



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

2 CORINTHIANS 5

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WHAT CAN WE EXPECT NOW?

It is universally common to want to have a better life. No one sets out to have a bad life or a lesser life. As we read the Bible, we find words and concepts that grab our attention because they seem to offer ways to find that place of blessing.

It has always been relatively easy to misinterpret what that means. We long for *victory* over our enemies both external and internal. We see promises of prosperity, and eagerly seek to find ways of having it. The apostle Paul speaks of “always being led in Christ’s triumphal procession” (see 2 Corinthians 2:14). We know from reading the Gospels that Jesus paid a supreme price to purchase for us a kind of life that is worthy of his payment. Surely, he didn’t purchase a life of subpar existence. It must be better than the “toil and struggle” perspective that seems all too common. All of this leads us to ask the important question: What can we expect now?

There is a book in the New Testament that focuses on this very question. In Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth, he addresses the kind of life we can expect between our conversion to Christ by faith and the great consummation of all things in him (Christ). The context of this letter includes the conflict in Corinth between Paul and others who promoted themselves as apostles. They claimed to be superior to Paul because of his many trials. They did not accept the hardships of life as part of the package of salvation. They promoted themselves as living in such victory that they were above such things, while Paul was rejoicing in his troubles because they revealed

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the kind of life he shared with the resurrected Lord. They featured their strengths, while he openly talked of his weaknesses. They were marketing a message that was palatable to human desires, for no one wants to buy into a life of trouble. Instead, we all crave escape from trouble and security for the future. Yet Paul was announcing the arrival of a new kind of life and a new day in history.

Since the time of the covenant with Abraham, those who believed in Abraham's God looked forward to a day when there would be a great intervention that vindicated God's people and defeated all enemies. The Law had been given to Moses accompanied by displays of glory. Even Moses's face shone with glory after his conversations with God. But that glory was temporary and preparatory. The Law was given to expose the need for a Savior. Paul announced that the Savior had come and the promises that made up the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ. Echoing Jesus, Paul was saying, "the new day is here." All the shadows and prophecies were pointing toward the revelation of Jesus, the last Adam and the ultimate Israelite. The new life that he brought was not just an

upgrade on the one lived under the Law. It was new, characterized by the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul was not competing in the marketplace of ideas with the others who were always tweaking their presentations to be more attractive to the people. He believed that the message he declared had the power of God's presence and would do its own work of transformation. To him, the issue was not building a following, but being a faithful partner with God. The words he used were expressions of the Word of God; and when God speaks, there is a new creation. In fact, Paul was careful not to add to or subtract from the word of God. Any dilution of the message would dull its power. He had full confidence that the Spirit of God would accompany the faithful declaration of God's Word, and it would do in the hearer what no other message could ever do. He was careful to eschew the metrics of culture by refusing to measure his success by the number of people who gathered around him. Instead, he rejoiced in the evidence of the new life that he saw in those who embraced the Gospel he preached. When faith, hope, and love blossomed in their lives, he knew that new life had been born.

So, what were the hallmarks of the victorious life according to Paul?

The victorious life that Paul knew was manifest in freedom from self-centeredness.

“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.”

(2 Corinthians 5:14–15, NRSV)

The new life received from Jesus includes a new purpose for living. Instead of living for our own preservation and exaltation, we live for his glory. We are not simply helped to do better in our selfishness but given a higher purpose than just getting what we want.

Since we still have our physical bodies that have severe limitations as they decay, our privilege is to display the strength of the indwelling Christ in these fragile bodies. Though we try to be good stewards of our bodies, we know that they are temporal. The Spirit within us longs for a body

that will be capable of enjoying new dimensions presented after death. Since Jesus has already gone through that, we have a glimpse of what we can expect. The presence of the Spirit in us is the guarantee that the new body is coming. So, we are not limited to this age and this physical state. Dying is not our greatest fear. We have an indestructible life with the guarantee of a new body that fits our existence. While we live on this earth, at this time, we are often called to display the strength of the one who lives in us. We are fragile jars of clay containing the treasure of divine light. We are crushed at times to let the light out.

Remember that before Paul's conversion, he saw a fragile jar of clay being crushed in Stephen. Unjustly stoned because he told the truth to a religious body unwilling to hear it, Stephen displayed a kind of life with which Paul could not yet identify. Stephen prayed for his murderers and his face shone with the light of eternal life. That light affected Paul. Later, he saw it again while traveling to Damascus. This time it got through to him and he became a jar of clay susceptible to being squeezed or broken. Paul understood that the

point was not his comfort, but the light getting out. In our weakness, His strength is magnified.

The new life is controlled by a kind of love that can only come from heaven.

It is stronger than any law. We are captured by it when we see Jesus. It captivates our hearts and controls our direction. The Law is not eliminated; it is superseded. We are comforted to know that we are not our own. We belong, both body and soul, to him who died for us. He has taken the responsibility to care for us and take us to where he has decided for us to go. Nothing is strong enough to stop him. He can keep his word, and whatever we have given to him. What security!

In the new life of victory, we have been reconciled to God and restored to our job of partnering with God. As his ambassadors, we represent him on this earth as he carries out his plan. His kingdom has come to earth and is working now. It will one day be consummated by the final appearance of his Son, Jesus. Until then, we are God's ground

force. Praying for his will to be done on earth as in heaven and offering ourselves as spokespeople as well as jars of clay, we enjoy him as he enjoys us. He has done everything necessary to reconcile us so that we can live without guilt, shame, fear, and self-seeking. In a world that is still reeling from the darkness of deception, we carry the light that dispels the darkness and give hope to those whom God loves. All this with the confident assurance that the best is yet to come.



P.O. Box 2022
Colleyville, TX 76034
(817) 267-9224
Fax: (817) 354-5522
Email: Mail@KerygmaVentures.com
www.KerygmaVentures.com