



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

PSALM 2:1-10, HEBREWS 8:6-12

MARCH 2017

Forgiveness Is the Issue

We live in a day of a self-proclaimed identity crisis. It seems that the whole society is trying to figure out how we decide who we are. It is true that authenticity requires that we act out of who we are.

No one can find their destiny trying to be another species. No matter how much a dog tries to improve in its meowing, it will never be a good cat. We have obsessed with our own identity markers. Without dismissing the importance of knowing who we are, I suggest that there is a more important question.

In ancient times as people tried to survive in hostile cultures, individuals and even nations had to align themselves with some stronger partner. They would make a covenant with another person or nation which had greater resources and power. So, the most important question was not "Who are you?" but rather "Who is your covenant partner?" It is no small thing that the one true God of creation made a covenant with a people and accepted the role of protecting and providing for them. In turn, they were to trust him alone and display his glory to the whole world. Much

of the Bible is telling the story of how this played out. Essentially, we discover that Israel didn't keep the covenant with God and ended up in exile under the power of a foreign nation. God's mercy moved to bring them out of bondage, and ultimately he made a new covenant with them. This time it was a covenant that he guaranteed by his own faithfulness.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house

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of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

Hebrews 8:6–12 (ESV)

Sin causes a deep darkness that cannot be overcome **simply by human efforts.**

We note that the benefits of the new covenant are based on the forgiveness of sins. The fault of the previous covenant was that it could neither permanently deal with sin, nor enable the people to be faithful to covenant stipulations. Since God became a man and made covenant with himself, both fulfilling the requirements of the covenant and paying the penalty of the broken covenant, the new covenant was much better for those who are included. Sins are forgiven and forgotten while obedience is based on the performance of Jesus our

covenant partner. God's people can neither worship freely nor work productively while under the guilt and shame of sin. Without a clear conscience, we are still wearing the chains of sin.

We should first define sin in relation to the covenant. The Old Testament presents the picture of sin as idolatry, disobedience, and exile. These three degrees of sin must be dealt with if we are to be free.

The first move is idolatry. God has promised to be all that we need. When we substitute something other than God to satisfy a desire that only God legitimately satisfies, we sin. Because of our idolatry, we follow up by disregarding his instructions about life and are disobedient. If we don't view him as our ultimate source, then we don't respect his words as authoritative. But there is more. When we neglect to submit to God as our source, we submit to another power. This produces bondage. We are servants of the one to whom we yield. (See Romans 6:16.)

For example, we have a legitimate desire for security. God promises to be our God and we his people. But we choose to trust money for our security thereby embracing idolatry. Then we are greedy with our financial stewardship and fail to follow his instructions. Finally, we are blind to the true value of money and actually become thieves. (God said idolatrous Israel was stealing from him in Malachi 3:8.)

Another example: We are designed to desire intimacy. God has promised that we can know him intimately and has also instituted the family so that we could enjoy sexual intimacy in marriage. When we choose to make sexual pleasure our god,

we engage in disobedient acts of lust and end up in perversion.

Many are trying to free themselves from the addictions of materialism and perversion without embracing the full release of being forgiven by the only one who has defeated the powers behind idolatry. Sin causes a deep darkness that cannot be overcome simply by human efforts. There is guilt, shame, fear, disqualification, condemnation, and constant failure to get free.

We are given a **clear conscience** to approach his throne and access his grace for every need.

In the Old Testament, exile is a picture of sin, and deliverance from exile is a picture of forgiveness. When God undertakes to set his people free, he does a thorough job. His goal is to free us to worship him freely and to work productively in his world. He sets us free to be his image bearers in his cosmic temple, and he makes us truly human again. He is not so much about going to heaven when we die but in bringing the kingdom of heaven to bear on the earth. Knowing that we are helpless slaves, he takes on all facets of our exile and brings us back to the land he promised: the land of partnership with him. The covenant is fulfilled, and we are made beneficiaries of his work. Our guilt is taken out of the picture by the sacrificial death of Jesus. Shame is cleansed by the application of his blood. We are given a clear conscience to approach his throne and access his grace for every need. (See

Hebrews 4:14–16.) He takes on the principalities and powers that stand behind the idols we have embraced. Of course, they don't want to let us go, but he is a covenant partner who has won the battle.

In the unseen world, there is a battle raging, and the evil forces have sought to thwart God's plan from the very beginning. But there was a day when all the dark forces came together to do their absolute best (worst). They would focus all their power on the one anointed One who represented all of Adam's race and all of Israel's destiny. With one fatal swoop, they could erase the whole God-ordained plan of redemption. David talked about this day.

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 in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

Psalm 2:1–10 (ESV)

When the powers behind Rome, the pagan nations, and the deceived Jewish leaders came together at the holy hill of Calvary, they used all their power to destroy the prince of life. They thought they had won, then he came out of the grave and ascended to the right hand of the Father to rule over God's kingdom in a new way. The kingdom of God was launched on the earth. There would be a new creation with a new people based on the new covenant ratified in the blood of Jesus.

They were partners with God in the grand mission **to redeem what sin has marred.**

In the early days of the new kingdom, the believers were meeting daily in the Temple area listening to the teaching of the apostles. Peter and John walked by a man begging. He had been in that state for forty years. This day Peter and John had a covenant partner who could do much more than they could do alone. They gave him what the name of Jesus could give, and it caused a stir among those who didn't believe in their narrative. As he was dancing and praising God, they were on trial. They tried to explain that it wasn't them but their covenant partner who did the deed. Later when they gathered with their friends they prayed based on Psalm 2. They knew the exile was over. Their enemies in the unseen world had been defeated by the Son. (Read their prayer in Acts 4:24-31.) They asked that the victory of the cross be applied to their situation and that they

would be given a heavenly boldness to proclaim the truth of the new covenant. They asked that God would stretch out his hand to do signs and wonders affirming that the new kingdom had begun. They were partners with God in the grand mission to redeem what sin has marred. They were free to worship wherever they went and to work wherever they were sent because they had been forgiven.

Forgiveness includes release from the captors. When God initiates the exodus, he makes Pharaoh let you go. He makes Cyrus send you home. He makes Greece lend its language to communicate the good news. He makes Rome build roads to carry the gospel. He makes Pilate wash his hands. He makes the grave give up its tenant. He makes shame cover its face. He makes condemnation shut its mouth. He makes heaven come to earth, and he sums everything up in Christ Jesus, our Lord and King.

We are liberated by our covenant partner to live for a higher purpose than we ever imagined. We are partners with almighty God. Forgiven! Everyone needs it. All of us want it. It is the news that the world has been waiting to hear.



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