

The Year Ahead

Title: **“When God Brings Change”**

Matthew 2:13-15

January 1, 2017

OBJECTIVE: To encourage the church to embrace change and to resist the pull of living in the comfortable present and past.

New Year Resolutions.

New Year's is a time we evaluate our life and commit to making changes to improve our life.

Video - “New Year's Resolutions” - 1:30?

45% of us make New Year Resolutions

8% of us are successful with our resolutions

49% of us have infrequent success with our resolutions

People who explicitly make resolutions are 10 times more likely to attain their goals than people who don't explicitly make resolutions

People in their 20's success rate: 39%

People over 50 success rate: 14%

(<http://www.statisticbrain.com/new-years-resolution-statistics/>)

Why?

Because it's more difficult to change habits and routines you've been doing for decades than habits and routines you've been doing for a few years.

Changing how you live - changing your habits / routines is not easy.

Percentage of people who have a gym membership but never use it: 67% ! (<http://www.statisticbrain.com/gym-membership-statistics/>)

Even when you want to change - even when you realize change is a good thing - the best thing - it's not easy.

Change and church often brings added difficulty to the process of change.

Our faith is in God and God is not a moving target.

So, when we talk of change in a church setting, we are skeptical because God doesn't change - and we can begin thinking since God doesn't change, the way we worship or the way we do church or the way we do life shouldn't change either.

But God's immutability (attribute meaning God doesn't change) speaks to His unchanging character and truth. It doesn't mean God's plan for us static, or the way we do ministry - the way we do church is static.

In the Christmas account, we see God bringing tremendous changes into the lives of many.

Zechariah and Elizabeth - established in their old age and in the routines of life are told they would have a son.

Mary is told she will become pregnant while still a virgin - betrothed to Joseph - and God will be the Father of this child.

Joseph considers divorcing Mary, but is told by an angel in a dream (Matt. 1:20-21): “...do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Talk about changing the status quo!!

The shepherds were astonished by the announcement of the angel - and the appearance of many angels in the night sky.

Throughout history, God has used change to accomplish His will and to grow the faith of His people.

Turn to **Matthew 2:13-15**

I want you to begin seeing change as a positive.

Begin to see change as a work of God - as God moving the pieces on the chessboard as He sovereignly works and intervenes in human affairs for the advancement of the Gospel.

(vs. 13) Now when they (the Wise Men) had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy Him.”

14 And he rose and took the child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my Son.”

God’s plans are different than ours and not always easy. vs. 13

When they had departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and His mother,

and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy Him.”

Just because you are a Christian...just because you are an adopted child of God does not mean your life will be easy or that God will get rid of those who wish to do you harm.

“When they had departed” – This phrase is speaking of the Magi, and it must have been a glorious time for Joseph and Mary. A visit from such high-ranking officials to this poor little couple from Nazareth must have been encouraging and inspiring! On top of that...they probably never saw such wealth which they now had in their possession!

But there was no time to soak in the experience...danger was looming on the horizon, and they needed to take action to avoid it.

An angel appears to Joseph – the angel is unnamed – but the message is clear...and it’s urgent. Herod is going to try and kill Jesus...get up and escape to Egypt!

What a shocking message to hear on the heels of being visited by the respected dignitaries from the east who just worshiped their baby boy and gave them gifts of great value – gifts fit for a king! Now they are forced to run away in fear of their lives like fugitives running from the law!

In fact, the word “escape” or “flee” in your Bible is the Greek word *pheugō* – which is where we get our English word *fugitive* from.

What a roller coaster ride for them!

The unchanging character and truth of God doesn't mean life will not change or problems won't come into our life.

One day prominent dignitaries of the world are bowing down to their child, the next day they're running for their lives from their own murderous, paranoid king!

- Have you ever wondered if God cares about your problems...if He's even aware of your problems?
- Have you ever wondered if God is real since He doesn't prevent problems or heartache from entering your life?

Don't confuse problems in life with the idea that God is absent, unconcerned, or doesn't exist.

All throughout Scripture we see God working in great ways – through people who go through tremendous changes, and endured incredible difficulty and many times – incredible injustice.

Noah, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, many of the prophets, Jesus, Peter, Paul – and all the Apostles who endured persecution for their faith in Christ.

