

Jesus brings CHANGE

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Date: 02 January 2016

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm wondering how many of you have made New Year's resolutions. Dare I ask for you to put your hand up ever so slowly if you think that's a good thing to do.

Because, frankly, I never do it. I don't do it because I know that it only is going to take an hour or two and I've actually messed up my New Year's resolution.

But if you are a devotee of John Piper, John Piper would say we need to be making new resolutions every day. Every day we are to be turning our eyes towards Jesus.

So I need to take a little lesson from that. Now, considering it's the beginning of a new year, I thought it would be good to talk about change because this is our moment to actually step into a new year and to be fresh and to go with vigour into what it is that the Lord actually would wish for us to be doing.

So I want to ask you, if you were to change something of yourself, what is it that you would be wanting to start with? Lots of us would start with things like, we want to be skinnier, we want to be taller, shorter, better looking, or would you change your eyes, your hair, your teeth, your legs, your bulges, maybe just quietly?

[1 : 28] If you were to wave a magic wand and change any part of your appearance, would it be a light touch-up or would it be like one of those massive extreme makeovers that you see on television, which I personally actually really love, where you can't even recognise the person who's had the extreme makeover from the person who started?

I just think that is amazing. Well, I think we all go through periods where we desperately want to change something, something about ourselves.

Teenagers live in a state of wanting, living in a state of constant fear that they don't look good enough, that they, so they tinker and experiment with fads, with fashion, with this T-shirt, that hat, or whatever the latest artist might be wearing.

But when we grow older, we get smarter. Or do we? We spend hours trying to find just the right dress or the right shirt or the right pair of pants that will fit into whatever the crowd is that we're trying to impress.

And some diet obsessively and work out, which is good for our health, but it can be a losing battle really, can't it?

[3 : 02] Because we might lose weight and finally look good and then slowly it all sort of starts to creep back on again and we might reach a stage in our life where we think it's just much better to cover it up and not even bother anymore.

Or maybe we just stop caring about ourselves altogether. But people change slowly. If they change at all. But as hard as it is to change on the outside, it seems infinitely harder to change on the inside.

Think about all the struggles that you might have in your life. What would you change about yourself on the inside if you could?

Would it be an impatient spirit, a critical tongue, envy of those around you, a spirit of discontentment, lingering resentment, lust you can't conquer, financial mismanagement, a guilty conscience, an inability to work with others, overbearing stubbornness, a judgmental spirit, a profound discouragement, an inability to appreciate life, an ungrateful spirit, a disorganised life, an inability to say no, a mean streak that you can't seem to get rid of?

The list is unending. We would all want to change something. But we don't know how to do it.

[4 : 43] And we don't know where to begin. And dare I say, many of us have areas in our life that need change and we are so blinded by the fact that we need to change that that we don't even see it.

That's called deception. We all dream of being someone different at times. A better person. Advertisers know this and so that is why your email box, your inbox is always crammed filled with advertising to tell you that you can lose weight, you can make money, you can learn a new language.

I constantly receive, and I'm not too sure if the computer actually knows this, but I constantly receive unwanted emails about this herb that you can take in a pill form from Africa where you don't have to exercise, you don't have to worry about what food you eat and you lose weight.

I mean, how fantastic is that? The problem is, I think the only thing that you lose is lots of dollars and maybe not the weight. So, you know, sort of unfortunately, that's not something that I want to take up.

Change is hard. Go to any bookstore and you'll see an entire wall of self-help books. Helping people to change is big business nowadays.

[6 : 19] But when we get up in the morning and we look in the mirror, it is still the same person that we see from yesterday. That's why we sometimes want to move.

We change jobs, we buy a new car, we start a new career, we have a new boyfriend, we have a new girlfriend, we have a new outfit, we go and change work.

It's not as easy as those things. Those things aren't wrong in themselves, but sometimes we need to make outward changes.

But it's not the outward stuff that trips us up. It's the stuff that's on the inside. Well, the great news is that there is an answer and most of you here in this building would actually know that the answer is going to be the Sunday school answer.

It is Jesus. We all know that. Do we? Yes, of course we do. We all know that it's Jesus, is the answer. So why is it that we have so much trouble?

[7 : 29] What we learn with our heads needs to travel 30 centimetres in my old schooling, one foot, but 30 centimetres to reach our heart.

And without that journey to our heart, whatever we know about Jesus, we'll actually be missing the point. So the change, the lasting change that we want is going to come by our hearts being transformed.

What does it mean to follow Jesus then with our hearts? In our reading in Matthew 4, we see Jesus walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and he calls Peter and Andrew and also James and John to follow him.

Two sets of brothers who are at work doing what they do daily, earning a living. Now these guys have already met Jesus either days or weeks or a couple of months beforehand.

