



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

2 CORINTHIANS 4

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Hast Thou No Scar?

As Jesus came to save (heal) the brokenness of the fallen world, He released the power to accomplish His purpose and extended that mission through His corporate body.

The doctrine of suffering has been neglected in understanding the Christian experience. Yet, sacrifice is the core expression of love that transforms. Having a consistent doctrine of the mission of the church, which includes suffering, is essential for our implementation of a community that extends Christ's healing in the world. Let's examine the commission of the disciples after the resurrection and then look to the Epistles for explanation and amplification, focusing on 2 Corinthians 4 and 11-12.

In the Gospel of John 20:19-23, we find Jesus on the night of Resurrection Sunday meeting with fearful disciples to commission them for the task of extending the dynamics of the kingdom of God that were at work in Him. He had, in those last few days, released the greatest power in the universe. He had given His own sinless life in total sacrifice. The Father had accepted the sacrifice and vindicated Him by raising Him from the dead. It is this unique person who is sending ordinary men into a

sick world with everything they could need to see His purpose fulfilled. This is a short text, but every word and every move is important. This is a new era being launched. Never had anything like this been done. Everything prior was a precursor - partial, predictive, and promising. The time for invasion had arrived. A good leaven was being released into the dough that would infect and influence every people group and every square inch of the world.

Jesus appeared and announced, "Peace." It is truly an other-worldly kind of peace. It is the peace of reconciliation - restoring humans to God, to their own original humanity, and to others made in the image of God. It is the peace that characterizes the communion of the Holy Trinity. Astoundingly, His presence brings the kind of peace to disciples facing even greater threats than the Jews were threatening at the time. They would come to know by experience that when He is in the room, there is a peace that even hell cannot

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disrupt. In a world fraught with turmoil, terror, and tragedy, peace is a healing balm.

Then He showed them His scars. He still had them after the resurrection. The body that continues to display the Gospel will have its own scars. They are witnesses of His healing wounds, and they replicate the transforming power of sacrifice. Regrettably, in our efforts to magnify the resurrection, we have allowed the sacrificial power of Christ's death to be minimized - especially as it relates to our continued fellowship in His sufferings. Dennis Kinlaw says: *"The only saving force in all of existence is a life sacrificed in love, surrendering to something outside and bigger than itself."* That means that we extend the kingdom the same way Jesus did: through sacrifice. Of course we can't pay the sacrifice that He paid, and there is no need to. However, we do get to display the scars of our own wounds that testify to His power to heal.

The false narrative of trouble-free living is a distortion of the "Christo Victor" theme in salvation history. A mixture of American-dream optimism, cultural materialism, and the influence of postmodern thinking has crept into our concept of victory in Christ. We have drifted toward escapism and triumphalism while misunderstanding the biblical timeline. Some have insisted that the Kingdom of God only comes to earth in the millennium. For now, they insist that we focus on getting people ready to die. At times, we have featured reaching the world with the message of: 1. Making decisions for Christ. 2. Getting assurance for heaven after death. 3. Showing compassion to those who are most needy. 4. Establishing or maintaining a lawful society. 5. Pursuing political liberation for the oppressed. Notice the lack of emphasis on how to live now between the finished work of the cross and the final work of new heaven and

new earth. Enjoying the life of the age to come now is the theme of Jesus' healing. We live in the midst of trouble with a confidence that our afflictions give place to His overcoming grace that heals all who partake. Those who insist on a kind of victorious life that exalts in superior circumstances as evidence of being blessed boast in their achievements, but we, like Jesus, have scars to make our case.

*Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;
I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star.
Hast thou no scar?*

*Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.
Hast thou no wound?*

*No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me.
But thine are whole; can he have followed far
Who hast no wound or scar?*

- Amy Carmichael

The apostle Paul's great ambition was to know Christ, including the fellowship of His suffering. In 2 Corinthians 4 he details the healing power of bearing the dying of the Lord in our present bodies. Much of this whole letter to the Corinthians is his defense of apostleship. He opens his vestments to reveal his own scars and uses them as his qualifications. After all, he is displaying the life of his suffering Savior. His accusers are presenting more victorious apostles. They are not so sure of one who is often in jail, evicted from cities, shipwrecked, stoned, hungry, and

thirsty. If faith in God produces good things and good times, Paul must be lacking.

