

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

MAY 2023 | EPHESIANS 2:4-5

“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—”

Ephesians 2:4-5 (NRSV)

TRANSFORMING GRACE

Sociologists say that societal change happens in this order: First, a recognized problem; second, a new paradigm; third, a movement that embodies the ramifications of the new paradigm. With just a little analysis, we can see how the American culture has been eroded as some strategic thinkers sought to change from a Bible-informed society to a secular society following this order. But there is another Strategist who is moving now to counter this substitute “wokeness” with an awakening that features a new paradigm called the gospel of the Kingdom, or **kerygma**.

Sadly, we have clouded the good news of what God has done in Christ Jesus with what we need to do to get salvation. We have preached the good news of an available transaction, but not of a finished work of God. Shortly after I was married, a vacuum cleaner salesman came to our apartment and excitedly announced that he had good news for us. If we would gather some of our friends for his presentation, and they bought a vacuum cleaner, we would get ours for free. His good news required us to do something for him in order to get something we wanted. That is not the **kerygma**! The **kerygma** is an announcement so great

that a decision is required, but it is not a transaction whereby we trade with God. Isaiah 40:1-2,9 (NRSV) says:

Comfort, O comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid. That she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins... Get you up to a high mountain O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

The message is that Israel's exile is over. God has acted to show them mercy. It is an announcement of what God has done. Of course if they believe such astounding news, they will act in accordance. This is a pattern for the proclamation of the gospel for the New Testament and forever. In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul explains the theological dynamic of this message (see Ephesians 2:1-10). Paul says that God has made us alive when we were dead in sins. He united us with Christ so that we are seated with Him in heavenly places having our sins forgiven.

We receive this blessing because of His choice and His grace. We have no grounds for boasting. This grace that is given works in us to produce the kind of works that fit with people who live in full gratitude and freedom from guilt and shame. We live in community with others who have experienced such amazing grace and that community (church) shines as lights in the dark world that has been loved and redeemed but doesn't yet know the good news.

Luke gives an illustration of the power of **kerygma** with the story he tells of the sinner woman who experienced God's grace in her encounter with Jesus at a Simon's house (see Luke 7:36ff). Luke tells of a dinner party Jesus attended at a pharisee's house. A notoriously sinful woman came and stood behind Jesus, weeping, wiping his feet with her hair and pouring expensive perfume on Him. In this story, we see grace in action. She came to a pharisee's house - the last place a public sinner would want to go. She was being drawn by God as she somehow knew Jesus would love her. She recognized her problem, and she believed Jesus would give her a new perspective on life. Though judged and criticized by Simon, she stayed

with Jesus who told Simon that those who were forgiven much would love much. This was before Jesus verbally announced that her sins were forgiven. Jesus gave her two words to live on. First, "Your sins are forgiven." Second, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Here are four truths to ponder about the nature of the *kerygma*:

One, obedience without love is not distinctively Christian. Many people are obedient to their religious traditions in order to appease their god, please their god, get rewards from their god, or build a basis for bargaining with their god. It is only the love that comes from being loved first that produces obedience that is truly Christian.

Two, Christians obey because they have been loved by the only person in the universe who loves unconditionally, eternally, and produces a changed person. Humans long for that kind of love, but until God showed it, the world never knew such a power existed. We cannot give away a divine virtue unless we receive it first. Obedience without a love motivation is a dead work as it relates to our relationship with God (see 1 John 4:8 and 1 Corinthians 13).

Three, God's love to us is expressed in forgiveness. Sin is the problem. Forgiveness is the only solution. Until we are forgiven, we are guilty of the crime of rebellion that demands the death penalty. We are slaves to the power of sin from which we cannot escape on our own. We are infected by a wasting disease for which we cannot find a cure. We glibly preach about sin being a bad choice. It is so much more. It is captivity. If it is only a bad choice, we could be better by learning better choices, but even when we know the right choice, there is a force acting on us that causes us to choose badly (see Romans 7:7-13). The great story of the Exodus foreshadows the deliverance we discover in Jesus. The descendants of Abraham were in slavery and dominated in every way. Only when an outside force invaded did deliverance happen. Likewise, when Israel was captive to Babylon, they needed a deliverance from someone greater in might and mercy than themselves. Being forgiven is big. Our condition is dire. The cross of Jesus as God's solution to our problem is a good indication of the depth of the problem. The catastrophic suffering on the cross shows the catastrophic problem we have.

Four, love known is proportionate to His grace shown. We love in proportion to our awareness of the grace we have received. The pharisee was not conscious of his own sin or forgiveness, thus he didn't feel the necessity to serve Jesus. The woman had encountered His grace and couldn't stop showing her love. Those who believe that they contributed anything to their own salvation will love less and worry more.

Grace prepares us by revealing how desperate our situation is. Like Jacob who was running from his past and fell asleep on a rock, God gets us ready to meet Him. Grace pursues us like the shepherd who lost one out of 100 sheep, but went looking for it; or the woman who lost a coin and diligently swept the house to find it; or the Father whose son went to a far country, but ran to meet him. Grace pursues us when we are not looking for Him, but He is looking for us. Grace purchases us like Hosea went into the streets and bought his wife out of prostitution. Grace proclaims that God has taken the initiative and done what is necessary to secure our redemption. Grace possesses us and we are made bond slaves to righteousness when once we were slaves to sin. We didn't know we

were lost until after we were found and our eyes were opened to grace.

Living the **kerygma** is the freedom to now proclaim a gracious God, forgive others just like God forgives us, and rejoice when we are convicted of sin. After all, He has already forgiven and let us know by showing us what He has forgiven. We get to live as trophies of transforming grace.



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