



BE THE CHANGE

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, June 28, 2020

Change is all around us today. Changed requirements. Changed expectations. And ever-changing plans. This kind of shifting is what it takes to gain and maintain balance.

Most people are pleased with balance, but in real life, balance is never static, because life is never static. So, continuous adjustments are necessary to find, and keep on finding, the balance we crave.

Unless, of course, we just get in a rut and get stuck. Religion has an uncanny way of finding ruts and getting stuck. Believers, beware!

Early one morning, Jesus was back at the Temple in Jerusalem to teach. Apostle John remembered it like this:

John 8:2 A crowd soon gathered, and [Jesus] sat down and taught them. ³ As He was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

⁴ "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

⁶ They were trying to trap Him into saying something they could use against Him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with His finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so He stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!"

⁸ Then He stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹ When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

¹¹ "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

I know the Pharisees usually get the pointed end of the stick, because they were so often at loggerheads with Jesus, but they weren't all bad.

Consider the general character of the Pharisees:

- God-fearing believers
- protectors of the sacred Scriptures
- stern adherents to the Law of Moses
- recognized the activity of the Spirit
- devout champions of the faith of Abraham

There two things going on in this scenario. The first issue was the adulterous woman:

- A woman had been caught in the act of adultery—unfaithfulness to her husband—a sin punishable by death
- Not a death at the hands of “the system,” but at the hands of her peers
- Her husband would have been among those prepared to stone her

And, consider for a moment the brutality of this manner of punishment... Where it is still practiced today (and it is, though you won’t hear about it on CNN), a person (most often, a woman) is buried to their armpits in the ground, making self-protection and escape impossible, while a crowd of ordinary citizens, armed with fist-sized stones, hurls them at their captive until she is dead.

The Law of Moses commanded this. They were prepared to execute this woman. But they saw an additional opportunity—a possible twofer.

The second issue was the teacher, Jesus, whom they feared and envied and despised—perhaps they could also trap Jesus with His own words and discredit His teaching at the same time that they purged their village of this sinful woman.

So they brought the woman and the crowd to Jesus and challenged Him with a conundrum: the Law said the adulterer deserved to be executed; what did Jesus have to say about it?

Would He side with God’s Law and condemn the sinful woman, or would He side with the lowly sinner and abuse God’s law with His mercy?

In contemporary terms, this was an issue of justice. Jesus was being challenged to define and evaluate justice for them. Justice or mercy? Righteousness or ignorance? Brutal retribution or compassionate weakness?

Think about it. What side would *you* have chosen? Would you uphold the truth or cover the sinner? People are watching. People are asking. People want to know where you stand.

The culture in which we have grown up—at least outside of our homes, which means, in our schools, on the playground, and at work—has trained us to support the majority opinion (even suggested that the majority opinion is the correct measure of truth and rightness).

The revelation of Jesus Christ and the new birth His Spirit brings, teaches something new, something wholly different. But even if we “get it” and agree that Christ’s way is right, there’s a learning curve, in which we battle with what has always been familiar and usual to us, and with which the culture loudly agrees.

Apostle John wrote these cautionary words:

¹⁵ Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. ¹⁷ And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

He described a divine dichotomy, a fork in the road that forces a decision. The way of the world, the love of the world, the values of the world—though familiar as our own heartbeat—are NOT in alignment with the way of the Lord, or the love of God, or the values of His Kingdom. And you must choose. Over and over again.

You must decide which road you will take. You must choose which life you will live. You must determine what sort of person you will be. You cannot have it both ways. And you can’t fool God about what you have chosen to become.

Apostle Paul clarified the distinctions for us, referring to the world’s way as the “way of death”:

Colossians 3:5-8 MSG That means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That’s a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. It’s because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. It wasn’t long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it’s all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk.

He described worldly culture as “a life shaped by things and feelings instead of God.” That’s a *natural* life. That’s a *common* life. That’s a *normal* life.

But that’s not a *Christian* life.

So, when a Christian person lives life in that old way, what does it look like? Bad tempered, irritable, mean, profane, and slanderous. Just like the culture around us. Just like the bulk of programming on TV. Just like the herd of talking heads—even many conservative ones (the Pharisees were “conservative” in their views). Just like the crowd of “righteously angry” protesters, whatever the issue of the day happens to be.

That's not the way of the Lord. Here's what the Christian way looks like:

Colossians 3:12-14 MSG *So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

I imagine we all like it when we are treated in these ways by others. So, don't you think others should be treated these ways by you?

And before you dismiss this as some milquetoast piety of a sheepish believer, who just wants to avoid all conflict or adversity, this has come to us from Paul, who was publicly mocked, ridiculed, spit upon, and beaten senseless, and put in prison for telling people about Jesus—repeatedly. More than once, the people rioted against him, to the point that the authorities showed up in riot gear to subdue the crowd and rescue Paul.

Did he have to do that? Couldn't he have taken a professorship at some Christian university, or a pastorate in a remote community, where he wouldn't encounter such hostile opposition. I suppose so, if he had thought that he could "do whatever he felt like whenever he felt like it."

But he no longer served himself or his own wishes; he had surrendered, not only his faith, but his whole being, to Jesus Christ as Savior and Master of his life. Now, isn't that what you have done? Isn't that what you meant to do when you bowed before Christ in faith? Isn't that what you proclaimed when you were buried in the waters of baptism?

And what about now?

Scoffing, scowling, or slandering—whether the president, or the congress, or your parents, or any other authority—does not demonstrate the heart of Jesus Christ. And it is your sworn duty to faithfully represent the heart of Jesus. If you don't, who will?

¹³ *For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.* ¹⁴ *For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* ¹⁵ *But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.*

When you look and sound like people of the world, who have no allegiance to Jesus Christ, you fail to present the Message, you fail to represent the King, you fail to demonstrate the Savior's heart.

That's "a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God."

The world has lost its mind! Don't be like them. Don't act like them. Don't talk like them.

Instead, be controlled and stimulated by the Holy Spirit, turning the other cheek—supporting instead of ignoring, giving instead of taking, contributing instead of withholding, loving instead of despising.

So, when challenged to choose between what was right and what was loving, between a woman's past and her future, what did Jesus choose?

After prayer, He rose to His feet, and said:

John 8:7 "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

⁸ And once more He bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before Him. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

They were convicted by His wisdom. They were stunned by His compassion. And she was set free by His mercy and grace.

How differently that could have turned out! But that's the way Jesus rolls. That's the way His Kingdom works.

It's not easy even to distinguish the weeds from the wheat, let alone to extract them. We cannot right every wrong, but we can act right and speak right when challenged to join in with the wrong. May God give us discernment between the two, and courage to follow His lead.

Let's proclaim, along with the Lord Jesus:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, ¹⁹ and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."

Let's pray, along with the psalmist:

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to You, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

And, finally, to refresh an overused adage:

Be the change you wish to see, in the name of Jesus Christ.