

20.04.2019 PREPARING FOR CHANGE

Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway. Psalm 85:13

Death and change are 2 certainties of life. This week we focus on change and how we prepare for it.

There are 2 types of changes in life:

Expected changes: growing older, marriage, parenting, old age and ultimately, the sleep of death.

Unexpected changes: illness, trials and tragedies. (There are also unexpected joyful events in our lives, but our study focus is on the unexpected changes that can challenge our trust in God).

When we watch children we see that they love routine. The same is true for us as adults. We often fear change for we like life to have a routine. But life is constantly changing. We lose jobs, relationships end, illness and tragedy intervenes. And society keeps changing its values and behaviours constantly.

When such changes enter our lives, it can leave us confused and overwhelmed.

As we all encounter major changes in our individual lives, and in society, we need a place to find hope. There is only one thing that never changes, the one thing that stays the same: our unchanging God.

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed”. Malachi 3:6

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Hebrews 13:8

For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5

Because God never changes, His word never changes. All that He has said about himself remains true forever. Everything He has told us about Creation, about the sin problem, and about what He has done to save the world will never change. No matter what anyone may say, no matter who denies or defies God’s word, it remains firmly fixed. *“Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens”...Psalm 119:89. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”...Matthew 24:35.*

And because His word never changes, His promises for us remain true:

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

God’s will for His believing, re-created people is that they purpose in their hearts to live by His Word and order their lives (particularly when faced with the unexpected) by God’s will as laid down in His Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Preparing for Marriage

Though we are now a fallen race, God’s will for His believing, re-created people is that they purpose in their hearts to have a marriage according to God’s will as it was *‘in the beginning’* and not to take advantage of permissions that God has allowed because of sin (Matthew 19:8). **God calls marriage ‘the LORD’s holy institution which He loves’ Malachi 2:11.**

Marriage is a witness to the world of the CHARACTER of the Godhead (as the Sabbath is a witness to His perfect WORK). In Christian marriage, both husband and wife must demonstrate to the world the unconditional, unfailing, self-giving love of God. They must demonstrate the unity that lies within the Godhead, 3 persons united in purpose and love. Every Christian marriage has 3 persons in it – the husband, wife and Holy Spirit; a three-fold cord that is not easily broken. When children are born, there must be a demonstration of the fatherhood (Deut 32:18) and motherhood (Isaiah 49:15) of God.

We must know God's desire for marriage and obey it. When there are children in a marriage, we prepare them for marriage by demonstrating to them the God-ordained relationship between husband and wife and children.

The Universal Biblical Law of Marriage:

Genesis 2:22- 24: Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife...

As Re-Affirmed by Jesus:

"From the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." Mark 10:6-9 (see also Matthew 10:4-6 and Paul in Ephesians 5:31-33).

Below is a portion of the marriage declaration and vow:

"Will you love...comfort... honour and keep..., in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to... as long as you both shall live?"

"I promise .to have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part; according to God's holy law. In the presence of God I make this vow."

The marriage declaration and vow recognises that life will not be as it is on the wedding day; there will be changes because we live in a world of sin and sickness and death. Nevertheless, in Christian marriage, the husband and wife are called to remain unchanging in their love and faithfulness to each other for as long as life shall last, no matter what circumstances life brings them.

This is the closest demonstration on earth that believing Christians can give to the world of the God they worship. They witness to the God who unconditionally loves and remains unchangingly faithful to humanity.

It is therefore of utmost importance that we teach our youth and young adults the true principles of Christian marriage. They need to understand that, as in other issues of life, they have a choice – to follow God's will regarding marriage or follow the world, that is under the rule of Satan.

*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **Love never fails.** 1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

Preparation for Parenting

Children are our most precious possession. God has made us stewards and has given them to us to nurture and train and teach them of the God who has created, loved and redeemed them.

Every child born into this world has the disadvantage of being born with a sinful nature, inherited from Adam. It is the parent's duty to train the child to 'hate evil and love good' and to claim the promise that God himself will teach our children and keep them from the evil one. The parent's first priority for his child is to lead the child to Jesus Christ and demonstrate to him the wonderful blessing there is in following Jesus.

You are children of the Covenant...Acts 3:26

And yet, even though born with a sinful nature, the children of Christian parents have the blessed advantage of being children of the Covenant. Every parent who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is a spiritual descendant of Abraham and the promises God made to Abraham and his descendants are for us to claim as well.

On God's part, the promise is certain. But it is also conditional upon the FAITH of the parent. Abraham's seed was blessed because of the faith of Abraham. Our children are blessed only as we, their parents, believe the promises of God. Note that the promise was made BEFORE the seed was born. So God promises to bless our children, not just from birth, but before birth. His Spirit will be upon our children, if we call upon God to fulfil His promise regarding them.

