

# DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

OCTOBER 2024 | MARK 1:14-15

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Mark 1:14-15, ESV

## THE GOSPEL OF LIVING HOPE

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter proclaims and describes the gospel of God in terms of a "living hope." The first chapter summarizes the work of Jesus the Messiah and introduces the basis for Christians to have hope in the midst of the worst kinds of persecutions. He defines his readers as "elect exiles." They are primarily converted Gentiles who have been scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. They have been somewhat surprised at the level of persecution they have experienced since their conversion to Jesus. They are in need of an understanding of the gospel of God and how it applies to their own journey.

Interestingly, there is a connection between Peter and the Gospel writer Mark. We know this from the writings of an

early Church father, Papias, who called Mark "Peter's interpreter." In his gospel account, Mark clearly described the gospel of God. It is quite possible that his understanding of the gospel came from Peter:

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(Mark 1:14-15, ESV)

Peter understood the gospel as more than an invitation to make a decision to believe some biblical facts. He adopted the three-fold dynamic that Mark had recorded as Jesus' version of the gospel of God. First, there is a fulfillment element whereby the

advent of Jesus fulfills all previous promises, predictions, and prophecies. The gospel is a narrative with a specific plot moving toward a dramatic climax, and it took centuries to bring the time to fulfillment. It is the end of the grand story. It only makes sense when the rest of the story is told. Each of the evangelists presented their own perspective of Jesus with a view to how He fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament. Second, there is the dynamic of the arrival of the kingdom of God. The hope that had carried the believing part of Israel came from the prophecies of Daniel with the vision of the Son of Man riding the clouds of glory up to the throne of the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom that would not only last forever, but rule over all others. Peter understood that Jesus had fulfilled that aspect as well, and that it had massive implications which he addresses in his two epistles. Third, the gospel is of such nature that its announcement demands a response. "Repent and believe the gospel," Jesus said. Peter had followed this pattern in his sermon at Pentecost and heard the crowd respond, "What shall we do?" He responded by exhorting them to "repent and be baptized..." In his first epistle, he spends much time talking about how to get our minds ready for the new creation that has come into existence and what the implications are when we think as new creations.

The relevance of Peter's first epistle could not be more obvious in our day. Various versions of the gospel fill the airways, clutter the internet, and confuse even the most

serious Bible students. Seldom do we hear the gospel presented with even a reference to the fulfillment dynamic, the arrival aspect, and the demand for a radical change. We are accustomed to hearing principles presented that have the promise of making life better if we can find a way to implement them. They are not necessarily unique to the gospel, nor do they require the power of the Spirit to employ them. Unbelievers can plant corn and get a harvest. They can work hard with honesty and generally succeed in the marketplace. Principles are good and reflect the intricate nature of God's order. When applied, life generally works better. But that is not the gospel. Sometimes the good news part of the message being delivered is the opportunity to get in on a transaction that will put God in debt to our obedience, forcing Him in some way to bless us. We view the gospel like the insurance salesman who assures us that he is doing us a huge favor by allowing us to buy his product because it will bring security and riches. We often hear churches boasting about how their pastor "preaches the word of God." But that word is too often a cold exegesis of a text without connection to the living gospel, or it is even a focus on the judgment and destruction that is coming because we have failed to live up to God's expectations. It is evident that one can preach the Bible and miss the gospel.

As we contrast such substitutes with the message of Peter, we see the apostle consumed with the confidence that the gospel of Jesus proclaimed and applied will change people and their societies.

He connects the Old Testament story and sees the shadows pointing to the substance of Jesus, the living hope. His use of the imagery of exiles brings the Israelite story into the discussion. He describes an inheritance that was the center of hope for the Jews. They were fixated on a small piece of land, and he expands that to cosmic proportions and reveals how superior the new inheritance is. It is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. We can't lose it. It is kept by the powers of heaven. We also are kept by His power, assuring us that our faith, though essential, won't fail.

He even uses the experience of suffering and persecutions that the Israelites endured to show how that is part and parcel of the living hope we now share. God explained to Israel why He had led them through the wilderness instead of putting them on the smooth road of comfort and ease:

*And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandment or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your father know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*

(Deuteronomy 8:2-3, ESV)

Peter is sure of what is in the heart of his readers, and he wants them to know that God is purifying that golden faith so that it is more precious. Their persecutions are not random, nor do they reflect their failures. God has made them new creatures with new hearts and uses the pressures of persecutions to reveal the uniqueness of their holiness. They have the capabilities to respond in ways their neighbors do not.

In the first chapter, Peter describes the dynamics of the kingdom of God creating a new people. It was God who foreknew the believers. He knew them not as names on a list, but as His own people, captured by His love. They didn't find Him. He chose them with a specific purpose and embraced them as His own people. Their sanctification meant that they were different from others. They were not better in value, but they had been assigned to represent God on earth. The Israelites of the old story had been set aside to carry the story to completion, and that happened when the perfect Israelite was obedient to the covenant. These elect exiles are set aside to display the glory of the completed story. Jesus had introduced the world to a kind of love that had never been seen. They would spread it to the ends of the earth. Their holiness was not a legalistic kind of religious ritual, but a freedom mankind had not known since Eden. They were free to obey something other than sin. Jesus' blood was their mark of identity, and He had set them free to obey.

The living hope that permeates this text is brought about by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He ever lives. He is the promise made full. We no longer rely on the veracity of the prophets. Our hope is alive! When the gospel is proclaimed, that word is planted in our hearts and we are born again of the seed of the word of God - the Gospel. The Father who planted the seed in us gives us His own nature. His care for us enables us to grow in that as we become more and more like Him. Our part in the growth process is the dynamic of repentance. Peter describes that as preparing our minds for action, being sober-minded. The essence of the word is to change the mind, including adopting a new definition for reality and then adjusting behavior to fit the new perspective. Peter emphasizes the focus on the grace that is coming. It is as sure as the grace that has been shown in the past. What has begun in the faithfulness of God's grace will be consummated in His future grace. We are not at the mercy of evil or random events. The God who knew before time all that would happen in time is still on time. All that sin has defiled, the blood of Jesus has redeemed. The future is getting brighter for those who can see. The day when all wrongs are righted and all tears are wiped away is guaranteed by the precious blood of Jesus. This becomes another part of our motivation to live as the unique, set aside people of God. The cost of our redemption reflects the value God has placed upon us. We are not just an insignificant particle of mass that makes up humanity. We are specifically known and particularly bought by One who knows real value. If our time on earth is characterized

by suffering, even persecution, we endure and rejoice that we are called to reflect a kingdom that is so different from all others that they want to eliminate it. But in their actions, they give us the opportunity to reflect the love that is stronger than the sword or the bomb. In fact, there is nothing in the created order that is stronger than our living hope. He has defeated death, and rules over His own through the Spirit that raised Him from the dead and empowers His people to fulfill the mission He has established from the beginning.

The living hope that characterizes the Christian is anchored in the Word that promised a Messiah, that motivated the prophets of old, that became flesh in Jesus, that is planted when the gospel is proclaimed, and that abides forever. That Word is the good news.

*And this word is the good news  
that was preached to you.*

(1 Peter 1:25, ESV)

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