

Winds of Change

ILLUS – A lady sat in my seat in church just the other day. She's a very nice person. In fact, she's a good friend. And I can easily sit somewhere else. No big deal. But I like my seat. It's on the right just as you enter the church sanctuary. It's nice because I can rest my arm on the end. It's a good seat, but I wouldn't raise a fuss over something as unimportant as a seat, and I never hold a grudge. Actually, it was just three months ago she took my seat and I have no idea why. I've never done anything to her. I've never taken her seat, or anything that belonged to her. And now I suppose I'll have to come to church an hour early just to get my seat. You know, I think she took it deliberately, because it's one of the best seats in the house. And she had no business taking it, and I don't see why I should have to go to church two hours early just to get what's rightfully mine! This is the way great social injustices begin: inconsiderate people taking other people's seats! That's how revolutions start. A person can only take so much, you know. And what I want to know is: Where's it all going to end? If someone doesn't do something about it, nobody's seat will be safe. People will sit wherever they feel like, and next they'll be taking my parking place, then my home. World order will be in a shambles! Civilisation as we know it come to an end. But hey, I don't really mind.

If you thought that was just humour, I've been in a church and witnessed first-hand people who found it difficult to cope when someone sat in their seat.

And this really goes back to the way people feel about change.

Today, I want to talk about the Winds of Change.

1. God is an agent of change

Is 43:19 Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

For God to fulfil that promise in Isaiah, He has to bring about change.

When God does a new thing, that means that there are changes about to happen.

He's an agent of change.

Rom 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed...

God is into transformation; that means change.

When He gets a hold of a person's life, He changes it.

When He gets a hold of a church, He changes it.

He even changed water into wine, but here's the problem.

2. People find it difficult to change

ILLUS – Simpson had to fight to introduce chloroform; Lister struggled to have antiseptics accepted; Copernicus was forced to retract his belief that the earth went around the sun.¹

People seem to be naturally resistant to change.

But change happens continuously anyway.

Just think of the seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter.

God has built change into our natural existence.

¹ Barclay, William *The Daily Study Bible* p338-9

Think of the aging process.

No matter how hard you try, or what anti-wrinkling creams you use, you will not look the same, at 60-years-old, as you did at the age of twenty.

There's change.

People change jobs regularly.

I remember a time when it was normal for people to stay in the same job for twenty years or more; but not any more.

Change happens all the time.

ILLUS – 5 billion gigabytes – volume of data created globally in 2002 – equivalent to 800 books per person. *Time* 10th November, 2003 p 16

All that new information means a lot of change.

How do people feel about so much change?

All of this change brings uncertainty, fear, feelings of spinning out of control.

Because so much of the change we experience in life is beyond our control.

We can't do anything about it.

3. The church has a history of resisting change

ILLUS – Even the early church found it difficult to adapt to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Think about what Jesus said to the disciples in Acts 1:8: But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

This is where Jesus reinforced the mission he had already given His disciples in Matt 28:19-20 and Mk 16:15-16.

What was their mission? To go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

This is what Jesus was restating in Acts 1:8 and telling them that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit to help them to fulfil that mission.

That mission was to Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

In other words, local, national and international.

There's a new word that's been invented to cover all three: Glocal.

Their mission was glocal: local, national and international.

So they were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:4, then what did they do?

Did they fulfil the mission?

No, they sat around in Jerusalem all the way through Acts 2, all the way through Acts 3, all the way through Acts 4, all the way through Acts 5, all the way through Acts 6, all the way through Acts 7.

And it wasn't till Acts 8:1 that there was a persecution which scattered the disciples through Judea and Samaria.

Finally, they were starting to be obedient to Christ's command.

But not by choice.

Sometimes God has to take drastic measures to get His people to obey Him.

This time it took persecution, but they still didn't get with the program.

Yes, they were preaching the word (Acts 8:4), but they were still only preaching to Jews and Samaritans.

What about the Gentiles?

Didn't they know that Jesus wanted them to preach to the Gentiles too?

Of course they did!

Jesus was very clear about that.

He said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."

He didn't say, "For God so loved the Jews that He gave His only begotten Son..."

He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk 16:15)

This message was never just for the Jews.

But people find it so difficult to cope with change.

It wasn't till Acts 10 that they began to rethink their theology to come into alignment with God's theology.

ILLUS – Peter was on the roof praying, when he had a vision. And in the vision, he saw a sheet coming down out of heaven full of all kinds of animals. And then there was a voice saying, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." And Peter said, "Lord, I can't do that! I'm a good Jew."

Now just think about this for a moment.

The Lord told Peter to do something and Peter says no.

Isn't that a bit strange? His tradition had such a strong hold on him that even when God told him to do something, he said no.

God says, "But I've made it clean so don't call it unclean."

You'd think that God would have made His point clear, but this still isn't enough for Peter.

Immediately, he has the same vision, with the same sheet full of animals, and the same voice telling him to kill and eat.

Now, wouldn't you think that Peter would have got the message?

Nope. He answers God in the same way: "Sorry Lord, no can do. I'm a good Jew."

This message had to come to him three times.

Then suddenly, ding-dong, there's the doorbell.

And there are some men waiting to take Peter to Caesarea in the north to speak to Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army – a Gentile.

So Peter goes with the men, and when he gets there, he finds that Cornelius has gathered his friends and family, and they're all waiting for Peter.

Peter preaches his message, and suddenly, the Holy Spirit turns up, and everyone is filled with the Holy Spirit and starts to speak in tongues.

