

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

AUGUST 2026 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

*Now I would remind you,
brothers, of the gospel I
preached to you, which you
received, in which you stand,
and by which you are being
saved, if you hold fast to the
word I preached to you—
unless you believed in vain.*

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

DOES IT MATTER?

I have been invited on several occasions to address the contents of my recent book *At Last, Surprising Hope in the End Times*. The book explores how the story of redemption concludes, and some people have realized they have been taught different ideas about the purpose of creation and salvation. They have heard of such things as the rapture, the great tribulation, the battle of Armageddon, and the millennium, but aren't sure how those ideas fit into the biblical story. Yet when these concepts are challenged, there is tension. The strong temptation is to try to ease the tension by synthesizing various views or by dismissing the importance of clear doctrine. It seems we prefer the comfort of the status quo over the clarity of truth that delivers a salvation so great that the angels long to look into it. We are naïve to think that something as important as the gospel is not the target of Hell and the Deceiver. Paul tells us that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all people (see *Romans 1:16*). The muddled ideas regarding the essentials of the gospel that are allowed to be unexamined reflect a blindness to the

importance of the message. If the central message is unclear, the power to transform is lacking. Both the mission of the church and the stability of the world is at stake. The gospel has always been the target of violent denial and subtle adjustments. These present times are no exception.

"The details don't really matter because we are all going to heaven." That is not the issue. Going to heaven is a wonderful hope we have as Christians, but that is not the primary purpose for God's salvation. Heaven became a primary issue for those who did not see a purpose for our lives on earth apart from trying to get more people there. We have been told that any kingdom hopes we have are for a later time after the church is raptured away. But the New Testament gospel states that we are reconciled to God so that we can partner with Him in subduing the earth, displaying His benevolent rule over all things. We are saved to live on this earth for His purpose and for His glory. When we die physically, we shall forever be with Him in an eternal state absent of sin and

sorrow. The gospel declares that Jesus is now King who has saved us by defeating the rival ruler and now extends that rule through His subjects (family) who live in the undefeatable power of love and guaranteed victory.

Tension is not an enemy. It is inevitable when the status quo is confronted by a fuller reality. If Christians are discussing the same story, many of the details don't matter. But any alteration of the story must be confronted and corrected. Paul and Peter were both leaders of the church. They came to understand that Jesus is the completion of the Old Testament story, that Jew and Gentile had become one new man, and that the old covenant had done its job and was passing away as the new covenant was being inaugurated by Jesus. But pressure came when some Jews from Jerusalem came to town and insisted that there was still a separation between Jews and Gentiles. Was this a detail or an essential? Paul recognized that the issue was deeper than who was eating at what table. It was altering the story. It was saying that God has two stories with two people groups, and that Jews and Gentiles are different in God's economy. Though he was a junior apostle and Peter was a star apostle, Paul confronted the error publicly. "But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel..." (Galatians 2:14, ESV). The clarity of the gospel was more important to Paul than his reputation—even his life:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared

to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, ESV

From this portion of Scripture we can see at least three vital truths regarding the apostolic gospel. **First, the gospel is both clear and complete.** Jesus is the completion of the Old Testament story. Paul repeats his "according to the Scriptures" description to make sure the readers understood that Jesus had fulfilled all that the Scriptures had promised and foreshadowed. Everything in the story that related to sin was completed in Jesus. He reconciled humans to God, removing the alienation that Adam and Eve had known in the Garden. He was the final sacrifice, ending the thousands of sacrifices of animals throughout the temple era. In fact, He fulfilled the purpose of the temple itself by being both God and man on earth. He settled the blessing and curse dynamic that was part of the Old Covenant. He was the only Jew who fully kept every aspect of the covenant God made with Israel through Moses. He received all the blessings. He became a curse for the broken vows made by all others. Christians need no longer fear the curses of disobedience, nor are they motivated to find blessings on the basis of their works for God.

He also begins a new creation, fulfilling the hope of faithful Israelites in history who looked forward with hope for a new age. They were convinced

that the “present evil age” would be superseded by a new one where they were vindicated and the enemies of God and His people were condemned. Though they confused who the people of God would be, Jesus did just that. In His resurrection, He began a new creation based on a New Covenant, producing a new people with hope for a new heaven and a new earth.

Also, Jesus saves the world by defeating the enemy and establishing Himself as King. If there is no king, there is no salvation. The people and land are still under the authority of the previous ruler, in this case Satan. The human problem was worse than just being guilty of transgressions. Sin had rendered them slaves to Satan and the powers of evil and perversion. Deliverance required a battle. Jesus came as the Anointed One who crushed the head of the serpent on Zion's hill (see *Psalms* 2). His people are liberated because their captor was defeated.