In each case, God does amazing things through His people - and the difficulties or changes in their life are often how God accomplishes these things!

2 Corinthians 4:17 “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

It’s important to realize how God uses change in our personal, spiritual growth.

Our spiritual growth depends on changes happening in our life.

Think about it...if change never occurred in your life - you would be the same and stay the same - but God doesn’t want us to stay the same as we are today for the next year - 5 years - 10 years!

He wants to grow us - strengthen us - increase our wisdom - increase our faith and confidence in Him. So, He brings us through circumstances which stretch our faith - challenge our thinking and our assumptions. These changes cause us to rely more fully on His Word - His truth. We are forced to see the futility of our own mentalities and replace our thoughts with God’s thoughts - our version of the truth with His truth. The danger is when we reject what God is doing in our life. When we do this, the changes He is using to mold and shape us never have their intended purpose and we stubbornly hold onto our original plans. As a result, we don’t grow in our faith - we don’t allow God to use us -

and we miss out on some incredible opportunities God would love to bless us with!

When God changes our plans, we need to obey. vs. 14-15a

Notice Joseph's reaction to the angel's instructions:

“So he got up, took the Child and His mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod.”

The sense in the Greek is that after the dream he awoke while it was still night – and they left for Egypt before sunrise that day! This was an immediate response to the command of God.

- What about going back to Nazareth to show all the relatives the baby?
- What about the baby shower they were planning?
- What about the plans they had with their new life and new baby together?
- What about his business back in Nazareth?
- What about their parents?
- Remember...they were newlyweds, and this was not part of the plan!

In times of uncertainty – in painful times or difficult times, we can be slow in obeying God. We may even resent God for allowing painful changes into our life.

We may think more slowly or deliberately when we read something in the Bible that clearly points to an obedience issue in our life. But slow obedience, *even though it's better than no obedience*, slow obedience is

not the example for us to follow. Quick, decisive obedience is what God desires – and it's the best thing for us!

Imagine if Joseph had delayed in obeying the angel's command?

It's not clear how long they stayed in Egypt. It could have been a few months – or up to one year.

The gifts they received from the Magi would have been vitally important for this trip. They would have provided the money for the trip to Egypt and for expenses when they arrived. Depending on how long they stayed there, the gifts may have funded their entire stay – or given them enough money until Joseph was able to find work.

Now you must know...there are many stories and books written (primarily in ancient times) that claim to give details about Jesus' time in Egypt. They describe all sorts of miraculous things which Jesus did - and Mary did - while they were in Egypt.

All these stories are false and simply made-up.

Nobody knows what happened in Egypt. The only information we have about Jesus in Egypt is what we have in vs. 14-15.

Matthew doesn't tell us the details about Egypt... because the details aren't important. The most important part about Egypt is what the end of vs. 15 tells us:

And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet:
“Out of Egypt I called My Son.” (A fulfillment of the prophecy found in Hosea 11:1)

**Saying ‘YES’ to God’s leading allows God to work through
us.** vs. 14- 15

Do you realize how much God leads through change and uses change to accomplish His work?

In 1992 Kim and I realized God was leading us into full-time ministry. He was bringing wild change into our life. Saying ‘yes’ to God meant quitting my job and going to seminary. Our life would see huge changes, and even changes we couldn’t see on the front end of that decision.

I was a Youth Pastor for 12 years in Tempe - and when God began moving the pieces on the chess board to move us here to CDOBC - there was another set of changes coming into our life.

Some of the changes were exciting and full of hope and potential, while some of the changes were full of sorrow, increased work, difficulty and great uncertainty.

We knew God had a plan - but we didn’t know what the plan was beyond what we could humanly see!

Accepting change is not an easy thing for me. I like routine. I have a routine and rhythm to my life - and

it's something I get used to and if I'm not careful, I can be crabby if my routine gets scrambled.

What time is dinner...what time do we go to bed...what time do we get up...what do I do on my day off...what chair do I sit in at the dinner table.

Routines can be a source of comfort as they give a sense of reliability in life.

But there is nothing right or wrong about routines.

Routines are simply ruts we have worn into the path of our life.

But God is not limited or restricted to my routines - or your routines.

Change is an interesting thing. Over the past few years I've been reading quite a bit about change - and it's been an interesting study.