Not sure of how long it is, but we see their first meeting with Jesus in John chapter 1 from verse 35. Let me read it for you. The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples.

[8 : 53] When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, look, the Lamb of God. When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, what do you want?

They said, Rabbi, which means teacher. Where are you staying? Come, he replied, and you will see. So they went and saw where he was staying and they spent the day with him.

It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, we have found the Messiah, that is the Christ.

And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, son of John, you will be called Cephas, which now means, translated, Peter. It seems that these new followers of Jesus had hung out with Jesus for a time and then had time to reflect on who Jesus was.

And so when he's called to them to drop everything and to follow him, they were ready to do so immediately. That is, they left their work, they left their income and their security, they left their family, their focus was on Jesus and Jesus alone.

[10 : 26] They weren't concerned about what others might have thought. Obedience to Jesus meant what was important in life yesterday, that is work, income, now is totally secondary today.

Jesus is now their focus and their priority in life. They were believers first, but now they are obedient followers.

Two very, very different things. their world is about to change, but will it change quickly? No.

Will it change with ease? No. Will there be lessons to learn? Yes, definitely. And will there be rejoicing?

Yes, definitely. It is the same for us when we obediently follow Jesus. Is Jesus your main focus in life?

[11 : 40] Are your eyes fixed on him over and above your family, your work, your free time, your sport, your hobby?

This is a challenge for me. My free time, if I have it, I love watching movies. Love it. But I can watch a movie quite easily and be sitting there knowing full well that I have not gone and read my Bible, I have not allowed Jesus to input into my life by reading his word, I haven't actually had time praying that day and committing my day to the Lord.

I have my priorities very, very messed up at times and I am certain that many of you might have also.

If we were to judge the adequacy of a bunch of fishermen by their appearance, what would we see? We would see sun-beaten bodies they'd be well-tanned, they'd be muscles, strong men physically, not sure how strong they would be emotionally, educated in fishing, not so educated academically, hard-working.

Would we look and choose them for the A-team to be the disciples of Jesus the Messiah? I think not.

[13 : 17] and why not? Because we constantly fall into the trap of looking at a person and judging them by what is on the outside, their education, their financial security, what school or college they went to, what uni, how they look, what they wear and we do this same thing without knowing what is on the inside and without realising someone's potential.

And we make the same foolish mistake and foolish judgement of ourselves and we miss the need and the potential to change the inside.

We are in a trap that we cannot fix. Consider what happens when a caterpillar enters a cocoon only to emerge later as a beautiful butterfly.

The caterpillar doesn't change its basic nature. Metamorphosis reveals what was always there in the genes of the caterpillar.

Caterpillars can't fly but they were born to fly. when the caterpillar has been changed into a butterfly it becomes what God always intended that caterpillar to be.

[14 : 49] And we cannot see what God's intentions for us are either because it happens from the inside. These great men who Jesus called to follow him also had need of change on the inside but the change was going to be painful at times at least and dare I say downright embarrassing.

We read in Matthew 26 where Jesus predicts his death and also that Peter was going to deny him not once but three times.

Of course Peter didn't believe this. of course he would have been offended that Jesus would think such a thing. I mean how often have you been offended when somebody speaks something about you that you embarrassingly find out was correct in the end?

This happens to me more times than I'd like to count or that I'd like to share even maybe. my heart is clearly not pure and not perfect and dare I say nor is yours.

Look at Peter's confident answer. He declares even if I die with you I will never disown you. And then it doesn't take very long for Peter's heart to be shown when he has the encounter with the servant girl who confidently states that Peter was also with Jesus.

[16 : 32] And what does Peter do? Remembering this is the Peter who loves Jesus declared he will never fall away and deny Jesus. Peter lies and he runs away.

Isn't it bizarre that we all believe that if I just move into a different space be it changing work, changing church, changing friends, that the problem won't follow us.

But it does. If the problem is never resolved it's always going to stick with you like glue. Another person confidently says that Peter was with Jesus and Peter denies it and then a group of men challenge Peter and he denies that he knows Jesus the third time.

Imagine Peter's shock when he heard that rooster crow. How devastating. How utterly terrible to see one's own heart for what it truly is.

Peter wept bitterly. Friends, that too should be our response when we truly see the reality of our hearts.

[18 : 10] How often or have you ever been so struck by the darkness of your heart that you have wept bitterly.

Maybe for us to move into 2016 we first all need to shed heartfelt tears of the darkness of our own hearts and receive the love and the grace and the forgiveness that only Jesus can actually bring. Jesus called Peter to follow him and it was Jesus who saw potential within Peter even though there was much to learn and much change to occur and Jesus has called us to himself.

He has called us to follow him. He has called us to obey him and we too have much to learn and much change to happen within us and we wonder at the beginning of another year can I change is there potential?

