

Developing a New Perspective

Job 42:1-6

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By now, most of you have gotten something new since the last time we gathered or you've given something new to someone.

We like new things. We like new clothes, new cars, and new gadgets.

Tonight, we will celebrate the coming of the New Year and we don't even know what the New Year will bring, but we are going to celebrate any way. We are always hopeful that the New Year will be better than the last, but that's only possible if there's change.

Change is constant. We live in denial when we pretend things are not changing.

The Amish are about the only people still driving a horse and buggy. Granted, they have a perspective about things that might benefit us all, but our lives couldn't be productive as we know it had we remained in the early part of last century.

Sure, some things never change. We are all going to die. A new tax law has gone into effect, but we still have to pay taxes. There will always be rumors of bipartisanship, but it will always be rare. Hebrews 13:8 says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Jesus is always wanting us to grow more like him. Unless you have reached perfection, I will assume that means all of us need to continue to change. Unless our church has reached perfection, I will assume that our church needs to continue to change. If I am wrong about that, I should stop now. We can all go home and have an early lunch.

Yet when it comes to change, some of us seem more like the Amish, stuck in time, with no desire for any change at all.

I came here 8.5 years ago and this church was recovering from a vision. That's about the best way I know to explain it. This church was grieving. In fact, the entire country was grieving from one of the greatest economic crashes in our nation's history. Not only were many of our financial dreams diminished, but the vision of this church was gone, seemingly in a flash.

For one moment, I want you to pretend that the financial crash of 2009 had never happened. For those of you who don't know, it's very likely this church would have built a 700-seat worship center and borrowed around 3.5 million dollars to do it.

If the financial crash had never happened, who knows how many people you might have in this church now, or how much money you still might owe to pay off the new building.

But one thing is for sure, things would have changed. Not only would you have not had worship in this space, but the drawing of the inside of that church shows how much your worship was going to change

You would have had two permanent screens in the sanctuary. In addition to a very large choir space, the stage was going to be large enough to accommodate instruments, instrumentalists, and a praise and worship team. The sanctuary was going to be built for you to have options in how you worship God through your music as you moved into the future.

Your church was changing and more change was coming. I believe you were soaring with faith, not because you had decided to build a new worship center, but because vision and relationships were in the driver's seat and you were not afraid of change.

It's time we reclaim that faith soaring mindset.

We sometimes forget that we worship a God who sent Jesus into a world of Jewish tradition.

Jesus marched right into that tradition on his first sermon. In the first part of his sermon he spoke words that appealed to their Jewish heritage.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of the sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” Luke 4:18-19 (NIV).

They were the poor. They had been the prisoners of the Romans and of the countries that carried their people away into exile. They had people among them that needed healing. They were the oppressed. They needed this good news.

What's more? Jesus told them that the words of the text were being fulfilled in their midst as he spoke. They liked what he had to say.

It's wonderful when we can “Amen” a sermon and affirm the words being said but that usually means what's being said isn't challenging us to change or develop a new perspective.

Then Jesus pushed them to develop a new perspective. He reminded them that during the great famine, Elijah wasn't sent to Jewish people but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

He reminded them that in the time of Elisha the prophet, there were many in Israel with leprosy, but only Naaman the Syrian was cleansed.

The people Jesus grew up among and worked around, those people who knew his mamma and his daddy, those same people who praised him about coming to minister to

them became so mad that he was talking about a God who loved Gentiles, they took him to the brow of a hill outside of the town to throw him off of it. But he walked through the crowd and went on his way.

We like new T.V.'s, new restaurants, new jewelry, new toys, but don't ask us to adopt a new perspective. Sometimes we like to build new things, but what's more difficult than building a new church is to build new attitudes, new relationships, new perspectives, new expectations, and new visions which are directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

As we walk into 2018, I challenge you to adopt the Lord's words as our theme, "Behold, I will do a new thing."

We find these words in Isaiah chapter 43:11-19 from the King James Version.

I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour.

¹² I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.

¹³ Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?

¹⁴ Thus saith the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships.

¹⁵ I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King.

¹⁶ Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters;

¹⁷ Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow.

¹⁸ Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old.

¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. (11-19)

Wow! What words of hope these are! Isaiah was bringing words of hope to people who had need of change. They desired for God to do something new in their lives.