Did you know people are often excited or agreeable to change?

What causes so many of the problems with change is the transition from what I do now (my routine) to creating a new routine.

This time of transition is uncertain - unestablished - often void of boundaries - there's no rut to guide me.

So, many people struggle with change - because of the transition from what '*was*' to what '*will be*'.

This is often the reason why some people don't grow spiritually - because they are safe and secure in the way they think and live today - and even when they know the change God requires is good - they are hesitant / fearful of leaving what they know for what *'should be'*.

How do they know what 'should be' will be as good or better than what they do now?

It's an issue of faith - of trusting God and His Word. The time of transition is not easy - and it requires faith in what is promised - faith that the destination is worth the effort.

Vs. 14-15 - Through the angel, God commands Joseph to take his family to Egypt for protection.

Going to Egypt was not their plan.

Fleeing to Egypt as a fugitive - was not part of their plan.

But it was God's plan - and Joseph was wise enough to know God's plan is always better than his own plan.

It's interesting to note the unique place in history Egypt has with the Jewish people.

We're all familiar with the time of slavery in Egypt where Moses was used by God to convince Pharaoh to let the people go (another story of huge changes in life). But in the centuries before Jesus' birth, Egypt once again played a prominent role – but this time it was as a place of refuge

– not a place of bondage. The Jewish people fled there to escape the oppression of the Roman occupation.

Egypt had become a natural asylum for the Jews.

Between the Old Testament and the New Testament there was a period of rule in Israel in which the Greek government ruled (Hellenistic Period 336-146 BC). The world powers in the latter half of the Old Testament are Babylon and Medo-Persia, then came the Hellenistic Period of the Greek Empire led by Alexander the Great, and then we see the power of Rome ruling as the New Testament opens.

Prior to the Maccabean Revolt (167 to 160 BC.), Alexander the Great – the great Greek General – had set up Egypt as a place Jews could live. In fact, Alexander the Great named one of the cities in Egypt after Himself – Alexandria. When he conquered Egypt, he allowed the Jews to have that city as a place of refuge, and they populated the area.

As long as Herod was ruling in Israel, more and more Jews fled to Egypt.

It's interesting (to note) that in 150 B.C., the Jews were given their own temple in Egypt so they could prosper as a community. Just after the death of Christ, in 40 A.D., Philo (Hellenistic, Jewish philosopher & historian), records there were at least one million Jews living in Egypt. So, Egypt became rather highly populated with Jews, and it was a place of refuge and a place of safety and security where Joseph, Mary and Jesus wouldn't have to fear anything.

(John MacArthur – sermon titled: “The King Fulfills Prophecy, Part 1”)

Going to Egypt was not Joseph’s idea. In fact, it would have been a trip over 300 miles - walking - with a toddler! How excited do you think Mary was for this new part of the plan?

Change is not easy - even when it’s for your own good. Smokers who suffer a heart attack are clearly told they must quit smoking. If they don’t, they double their chances of having a 2nd heart attack. Changing their life by giving up smoking is clearly the best choice - the wise choice - it’s a life and death decision!

Then why do 50% of them start smoking again after they leave the hospital? (<https://myheartsisters.org/2009/08/16/stop-smoking-program/>)

Because change is not easy - and my habits / routines I know today are comfortable - and we enjoy the ‘rut’ we have established in our life.

Change means leaving something I know - and leaving it for the unknown - even if we know the ‘unknown’ will be better.

Apply it...

Learn to embrace change in your life

God uses change to accomplish His will and to grow our faith.

Change is often how God shapes us - challenges us to think more deeply - to consider things we never considered before.

Resolve to obey God - even when obedience is difficult.

Saying 'YES' to change is not easy.

Sticking with the decision to change is even more difficult as you wonder how it will all turn out.

As you see the changes God brings before you, have confidence in Him - in His truth.

God doesn't change - His truth doesn't change - but He does bring change into our life and use change to form us into the image of His Son.

As we stand on the leading edge of 2017 - let's look forward to a year of great changes.

Changes you have decided to make personally...

Changes we will see in our church...

Will it be:

Difficult...yes.

Confusing...for a while.

Awkward...most likely.

Rewarding...absolutely!

Worth the effort...definitely!

Close in prayer

