

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

NOV 2023 | PHIL. 1:6

*And I am sure of this,
that he who began a
good work in you will
bring it to completion at
the day of Jesus Christ.*

Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

HOPE-FILLED TENSION

Questions continually arise: “Are these the end times?” “Where are we on God’s calendar?” “What can we expect before Jesus returns?” “Is Jesus really going to return?” “Is eschatology (the study of last things) even important?” These questions can cause both confusion and tension. So let’s examine the biblical record to discover how we are meant to live the very best we can in these days.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet

appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” (1 John 3:1-3 ESV)

God completes whatever He begins! He is not at the mercy of human fickleness to get His enormous and majestic plan done. He has always been the initiator and sustainer of all interactions with us and creation. He created. He initiated covenants. He decided when to purify the earth with a flood. He chose Abram. He caused Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. He set up kings and brought them down. He utilized nations as His threshing tool. He judged all things according

to justice. He promised to redeem all that was affected by sin. He has never begun a project that He didn't finish. All this gave Paul great confidence about the faith of the early Christians:

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6) ESV

It gives us ground for hope in the midst of confounding circumstances and personal stumbles. It is good to be reminded that this is not our world into which we invite God to assist us. It is **His** world, and we are in **His** plans to bring to fruition everything good thing that the blood of Jesus purchased—that is mindblowing.

The biblical narrative begins in a garden and concludes in a garden. There is a marvelous story of redemption in between. God created all things for His own pleasure, and that included humans who have the capacity to know God and enjoy Him as he enjoys Himself. He commissioned them to be His partners in discovery and development. They were assigned to begin in the Garden of Eden and subdue it under God's direction. They had constant fellowship with Him, and they worked in His delight. The Tempter came to them and they were deceived by him. They chose to trust another source of truth and were thereby alienated from God, hiding

from Him behind a bush and foreshadowing the posture of humankind going forward. Afraid of the God who lovingly created them, they hid and wondered how they might ever make it back to being in a friendly relationship with Him. Humankind has lived in this same way since Adam, wandering around and clutching at ways to appease or bribe their Creator. They started many world religions all with the common goal of negotiating a deal with the Almighty that would benefit them.

God then chose another human to represent Him in the middle of an earth-destroying flood. Noah and his family started over because God would not give up on His plan. He then chose Abram and made promises to him regarding the reversal of the universal curse on creation because of Adam's sin. He promised that Abram's offspring (singular) would be the catalyst for full redemption and restoration. A large portion of the biblical narrative describes how that promise played out. Abraham's descendants served 400 years of slavery in Egypt. God delivered them. He made them a special nation (Israel) by making covenant with them. They wanted a king, so He gave them kings. The most prominent one, David, was a foreshadowing of the final King who would come and rule over the new world. Israel broke their covenant and lost their land, their city, their temple, and their hope. Through His prophets, God proclaimed a future full of hope based on His

faithfulness. Even after their political exile was over, Israel spent 400 more years wondering about the future, oftentimes trying to make some of the prophecies come true in their way or with their timing.

Yet right on time God acted again. He sent His own Son to come as a man to represent mankind. He was another, perfect Adam. He represented Israel who had failed to be God's witness. He fulfilled the role of the temple. He was the final sacrifice accepted by God forever for all sins. He drank the cup of curses that was due sinful people. He reaped all the rewards available for being obedient to the covenant. He forgave sin and defeated death. As He arose from the tomb, a new creation began. Like leaven embedded in a lump of dough, the new creation began working, changing people by liberating them from sin, shame, fear, and deception. Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. From that position of authority, He sent the Spirit to indwell His people, empowering them to live on earth as He had lived. Once again, God had some people on the ground partnering with Him and enjoying Him, bringing disorder under the rule of God's kingdom of love. To the question of: *"Where are we on God's calendar?"*, we live in the "already, and not yet." The conclusion is as sure as the fact of Jesus' incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Holy Spirit lives in us to certify His completion. All that Jesus purchased in

His sacrifice is guaranteed to come to fruition. We believe in the faithful witness of the scriptures, so we declare that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a righteous life, died a substitutionary death, was raised from the dead, ascended to the right hand of God, sent the Spirit to equip and empower His church, and assuredly will come again to consummate everything He began. Our hope in the future completion is as sure as our confidence in the past work of Jesus on earth.

A clear description of the "already, and not yet" dynamics of the life we live is found in Romans, chapter 8. The first part of the chapter focuses on the benefits we have now because of what Jesus has done. We are not under condemnation. We are living in the realm of the Spirit and not the law, therefore we are not being evaluated on our own merits. The Spirit makes our intimacy with God realized now. We are justified by God's own declaration. We are adopted as God's sons. We have the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave. Yet, we don't have our resurrected bodies. We don't see creation restored to its final condition. We are still groaning because we have an eternal life housed in a finite created body and earth. We long to pray confidently, yet we are not sure how, so the Spirit prays for us. Creation suffers under the influence of sin, yet cries out for full restoration. It will have to wait until the sons get the final installment. Death is defeated, but not

yet eliminated. Sin is forgiven and forgotten by God, but not banished from existence. Love has been released, yet it has not reached every foothold of hate. Light is loosed, yet there are large pockets of darkness that lurk under cover.

We are being given the opportunity to share in our Lord's sufferings as we endure injustice and confront it with mercy. We share in sufferings, and we share in glory. When He appears that last time, it shall be revealed that everything that is true of Him is true of us. He gives us His inheritance. Our hope is sure. It satisfies our deepest longing. Our hope is pure. It purifies our every motive.

What we know with certainty is so great that it dwarfs the questions we still have. We don't know all the details of future events. We don't know much about the makeup of heaven. We don't really know how the judgment is going to be set up. We don't know exactly how the new creation will work without sin and death. But, we know that no one can bring a charge against us that can stick. God has declared us forever justified. We know that no one can be against us because God is for us. We know that if God freely gave us His Son, He will surely give us all things. We know that our security is based on Jesus' work and not our own. We know that God is so sovereign and so committed to completing in us

what He began, that everything works to bring that to pass. We know that nothing in all of existence can separate us from the love of God. So now, we are more than conquerors in all things. We hope for what we are sure of but can't yet see. There is tension, but it is full of hope.



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