

When Tragedies Strike...

Changing with Change, but Not Changing
(Sermon Transcript)

My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change. –Proverbs 24:21

“My son, fear thou the LORD and the king.”

God gives several commandments like this, that we should fear God and keep his commandments. And one of the commandments is to obey the rulers. “Fear...the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change.”

The world is tossed to and fro. That’s what Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

The title of this article sounds like a riddle: “Changing with Change, but Not Changing,” but really, it points to a dynamic truth.

Proverbs 24:21 warns, “Meddle not with them that are given to change.” And you see people who are tossed to and fro. The stock market’s up, the stock market’s down. So they’re up or they’re down. If their marriage is up, they’re up. If the marriage is down, they’re down.

But I believe that we, as Christians, ought to be more stable than that. And the Bible says not to meddle with these types of people because if you do, they’re going to affect and afflict you.

Have you ever noticed that when you get around someone who’s stressed, you want to be stressed? When you get around somebody angry, it makes you want to be angry?

But here God says you don’t have to be, because we don’t have to be like the children tossed to and fro. Satan is out there trying to deceive us and get us off balance and to take our normal and make it abnormal and get us off the track of what God wants us to be.

And that’s why 1 Corinthians 15:58 speaks to this subject, telling us to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. It tells us to stay on the straight and narrow path to heaven rather than go onto the broad highway to hell. It’s important that we continue on for Christ. Why? Because you might reach someone for Jesus Christ! God wants to use you! His Son paid the ultimate price for your sin: His blood.

Now, I understand that we change. Our church has gone through some changes. I think that my wife has said four or five times within the last few days, “I can’t believe that Mary’s not here! I can’t believe that Bill’s not coming back to church! I can’t accept that they’re gone on to heaven now.”

I can look out into the congregation, and I dare to say that about 80% of the people who voted me in to be pastor six years ago are no longer here today. I pastor a totally different church.

Now, that's not transfers from different churches. That's from people who've gotten their lives changed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they've continued on serving God.

To me, that's thrilling! But to some, I've seen that divide churches. I've seen pastors voted out of churches because the people say, "There are too many people coming in here. You've changed the tempo of our services."

I don't know about you, but I think that the Lord's tempo of ministry is to go seek and save that which is lost. Amen? But what's happened is that the dynamics have changed in the ministry.

I remember that Mary used to tell me all the time, "When you get to be my age, you need to roll with the punches."

Now what exactly is that? ... It's a boxing illustration.

Anyone who has been in a boxing ring knows (or in a fist fight) ... you know that every once in a while you'll hear a thud. Right after that thud, you know that somebody's going to be on the ground.

But our natural reflex does this: When we see something change in our environment, when somebody invades my space with their fist... When you see that coming, your natural reaction is to jerk back a little bit. Because if you stand solid, or you get what is called a sucker punch, or you get the thud-hit, it's going to knock you to the ground. I don't care how big you are, a little fellow can hit you and knock you out even though you may be two times stronger or two times bigger than he is because you didn't roll with the punch.

Do you understand why older people typically break their hip when they fall? It's because their reflexes are not quick enough to break their fall, plus the fact that their bones are a little softer.

But that's like in life. All of a sudden, life throws us a curve ball.

Think about Paul the Apostle. When he came to a town, he didn't look for the Holiday Inn Express; he looked for the jail cell because he knew that that was where he would eventually end up sooner or later.

Many of us look at him and say, "Man, if I was to do that, there is no way I could continue on!"

Yes, you can! God has given you the power and ability to take the Word of God and apply it to our Christian life today.

As I was preparing this message I was thinking about the deceased Bill Ramey's wife, Nancy, and the changes she has been going through. For a year, during his cancer, her life was turned upside-down. She had essentially been a caregiver, but now in her life came another Fruit Loop in the fact that Bill's not coming home from the hospital: he's already at home ... up in heaven.

I think about his boys, I think about his daughter, Pam. I spent three Christmases with them. Christmas will be totally different this year. Their dad won't be there. And my heart goes out to them because I know this means some devastating changes.

And Satan wants to capitalize on that. Satan wants to capitalize on things when our normal turns abnormal. With his cunning craftiness, he wants to get us all stirred up.

Do you remember back when you were single, how you were bored with life? But now that you're married, you haven't been bored in years! And you had the first kid and that wasn't too bad, then the second kid comes, but then after the third kid, you *always* have something to do!

