



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

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Step Into Freedom

The awareness of the existence of something greater, just out of reach, plagues all of humanity. C.S. Lewis recognized this when he spoke of having desires that nothing in this world can satisfy. His conclusion was that these unmet desires are evidence that we are made for another world. This is why fantasies captivate us.

We love the idea of Narnia - a new world with new realms of reality that we can step into from the door of a wardrobe. We love the songs that express our desire to fly away to a place where things are different and better than what we have now. Even King David sang:

"O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; truly I would flee far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; I would hurry to find a shelter for myself from the

raging wind and tempest" (Psalms 55:6-8, NRSV).

Since the Garden of Eden, humans have been looking for the portal that provides entrance into the next life. So, when Jesus appeared and announced that the kingdom of God was at hand, it was the announcement of the ages. He used the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep to express the relationship He has with His own, declaring that He was the door that allows the sheep to go into the place

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where there is safety and satisfaction (see John 10:9). It was God's good news that the hoped-for life had come among us. One could step into it by repenting - changing the way one thinks and acts. The story of Jesus, His disciples, and the birth of the Church is about stepping into that new reality and experiencing the life of the age to come.

It is extremely unfortunate that through the years we have redefined this marvelous salvation as primarily a ticket into heaven one day. Multitudes of saints have settled for looking forward to heaven while singing songs about flying away from this ole world. Ignoring Jesus' description of the life of the age to come as the privilege of knowing Him (John 17:3) and simply tolerating a transactional gospel that features some measure of working to get blessings, the Christian life has lacked joy and fulfillment.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi writes of stepping into this new world of freedom. He writes from jail, so the joy he promotes

is not related to his circumstances. He expresses complete confidence that the life given to us by the grace of God not only fulfills our destiny, but satisfies our longing for meaning:

"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6, NRSV).

He is clear that this new life is not just a standard to live up to, nor some principles to live by. It is a shared life. Believers truly share the life of the living Lord.

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interest, but to the interests of others. Let the same

mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus... (Philippians 2:1-5, NRSV).

Who wouldn't like to be free from the enslaving "me-ism" of self-centered living? It would be great to live without fear of being rejected by others, of failing to live up to expectations, and instead be able to live with the only focus to glorify God and serve others. That is the offer. We are not encouraged to try to make our old self-life more sociable and civilized. We are offered the gift of death that puts away that which cannot be rehabilitated and replaces it with the new ability to reflect the life of Jesus Himself. It is a kind of liberation that goes so far beyond political freedom that it astounds us. We have been granted the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. He lives in us to reveal all that Jesus is and to make real the ramifications of His work on the cross and in the tomb. Paul calls this growing awareness and its corresponding actions,

"work[ing] out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling

you both to will and work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13, NRSV).

Everything we need to enjoy the life of the age to come now is ours in Christ. We have encouragement in Christ who has settled our sin issue, defeated death, and guaranteed us our final position of being in Him at the right hand of the Father. We have the consolation of love, which overcomes evil in all its forms. It never fails and endures throughout eternity. We share in the Spirit who opens our eyes to see the new world in which we live. We have grace-driven compassion and sympathy, allowing us to carry on the same work that Jesus did while on earth.

"For whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him"
(Hebrews 11:6, NRSV)

We work out the great gift of liberation by first believing that such blessings exist.

Next, we admit that we cannot find such liberation on our own. Then we act on His promise and expect Him to work through us to accomplish what He intends. He is faithful. We are abiding in Him and sharing His life. As we do, we share His mind and with it His perspective on the world. This enables us to live in the same freedom the Son has always enjoyed with the Father. We can give our lives for others asking nothing from them in return. We can find a joy that surpasses any satisfaction we could ever find in trying to squeeze more from the human life that was deeply flawed by the fall of Adam and Eve. Having been in bondage to demanding satisfaction from the created things in our lives, we rejoice in being connected to the Creator. We move from the disillusionment of lifeless idols to the unbounding joy of the life of God.

And there is more to come. We have the down payment now, with the

promise that what Jesus purchased is more and bigger. The age to come keeps on coming with fuller awareness of who He is and what He has done. We have resurrection of the body ahead. We reign with Him. The partial will one day be fully revealed. Until then we can live with Him on earth as sons, friends, and partners. There is no need to fly away when we are in our right mind—the mind of Christ. We simply step into the freedom of our new reality in Him.



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