



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

REVELATION 21:23-24

AUGUST 2015

Good Grief

I've been surprised to see how surprised many were by the decision handed down by the Supreme Court of the United States regarding same-sex marriage. Did we think that American democracy was equivalent to the Kingdom of God? Have we shifted our hope of justice and peace totally to the structures of the state?

Have we not seen the shift toward magnifying human dignity while ignoring the creator and Lord? Did we think that these choices would not have consequences?

It is true that our history is of a people who, because of the light of the gospel, realized the dignity of all humans and sought to produce a civil structure to promote freedom from political oppression. But we must remember that those structures do not address the personal bondage to sin's power. Unredeemed people are not free to think only of another's benefit. Politically-liberated but personally-enslaved people will eventually enact policies that

promote and protect their prejudices and perversions. Structures built on the dignity of mankind—even with built-in checks and balances—which neglect the necessity of individual redemption, will ultimately fall under the weight of personal entitlement.

We as a nation have lived a long time in the residual light of the revelation that sparked the Great Reformation. It was the rediscovery of the gospel of the Lamb described in *The Revelation*:

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the

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Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it . . .

Revelation 21:23–24 (ESV)

The darkness that characterized the Middle Ages was greatly pushed back when Martin Luther saw the heavenly illumination of “the just shall live by faith.” Personal redemption, liberation, and eternal hope enabled him and the multitudes who also saw it, to engage the stagnant church and the befuddled culture with liberating results. Though all people did not experience the personal redemption that Martin Luther promoted, the tremendous light of

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that “city set on a hill” illuminated a huge portion of the intellectual and political landscape. Certainly the grand experiment of democracy in the New World was one of the fruits of that illumination.

But we know that even a nation that promotes democracy is not the Kingdom of God. It focuses on mankind, the crown of God’s creation, but it leaves Adam and

Eve in the Garden without the necessary partnership with God. Mankind was neither designed nor expected to manage the creation without a personal relationship with God and an awareness of his presence. No one can successfully manage any garden while hiding behind a bush in fearful shame. The perspective is distorted, the wisdom faulty, and shame paralyzes.

Many of us are grieving. It can be good grief. If it exposes the idols we have erected, we should be glad. But idols do provide a facsimile of satisfaction. They offer substitutes that better fit our selfish demands and allow us to remain in a perverted kind of control. Until they are exposed as idols, we will fight tooth and nail to defend them. Recall when Gideon broke down the Midianites’ altar of Dagon and the idol fell on its face. The people were ready to fight. They were reminded that any god worth its salt could fight for itself. (See Judges 6.) When a source of personal provision or protection has to be defended, it could be a clue to its deceptive nature. This is a good time to re-examine our idol collection. If we trust anything or anyone to do what our God has promised to do, we are idolaters. It is time to clean out the shrine and worship God alone.

Another aspect of good grief that we

probably need to identify is our deep sadness when our Father's love is rejected. Once we have known God as the Father who wants our very best, we long for others to open up to his love. The beauty of the story Jesus told about a prodigal son and his Father is that we can see the whole story played out—end from the beginning. As we watch the young son dishonor his father and demand his rights, we want to jump in and stop him. We want to tell him how much his father loves and desires his best, how his plans include celebrating him as a joint heir of the estate. We want to warn him that there is a hog pen in his future and that he will deeply regret his rash decisions to leave. No one would want to encourage that boy in his selfish focus. No one would celebrate his freedom to choose his own way. No one would insist that there are no bad consequences for personal choices. It would take a mad man to justify the boy's personal rights and criticize the father for wanting him to stay within the boundaries of their relationship.

We grieve when people speculate about the Father based on some painful experience with an earthly authority. We know that because every person is a child of Adam, he or she has a deep longing to be unconditionally loved by a father who

only wants their best. They want to go home and live in partnership with him and accomplish something great for him. It is part of their original design. That design has been marred, and the Father has been blamed. If they could only know what he

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is really like—if they could watch him take the dishonor of his son's actions even welcoming him home and giving him what he didn't deserve. If they could see him cover his filthy rags with his own robe, put shoes of dignity on his feet, place a ring of authority on his hand, and throw a party to celebrate him—they would run to him. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope. We know that the gospel narrative gives that perspective and that the Holy Spirit works with the gospel to open blind eyes to such a vision.

For many in this country, it is a sad day. We believe we have watched a judicial decision that will promote the kind of misery that prodigals experience when they ignore

the Father's house. But we choose to rejoice that we are not only citizens of this nation, but also of the Kingdom of God. The culture of this kingdom transcends all other cultures and is backed by the authority of

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the Son of Man who has faced the opposing authorities in both the civil and religious world and defeated them. He is now the reigning king over all that he owns, and that is everything. Daniel predicted him when he saw the kingdoms of the world being toppled by a stone cut from a mountain and rolling down in judgment. That stone is Jesus and his kingdom is eternal and cannot be toppled. It permeates throughout every inch of blood-bought earth, and establishes a beachhead wherever a gospel believer lives. People focused on honoring their king affect earthly nations and cultures. Nation building is the result of passionate subjects of the king living for his glory in every sphere of human influence. It is interesting that the apostle Paul and his team are not recorded planning strategy

to save or secure an earthly nation. They promoted one kingdom, recognizing that it would bless all people and people groups who would submit to the one King. In the future, when God blesses nations, it will be the fruit of the revelation of the gospel that exalts Jesus as the Savior of all people without distinction. His salvation restores them to partnership with the Creator-Father, who enlightens them to promote structures that align with his heart.

So, what shall we do? We shall check our idol collection and clean it out. We shall refocus on the Father's love that is displayed in his design, redemption, and personal presence. We shall feature the gospel everywhere at all times. Everyone needs it and some are desperate enough to want it. Finally, we are to live humbly but boldly as citizens of a real kingdom that is the most powerful one ever known. We shall continue to pray that our earthly nation will walk in the light of the city whose light is the Lamb.



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