Second, the gospel is of first importance. Why does Paul make such a decisive statement? Simply put, because the gospel determines the identity, stability, and means of progressive transformation of Christians. It is a proclamation regarding an event that has happened that affects everything - not an idea, ideology, proposition, regulation, or law. The proclamation is about a finished work. It is not a path to becoming a better person, nor is it a requirement to be met regarding either belief or behavior. *It must be received*, not just acknowledged in concept, nor considered among other truths. Like the ground receives a seed into itself, the heart of a person receives the life-producing seed of God's word and inevitable fruit is the result. It provides a foundation of reality upon which we stand to build, grow, and defend against all accusations. It guides in every decision and reproduces a life that is different from those who have not received it. It produces a gospelized community that operates on the basis of the freedoms granted by the King in residence. It is the ever-unveiling of the mystery that is Jesus

as Christ and King. The more we look, the farther we can see, and the more we know and deeper our love grows. In fact, we discover that we can't really know someone or something we won't love. And, when we love something we can't stop searching to know it better. (I fear that many Christian leaders don't know the gospel because they don't love it. It is too easy to love ministry, affirmation, achievements, even people's honor more than the gospel.)

Third, the gospel as preached in the New Testament denies the claims of a two-story gospel. A relatively recent brand of the gospel has infected a large portion of the church. It is an outgrowth of the conflict the early church faced regarding Israel and the Church. The majority of the Jews in Jesus' day were unwilling to recognize Him as the completion of their story. Though He as the obedient Israelite fulfilled Israel's role of blessing the world, the ethnic Jews demanded to be considered as God's favored and protected people. Even the terrible judgment of 70 AD on the city of Jerusalem and the temple did not persuade many that, through Jesus, a new covenant and a new people had come. Picking up this sentiment, those adopting the dispensationalist story presented a two-story message. It is a story that says that when Jesus was rejected by the majority of the Jews, God chose to postpone the kingdom until a later time. He inserted a gap in time where the Gentiles were given salvation without a king or kingdom on this earth, while God awaited a time to deal with Israel again. That time is still in the future when the Gentile Christians will be raptured out of the world, and after a time of severe tribulation, God will again work to establish a kingdom in the land of Israel centered in Jerusalem and featuring a rebuilt temple.

This story diminishes the role of the Church as the body of Christ enacting His reign through the Spirit, pushing back darkness with light and replacing deception with truth. *That matters.* The main role of the Church in the dispensationalist

story is to get as many people going to heaven as possible and to help Jews return to the land of Israel so they can be a part of God's kingdom on earth. As mentioned before, with a postponed kingdom, we now live in a time when Satan is not yet defeated by King Jesus and we live with the old covenant still in force for Jews. The promise for blessing to be upon those who bless Israel as a current political and geographical entity is taken literally. That means that those who do not bless Israel are to be cursed. So, the land and Jewish ethnicity becomes the standard for judgment. Jesus is no longer the one who determines blessings and curses, though He received all the blessings of covenant obedience and took the curses of violated covenant for those who believe. That Old Testament stipulation is still in force for Gentiles as well as for Jews. *That matters.* When the story of the Bible is interpreted as two stories still being played out, confusion in understanding Scripture is prevalent. This discourages common people from even trying and therefore giving away that privilege and responsibility to find life in the Scriptures. *That matters.* When the present day church is viewed as a temporary parenthesis in God's agenda, the glory of the bride of Christ is diminished. *That matters.* It robs the church of its commission to take the gospel to the nations to bring the flourishing to every aspect of creation. In fact, it encourages disengagement because only as evil becomes more prevalent, will Jesus act again from heaven by taking the Christians out of the earth. *That matters.*

When the church at Galatia was invaded by the Judaizers from Jerusalem, Paul addressed this two story approach. He clearly interprets holy Scripture as a whole story with the Old Testament shadows becoming substance in Jesus, the prophecies regarding God's restoration being fulfilled in Jesus. The identity of the final people of God is determined by faith in Jesus Christ alone. The inheritance is defined as the eternal life we share with Him. Ethnicity is superseded by faith in Jesus the Messiah. He even talks about two people groups and the two covenants that define them.

He uses the allegory of Sarah and Hagar and their sons. Hagar represents the covenant given at Sinai, the covenant with Israel by Moses, the covenant that created Israel as a nation. The children of that covenant correspond to physical Jerusalem, operating in the flesh and living in bondage (see *Galatians 4:24-31*). Sarah represents the covenant of promise that is fulfilled in Jesus. Her children are free. They are not awaiting a future physical kingdom and a physical war with the nations of the world. They already serve the King who has won the battle with the evil one. Just like the two boys of Hagar and Sarah, the son of the flesh persecutes the son of the Spirit: "But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.'" (*Galatians 4:30, ESV*). There is no room in the house for two sons, nor two agendas. It is a one story gospel that liberates both Jew and Gentile in a new covenant and a new identity. *That matters.*

It is of utmost importance that we are clear about the gospel. It is worth loving. As we love it more, we know it better. It is worth proclaiming: "How can they hear without a proclaimer?" It is worth defending. Without it hope dims, purpose is confused, the world wilts into disarray, and the church is left to juggle its rituals without life and with no joy. Why should a preacher want to proclaim anything else? It is so grand we can never plumb the depths of its grandeur. It will never return without accomplishing its purpose. It converts the most hideous sinner and nourishes the soul of the most holy saint. It is eternally relevant, and no story ever told can compete with its effect. Yes, the clarity and priority of the gospel matters. Supremely!

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