



## DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

ACTS 1:6-8

SEPTEMBER 2017

### What Season Is It?

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*We haven't lost the desire to know the times and seasons of God's calendar. Books flood the marketplace, offering clues to the end of time and the meaning of certain political decisions and astronomical occurrences in the heavens.*

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It has been true since the first couple ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We still clutch to the notion that if we knew everything God knows, we would be fine. So, we speculate.

As the book of Acts opens, Jesus has spent 40 days since his resurrection appearing to various groups of disciples. His topic during that period was the kingdom of God. As he approached his ascension, his disciples asked a calendar question. "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus answered, but not with a simple "yes" or "no." He answered the question they needed to ask and gave them the information they needed for the season

they were in. He had earlier demonstrated that mankind does not need to know the specific dates on God's calendar when he said that even he (as man) didn't know. (See Matthew 24:36.) In his answer, he redefined the concepts of Israel, the kingdom, and restoration. They had pictures in their minds regarding all of these things that needed to be replaced by greater and clearer pictures.

Betsy and I have had the privilege of keeping our grandsons, Sam (7) and Ben (5), for a few days. As we made a trip to the toy store, I explained to them that we would buy some Legos that would stay at our house so that when they came over, they would have them to play with. Ben

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agreed, but not enthusiastically. As soon as we were home he began lobbying to take them home with him. He had a hard time enjoying playing with them because he so desperately wanted to be able to take them home with him when his dad came to pick the boys up. Finally, I sat both boys down in front of me and explained again our original agreement. Ben listened, but with angst. I was thorough in my explanation. Sam readily agreed with the reasoning and the agreement. When I said, "Do you understand?" Ben replied, "But Papa, can we take the Legos home with us?" I felt like I think Jesus must have felt when

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after 40 days of explaining to his disciples about the new season they were in, they went right back to the question that obsessed them. They had long anticipated a time in history when God would intervene and establish a kingdom in Israel that would be stronger than the other kingdoms of the world. They would have the power to oppress as they had been oppressed. This had been the hope since

the days of Daniel in Babylon when he received interpretation of dreams depicting a coming kingdom that destroys all others and is established forever. (See Daniel 2 and Daniel 7.)

Jesus spoke of a new Israel. Isaiah had prophesied the coming of a special servant who would restore God's people and extend his blessing to the ends of the earth. This servant would be a "Witness" to God's nature and purpose. (See Isaiah 43:10; 49:7.) He would be the fulfillment of Adam's call to be an image bearer on earth. The nation of Israel had picked up that role but, like Adam, had failed to accomplish the task. A Servant would come to do what neither Adam nor Israel could do. Surprisingly, Jesus identified his disciples as the extension of that role. "You shall be witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth." Blessings would not be limited by national boundaries nor defined by physical abundance. A people of God would be image bearers in the truest sense. They would reflect the one who is the exact image of God, Jesus. The fulfillment of that prophecy had come. The followers of Jesus Christ are the people of God who are recipients of his covenant and partners with him in his mission to bless the whole world.

Jesus spoke also of the restoration

they hoped for. They had pictured a reconstituted kingdom under David's son that would be just like the one David had. That had been a magnificent kingdom. The land that was promised was taken. David was strong and kind. The whole world had to recognize the significance of Israel in David's time. Solomon had carried on the legacy for a while before it began to crumble under his sons. It was this restoration that the disciples saw in their minds when they read the promises of the prophets. But Jesus referred to a different kind of restoration by telling them to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit. Peter in Acts 2 amplified what that restoration looked like. He spoke of David and the fact that he prophesied resurrection. They all knew that David was dead and buried. So, the promise was fulfilled in Jesus, David's greater son. The restoration was neither national nor political, but supernatural. It was resurrection, and it began a whole new race of people. Those born of the Spirit are the people of God's covenant who fulfill his promise. Resurrection is ultimate restoration.

The kingdom Jesus spoke about was launched through his appearance. It was the rule that God had in mind for Adam and his descendants. God graciously determined to partner with mankind in

managing the earth. Adam had failed. Israel had failed. But as the last Adam and the representative Israelite, Jesus had ascended to the right hand of the Father to rule over that which God has assigned to mankind. (See Psalm 8:4-6 and Hebrews 2:6-9.) **The kingdom that was launched in Jesus' resurrection was one of a man ruling through his new covenant people, in the power of the Spirit, for the blessing of the whole creation.**

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**They live holy lives because God has set them apart,** rather than trying to live holy so they can be set apart.

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It was and is a new season. The old era has passed in that it has been fulfilled by the new. God has acted decisively in history to fulfill his purpose in creating mankind. Peter demonstrates the model for preaching in this season. He tells us that those who were filled with the Spirit were speaking of the mighty works of God in languages the people could understand. They were not issuing warnings nor explaining principles. They were telling what God has done. As this new picture

of reality began to focus in the minds of the hearers, they began to act differently. They showed evidence that they had been with Jesus. They thought differently about God, themselves, the world, and their mission. The “indicative” was emphasized before the “imperative” was issued. What does that mean? It means that new creation preaching first declares what God has done in Christ. Then it gives instructions about how to live out of that reality.

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We live in the aftermath of the great finished work of Jesus. **The kingdom has been launched.**

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When preaching or teaching features the imperatives, people focus on their own commitment and faithfulness. When they hear what God has done, they trust Jesus' commitment and his faithfulness. They live holy lives because God has set them apart, rather than trying to live holy so they can be set apart. Proclamation must precede exhortation, or else the cart gets before the horse.

What season are we in? We live in the aftermath of the great finished work of Jesus. The kingdom has been launched. The Spirit has come to enable and empower

God's people. The world awaits our blessing. **We live in the progressive comprehension of the finished work of Christ with adequate knowledge, authority, and power to extend God's kingdom on earth.** Our king will come again to conclude the matter. We look forward to his appearance not because we doubt the power of the Spirit to accomplish through us the assignment, but because we long to celebrate him in the midst of the creation he has redeemed. We have been sent by him with his promise to always be present. We continue our work until he says it's done.

We have enough knowledge to get our assignment done. We have not been told the dates of future events. We can trust the Father who is always on time.



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