In the year 1464 a sculptor named Agostino di Duccio Apology if I've said that incorrectly began working on a huge piece of floored marble intending to produce a magnificent sculpture of an Old Testament prophet for a cathedral in Florence Italy.

[20 : 04] He laboured for two years and then he stopped. In 1476 Antonio Rossellino started to work on the same piece of marble and in time abandoned it also.

In 1501 a 26 year old sculptor named Michelangelo was offered a considerable sum of money to produce something worthwhile from that enormous block of marble called the giant and as he began his work he saw a major flaw near the bottom that had stymied other sculptors.

He decided to turn that part of the stone into a broken tree, a broken tree stump that would support the right leg and the rest he worked on for four years until he had produced the incomparable David.

Today the 17 foot tall statue stands on display at the Academia Gallery in Florence where people come from all around the world to view it.

more than a masterpiece it is one of the greatest works of art ever produced. It has been said there is no statue more perfect.

[21 : 32] You might have a different view as I do but that's what they say. How did Michelangelo do it? Well here is the answer in his own words.

He said in every block of marble I see a statue. As plain as though it stood before me shaped and perfect in attitude and action I have only to hew away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it to other eyes as mine see it.

Said in more colloquial terms I cut away everything that didn't look like David. All of us are works in progress.

Now apply this to the spiritual life. We're not finished. We're not glorified. We're not perfected. We're not completed. We're all under construction.

Whilst the chipping away of unwanted bits continues it's hard to imagine what the final result will be. God God never stops working on us because there is so much work that needs to be done.

[22 : 54] In Isaiah 64 verse 8 it says O Lord you are our father we are the clay you are the potter we are all the work of your hand.

In my mind's eye I picture God as a sculptor working with a rough piece of marble. He's working on a big chunk named Deb Gould.

It's a hard job because the chunk is badly marred, it's misshapen, it's discoloured and cracked in odd places. It's about the worst piece of marble a sculptor could ever find.

But God is undeterred and he works patiently at his job chipping away the bad parts, chiseling, in an image into the hard stone, stopping occasionally to polish here and there.

One day he will finish one section of the statue. The next morning when he returns to the studio, that section is messed up.

[24 : 00] I thought I finished that yesterday he says, who's been messing with my statue? It turns out that I'm the culprit. I'm my own worst enemy.

What I thought would improve things has only messed them up by my actions, by trying to take control, by being self-centred.

But God is faithful. He is patiently picks up his chisel and goes back to work. He's chipping away everything that doesn't look like Jesus. In my case, it's evident that he's got a long way to go, but I'm encouraged by the certain knowledge that he will not give up.

He will not quit halfway through a project. What God starts, God finishes. After Peter's huge debacle, one would think that he would be kicked out of the list of close friends and disciples of Jesus.

But if you turn with me to John 21, verses 15 to 18, we read this. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

[25 : 16] Yes, Lord, he said, you know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my lambs. Again, Jesus said, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

He answered, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Jesus said, take my sheep. The third time he said to him, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.

And Jesus said, feed my sheep. Isn't that beautiful? that is no accident that Jesus asked that question three times.

Three times Peter disowned Jesus and three times Jesus wanted to show Peter that he is still Jesus' man. Jesus knew the change in Peter's heart and he was reinstated as it was to the role that Jesus had always planned for him.

[26 : 23] Peter had the role of feeding Jesus' sheep to lead his people. It was a ministry beyond anything a simple fisherman would ever have dreamed.

We see the transformation of Peter, the change that was orchestrated by Jesus when we read Peter's address to the crowds in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit comes and fills all the followers of Jesus and miraculously they speak in different tongues with eloquence, with power, with authority.

This is a change that cannot be achieved by human effort or by positive thinking or by any self-help book. This is a change that Jesus makes for those who follow and obey him.

Remember right at the beginning we saw Peter and the others leave everything to follow Jesus.

Being a disciple of Jesus is dependent upon us being 100% devoted and in love with Jesus above all other distractions.

Jesus needs to be our priority for change to occur. Do you want change? change? Do you want change on the inside that will last?

[27 : 49] Then we need to make 2016 a year of being devoted to the only one who can change us into the people that he envisions us to be.

Let me encourage you this week to spend time with God and ask him what area of your life this year needs changing on the inside.

It will not happen overnight but it will happen if you obey Jesus and keep your eyes on him day by day moment by moment.

How wonderful it will be that when we are in heaven we will get to see the masterpiece that the Lord is working on right now for each other.

Remember we are all works in progress and we all have potential if we follow and obey the master.

We may even choose the same engraving on our headstones when the day comes that we die that Ruth Graham, the wife of the great evangelist Billy Graham, has on her headstone.

[29 : 08] and it says, end of construction. Thank you for your patience.