



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

GALATIANS 5

MARCH 2022

THE SOUND OF GRACE

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1 NRSV)

Because the gospel as proclaimed by the New Testament apostles is the only power able to transform people, the purity and clarity of it is the most critical issue of our day. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he addresses the importance of the gospel of grace in initial salvation *and* in living as God's people now and forever. He makes it very clear that we don't begin with grace and move on to willpower or obedience. He speaks of being called by God and shows how the sound we heard that grabbed us in the heart is the same sound that nourishes our hearts each day of our lives and gives us the proper

hope upon which we build and sustain our lives. Every true believer in Jesus wants to become more and more like Him, since He alone is the one unique complete person. The only hope we have of that is the transforming power of grace.

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Though many have erroneously concluded that God wants to constrain their liberty, He has acted to finally and fully liberate us from

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everything that would hinder us from being the humans He designed for His pleasure and glory. Grace-liberated people are joyfully productive and wildly gracious. They make the gardens produce and the social structures of culture work. Those who really want to be free and empowered will love the gospel of the New Testament: *the kerygma*. But, since the original sin in Eden, humans have concluded that there is something we can do to merit favor and gain advantage. Therefore, we are vulnerable to any proposition that offers us a prize for our achievements. We profess that we don't want the law, but find ourselves running toward it constantly. We acknowledge that God has shown us the way his creation works and we have turned those laws of management into ladders toward some form of righteousness. We are addicted to laws because we are compelled to achieve. Strangely, we rejoice when we hear the refreshing sound of grace, but quickly move to self-effort in our attempts to

become better people.

Paul mentioned that the Galatians were running well until someone distracted them (see Galatians 5:7). His point is that when they first heard the sound of the kerygma, they were full of joy, graciousness, and hope. Now they are judgmental, critical, and victimized. What happened? They had listened to some sounds made by those trying to add law to grace. The "gospel" they were preaching was a mixture of the old covenant which was designed to expose the flaws of self-attained righteousness and the new covenant of grace that bases everything on the obedience of Jesus, Our Mediator. It is deadly. We only run well when we listen to the sound of the original call we heard from God when the kerygma is preached. In his letter to the Romans, Paul deals clearly with the way salvation takes place (see Romans 10:5-21). The narrative is somewhat different if we tell it from our perspective. We feature our confession. Typically, we say

something like this: “I was pretty much doing my own thing, when things began to go bad and I began to question my life purpose. I was invited to a church service where I heard a message and suddenly, it was like it was just for me. When the invitation to respond came, I did. I prayed a prayer, then I was baptized, and I started studying the Bible. I am now trying to be a good Christian, but I often feel so inadequate.” That is a legitimate testimony. We have to hear the story and respond, but there is more to it than that. When a mom calls to her son in the backyard, “Dinner is ready!” and the child responds, “Coming!”, something has been going on before that interaction takes place from the mom’s perspective. When God tells our testimony, it sounds more like this: “I chose you to be mine before time. I have prepared for your restoration and worked through the centuries to put you into my plan for blessing the creation. I sent my Son to obey where you couldn’t, to

die in your place, to redeem all that sin has defamed. I sent my Spirit to inspire humans to write history from my perspective. I sent people to proclaim my story. When you heard the proclamation, I opened your eyes to see and your ears to hear beyond what the preacher was saying. You heard the word of Christ—you heard Him speak. That sparked belief. As you believed, you put words to your faith and confessed. As you confessed, the reality of the new life in you began to manifest and your whole being experienced a new level of joy and hope. You began to see that I am working in you all that I have done for you. As you act in faith, I work with you to produce what your actions alone could never produce. Like the man with the withered hand being commanded to stretch it forth, as he did, I worked in him so that he could obey.” (It can be perilous to attempt to speak for God, but I have tried to be true to the text of Romans 10.)

The sound of grace not only

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interprets our first calling, but also nourishes our hearts to grow as our character is progressively transformed. We are freed from the fear of failing in our attempts to hold on and finish well. We hear the sound of grace tolling the news that Jesus is sitting on the throne and we are in Him. He finished well. We are in Him. The same grace that found us when we were hopelessly lost, gave us life when we were dead in sin, and reconciled us when we were sworn enemies of God is the same grace that will be present in the midst of storms, and steadfast when our strength has been depleted. As great as life shared with the resurrected Lord is now, there is more. One day all that His blood purchased will be reclaimed. We know that redemption rules in creation, not chaos. We know that all God allows, He redeems to the praise of His glorious grace. We live each day eagerly awaiting the fulfillment of all that began when Jesus arose from the grave. One day, all graves will empty. All wrongs

will be made right. His grace goes farther than the curse has gone. The wounds in His hands are now scars testifying to His redeeming grace. The failures of our past are being recast as demonstrations of His unfailing grace.

As a believer in Christ Jesus, you have heard the sound of grace. It still rings out. Listen. Find a gospel proclaiming community and go there often. Listen to the sound that nourishes your soul. Turn down the offers to find something better by climbing one more ladder. We have heard the joyful sound. Tune in.



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