



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

PSALM 2:1-6 (ESV)

DECEMBER 2015

No Need to Rage

The debate was hijacked by rage! Most of them today are. It doesn't matter if the issue is political, geological, theological, or ideological. The participants are armed with zingers aimed at their opponents, rather than researched facts that could be discussed and interpreted. Winners are chosen on the basis of who got in the best zingers. The losers are those who expected to gain some insight into the issues.

I am not referring to the recent political debates carried on TV networks, but I could be. Just listen to news outlets, sports commentators, or even religious discussions online or from the pulpit.

It seems that our society is becoming increasingly vitriolic. Instead of listening and responding, we resort to talking over each other and demonizing our opponents. I suppose that is what can be expected when we deny the possibility of spiritual warfare and thereby conclude that our enemy is solely flesh and blood. In a purely secular society, where demons, angels, and God are mocked as primitive myths, we shouldn't expect an acknowledgment that we have a common spiritual enemy who seeks to deceive and destroy God's good creation. That leaves us fighting each other, even willing to destroy our opponents in order to establish our own viewpoint. Add to that the human proclivity toward envy, and class warfare is inevitable. Would-be public leaders skillfully use envy to gain a following by sug-

gesting that a certain segment of society is being disrespected while another is being favored. We have successfully divided the country into men vs. women, black vs. white, rich vs. poor, minorities vs. police, conservative vs. liberal . . . Us vs. Them.

But it should be different in the community of faith where belief in spiritual reality is common. We are aware that we don't fight against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers emanating from the devil himself. Yet we rage. Russell Moore points out the inconsistency in "fighting like the devil to please the Lord."¹ When we fight like the devil, we yield to him. We should fight him but not with his tactics. We confront the Liar with the Truth. The church representing the kingdom of God is to be the salt and light in a society, but when it has become the voice of the shifting culture rather than a voice to it, the whole

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¹ Russell Moore. *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2015) p. 190.

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society begins to rot in egoism and grope in darkness.

Certainly, there are cultural trends that alarm us. We have lost some essential values that once seemed secure and sometimes even sacred. The message of the gospel of God's kingdom was recovered to a great degree in the Great Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. Whole countries and their cultures reflected the implications of a Christ-centered Bible with a cross-centered message that offered hope to people in every strata of life. The foundation of the American colonies was greatly affected by those who had been influenced by this recovery. This nation was blessed to have been founded on many of the values inherent within a worldview produced by gospel-marinated thought. But the message that produced such implications became mixed with the man-centered culture, and lost its ability to offer hope to all. The American dream has displaced the heavenly vision; now we are losing both.

A Psalm quoted often in the New Testament reveals the different viewpoints of the nations and God.

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them . . . "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

Psalm 2:1-6 (ESV)

The nations rage because they are afraid, insecure, and threatened. They know they are vulnerable to larger nations, stronger powers, and unpredictable circumstances. But he who sits in the heavens can laugh at their comedic behavior. The ultimate king

is sitting on the one throne that controls everything on earth. For Christians this is fabulous news. We are in Christ, and he is already seated at the right hand of the Father as king over all that is his. Why then do we act like the devil in our confrontation with our culture? Perhaps we have not been told? Or more likely, we have bought the perspective of culture rather than the perspective of the kingdom of God.

The cultural Christianity that has evolved in the last century is more like the secular culture than like the kingdom culture. Reviewing a few key words and their current definitions should give us a clue:

FREEDOM is culturally defined in terms of being free from political and moral restraints. This definition of freedom means morality is determined by the desires of the individual rather than the good of the community or the design of creation. Sexuality is divorced from marriage, commitment, and reproduction. Divorce is hailed as the solution to conflict, and same-sex marriage is declared normal. Abortion is a legal option because we have stood by as the freedom to choose has triumphed over the freedom to live.

Notice that the kingdom of God describes liberty as the freedom to live as God designed us to live reflecting the love of God and blessing the world around us with truth. Yes, we are freed from bondage to sin, but more importantly we are freed to live as God first designed us and then redeemed us to live.

What about **EQUALITY**? The culture focuses on economic and political equality. When some have more stuff than others, equality demands that it should be redistributed—by government policy. The kingdom of God features the equality of dignity as granted by God alone. The big and powerful are not more important than the little and weak. In fact, in the kingdom culture, the least are exalted and the greatest are brought low. The poor and victimized are recognized as image-bear-

ers of God. They are important to God and his eternal purposes. When the Christian community is lax in defending the weak and fearful of standing for justice, we have been infiltrated by our secular culture. We lose the right to speak when we forfeit the privilege to serve.

UNITY is held up as an end in itself. The dominant culture seeks unity through sameness as it downplays the distinctive nature of male and female for example. Christians who live from the perspective of Zion know that distinctions are vital to real unity. As husbands fully embrace their maleness, they make better husbands. The same is true of wives. In trying to serve the cultural mandate to reach equality and unity through erasing created differences, life has not only become boring but also enormously confusing.

