

“The Times, They Are A-Changin’”

Matthew 9:14-17

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A man and his wife were living on a houseboat. One night while they slept the boat broke loose from its mooring and drifted to sea. The husband got up in the morning, went up on deck and noticed there was no land in sight. He called to his wife “Honey, get up quick. We ain’t here anymore.”

Friends, do you ever feel like we ain’t here anymore? It was in 1964, 60 years ago, that Hibbing’s own Bob Dylan told the world “The times, they are a changing.” In the past 30 years, the digital revolution, computers, and cell phones, have changed not only the ways we communicate with each other, but many other things as well.

A few weeks ago, I was talking to a fellow who is developing software for medical equipment that will diagnose illnesses and ailments more quickly and more accurately than any physician could possibly do. And folks, we are just beginning to see the changes that AI, artificial intelligence, will bring to our lives.

Though the changes in technology are most obvious, there are others that can be even more important. Geo-political shifts and changes in the world economy seem to occur consistently. Some folks believe climate change will be one of the biggest challenges we face in the decades ahead, though I would not object to a few more winters like we had this past year in Northern Minnesota. The intellectual shift over the past 30+ years, moving towards post-modernism in various spheres, has been a significant, though often not welcome change.

The whole concept of non-binary, gender fluidity, where the terms “male” and “female” are meaningless, is just one example where we are losing our grip on not only objective knowledge, but on reality. I frequently find myself saying, “It is a crazy world out there, and it is only getting crazier.”

But, how about the Church? Is the Christian Church changing? Is Chisholm Baptist Church changing? Sure, it is. Sunday School teachers

used to use flannel graphs, then film strips, then cassette tapes and VHS players to teach their lessons. CDs and DVDs are still utilized, but streaming music and videos is certainly the easiest thing to do. In many ways Chisholm Baptist Church is a “stable” church, but I have seen plenty of changes during the past 30 years. Some claim churches need to change their theological beliefs in order to meet the challenges of a changing world. Some congregations, and even whole denominations, try to do that. Acceptance of the LBGTQ+ agenda and affirming other paths to God through non-Christian religions, has happened in mainline churches and in even some churches that call themselves “evangelical.”

Folks, whether we like it or not, as we approach the 2nd quarter of the 21st century, which is what 2026 will be, the times they are a changing. As Christians we are surrounded by challenges. We must decide what changes to make and what changes to resist as we seek to faithfully serve the Lord in the days ahead.

Our text this morning can help us do that. Our journey through Matthew’s gospel brings us to 9:14-17. This may not seem like an easy passage to understand, but I believe the Lord will use it to increase our wisdom and strength for the days ahead. Let’s pause and pray that would happen.

Matthew 9:14 Then the disciples of John (John the Baptist) **came to him** (to Jesus), **saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”** Throughout Matthew we have seen the Pharisees, Jewish religious scholars and leaders, challenging Jesus with questions. Now, we have followers of John the Baptist asking a question. They are certainly a group more friendly to Jesus, but just like the Pharisees, they are puzzled by Him and His followers.

John’s disciples are confused because Jesus’ disciples don’t fit the mold of what religious people are to be like. They expected Jesus’ followers to walk around with solemn, pious, looks on their faces, saying prayers and fasting, because that was what religious people did in

those days. Instead, Jesus and His friends are at Matthew's house having a dinner party! A dinner party with not the most desirable guests. What is going on?

Matthew 9:15a And Jesus said to them, “**Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?**” In other words, “When I'm around, there's no reason for my disciples to mourn. They are happy.” And then He makes this statement. **Matthew 9:15b** **The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.** This is a prophecy, a prediction, of Jesus' arrest and execution. At that time the disciples will be separated from Jesus, and they will have reason to fast.

Jesus then goes to the broader issue. He explains the tension John's disciples are feeling with his new way of doing things. He gives two brief parables or illustrations. **Matthew 9:16** **No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.** Even though I am not a seamstress, I think I understand Jesus' point. If you use a new piece of cloth to patch an old shirt and then wash it in hot water, the patch may shrink and make a bigger tear in the t-shirt.

Matthew 9:17 **Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.**” This analogy may not be obvious to modern readers, especially to Baptists who may not know anything about making wine. In Jesus' day, the container for wine was often made from animal skins. A new container could be stretched and made bigger, but once the skin dried, it became hard and could not expand.

Now, my only experience with brewing was making root beer when I was a kid. And yes, if you left the root beer sit too long, it would expand. And since the glass jar or bottle it was in did not expand, it would explode. That's why we always kept them in the bathtub, just in case.

