

Times Are Changing

In 1964, a 23-year-old young man released a song that became the anthem of change for a generation. The young man's name is Robert Allen Zimmerman. In 1959, this young college student began to sing in local coffee houses under the name of Bob Dylan. The song which I refer is *The Times They Are a-Changin'*.

The first verse of this song goes:

*Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'*

In his song, there are several cautions about the changing is addressed to educators (*writers and critics*), the governing bodies (*senators and congressmen*), and parents (*mothers and fathers*). The theme of the song is that the change is coming and will over-shadow the existing (*Then you better start swimmin' Or you'll sink like a stone For the times they are a-changin'*). The old and established order will need to adapt or be left behind. Each generation has brought this same theme to the established order as they arrive.

There are times when the change is monumental and truly opens the doors of change that radically changes the norm. Some of these changes we may remember and some, we may note, are momentary “flashes” that quickly fade into the pages of history and then from our memory. Last year ended with our celebration of the birth of Jesus and the final message for the year was a reminder that we are to live like Jesus. When we pause to think about Jesus, we are forced to admit that Jesus was (and remains) a change agent. We may fail to understand the radical change that began when Jesus was born.

In our responsive reading and call to worship this morning, we are reminded of the very special relationship that existed between the family of Israel and God. God dealt with this nation in a way that no other nation could approach. Even when God allowed the nation to be taken over by other nations, God restored them and continued to watch over them.

There was a unique relationship between God and the descendants of Abraham. Abraham was promised that God would bless all the nations of the world through the family of Abraham. We may remember in Genesis, these words spoken to Abraham: **And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3 NASB)** Then in the 22nd chapter; **In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:18 NASB)**

Truly, the birth of Jesus marked a monumental change. More than 2000 years later, we see change still producing change in the world. Much of the world saw the events unfold and, like the song we mentioned earlier, they failed to swim and thus sank like a stone. John tells us of the tragic rejection of the religious leaders.

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (John 1:9-11 NASB)

The pain of rejection may be seen throughout the interactions Jesus had with the religious leaders. Their refusal to see God's promised Messiah hurt Jesus. His mission was constantly correcting their errors in reading and understanding the scriptures which many had spent a lifetime learning and studying.

What a change came about for those who heard Jesus and believed Him.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13 NASB)

The birth of Jesus was not just another Hebrew born to a peasant girl. This birth marks the actual incarnation of God. God became flesh (Colossians 1:15). This cannot be said of anyone else in the Bible or in recorded history. John opens his gospel with the same images that Moses used in the book of Genesis. John goes all the way back to the beginning of creation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1-3 NASB)

The word was there with God and indeed the word is God. Once more we catch a glimpse of the trinity. The word was active in the creation. God, who was active in the creation of the world, actually came to earth to live with us.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" For of His fullness, we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*. (John 1:14-18 NASB)

The birth of Jesus brings a change in the relationship between God and humans. Under the Law, the relationship is like a student under a tutor. We learn to perform certain acts and behaviors to please the tutor. When the tutor is happy with our behavior, we experience certain liberties and certain blessings.

With the birth of Jesus, we are no longer students. We enjoy a new and special relationship. We become children of God (John 1:12).

The apostle Paul outlines this change and echoes the word of John about our kinship with God. When he writes to the church in Galatia, he mentions that we become children of God and also ties this to the promise made to Abraham. Let's read in the 3rd chapter of Galatians.

Therefore, the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:24-29 NASB)

With the birth of Jesus, we see a change. We are no longer under the guidance or control of the tutor. Our status has elevated from a virtual slave to a child of God. We become an heir to the promise made to Abraham.

The birth of Jesus brought change. This change has over-shadowed the norm of the first century. The message of Jesus was and remains one of change. Many of the religious leaders whom Jesus met were more concerned about the various aspects of the Law. They were rigid in their observance and even created layer upon layer of new laws to help ensure that people did not violate God's law. Jesus stripped away all of the false layers and taught the simple truth that all of the Law is based on two fundamental laws; love God and love our neighbor.

There are still some religious leaders who push for a master-slave relationship where we must do certain things in order to receive any blessing from God. This type of relationship has driven many away from organized religion. These leaders fail to see the change and therefore are sinking like a stone as the waters of change wash over them.

As we begin this new year, we may want to pause and realize that we may swim with the flow of change that started with the birth of Jesus. This change that means we no longer live like or look like those who do not have Jesus. Paul tells us that we are to change from the worldly self and be transformed.

Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB)

God, through Jesus, brought about change. The swelling waters of that change swirl around us. Will we understand and accept that change so that we may swim with the tide of God's Change? Many of us start the new year with resolve to improve our health through exercise. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with that change in our life. Again, Paul addresses the idea of physical exercise. He writes to Timothy: **for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life to come*. (1 Timothy 4:8 NASB)**

The idea and concept that has been held and still held by many that we must perform certain acts to receive God's blessing was a part of the world in which Jesus was born. Jesus frequently pointed out hypocrisy of earning our salvation through works under the Law.

But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7 NASB)

We look at the change that is found in the birth of Jesus. We know the "story" well. Yet, we still live in the world and like the world. So-

*If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'*

Are you ready to change and start swimming with the flow of salvation found only in Jesus?