

The Times, They Are A-Changin'!

Introduction: Things that are about to disappear

[Wish Fathers, Happy Father's Day]

I don't know about you, but when I read or hear of things like that, I have mixed feelings, something between apprehension and nostalgia. Some people, on the other hand get excited by it. They are energized by the thought that the times, "they are a-changin'!" On the other hand, for a lot of people, that is scary. They don't like change; at least not some of the changes that are happening.

Oddly enough, change is a permanent part of life. You can't change that and I don't know how you are going to do it, but you might as well get use to that! Of course, change is not always bad. It can be good, take air conditioning for example. We are getting into the hot time of the year and I'm sure most of us wouldn't want to live without something that a lot of our grandparents never knew. A candlelight dinner might seem romantic, but how would you like it if you had to eat every dinner that way because there was no electricity? Most of us would not think it a good thing to go back to a time when there was no automobile, or airplanes, or television! Well, maybe no television! And then of course, the computer came along; the personal computer, or PC as it is called. And now we have very personal computers, called Smart Phones and most of them are smarter than we are!

I got to thinking about these things the other day, how the world and the times, "they are a-changin'!" As a Christian deeply concerned about evangelism, I began to wonder how Christianity is going to fare in this brave new world. If books are going to disappear, as trends seem to suggest, what effect is that going to have on the Bible. We already know that the Bible doesn't have to be in a book. It didn't start out that way. It looks like the first words of God committed to print were one tablets of stone. It might be hard getting people to carry that around. Will we continue to read the words, or will they be placed on a chip that is implanted into our brain that produces a readout on the lens of our eyes?

What is going to happen to proclaiming and spreading the good news. How is Christianity going to fare in the brave new world? Will a technology driven culture render religious faith and practice obsolete?

Of course, no one a crystal ball and no one can predict the future. One thing is for sure, change seems to be the only thing that doesn't change. It is hard to predict what man might do. It is entirely possible that the madness and insanity and immorality and violence currently causing so much anxiety will get worse. It is possible that these things will dominate events to the point that freedom as we know it will be lost. It is possible that Christianity in America will go the way of Christianity in Europe where just a small minority still claim to be Christian.

On the other hand, there are some things that will not change; things that should give us a good bit of comfort and encouragement. Those are the things that I hope will give us encouragement as Christians; things that we should use to encourage others when the opportunity comes; and they are things that should affect the way we live our lives.

God doesn't change, does He? In **Malachi 3:6**, the prophet speaking for God said: *"For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."*

God doesn't change. People change; in fact people change all the time. One day we are happy and feeling generous, next day we are grumpy and everything is about us. We get old and senile and sometimes we get brittle and stubborn. Sometimes we age and become gentle. We are into one thing for a while, then we get bored and get into something else. We can be hot one day and cold the next. People change, so don't ever say "that's just the way I am." You are not God, you can change.

We are not God, and God is not like us. Friday's reading in the Daily Bible was the book of Jonah. After Jonah finally obeyed God and went to the Assyrian capitol of Nineveh, and proclaimed how Nineveh was going to be destroyed in forty days, **chapter 3:5** says, *"The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth."* **Verse 10** says, *"When*

God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."

Now, you would think Jonah would have been happy! The word of God he preached brought about incredible results. Everyone in that large ancient city were convicted and began trying to humble themselves before God. From the least to the greatest. You would think Jonah would have broken into a happy dance, but no, **chapter 4, verse 1** says, "*But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.*" So Jonah just decided to let God have it. Praying to God, he said: "*O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*"

That's what God was saying through Malachi. God is a God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, and abounding in love. Do you remember in the 33rd chapter of Exodus, when Moses asked to see the Lord, and Lord told him that he could not look upon him, but that he would pass by, which he did. In verse 19, God said: "*I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.*"

That's the reason why God said through Malachi, "*therefore you, O children of Jacob are not consumed.*" The Psalmist wrote (**90:1-2**): "*Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God,*" In the New Testament, quoting from yet another **Psalm (102)**, the Hebrew writer said this about Christ: "*And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; (11) they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, (12) like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end."* That is why in chapter **13:8**, the Hebrew writer will say, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!*"

That is why faith in God makes sense. God doesn't change. His ways do not change and His nature doesn't change. God is good all the time, and all the time, God is good!

Of course, if God does not change, then we can be sure God's word does not change. The form or format, or the instrument by which we get God's Word may change as it has in the past but what God has made known, what He has declared, none of that will change. In **1 Peter 1, beginning in verse 23**, we read: "*For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. (24) For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, (25) BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER."* And this is the word which was preached to you."

I find great comfort and strength from the promise that "*the word of the Lord endures forever.*" Don't you just hate it when you basically have to start over again when you buy a new appliance or a new computer? I consider it a blessing that while information about almost everything else in the world is constantly changing, that isn't the case with God's Word. There wasn't one set of instructions for people who lived in ancient times, and another for those who lived in medieval times, and something else for people today. There is a faith, as the writer Jude tells us, (verse 3) "*that was once for all delivered to the saints.*"

In **2 Timothy 3:15**, the apostle Paul commended Timothy because from childhood—with the help of his mother and grandmother—he had known the scriptures "*which are able to make you wise for salvation through Jesus Christ.*" You can go to college or enroll in a university and maybe get an education—I say, "maybe!" An education might make you smart, but that doesn't always equal wisdom. Jesus said man needs the word of God in order to live (Matthew 4:4). It isn't more information that the world needs. It isn't more education, or people with brains that are pumped full of facts and figures and theories and philosophies. What the world needs more of is wisdom, and wisdom comes from the fear and word of God.