The same thing happens with wine. As the grape juice ferments, it expands. Thus, a wineskin that will also expand is needed so it will not explode.

Maybe that is what we should have used when brewing root beer.

So, what is the meaning and significance of these parables? Well, I believe Jesus is saying that as the Messiah, He has come to inaugurate the kingdom of God. It is a new day. Through His death and resurrection, He will initiate a new covenant that will provide salvation for all those who trust in Him. This new covenant, this new way of God working, will not fit with the Pharisees' idea of things are supposed to be done. Even John's disciples will find things a bit disturbing.

The Pharisees were kind of like a company manufacturing cordless telephones 20 years ago. They may have had a great product. Yet, as people started getting cell phones, the cordless phone, even with a push button dials, was seldom very attractive. They became almost as obsolete as typewriters and 8-track tape players. Jesus says He is going to make the Pharisees' religion totally obsolete. The new wine of the gospel means that a special revival is going to bust the seams of old covenant Judaism. Being faithful to God will mean something very different for a follower of Jesus than it did in any other context.

The Pharisees, of course, will resist the change. They are very content with the status quo and are threatened by Jesus' “new way.” Yet those who are able to adjust, those who can see that what Jesus offers is far superior to the old way of doing things, will find great joy. The new wine of the gospel is going to burst the old religion, but the new wineskin, the new religion, the new covenant is so much better.

Okay, so what is God saying to us this morning through this passage of scripture? Well, one thing I believe Jesus addresses is our attitude toward change, toward change in our society, in our own lives, and change in the church.

Now most of us have a natural aversion to change. I sometimes say, “The only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper.” Many of us are like the fellow who said, “I'm all in favor of progress, it's just all this change that I am against.” And it is not just old people like me who have a tough time with change. I sometimes hear 30-year-olds complaining because things are

done differently than when they were in high school or college. Yet, we must be careful. Our natural resistance to change can cause us to try and force the work of God, which is sometimes new and fresh, into our old private wineskins.

So how should we, as individuals and as a church, respond to new trends and ideas that we encounter? There are two things we need to keep in mind.

#1 Not all change is good. Everything new is not from God. Many times, being faithful to the Lord means resisting change. I think G.K. Chesterton was right when he said, “The one who marries the spirit of the age is frequently a widow.” If we choose to attach ourselves to all the current fads, we will have to be constantly detaching ourselves because those fads often shine brightly and burn out very quickly. The only way to guarantee that we don’t become irrelevant and behind times is to attach ourselves to what is eternal.

As C.S. Lewis said, “Those who ignore eternal truth are eternally out of date.” The eternal truth to which we need to be anchored is God’s Word, the Bible. When there is a new teaching, or a new way of doing things that is contrary to what the Bible teaches, then we must just say “no” to change.

One foggy night the captain of a large ship saw what appeared to be another ship’s lights. The vessels seemed to be on course that would result in a head-on crash. The captain quickly signaled the approaching ship. “Please change your course 10 degrees east.” Through the fog, the signal reply came back, “You change your course 10 degrees west.” The captain became furious and shot back this message. “I am a sea captain with 30 years of experience. You change your course 10 degrees east.” Within seconds the signal flashed back, “I am a Seaman 4th class. You change your course.”

Furious and fearing an imminent crash, the captain shot back, “I am a 20,000-ton freighter. Change your course 10 degrees.” This simple message winked back, “I am a lighthouse. You change your course.”

Folks, that is an old story, but I love it. And it illustrates well the fact that even if we don’t like what the Bible says, it is not going to change its position. The Bible is a lighthouse that shines in a world blanketed by darkness, a world where people wander around without purpose, without moral direction and without hope. In a world where everything seems to change, God and His Word do not.

So, what are some current changes in our culture that are not good, new things that we should resist? Let me first say that technology changes, communication, medicine, transportation, are almost always amoral, meaning neutral. For the past 25+ years the internet has been part of our lives. It is an incredible medium, at least for those of us who remember life before the world wide web. It is a tool that can be used in a huge variety of ways to share the gospel with others. It also provides almost unlimited resources for spiritual growth. It is clearly a positive, right?

Well, 35% of all internet traffic is pornography, generating about \$14 billion in revenue. That is a problem. Internet gambling is very accessible and very addictive. Then there is social media. Yes, it’s a wonderful way to connect with old friends, but the coarseness and rudeness of social media interactions seems to poison public and private discourse. Not a good thing.

Yet perhaps the biggest issue is all the folks, including maybe some of us in this room, who spend many hours each day on-line, ignoring responsibilities at home, work, and church. Not good! Like all technology, the internet can be used for both good and bad. It would be foolish for Christians to resist the internet as a tool of the devil, but it is equally foolish to ignore potential dangers.

