

|| Series: Growing Season

Title: Reformation

Over the past 6 months we have been sowing into our church community the proposal that we are in a seasonal time of change. A transitional moment in the history of our society. This season of change isn't something that began at Christmas time. There has been a shift in the atmosphere of our world that has already been in play for at least a decade. This shift is a global phenomenon. It's not as simple to think that it's only about a single issue. I believe we are travelling through a moment that future historians will coin a reformational era.

I was reminded of the prophetic word that was given to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah:

|| "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him." (Jeremiah 18:1-4 NIV)

A reformation simply means a season of being "formed again" through correction or realignment. At the time of any reformational period events aren't easily understood or collated in sequenced formats at the time they are occurring. They are generally misunderstood until much later when hindsight experts design their flowcharts and timelines.

As a follower of Christ we are called to be people of foresight. People of the Kingdom of God as "Seers". Jesus said on a number of occasions things like:

"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." (John 4:23 NIV)

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door." (Matthew 24:32-33 NIV)

Jesus is telling us to read the signs. Be a people of foresight. A prophetic people who understand the times we are in and to recognise things that lie up ahead. Reformation isn't about a single issue that is occurring which requires correction or addressing. It is a recognition that many things are moving, maybe even over a long period of time, causing the atmosphere or environment to slowly shift (e.g. frog in the kettle).

It's not a time to be fearful – in fact it's the opposite – we were born for a time such as this – just like Esther was born for her time, and the disciples for theirs and the early church fathers for theirs, etc. You were crafted, made and equipped to enter this chapter of history.

I believe we are in the middle of a significant reformational era. That is what this Growing Season has really been all about. That is what the prophetic word that Ps David McCracken

gave to us last year from Song of Songs (2:11-13) that a seasonal change is occurring (from winter to summer).

Let me identify some of the reformations that have occurred over the past 2000 years.

1. **|| The coming of Emmanuel** – God with us – The Advent of Jesus Christ, was a moment of reformation. A New Covenant was established through the sacrifice of God’s own Son. Humanity was given the ability to be reformed through rebirth in Christ. The Apostle Paul says:

|| “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV)

This is a reformational statement! Jesus Christ changed history forever from this moment. The Cross becomes a symbol of demarcation between one era and another. From here the church is born and over the next 300 years the known world is revolutionised by the message of the Gospel. Jesus himself launched the church by saying:

|| “...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18 NIV)

A period of about 1000 years passes throughout which the church slowly morphs into an institution whose teachings and rituals wander far from the original message of Christ and the Apostles.

Another reformational moment was brewing to bring correction and realignment back to the original purposes of Christ.

2. **|| The Protestant Reformation** occurred in the 15th century when Martin Luther, on the 31st October 1517, nailed his 95 theses (basically 95 points he wanted discussed by the church) on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. This was like posting his thoughts on the Facebook of the day. It went viral!

This reformation had probably been brewing for almost 200 years prior to Luther's actions. Men like Waldo, Wycliffe and Hus had begun rigorous conversations contesting the state of the church. Luther happened to be the spark that sets the entire world aflame. Luther had an encounter with the book of Romans. The Holy Spirit opened his eyes to see that we are saved by grace, not by works. Luther’s life was changed when he read these words:

|| “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”” (Romans 1: 16-17 NIV)

This moment in time saw a demarcation line drawn that signalled the end of one era and the birth of a new time in history. Saved by grace, not through works became the message.

The message of the Cross had been placed back into its correct place. The work of Jesus correctly realigned as a message of His unmerited favour toward his creation. This message now caused a seismic shift in the religious world (one we still see today) but it revitalised the church for the next 500 years – until the next reformation was to hit the world:

3. || The great Spiritual Awakening

|| “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2:1-4 NIV)

The Azusa Street revival (in Los Angeles) exploded around the world in 1906 with an incredible outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Millions of people around the globe experienced a powerful conviction of sin, miraculous healings and a dynamic experience of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism had been born and it swept around the world.

