



# DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 CORINTHIANS 10

SEPTEMBER 2020

## Profound Times

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*2020 has certainly been surprising to us all, and that surprise has manifested in a lot of different ways: Angry people are shouting, fearful people are fretting, predators are pouncing, and almost everyone is scratching their heads, wondering what is really going on. All the while, it seems as though the wise and mature are ignored as they stand in the shadows, leery of offering what they know is not welcomed.*

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A dear friend used an interesting word to describe these days. She said that we are living in “profound” days. It struck me as an unusual but very accurate description for what is happening. Profound means difficult to fathom, deep-seated, characterized by intense feeling. Pretty close to what we are experiencing, I’d say.

Of course, those who give credence to the Bible as a major source of truth want to know if there are biblical precedents for the profundity of these days. Are they like the days of the flood? That is an important stage in the big story, but not repeatable, since God promised not to destroy the world with water again. Are they like the story of Sodom and Gomorrah? Probably not, though that episode reveals that God

does destroy that which refuses to be redeemed. Are these days the beginning of the end as described by Jesus in Matthew 24? Well, in that passage Jesus was speaking primarily to the Jews of His day who had turned true religion false and were awaiting the promised destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Though, again, this event reflects the purging love of God when people refuse to be redeemed. Perhaps the clearest parallel to the days we’re in can be found in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians as he compares this age to the journey of Israel from Egypt through the wilderness to the promised land of Canaan.

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*Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play (1 Corinthians 10:6-7 ESV).*

Since God reveals His word in narrative form, let's rehearse the big story:

God's original purpose in creation was to have humans as His agents of delight and development. These creatures, made in His image and designed to enjoy Him and work with Him in discovery and development of the earth, are the crown of His work. They were not designed to live in isolation, but in intimate fellowship with God and each other. They were made to worship, work, and walk in joy. Properly related to God, they would be appropriately related to each other and the rest of creation, which was made to respond to them. The laws that governed nature matched the design and desires of the humans assigned to live in nature. Sadly, the first humans listened to the lie of the enemy, sought something outside of God's provision, and trusted someone other than God. This brought alienation and confusion to them, and that characterized the race from then on. The ones created to be sons lived like orphans.

Later, God chose a second human agent: Abraham. He was the father of a whole ethnic group that became the Israelites. God graciously gave them detailed laws that revealed how people can live within

the creation that He has designed. The Law that Moses received from God for these people was a gigantic expression of grace. If they would follow these laws, all of nature would respond positively, and they would reap the fruit of the land. God never lost His desire and determination to delight and deploy His people. He has always wanted His created ones to enjoy him and the creation He gave them. It is no wonder that those who saw the laws from God properly loved his laws. No nation ever had such insight into how things worked. The whole world had wandered around in superstition and fear, looking for ways to make sense of life. Israel was distinct because God gave them the key to living in the world that was designed for delight and development. We should often read His word to them as recorded in Deuteronomy 6.

*Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.*

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6: 1-9 ESV).*

Note that God's purpose is to bless them and show them how to live life at its best. Note also the simplicity and secret to the life of joy. There is one God, and He has a name. He is Yahweh, not just any god. The key to everything is loving Him with everything we have. Any distractions from singular trust in Him will diminish joy and deny Him as the one God to be worshipped. For God to allow a mixture of our response to Him would violate His love. He loves us too much to permit idols that promise but cannot produce.

*And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees*

*that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 6:10-15).*

So how does the big story relate to our profound times? We, too, have been given magnificent grace. We not only have the laws that God gave Moses, but we have a Savior who embodies those laws and shares His life with us. As wonderful as the Law was, Moses and the Israelites couldn't keep it. They were continually being drawn away to other gods. They gave in to the cultures around them that promoted new and enticing ways to meet the deep needs of their hearts. Each time they went astray, they would end up with empty hearts and in bondage to the very gods that offered them freedom. So, the same God who thought up creation and designed it for the delight of his creatures and himself, came as a human and lived according to the laws that unlock nature. He received upon Himself the wrath of broken laws and violated trusts, reconciling the alienated humans to Himself and restoring the relationship He originally purposed. We heard that good news and

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believed it, becoming the beneficiaries of His majestic grace. We, too, have enjoyed so much that we did not make or build. We, too, have allowed our desires to lead us to the enticing offers of satisfaction. We, like Israel, have become so enamored with the prosperity that comes from tapping into His laws of nature that prosperity itself has become our god. We focus on ways to keep prosperity coming. We make it our measuring stick. We continue to need more because the nature of idols is that they cannot satisfy. They promise, but cannot produce. We are left to try to get more, refusing to admit that no amount will satisfy the desire to know God and be delighted in Him alone.

*Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV).*

The profundity of this perspective is that God is jealous for His people. He loves them too much to permit them to continue in slow spiritual starvation. He will purge the land when the inhabitants refuse to embrace His grace, but He is slow to destroy when restoration is possible. He is offering Himself as the God who delights in us. He is graciously opening our eyes to see the shallowness of any prosperity

that does not feature intimacy with Him. We can respond in the way that is always appropriate. We can focus on the one God revealed in Jesus Christ. We can embrace the good news of His work on our behalf. We can be grateful for His persistent mercy. We can refuse to serve any endeavor or cause that does not glorify Him. We can establish His word as the final authority in our lives. As we are more conscious of His great love for us, we are more conscious of our love for those around us. His kind of love inevitably moves us toward giving it away. The world around us is begging for kindness that offers hope in the midst of the turmoil.

It is always true in the kingdom of God that the profound is simple. "Love the one true God with all we have and our neighbor as ourselves." When you have trouble doing that, remember that Jesus did it when He died for us. Relish His love. Soak in it. Tell Him all about your fears and failures. He will replace them with His delight. That has always been his purpose.



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