And that's why I think marriages are destroyed so many times. People say, "Well, marriage just isn't what I thought it would be." They had what they thought was a normal life, then they added another person into the equation.

I tell people in pre-marital counseling all the time, "Get ready for World War III, because you're molding together, becoming one flesh." Their normal turns abnormal, abnormal then becomes normal to them, and then Satan comes in to destroy. And many people wind up with divorces.

There's a book that I read called *Who Moved My Cheese?* Now I don't particularly endorse the book, but I do like the plot. The plot is that you have four little mice in the middle of a maze, and that maze represented life. And one day they look around and their food source of cheese was gone. The characters were Sniff, and Scurry, and Hem, and Haw.

Now, Hem and Haw, you can practically just assume what they were doing. They were sitting around hemming and hawing. They sat around and said, "The cheese will come back to us one day. If we sit and wait here long enough, then somewhere the cheese is just going to jump over the corner of the maze and we will eat again."

Sniff and Scurry said, "We can't just sit around here and wait for the cheese to come! We've got to out and find new cheese!" And they did just that. Now, the same is true of life.

You see, God never changes. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). But sometimes circumstances do change in life. Sometimes you don't get to vote on the things that come into your life. Job didn't get to vote on looking upon a hill full of the gravestones of his kids. He didn't get to vote on looking at his bank account and it saying "over-drafted" many times over. He didn't get to take a vote on his wife telling him, "Curse God and die, fella'!" (Job 2:9). He didn't get to vote when he looked all over his body and there were boils with puss and he was scraping out the puss with a piece of glass with ashes just to get some relief.

But what he did was, he changed change and he said, "Though God slay me..." (and I'm paraphrasing a little bit) "... though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15). "Though everything seems to be bad, I still know Who God is and it will not change me!"

And I pray the secret will be true of you. I can look through church after church and even amidst our people who used to be serving the Lord. Change came into their life. Normal became abnormal, and they never got past abnormal. They didn't change with the change, and all of a sudden they're no longer there. And I've said this before: When we need church the most is when we miss.

Their normal became abnormal and it wrecked their lives. Now I can think of many illustrations, and you can too. But I think of Brother Faulkner. Over the past six years, I've seen change in his life. His wife, Betty, got seriously sick before I came, so I only know the first part of the story, and I've lived the last part with him. When Betty got sick ...

... Brother John Faulkner was always a hard worker. He cut the grass here, and he worked full time at Chrysler, and he retired to work at Wal-Mart. And he had so many things going on in his life. Retirement is a great change for anybody. And all of a sudden, he went to church one morning and Betty was on the side of the bed and she had a stroke.

He took her to the hospital. And they said, "John, she won't make it very long. You might as well just go ahead and put her in a nursing home, a hospice-type situation, and she will probably go on to be with the Lord."

John said, "Not *my* wife!" He picked her up to put her in the car to take her home, and they asked, "How are you going to take care of her?"

He fed her soup through a straw. And for the next thirteen years, his normal became very abnormal. He took that abnormal and made it normal.

But then one morning, John didn't show up for church. I sent my wife down and told her she could skip church. She went down to John's, and Betty went home to heaven that morning.

Then all of a sudden, his normal became abnormal, then the abnormal became normal, and then all of a sudden his normal became abnormal again.

But you know what has happened since then? He's serves the Lord much better, and his faith has been stronger. But I can look at people who've done the exact opposite in life. And it could even happen to me, and it could happen to you!

It could be getting older. It could be getting sick. I had a physical not too long ago. I said, "I've been pretty strong, no big problems here." But I added, "Although, there've been these things that have been floating around in my eyes." I said, "I've looked on the Internet. What can you do for those?"

He said, "Nothing. You're getting older."

I said, "Now wait a minute ..." I was only 22 years old. I said, "There's no way I'm going to be stuck with these!"

He said, "You get used to them ... There's nothing we can do."

And you know what happened? Before I was noticing them because I thought there was something wrong: that my cholesterol was up or I was doing something wrong. But you know, now it's just something normal in my life and I'll live with it probably for the rest of my life.

It may be pain. Or for you, it may be loneliness. Or having marital problems. In the Bible, when it talks about divorce, it's one man and one woman for one lifetime. You know, I understand that you have some great and mighty burdens in your life. But I understand that my God is still a working God. Stay faithful to Him and do that which is right. And God can still restore the years the locust have eaten (Joel 2:25). We need to not forget that.