For years now I have pursued the practice of reading the Daily Bible every day. I don't always get to read, like this last week I got behind, but over the past two days, I caught up again. I love reading and being renewed by God's word. It is like coming home every day. As I read and consider that old, old story, and all of the things God has said and recorded for us, my faith is strengthened, My joy and hope renewed.

God said it so long ago. *“I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps,”* (Jeremiah 10:23). That tells me that the world is never going to outgrow its need for the God the is unchanging, and for His unchanging word. The world may come up with more whiz and more bangs but mankind will never be without the need for God’s wisdom.

Because that is true, I know that another thing that is never going to change and that is the unchanging gospel. If man’s way is not in himself, if it is literally impossible for him to direct his steps—at least in spiritual matters—and if man’s habit and practice of sin is universal, then the need for the gospel is always going to be present. People are not going to get past sin someday. They are not going to outgrow it. We aren’t going to get so good, or become so educated, that we no longer need the gospel that saves us from ourselves.

The changing, but always sinful world is always going to be in need of the unchanging gospel. Now, I’m not saying that the gospel hasn’t changed. It has changed, in every age. Almost everyone who gets their hands on it wants to change it in some way. They want to add something to it; take something from it; make it a little more appealing, palatable, easier to believe and accept. The problem is, a changed gospel is no longer the gospel that saves. That is why Paul the apostle wrote with tremendous passion there in **Galatians 1:8-9**. I know you have heard this many times, but listen to it again:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

What is another gospel? What was Paul talking about? In that day, he was talking about the gospel preached by the Judaizers. These were Jewish Christians who insisted that alone with belief in Jesus as the Christ, converts had to also essentially pledge allegiance to the Law of Moses, and be circumcised if necessary. That was another gospel in Paul’s day, but the world has seen many, many other gospels. There is the gospel that proclaims Jesus as a good man, but not the divine Son of God. There is the gospel that proclaims salvation to those who recognize the Pope as the vicar of Christ and their spiritual father. There is

the gospel that teaches that it doesn't really matter what one believes, or does, as long as they are sincere. There is the gospel that says salvation is by faith only. There is the "Burger King" gospel—have it your way! Unfortunately, the gospel has been tampered with so much that people are confused about what the true gospel is.

God did not have a gospel for the Jews, and one for the Gentiles. In **Romans 1:15-16**, the apostle Paul said,

So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

If there is not one gospel for the Jews and another gospel for the Gentiles, then I can assure you there is not a gospel for people of Africa and another gospel for the people of Asia. There is not a gospel for the black man, or the red man, or the white man, or any other color of man. There is not a gospel for the young folks and another gospel for the old folks. There is not one gospel for homosexuals and another gospel for the straights.

The gospel is unchanging! It is the gospel of Christ that is to be proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and he that believes and is baptized will be saved by it. Those who do not believe, or become obedient to it will be condemned. The times, they are-a-changin' but dear friends, one thing that will never change is the gospel that saves.

And finally, another thing that will never change is the Lordship of Christ. In **Matthew 28:18**, following His resurrection from the dead, Christ declared: "*All authority has been given to me, in heaven and on earth.*"

What that means to me is that contrary to what it may seem at times the world is not out of control. The nuts are not in charge of the asylum! We might wonder about that at times. We might wonder what God and Christ are doing, or why don't they do something; at least something else, but Christ is Lord, and he is Lord of Lords. Every so called ruler, rules by one authority only, and that is Christ's

authority. I am so thankful for that. It's what allows me to get along in this crazy mixed-up world. I know, as **Romans 8:28** says, that *"God causes all things to work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose."*

I hope you find it encouraging to know that the One whose hands made the heavens and the earth once again has His hands on the controls of everything that happens in heaven or on earth. That doesn't mean everyone and everything in heaven and on earth respects and submits to His authority, but nothing and no one has any power to do anything except what He desires or at least permits.

In **1 Corinthians 15:27-28**, the apostle Paul put a postscript on this matter of Christ's Lordship. He said this:

For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

That tells me that God's eternal plan was put into motion with the beginning of creation, and has moved like clockwork throughout the ages. Everything you read about in the Old Testament revealed God's unfolding plan and purpose, which reached its critical point with the coming and death of Christ. By that heroic and humble sacrifice, God's plan of forgiveness of sinful men was established for all eternity. God himself, in the person of His Son would make that forgiveness possible, and having done that, he has now ascended to the right hand of God to finish his rule over his creation. But the day is coming, and the scriptures which cannot be broken declare it, when Christ will bring to an end this physical material universe. Everything that man has made, every change that has been wrought one day will be no more. Talk about change! Real change is coming.

The times, they are a-changin', but there are some things that will never change but this world, this universe is not one of them. God does not change. His word endures forever. Man will never be without the need for the unchanging gospel,

and the Lordship is in place until the full Godhead asserts His glory and authority for the last and final time, and for all eternity.