Peter looks around and his fellow-Jews who had come with him and says, "Well, I suppose we can't very well refuse to baptise them in water if God has filled them with the Holy Spirit, can we?"

So Peter goes back to Jerusalem, but the news has gone on ahead of him, and there are people waiting to take issue with him.

He has to explain the whole thing right from the beginning before they finally realise that God has granted salvation to the Gentiles too.

That's in Acts 11:18.

Why didn't this happen a lot sooner?

People find change so difficult.

And the church, down through the ages has been no different.

When the Roman emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire, the church went into a downward spiral.

That downward spiral was already happening since the time of the apostles, but making the church the official religion brought masses into the churches who brought with them their beliefs and their immorality.

The church degenerated into a political force and, except for small pockets of genuine believers, there was spiritual darkness for over a thousand years.

Then in 1517 Martin Luther declared the revelation he had received from God that the just should live by faith, not works.

Guess what happened to him? He and his followers were persecuted.

Then along came the Anabaptists who believed that there was another step that had to be taken after committing your life to Christ: You had to be baptised in water.

Many of them lost their lives; some responded to the Anabaptists by saying, "Fine, if you want to be baptised, we'll baptise you."

And they held them underwater till they drowned.

The recipients of the previous revelation became the persecutors of the recipients of the next revelation.

Then along came the Pentecostal outpouring in Azusa Street revival.

Guess what the Baptists thought of that?

The recipients of the previous revelation became the persecutors of the recipients of the next revelation.

People were kicked out of their churches because they spoke in tongues.

Then along came the Charismatic movement in the 60s and early 70s.

Guess what many of the diehard Pentecostals thought of the Charismatics?

The recipients of the previous revelation became the persecutors of the recipients of the next revelation.

Many of them didn't like it one bit; you had to do it their way.

The church has always found it difficult to cope with change.

I don't know what the next move of God is going to be, but I want to make sure that I have an open heart to what God wants to do.

And even more importantly, I want to be open to the changes God wants to bring about now in this church.

Here's a question for you to think about: Are you ready for what God wants to do in this church? Or are you a resister?

4. Leaders are agents of change

This is important to understand.

There's a saying: If nothing needs changing, you don't need leaders.

Leaders look to see what God wants to change, and it's their responsibility to change it.

But remember: People find change difficult.

It's threatening, it's uncomfortable, and it provokes an internal reaction.

Just think of the Scripture we began with:

Is 43:19 Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

If God wanted to fulfil that literally, just imagine the opposition.

People would tell Him: You can't build a road in the wilderness. It's bad for the environment. You can't put a river there. How are You going to get water into the desert? Have You done any environmental impact studies, Lord?

Change is difficult, but it's what leaders do.

What if God wanted to fulfil this Scripture in this church?

For God to do a new thing there would have to be change.

Would you allow your leaders to be agents of change? Are you sure?

But your leaders are just like you: They make mistakes.

Can you cope with that?

You might say, "But if it's really God, everybody will be behind it."

No they won't.

It didn't happen that way for Moses when God told them to go into the Promised Land.

It didn't happen that way for Jesus.

It didn't happen that way for the 12 apostles.

It didn't happen that way for the apostle Paul who constantly had to defend his apostleship and bring correction to the churches.

5. Let the Spirit take control

Change is all about yielding to the Holy Spirit.

ILLUS – A man had a 2-storey house. One day, he heard a knocking, opened the door, and found Jesus there, so he invited Him to live in the house and gave Him a room in the top floor. Jesus will only take what you give Him. The man was sleeping and heard a pounding on the door, opened the door a crack and the devil barged in. He had a terrible fight, trying to resist the devil and his temptations, yelling out for help all the time. Eventually, he managed to throw the devil out. In the morning, he said, "Why didn't you help me last night? Couldn't you hear me calling for help?" Jesus: "The problem is, you've got this whole big house to yourself, and I've only got one room." Man: "Ah, I see your point. You can have the whole top floor, and I'll keep the bottom floor." The man was sleeping and heard a pounding on the door, opened the door a crack and the devil barged in again. He had another terrible fight, trying to resist the devil and his temptations, yelling out for help all the time. Eventually, he managed to throw the devil out. In the morning, he said, "Why didn't you help me last night? Couldn't you hear me calling for help?" Jesus: "The problem is, I have the top floor, but you still have the bottom floor to yourself." Man: "Ah, I see what you mean. From now on, the whole house is yours." That night, the man was asleep, and there was a pounding at the door again. This time Jesus went to the door, opened it wide, and stood in the doorway. The devil looked at Him, bowed very low and said, "I'm sorry, but I think I knocked on the wrong door."²

That story illustrates our need to be fully yielded to the Lord.

Unyieldedness to the Holy Spirit is the most significant factor in preventing change.

It all comes down to attitude.

ILLUS – In the days of Jesus, they didn't generally put fluids like wine into bottles. They put them into skins. They'd kill a goat, cut off the head and feet, skin it, cure it in a way that minimised unpleasant flavours, then

² I first heard this parable told by Reinhard Bonnke

sew it back up, except for the neck. Then they'd put wine, water or milk in it. The problem with wineskins is that as they get older they become harder and more brittle. They aren't as flexible as they used to be. If you put new wine into an old skin, the new wine was still fermenting, which means it was releasing gases. The gases would cause the old skin to burst. Because a new skin still had its flexibility, the gases released by the wine didn't cause a problem.

If God is going to do a new thing here in this church, He needs flexible skins that He can pour His new wine into.

What about you? Are you willing to let God do what He wants?