Why? Because these people had suffered. These people had been oppressed. These people had been exiled.

Strange isn't it, that we complain about change until we are suffering and then we cry out for it?

Suffering is often the place where we discover a new perspective. When we suffer, many times the hard hearts, and stubborn attitudes we lived with before soften. We realize that whether we want it to or not, life can change in a heartbeat. It can change before we get home today.

Like Job, today we can lose possessions, friends, respect, health, and family, and be questioning our faith and our purpose in life.

Job lost these things. His suffering gave him a new perspective.

Because of his suffering, Job became humbler. He became more willing to listen than to give answers. His began to more on pleasing God than pleasing himself.

Do we have to suffer before we learn these lessons?

I don't think so. There is enough suffering in the world around us that when we enter the suffering of others, we can learn these things and gain a new perspective.

I believe God gained a new perspective by entering our suffering through the person of Jesus.

The other way that we develop a new perspective is through our prayers.

We are more prepared for change because we have been a church in prayer for this upcoming year.

We need to continue praying and as a result of our prayers, we need to submit to God in obedience.

In the book of Hebrews it says that “In the days of his flesh, Jesus^[a] offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” Hebrews 5:7-10 (NIV).

We do not worship a “me” God. If worship had been all about him, Jesus would never have gone to the cross, but because his worship was about submission, Jesus became our High Priest. It is Jesus we go through to get to God.

Since we go through Jesus to get to God, the Spirit of Christ is not going to teach us make worship about us, or the church about us. That is our temptation when we pray about our church. We tend to pray for God to make the church around our will, just like Jesus prayed to God to save him from the cross.

These prayers are not sinful. Sin develops when refuse to submit to God's will. Notice, even though it was Jesus' prayer to be saved from death and the suffering of the cross, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered.

Most of us are tempted to pray for what we want when we pray for our church, as opposed to what it is we need. Sometimes, we don't even know what we need.

If we want to soar with faith, we need to find out what it is that God wants for us and then reverently submit ourselves to God. That is what Jesus did.

God told Isaiah, “Behold, I do a new thing.”

When we are submissive to the new thing God is doing, it brings changes in our thought, our attitudes, and our actions. When we can see life from another vantage point or another disadvantage point, it can lead us to being more empathetic, more compassionate, and more caring.

Truthfully, we don't care very much about going through any pain or loss to gain new perspectives any more than Jesus wanted to suffer.

However, being a disciple of Jesus requires some sacrifice.

We are so used to resisting anything that makes us uncomfortable, we forget that sacrifice is not a bad word.

God wants to do a new thing among us so that we can be the church that is helping people discover the new life that is available in Jesus.

The irony for people of faith and for communities of faith is that if we are not open to the movement of God's Spirit and if we do not remain open to the changes God wants to bring in our lives and into our church, our lives and our church WILL suffer because we were not willing to follow.

While there are no cliffs on the edge of town for any of you to throw me over, I realize there are other dangers for me anytime I say anything about change.

However, let me remind you of the beauty of where we have been for the past several months.

About thirty teams of you have been praying and you produced 24 pages of information that has now been categorized and sent to our coach, George Bullard for analysis.

George will now coach Andy Garrison, Glenda Blackstock, and Brian Ferguson, people you chose through our People of Passion analysis, and they will lead us through our Season of Change and Spiritual Discernment.

Three different future stories for our church will be written with your information. Future discussions will be held, and we will eventually adopt one of these stories to serve as a guide for us as we move forward as a congregation.

Any change that occurs comes from God to you, all of you, and that's the kind of change we are looking for.

The best kind of change for a church is God-inspired, intentional change designed to help us achieve our vision, develop strong relationships, ensure that our programs are as effective as possible and that we are ministering efficiently, and efficiently to those in our church, community, county, country, and world.

It is impossible not to change. We either make a decision to change as directed by Jesus, or we change with the wind. If we do that, we will develop attitudes like those people in Jesus' hometown: narrow, me-based, and unChrist like.

2018 awaits us. Let us hear God saying, "Beyond, I do a new thing."

Let's continue to be a visionary church that seeks to lead people to Jesus, love them into the kingdom, and build relationships with people so we can have those kinds of opportunities.

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