Folks, the changes we as Christians are most often called to resist don’t involve technology musical style, or how we dress when we come to church. The changes we need to resist are moral and doctrinal. Over the past 50 years our culture has endured the sexual revolution. The Bible, the Christian view is that sexual intimacy is intended only for a man and woman in a monogamous marriage. That is the understanding which Christian all over the world have believed for almost 2000 years.

Yet, now this view is treated as anywhere from quaint and unrealistic, to very oppressive. All sorts of articles out there talk about how the purity culture, teens pledging to wait until marriage to become sexually active, was not a good thing, but psychologically damaging. I don't believe that at all. But it is a new perspective we need to reject.

There are also a variety of doctrinal changes being advocated by various folks that I believe pose a threat to the Church. Let me list some *new beliefs* Christians need to resist because they flow out of false teachings.

#1 False teaching: Christianity is only the best road to God, because other religions can also lead people to salvation. No, Jesus said, **John 14:6 I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.**

#2 False teaching: God does not know certain things, including future choices we are going to make. This is usually called open theism, and it is theological poison. Stay away from it.

#3 False teaching: Helping the poor or fighting for Christian values is more important for the church to be doing than evangelism. Yes, it is good to help the poor, and good to stand up for Christian values, but the great commission of making disciples of all nations is our primary assignment from the Lord.

#4 False teaching: The roles of men and women are interchangeable, there are no differences between the sexes. Oh, men and women have equal value and worth. Anyone who suggests differently is denying a basic truth of scripture. Yet, the Bible is also clear that men and women play complementary roles at home and in the Church.

#5 False teaching: The teaching that meditation and other spiritual exercises are a better way to hear from God than studying the Bible. Meditation is fine, but we are called to meditate on the law of the Lord, the Bible, because that is God's Word for us.

#6 False teaching: Is the idea that Bible teaching and theological doctrine don't really matter, are

not important. Instead, the only thing on which we should focus is our personal relationship with God. Now, certainly that personal relationship with God is important, but so is sound teaching. That is why the apostle Paul admonishes Timothy, **1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely.**

Folks, those are all dangerous errors being packaged as new and exciting ideas. But remember, not everything new is from God and not all changes are good. If we are to be faithful to the Lord, sometimes we just have to say no!

#2 We also need to recognize that some changes are good. Sometimes the Lord is pleased with new things or ideas, and He calls us to embrace changes and throw out the old wineskins. Though neither God nor His Word change, this world and people in it do. Since part of our job is to help those people know God, our methods and ways of doing things, sometimes need to change. We want to maximize our effectiveness as we seek to be Jesus' ambassadors to those around us.

It is foolish to embrace every suggested change and foolish to resist them all. It is sometimes said the seven words that will kill a church are: "We have never done it that way before." I think that is true. Churches and Christians refuse to make any changes are often left behind in irrelevance.

One of the ways we need to be open to making changes is in how we do evangelism. Again, our commitment to doing evangelism, obeying the great commission must not change. But we need to often evaluate and re-evaluate our methods. Listen to the apostle Paul's philosophy of sharing the gospel with others, spelled out in **1 Corinthians 9:22b, 23a. I have become all things to all people, that by all possible means I might save some.**

Folks, if we follow Paul's model, our methods will change. Oh, Paul never changed his message, and yes, our message is still the same as his: Salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Yet, the way we communicate this message must not remain static. Tent meeting revivals may have been great in the 1950's, door to door evangelism may have working in the 1980's, but we need to focus on the most effective way in 2024 to share

God's truth and persuade others to trust and follow Jesus.

Though it is not listed in Galatians 5 as a fruit of the Spirit, I am convinced "flexibility" is one of the most important characteristics that the Lord wants to cultivate in our lives. Flexibility involves being humble enough to recognize that the way we do something may not be the best way. It means being willing to make mid-course corrections, if that is what God leads us to do.

If we cling too tightly to the status quo, to our traditions, to the way we are used to doing things, we will find ourselves in the same trap as the Pharisees, using old wineskins that just don't work anymore. We need to remember that some changes are good, and that God desires us to embrace them, rather than resist them.

Friends, my prayer is the Lord would enable us to be the type of people who have the guts to leave the ruts, who will travel new paths if the Lord leads us to do so, and who will be willing to use new wineskins. At the same time, we need to always be anchored in the unchanging truth of God's Word. We want to avoid getting caught up in all the fads around us, and instead focus on bringing glory to God by loving Him, loving others, and making disciples. May God help us to be that type of Church, those type of individuals in the changing times in which we live.