I wonder if today we have many apostolic figures aspiring to be more like the Corinthian apostles than like Paul. Claiming to demonstrate how much superior life with Christ is to alternatives, we feature best practices in achieving success the way culture measures it. Those sick from shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, and hopelessness see success as a land too far away. Instead of seeing their own afflictions as opportunities to approach the throne of grace and find help, they are made to believe they are somehow disqualified. Physical healing, emotional stability, and spiritual wholeness must be reserved for the apostles of trouble-free living.

In chapter four of 2 Corinthians, Paul doubles down on the upside down nature of the kingdom life that is available now. Those who insist on seeing reality from the natural perspective are blind to the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3). How could they worship a wounded savior who still bears scars? They can't see the glory in His face. He insists that God has embedded the light of the Gospel in the heart of believers, and that it comes out when they are squeezed. Since true believers live for the glory of God, they rejoice in their opportunities for squeezing:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us... For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is a work in us, but life in you (2 Corinthians 4:7, 11-12 ESV).

They do not complain though they often groan, knowing that we are living in that part

of the story.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:22-25 ESV).

Having this revealed perspective empowers the scarred disciple to endure. Reality is not fully identified by what our physical eyes see. There is a higher sight (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Paul had seen this perspective during his years in the desert training, but also illustrated by his own conversion. Stephen was an ordinary man full of the light of the life of Jesus. The man known as Saul watched him being squeezed (stoned). In Stephen's face, Paul saw a light that he saw again in greater intensity on his way to Damascus. Saul's greatest human influence was probably Stephen. In Stephen's dying, life came to Saul. The sickness of his soul was healed by the light that dispelled his darkness. Joy in the midst of suffering cannot be replaced by any slick evangelistic strategy. The hope for such wholeness occupies every human soul. Joy being central to human satisfaction, it is the great attraction. Joy shines in affliction.

The episode of the thorn in the flesh highlights how weakness on our part gives place to strength on His part. Paul could not boast of the effectiveness of his faithful prayers in getting rid of the thorn. He could boast in his own weakness and did so, though he felt foolish and had to defend his apostleship.

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Rather than being embarrassed by this thorn, he chose to embrace it as God's gift delivered by Satan. Hurting people are looking for a safe place to acknowledge their wounds. God is developing a community of scarred people who can be safe and can offer a life beyond wounds.

On that Sunday evening, after showing them His scars, Jesus authorized the disciples to be His sent ones. No greater authority exists than the resurrected Lord of all things. We shall never face a superior authority. We need not fear. And we don't have to feel it to exercise it. The record of the Acts of the Apostles shows how the early church increasingly advanced through the lives of disciples facing the world's greatest threats and showing that sacrifice, suffering, and death can win any battle. In their willingness to die, they found a power that allowed them to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. They proved to care more than to just have a list of miracles they had seen, though miracles are part and parcel of a life grounded in another world. When He breathed upon them to receive the Spirit, Jesus was granting them the same power that energized His daily life and that ultimately raised Him from the dead. It is not a problem to be weak when we have as our comforter and advocate such a one.

The disciples' assigned message was the forgiveness of sins purchased by Jesus's shed blood. Those who depend on His blood can and must be declared *forgiven*. Those who deny sin or try another absolution are not forgiven. It is clear. Those sick from the ramifications of guilt, fear, shame, and condemnation have hope. They can enjoy fellowship with God now and forever. They can be confident that nothing is stronger than His love and that, in every circumstance, He is ready to display His life.

As we investigate our own brand of community, we are forced to admit that instead of featuring the radical nature of the kingdom among us, we have sought to downplay it so that we could be viewed as more favorable when compared to other world religions. After all, we, too, are trying to make people nicer. Our distinctives are not important... And we are seeing that this brand of religion doesn't work. The culture is getting sicker as we continue to expand our efforts to reach people with lukewarm love and a culture-friendly message of moralistic platitudes. Some feature physical healing with much fanfare when someone is healed, but the neglect toward the mentally, emotionally, and relationally ill is obvious. If we are to reflect and extend the work of the resurrected body of Christ, we must be captured by love, captivated by the present expression of the kingdom of God, and committed to a life of risk and adventure. The love that is poured into our hearts is longing to affirm the worth of those hurting for love. When we operate in love, we cannot fail. When we proclaim the truth of the Gospel, it will not fail.

With a more clear understanding of what God is doing with His people during this part of the story, we can better offer a healing Savior to a hurting world.



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