



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 PETER 2

DECEMBER 2020

BORN FROM HEAVEN, ASSIGNED TO EARTH

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

1 Peter 2:11-17 ESV

The recent election has revealed a tension many Christians feel as citizens of both heaven and earth. Some have concluded that, since we are born from heaven, we have little or no business trying to influence such matters as politics and civil government. Others have felt so connected to our earthly responsibilities that they have put too much hope in the civil structures of society. In the middle of the confusion, we have been

susceptible to defining our preferences by the reputation or disposition of the individual candidate. We long for a clear word from our Lord about living in two kingdoms at the same time.

The tension may not be the same for those who have interpreted scriptures as saying that the kingdom hasn’t come yet and are waiting for Jesus to come again to establish

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His millennium rule on earth. That view can lead to a pessimism that expects the earth to continue to spin into deeper levels of decay, ruled by evil, while hoping that Jesus' return will rescue us from a world destined to be destroyed. The influence of this perspective within the Church creates even more confusion for those weighing the question about our earthly responsibilities. Personally, I embrace the perspective that Jesus brought His kingdom to earth in His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Holy Spirit. His kingdom is now working in the earth through the agency of His redeemed people like leaven working through the lump until He consummates everything in His final appearance, which will result in the new heavens and new earth. We are born from heavenly seed to display the glory of our Father on earth with the assurance that we shall forever be His children.

The apostle Peter wrote to scattered believers in the first century to address this kind of tension. They had been born into God's family and were living in the various regions of Asia Minor under constant pressure to conform to the culture at large. They were persecuted by the Romans who were suspicious that they were dangerous insurrectionists because they swore allegiance to a Lord other than Caesar. They were cursed by Jews who viewed them as a cult and pagan threat to their own religion. With pressure from all sides, these believers needed clear instruction on how to live in the world as "alien-citizens."

In his encouragement and exhortation to these believers, Paul began by first reaffirming their true identity: God's people. As such, he reminds them that they get the inheritance. They have received the package of salvation given by God through Jesus Christ, and they

are progressively opening it to discover more and more treasure. They are living stones in the final temple of God on earth. They are His priesthood. He also describes them with emphasis on their distinctiveness: *"Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls"* (1 Peter 1:8-9 NRSV). One can easily see in this description why they would be misunderstood by their culture. They were captivated by a love of Someone they had never seen in the flesh yet totally trusted with everything. They would be considered crazy by those who only trust what they can see, feel, taste, or touch. These believers offered the only hope for their society's salvation, yet just like Jesus, they were rejected by those needing it most.

God has always loved his creation. He placed his highest creatures in charge of discovering and developing the earth. He wants humans to flourish. History records that alienated and enslaved humans cannot successfully order and maintain creation. God sent His Son as the mature human to both model and empower those who have been devastated by sin, so they could get about doing what humans were designed to do. He did everything necessary to reconcile humans to God and to restore them to fulfill their destiny now and forever. Only restored humans can lead in ordering structures that enable humankind to flourish. These people, born from heaven and assigned to earth, are essential if societies are ever going to work at all. "Alien-citizens" hold the keys to society's hopes.

Having established the eternal identity of the believers as God's people, Paul moves on to explain the freedom of the people of God

in unusual terms: “As God’s slaves, live as free people...” (1 Peter 2:16 HCSB). Slavery to God is freedom from all imposter-masters. Slaves of God are cared for by a Master who is both sovereign and loving. They have no rights, but many promises. They only have mercy as their plea, but that is what opens heaven’s store for them.

Having explained the Church’s identity and the nature of her freedom, Peter then proceeds to instruct on how believers are to relate to the earthly institutions that God has established to order society on earth: (1) Honor everyone. Since all humans are created in God’s image, we honor each one as He does. Since Jesus paid for their redemption, we value them as he does. This eliminates prejudice, racism, and elitism. (2) Love the family of God. The family is the God-ordained structure to nurture and train humans on how to live with each other. Even when the natural family is dysfunctional, He has designed the family of God to equip people to successfully relate to each other and work together for the common good of the family’s mission. Those who try to live successfully without being connected to the family of God

will find their efforts are futile. God designed us as relational, and we only learn who we are and what we are doing as we relate to one another. We have the capacity to love our enemies, but we learn how by loving our brothers and sisters. (3) Fear God. When He is the ultimate authority, His word is final in all matters. As we revere Him as our ultimate authority, we are unintimidated by any other authority, yet free to submit to those delegated authorities that govern society. (4) Honor the Emperor. To honor does not mean to condone his or her character or approve of his or her disposition. It means to respect God’s appointed institutions and leaders for the purpose of upholding and promoting justice. We do this “for Jesus’ sake.” Refusal to honor God’s appointed institutions is a repudiation of Jesus’s mission. We cannot refuse our responsibility as citizens of our earthly country and still claim to be delegates of God’s kingdom assigned to an earthly task.

There are parallels that help us know how the two kingdoms work and relate. As a citizen of the United States, I will use it as my example:

Kingdom of God: We are born from heaven.	Civil kingdom: We were born in a physical country, the United States.
Kingdom of God: Our final authority is God.	Civil kingdom: In the United States, the final authority is the people.
Kingdom of God: The written authority is Scripture.	Civil kingdom: In the United States, it is our Constitution.
Kingdom of God: The narrative is the biblical story.	Civil kingdom: The narrative is the history of our foundation.
Kingdom of God: Our destiny is to represent God on earth.	Civil kingdom: Our destiny is to bless the other nations.

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Sadly, we have done a poor job of training our families to be good citizens of both kingdoms. Too often we have bought the lie that politics and religion don't mix. Truth: There is nothing outside the domain of God's love and care, and He shows that through His people. Making disciples includes making good stewards of one's earthly blessings. For years, we could depend on public schools to train good citizenship. When education is separated from biblical narrative, truth is distorted. Who is training our children? In the future, churches that take seriously the commission of our Lord will include training believers to live as productive citizens of this world.

As we pray for our country, we must honor the way God has structured His kingdom. He works through human agents. His order is for the Church (the family of God) to infect our nation. He does not promise to bypass the divine order and bless the nation without the Church. The "land" that needs to be healed is the Church. When it is healthy, the nation will be affected for the good. Good citizens of the kingdom of God make good citizens of the country. When leaders try to lead without submitting to the order of God's purpose for the nation, they will fail and we will suffer. So, in a sense, the world is waiting for a nation to lead. Our nation is waiting for the Church to lead. We are praying for a massive revival in the Church. When we do what we are assigned to do, other institutions can do what they are assigned to do.

As joyful slaves of God, we exhibit our freedom by serving those who need to be loved and restored. We can submit to the various institutions of government as God's way of order. We might be called to suffer when core values conflict, but we are not demeaned by suffering. It is our way of releasing the power of love into the world. Life is anything but boring as we embrace our citizenship from heaven and our assignment on earth.



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