. **The ignorant and the misperceiving do not know the true value of the kingdom of God, and therefore are not willing to pay the price for it.**

Jesus had another way of talking about the kingdom of God. Remember, the kingdom of God is not a place, or location, or geographic area. It is not a future state. It is a relationship, ...a relationship of commitment, allegiance and obedience. It is the reign and rule of God. It is where God is obeyed, followed and served as King. And Jesus is the messianic King. Therefore, **Jesus spoke of the kingdom in terms of "*Follow Me.*"**

The "gospel of the kingdom" was a fairly recent thing. John the Baptist had begun preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, saying "Change your perception, because the kingdom of God is *near*". He told people to "Get ready, come, be washed and rededicated in preparation for the coming kingdom." He identified Jesus as the One who was greater than he was, the One whose sandal he was not worthy to untie. **Jesus also began to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, but He was saying that the kingdom is *here*,** ...it is *available* to those who will believe and adjust their lives to take it for themselves. He preached, "Change how you look at things, and come, be washed and dedicated to God in My name, and *follow Me.*" Many people heard the good news, and responded by an outward sign of baptism, but how many of them actually *followed Jesus*? Jesus raised the bar. **He said if anyone would come after Him, he or she must deny themselves, take up their cross *daily* and follow Him.** A person who loves his or her natural-life (self, soul) will ruin it or destroy it, but he who is willing to lose his natural-life (self, soul) for Jesus' sake will find it (Lk. 9:23,24). In another passage, **Jesus talked about how we had to be willing to count the cost to follow Him.** "If any one does not prefer Jesus over his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk. 14:26). He also said, "None of you can be My disciple who does not give up (take his leave of, renounce, withdraw from) all his own possessions" (Lk. 14:33). In Luke 16:16, Jesus observed, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time **the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone forcefully-enters into it.**" The word for "forcefully-enters" means to seek with the most ardent zeal and most intense effort, *letting nothing get in the way.*

You see, Jesus isn't asking us to give up anything more than we have been willing to give up *out of fear.* Out of belief in an impending danger, we have chosen to distance ourselves from loved ones and friends, we have given up jobs, and willingly embraced financial loss, we have radically changed the "natural-life" we had for fear of losing it, a fear of bringing death. **The gospel of the kingdom is calling us to be willing to embrace such changes for a good and positive purpose.** Out of belief in an impending promise, let us choose to live radically for Christ, putting aside anything that would hinder our pursuit of Him. **If we are willing to give up our natural-life to follow Him, and are willing to prefer His will over our "normal", we will find LIFE.** A life of radical change and transformation, yes, ...*but a life that will bring life to others.* Instead of bad news, this is good news; instead of the fear of death, this is the hope of life.