

Jesus- Unless You Change

Happy New Year! I wish I could tell you this morning that 2012 is going to be better- Your health, wealth, relationships, church mortgage, leadership in Washington, world peace, but I don't know..... This one thing I do know. 2012 will be different. There will be changes. I can't promise whether they will be good or bad, but there will be change.

Over the last ten years, from Christmas to Easter, we have studied the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. We have studied the gospels individually and synoptically, the teachings of Christ, the parables, and people whose lives were changed by their encounters with Jesus. We've focused on the earlier years and at other times the last week of Jesus life and ministry. Are we done? Have we exhausted the subject? Can any thing else be said or learned? Or, have we barely begun to draw water from the well that never runs dry? I, without hesitation, choose answer B. We have barely begun to scratch the surface of possibilities for potential knowledge and understanding of who our eternal God and Savior was and is.

So today we will continue our "tradition" and dive right in to the eternal spring of truth. This year, the Lord willing, I would like for us to focus on the teaching/sermons of Christ as they relate to certain subjects . One year we extensively studied the Sermon on

the Mount so we won't focus too intently on that one sermon.

Today, we will consider the topic of change in relation to the teachings of Christ. Is this a reasonable subject, worthy of our time and attention? What was the subject of the first sermon Jesus preached? Immediately following Satan's temptation of Jesus in the desert prior to the beginning of His earthly ministry.....

12 When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. **13** He left Nazareth behind and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. **14** This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: **15** **Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the sea road, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles! **16** The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the shadowland of death, light has dawned. **17** From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!"** **Matt 4:12-17 (HCSB)**

What does Jesus' repeated message of repentance have to do with change? Everything! To repent means to have a change of mind. And no good, positive change has ever taken place in anyone's life without first having a change

of mind, particularly in regard to sin. Real change, the best change, good change has to do with forsaking sin and committing to more Christ-honoring life-style and behavior. Without repentance it is impossible for anyone to experience genuine conversion to Christ. And, without continued, frequent repentance, it is impossible for the true follower of Christ to mature in his faith beyond the first baby steps.

In fact, I would guess that the number is quite large of those who come to Christ for salvation but resist or even refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to continue His work leading to repentance and the subsequent change it brings.

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” **2** Then He called a child to Him and had him stand among them. **3** “**I assure you,**” He said, “**unless you are converted and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**” **4** **Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.** **5** **And whoever welcomes one child like this in My name welcomes Me.** **Matt 18:1-5 (HCSB)**

What is so essential about the nature of a child that we should emulate and how does that relate to our subject of repentance and change?Children, though far from perfect, are way more malleable than most of us adults are. They can still be molded, shaped, and changed into

something better than they already are. They are much more open to change. We are hard headed, stiff-necked and tend to strongly resist most all changes whether good or bad. Jesus, addressing the religious leaders of His day said....

32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him. Tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him, but you, when you saw it, didn't even change your minds then and believe him. **Matt 21:28-32 (HCSB)**

Ready or not, like it or not, good or bad, change is coming. How can we prepare? How should we react? What did Jesus have to say?

Prepare for Change: 1.If imposed/inflicted

You and I live every day with the consequences, good and bad, of subtle and not so subtle decisions we have made. There are physical scars from foolish behavior. There are emotional scars from wrong relationships. There are spiritual scars from periods of rebellion against God.

There are blessing from good investments, rewards from sacrificial service and giving, and wisdom and knowledge gained from diligent prayer and study of God's Word. These decisions and hundreds more are made every day.

This year, every waking minute of each of the 365 days of 2012 are wide open for you to make changes in your life for good. Changes that improve your health, strengthen relationships, enhance your financial situation, shake up Washington and most of all changes in your life that could enhance the kingdom of God on earth and bring glory to His name. You may not be able to or want to change everything but there are at least some things that you have control over that need to be changed.

23 "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must **deny himself**, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.
Luke 9:23 (HCSB)

Self denial is the necessary beginning point for good, Christ honoring changes in the areas of our lives we have control over. The very thing that keeps us from being more loving, giving, and Christ-like is our self-centered, self-serving, self-satisfying spirit of selfishness. We will struggle with this uncrucified nature until the day we die. But as we seek to be truly devoted followers of Christ, self-denial should be a growing strength of our self-imposed changing character.

2. World/environment

So much of what the world throws at us, pollution, bad economy, terrorism, sin and evil we have no control over. Our world is changing at break-neck speed and very little

of the change that I see is for good. And, it is being shoved down our throats. In God we Trust and Merry Christmas are on the endangered list in America and it seems there is little we can do about it. (Cross City-Hardees) Jesus said that if we wanted to come with Him we must....

23 Then He said to [them] all, “**If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.** **L**uke 9:23 (HCSB)

Jesus wasn't specific about what our cross might be. Maybe it is the burden of carrying the cross of our faith in our world that is increasingly resistant to it.

31 Jesus responded to them, “**Do you now believe?³² Look: An hour is coming, and has come, when each of you will be scattered to his own home, and you will leave Me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.³³ I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”** **J**ohn 16:31-33 (HCSB)

3. God

The purposes of God for each of our lives and for the church collectively can be pretty accurately summed in the statement that God is working on us day by day and

minute by minute to bring about Christ-like change in our lives. His plan is to form us into the perfect likeness of His Son. For most of us that involves a lot of change! The last time I looked in the mirror I didn't see a whole lot of Jesus reflecting back at me. What about you? Jesus put it pretty simply.....Follow me.....

23 Then He said to [them] all, **"If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me."** Luke 9:23 (HCSB)

If we are truly following Christ, we are fully open to God's Spirit working in us to bring about good, positive, Christ-like change. If we are legitimate followers of Christ, God is working on us full-time to bring about change. We are His workmanship. The question is, "will we respond with grace and surrender?" or "kicking and screaming?" In Larry and BJ I see grace and surrender. What about you?