God requires us to be good and faithful stewards of our children. Every parent must seek to bring their children up so that they will learn to know God and to one day choose and love the God of their parents. This is the first priority of the Christian parent; everything else - riches, education, careers, an advantageous marriage – what will they matter if the child rejects God and life eternal?

For I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. Genesis 18:19

God gives parents AUTHORITY over their children – to command their children to keep the way of the LORD. We have lost to a great extent the Biblical teaching of authority in the pursuit of equality. But authority is a God-given prerogative and we must use it as good stewards of our children, teaching them the love of God, to love as He loves, to be just as He is just.

"For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent (granted) to the LORD." 1 Samuel 1:27, 28

This is the wonderful response of Hannah to the birth of her longed-for son. Like all godly men and women she recognised that our children are given to us and we must consecrate them to the Lord, for in ourselves we lack wisdom to raise them up in the right paths. We live in a world and a society that tempts our children continuously, both overtly and insidiously with the pleasures it has to offer.

Children need instruction in the truth of God: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

In this passage we are taught the 3 essentials of a Christian home:

1. There must be a revelation of God (6:4).
2. There must be a response to God (6:5) - a total response that involves heart, soul and mind.
3. There must be a three-fold responsibility (6:6-9). This responsibility is
 - a. To have God's truth govern the heart.
 - b. To have God's truth govern the home – children are to have formal (teach diligently) as well as informal (talk of them) instruction.
 - c. To have God's truth govern habits and conduct personally, privately and publicly.

To all parents who follow God's will, the promise is sure as it was to Abraham - 'that *the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.*' So also it will be to faithful parents - God will give us the covenant blessings He has promised us through Abraham.

Light has been shining from the Word of God and the testimonies of His Spirit so that none need err in regard to their duty. God requires parents to bring up their children to know Him and to respect His claims; they are to train their little ones, as the younger members of the Lord's family, to have beautiful characters and lovely tempers, that they may be fitted to shine in the heavenly courts. By neglecting their duty and indulging their children in wrong, parents close to them the gates of the city of God. These facts must be pressed home upon parents; they must arouse and take up their long-neglected work. *Child Guidance: P 13*

*That which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength
And His wonderful works that He has done.
For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers,
That they should make them known to their children.
That the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born,
That they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God,
And not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. Psalm 78:3-7*

Preparing for Old Age

Some of the best advice given to us about preparing for old age is found in that marvellous passage of Ecclesiastes 12: ***Remember your Creator while you are young...that is the best preparation for old age.***

To remember and know our Creator daily from youth is to live by His will for our lives – spiritually, socially, mentally and physically.

*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come,
and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them".
While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain.
In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow down;
When the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows grow dim...
Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed (broken), or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at
the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well.
Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:1-7*

*Honour and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, before the years take their toll and your vigour wanes,
Before your vision dims and the world blurs and the winter years keep you close to the fire.
In old age, your body no longer serves you so well.
Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen; the shades are pulled down on the world.
You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt. The hum of the household fades away.
You are wakened now by bird-song. Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past.
Even a stroll down the road has its terrors.
Your hair turns apple-blossom white, adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body.
Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral.
Life, lovely while it lasts, is soon over. (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 The Message)*

Here is a promise to all who remember their Creator from their youth:

*I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.
Psalm 37:25*

Preparation for Death

There is but one way to prepare for death. We must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that we may 'not perish but have everlasting life. For God has sent His son, Christ Jesus, not to condemn the world but to save it' (John 3:16, 17).

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” John 5:24

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:11, 12

He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:20, 21

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Colossians 3:1-4

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

If we have made Christ our Saviour and Lord, then like Paul, we can testify at the end of our lives:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7, 8

Conclusion: We can put our trust in our unchanging God and His unchangeable Word.

As we prepare for the changing scenes of life, let us set ourselves to live by God’s Word which is our guide to life and living. When faced with the unexpected, let us remind ourselves of the principles set down in the Word and ask for the guidance of the Spirit, by which we make the correct responses to the unexpected.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:8

Let us never forget that as believers, our lives and times are in God’s hand. If He has allowed what we perceive as trials to touch us, let us be confident that He has done it to teach us more of His character and how we come short of it. Let us ask Him to reveal to us His purpose in every trial and every tragedy, for even in these things, He works out everything for our good and for His ultimate glory.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling” Psalm 46:1-3.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

Above all, let us set our hearts on God and claim His promise that He never will leave us or forsake us in every circumstance of life.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

“And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Matthew 28:20