This was not a new phenomenon. The pre-reformers like Wesley, Finney, and Moody (to name a few) had been having conversations and experiences of a spiritual encounter for several hundred years prior to the Azusa Street revival.

Many of us that have been Christians throughout our lives have experienced this reformation. Whether we accepted it as genuine or not. It cannot be denied that it changed the face of the global church. It was a reformational moment that has reverberated for over 100 years.

|| Observation:

Jesus’ final instructions to his disciples were to:

1. Wait for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4)
2. Go out into all the world (Matthew 28:19)

A common trait that seems to occur somewhere within the preceding season to a reformational moment (that spark that causes change to occur) – is human intervention and control which dilutes, even diverts the sanctity of what had been reformed. **The church**

|| stops “waiting” and “going” but instead “stops” and “stays”!

For example:

- After the Ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the message of the Gospel spread across the known world. Over time the church became an institution creating rituals, mystical practices through the worship of relics, introducing weird theological beliefs, ultimately creating a powerful system that

people blindly obeyed through fear. The church had become corrupted and nothing but a reformation was going to bring it back.

I am a Pentecostal believer who recognises the incredible season I have been raised within. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is something that every believer in Jesus should ask for as it is the promise of the Father for those who accept Christ. The gifts of the Spirit did not cease when the Apostles died, they have been evidenced throughout the centuries since but a great supernatural outpouring (like that promised by the Prophet Joel and seen on the Day of Pentecost) did occur in 1906 and burst around the world like a titanic flood. My family were one of millions of others who experienced it, and continue to do so.

Let me link my previous comments together to come to my point today.

Reformation history reveals a cycle of people being sent out with the message of the Gospel (where tremendous growth, revival occurs, miraculous and supernatural events) but ultimately (over time) recedes back to some form of works based salvation/sanctification coupled with a withdrawing of the saints back into their church walls. The reformation history I've outlined therefore looks like this:

- Jesus Christ came and made all things new through the Cross. A New Covenant dealt with the shortcomings of the Old Covenant. The potency of that event reverberates throughout the world today as it did then.
- 1500 years later, human greed and sinfulness had stained that gift and a seismic shift was required to re-form that which had run askew. Martin Luther has a God moment whilst reading the book of Romans.
 - The Gospel wasn't superseded by this reformation – it was actually lifted back to its proper place - but now through this reformational moment human understanding of it had been enhanced!
 - Salvation through the resurrected Jesus Christ was directly through his grace.
- Now only 400 years later a new set of diversions had taken people away from this message and various denominations and sects had emerged through the movements such as the Holiness movement, and others, where the whole concept of grace was again being redefined.
- Azusa Street became the catalyst for a global reminder of the power, presence and promises of God for all humanity. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit brought a dynamic renewal of God's love for people. The gifts of the Spirit powerfully and supernaturally changing the lives of millions.
 - Within our lifetime, we have witnessed the incredible work of the Holy Spirit to empower Christians to fulfil the Great Commandment of Jesus to *"...go and make disciples of all nations"* (Matthew 28:19)
 - But we have also witnessed the shift, or change in the season during the last decade or so, as the message of the Holy Spirit has been hijacked, causing the people of God once again to congregate back within their walls.
 - The dynamic, supernatural impact of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit changed the known world with 100 years after the Day of Pentecost. The gifts were made for the marketplace but we've hidden them in the church, or conferences and seminars.

- Jesus called us to “wait and go” but again the church has “stopped and stayed”.

The prophetic voices speaking into our generation have been telling us for several decades that a time of reformation is upon us. I sincerely believe that the time we are entering is the era of the Father and His love and plan for everyone. His ultimate goal was bringing people home. The book of Revelation (chapters 21 & 22) gives us the picture of the completion of that goal.

His mission statement is emblazoned around the world:

|| *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NIV)*