



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

2 CHRONICLES 7:14

JULY 2016

How Did We Get Here, and What Can We Do?

I am dizzy! Just trying to figure out what has happened and how fast it has occurred is a disorienting experience.

Just a few years ago, we were celebrating diversity of opinion. We were boasting that open discussion and debate were privileges in a nation where liberty is prized. Now, there is an atmosphere of shock. There is a host of sincere morality-loving citizens who are in a quandary as to how to respond to the choices we have for president this year—two people who seem to treat truth as a primitive myth. Lies, exaggerations, spin, insinuations, and false accusations are daily fare. Politics seems to have created its own world where moral values have been excluded. Added to that is the insanity of current discussions regarding gender identity and which bathrooms and showers our children must share. The definition of marriage has been

co-opted by the federal government, and liberty of conscience seems under mortal threat. A nation that once prized the value of freedom from oppression has itself developed a culture that is oppressive toward all who dare to challenge the gods of secular religion. Christians in particular seem perplexed as to what to do. Will God help us?

As they look at the surrounding landscape, concerned Christians often reference 2 Chronicles 7:14. *“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”* It should be noted that this text is a promise made to the covenant people,

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Israel, related to the temple that Solomon had built. Of course it reveals something of the nature of God who does not delight in the affliction of his people, but wants to forgive and heal their land. But we must understand that it is not directly addressing the United States or any other

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currently existing political nation. The promise is made to God's covenant people. If we follow the progressive revelation from the Old Testament through the New Testament, the covenant people of God equates to the present Church, the body of Christ throughout the world. That is the "my people" of this promise. No longer must we travel to a physical temple to make such a prayer of repentance. As members of his body, we make up the temple. He lives in us and among us. We have a new covenant!

Just as Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden to keep it and work it, Israel was chosen to be a worshipping community working in the bigger garden of the world to keep it and make it productive. Just as Adam did, Israel failed in that assignment.

The God of creation was neither surprised nor frustrated. He himself became another Adam and accomplished what neither the first Adam nor Israel could do. Jesus started with a relatively small garden of 12 men and kept them. He trained them to be keepers of their own gardens and to reproduce in order to infect the whole world. That body of believers has been reconciled to intimate partnership with God and given the adequate authority and power to expand their well-kept gardens to the ends of the earth. If the garden has been overrun with briars and if the serpent has been unhindered from deceiving the inhabitants, the church must bear some of the blame.

Adam was given authority over all other creatures in the Garden, but he failed to use it to stop the serpent from assaulting and defeating Eve. Likewise, the body of Christ has been given the same authority and power that Jesus used on earth. The problem is not our weakness, but our abdication. To a large extent we have abandoned the garden to the briars and snakes. That is called "apostasy"; we have left our post. We have bought the lie of the devil that we don't belong in the realm of garden-keeping but should instead be thinking about a future heaven. Garden-keeping is dirty and involves working with worldly things, the enemy tells us. He convinces us that spirituality is too ethereal to be associated with engaging the cultures of the

world. Evidently, he has also convinced many that the battle for this life is hopeless. As a result they only expect victory at a future battle of Armageddon or later—

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in the millennium or heaven. Sadly, some Christians secretly rejoice that things are getting worse, believing that it will usher in the coming of Christ. They get excited about the prospects of a nuclear conflict that will take us all to heaven.

While we wait and wish for better times, or look on with an “I told you so” attitude, the serpent runs rampant in the garden where we have been placed. We lament lost privileges and eroding rights while the murderer inspires the death of millions of innocent babies each year. The thief steals fathers from the home where struggling single moms try to cope. The authoritative social scientists are busy doing studies and writing papers to decide if children thrive more with both a mom and dad or if that is an outdated model. (There is no need to wait; this is the creator's design.) The schools

are infested with false assumptions regarding origins, purpose, and identity. The serpent has injected his venom into communication, and even inspired his own language that makes addressing real issues politically incorrect.

The craziness does seem to have happened quickly, but it has been going on for a long time. We have enjoyed the fruits of liberty but ignored its true nature. We have been blessed by the work of forebears who understood that liberty is a fruit of individual freedom. Spiritually oppressed people cannot produce or sustain politically free people. Guilt, shame, and fear cripple people beyond the capacity to build for the sake of others. When the good news of forgiveness, love, and reconciliation is assumed or ignored, it is lost, and society rots. Humans were not designed to live apart from the conscious presence of God. Life simply will not work when separated from divine design. The day that we assume that the privileges of liberty can be enjoyed without a battle with the oppressor, that is the day liberty begins to erode.

So, we ask, “What does the battle look like?” It is actually a matter of standing in the midst of every voice demanding that we don't. Our real enemy has been confronted and defeated by the actions of our Savior. We stand in that victory. We are not trying to pay the penalty for our transgressions or live up to the perfect

law of righteousness. We recognize that such achievement is impossible for us. Jesus has done that for us and now gives us the privilege of enforcing that victory wherever we encounter the liar, murderer, oppressor, and accuser. Jesus has qualified

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us. He has called us to be his representatives on the earth to spread his liberty, one garden at a time.

The liberating truth is that God has taken the initiative and done for mankind what was needed for reconciliation. He came as us to live as us and die for us so that with him we could defeat death and in him sit in the heavenly place of final acceptance. The story is about what he has done—not what we need to do. Once you hear what he has done, you can trust him instead of yourself. It changes everything.

If we don't stand here as "my people," we have no hope of experiencing personal freedom, or of building for corporate liberty. If we turn from our wicked ways, it will mean turning to the centrality of the gospel. It will include accepting our role as God's appointed "Adams" in the garden in which we live. It will include embracing fellow believers as brothers and sisters

in love and patience. It will mean caring for God's creation and discovering how to keep (protect) and work our garden. There is not time to stand around blaming other entities for our overgrown and out of control garden. It is ours, and we have been given adequate resources to keep it and work it as partners with God.

Our hope is not in what happens in November. It took a while for the rot to get so prevalent. It might take a while to get our gardens productive, but we have time to do God's will, and we have the privilege of working with him in the process.



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