HISTORY according to our present culture is a collection of individual stories with none of them necessarily giving any meaning to others. Thus, each person can have his or her own story, and no one should pass judgment on the validity of someone else's story. The kingdom of God offers a big story that connects all stories in a narrative that gives eternal meaning to every person in every era of history.

POWER is viewed by our culture as being in the majority, with influence among the elites, holding wealth, and enjoying some measure of fame. We look for those kinds of people to lead our corporations as well as our churches. But power in the kingdom is manifested in the Lamb who rules through love. The weak qualify for assistance from heaven, thus giving them an advocate that is strong. Kingdom-oriented Christians are not quick to measure the winner on the basis of popularity. They are sure of the outcome and are willing to work and wait. When the Christian community has been seduced by secular power, the power of the cross is left untouched, and we lament our inferior position.

When the religion of "God and coun-

try" has become more prominent than "Christ is king," the people rage. They rage because they feel victimized by circumstances they can't control. They rage because darkness seems so dense that light could never penetrate. They rage because the opponent seems to be winning. They rage because they have lost a comfortable culture and aren't sure they can ever get it back. They rage because they have foolishly believed that the best they can hope for is a last-minute escape. They feel like their time is short and something dramatic must take place. They promote apocalyptic panic attacks trying to get their followers pumped up to fight the flesh and blood enemies. They gather into their ideological closets and rally the troops by emphasizing how badly they are treated. They practice their talking points but refuse to think through the real issues. They are vulnerable to those who lead with anger and communicate with rage. When they find someone who can articulate their fears, they want to make him or her a savior. They long for a Goliath to join the team and intimidate their enemies.

No need to rage! No Goliath necessary! We have a David who has already faced the giant and won. He has severed his head from his body and has given us the power to rout the enemy who now fears our king. It is the enemy who rages. It is his time that is short. The cross looked like our defeat, but has become our victory. Death looked like the end, but has become our beginning. We are citizens of an unshakable kingdom.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:28-29 (ESV)

We **REST** on the inevitable success of God's imperishable word. Just like at

creation, when his word is released it goes on for eternity without stopping. When the message of the Son is proclaimed in word or deed, it causes ripples that continue to pound the shores of time until his rule is supreme.

We **TRUST** the finished work of Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. He has done all that needs to be done to reconcile man to God and restore him to the elevated position of being God's partner on earth. Righteousness has been fulfilled. Sin has been forgiven. Death has been defeated. Satan has been exposed as the prosecutor without a case. The future is secure. The blessing of Christ's obedience has gone farther than the curse of Adam's disobedience. There is nothing left for us to do but live out what God has put in us. There is a garden to tend and a world to bless.

We **REJOICE** in the power of the gospel to transform. We realize that those who will lead in the next phase of God's program are quite possibly pagans right now.² They may be drunk, or marching in some futile cause. They may be agnostic revelers like so many of the past champions. They may be religious zealots like Saul of Tarsus. The gospel changes people from the inside out. There is nothing that death and resurrection can't change. Therefore, we can confront our opponents with kindness as Paul instructed Timothy (2 Timothy 2:24-26). They, like us, can be rescued from the deception of the enemy and regenerated by the same Spirit that raised Jesus.

We **CELEBRATE** the ultimate success of the Church. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it. The power of the message lived out in a community of faith cannot be stopped by any earthly or demonic power. We may not like the current structure of the churches in our culture, but God's Church is marching on. It is not "slouching

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2 Moore. p. 206.

toward Gomorrah" or fearful of Armageddon. He who is the head is already seated on Zion, and the body draws both wisdom and power from him.

We **LAUGH** at the presumption of darkness. It cannot win. It promises freedom and delivers bondage. It promises satisfaction and produces thirst. It promotes the significance of mankind and reduces both men and women to animal-like instincts. Like the woman at the well in Samaria, those whose lives have been scarred by the ruthlessness of deception will be thirsty of soul, and the only water that satisfies the thirst of the soul is that which flows from the throne upon which our king sits.

We *can* engage our opponents because we are not afraid. The issues are too important to be overlooked in an effort to win an argument. The opponent is too important to be considered our enemy. He or she might just be the next voice declaring the truth that sets men free. We *must* engage because we represent our God who loves all his creation and has paid a high price to redeem it. We *shall* engage because we believe the good news of Jesus' reign will illuminate the darkened heart, soften the hardened heart, empower the timid soul, and restore a vital hope. We are not making contingent plans to hide from trouble, escape from persecution, or compromise our belief. We are marching from Calvary's victory toward Zion's glory. Our king sits on the highest throne. We shout, but we do not rage.



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