And my normal can become abnormal, then I make it normal because "This is what God has for me."

But the world is not this way. When something happens, we stick up our arms and say, "Where was God?!" And, "God, how am I going to walk through this?!"

See, it's time that we, as Christians, stop telling God how big our challenges are, and start telling them how big our God is.

I'm going to teach you how to take life's punches and change with change, but you don't change. Back in the book of Genesis, chapter 13, the story is very familiar of Abraham. Abraham was a little man, and God said to Abraham, "I want you to go out to

a land that flows with milk and honey.” “The Promised Land,” we often call it. God said, “I want you to go out in that place, and when you go, I want you to follow by faith until you get unto that place.”

He stepped out by faith with his nephew, Lot, but then a controversy came and they said, “We’ve got to part.” Now, I don’t believe that was the will of God, but that’s what happened here.

Now, what Lot did was to look onto the well-watered plains of Sodom and Gomorrah and he said, “That looks pretty good to me. I’m going that direction.”

However, Abraham did the opposite. **He went where God had led. And that’s true when we try to find out God’s will. We have to remove ourselves from the equation. It’s all about God and it’s not about me. It’s all about His will, and not about my will. It’s all about what God has purposed to do in my life, not what I have planned and purposed to do in my own life.**

So Lot went to Sodom and Gomorrah. And “day to day,” it says in 2 Peter 2:8, that he was a “righteous man dwelling among them.” In “seeing and hearing, (he) vexed his righteous soul.” “Day to day with their unlawful deeds.”

So he started finding entertainment in it. He started thinking that it was not that bad, instead of his being salt and light.

No matter where we are or what we’re doing, we are to be the salt and light of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the Bible says that if He had found ten righteous, He would not have destroyed that city.

But the salt had lost its savor. He had stopped being salt and light. He had changed with change, and his character had changed. His normal had become abnormal. He slipped Abraham. Then that abnormal became normal in his life, and he never brought out any normalcy in his life.

But look what Abraham did in Genesis 13:18, “Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.” He built an altar while Lot pitched his tent towards Sodom and eventually walked in there.

Abraham said, “This world is not my home; I’m just passing through. I’m going to build myself an altar unto the LORD.”

So the first secret today of changing with change without letting it change who I am in character is to BUILD AN ALTAR, a place of sacrifice.

To those of you who are new to Christianity, what is church all about on Sunday? It’s in Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” – ***Your reasonable service!***

When you hear the Word of God preached, you say, “This is my life. And, Lord, I lay my sin, I lay my situation upon the altar.” The greatest thing that you can give God is your life.

If you don’t know for sure that heaven is your home, one of the greatest things you can do is get saved and give yourself to Jesus. Jesus has paid the penalty of sin to give you the assurance and not be tossed to and fro like the world, to change you into a creature that is after the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. We go to the altar of God and say, “This is my life. It’s not about me anymore. I lay down my life before Thee, God.”

For an effectual sacrifice, we give our best. We don't take the old scraggly animal with broken legs and put it upon the altar. God doesn't want that. He wants the best. He wanted the lamb that was without spot or blemish.

He couldn't have a female sacrifice because He couldn't find a female without spot or blemish. Amen? (Just kidding!)

We give God our best. And now it's not some cat or some dog, but our own life. Abraham said, "I'm going to give God my very best and sacrifice it unto Him and unto Him only." That's why the Bible says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

That's one thing I committed when I came to this church, seeing the circumstance. It looked pretty bleak sometimes. But I said, "You bring me here, Lord, and I'll not move until You move me."

Shortly after I came here, someone said to me, "You have ruined my church."

I quickly and sternly said, "It's not your church, Buster! It's *God's* church. And it's not *my* church; it's *Jesus'*. He paid with His blood. I'm not prepared to give my blood for this church." And I said, "I can't make you happy, but you know what? It's easier for you to move your letter of membership than it is for me to move my couch."

And I'm here, but we've been through some storms and change, amen? In six years I haven't changed my stand. I'm still going to preach salvation, I'm still going to preach what's right. I'm going to stand against what's wrong. I'm not changing who I am.

The church may change, and that's fine. But the church changing doesn't change *me!* And the same is true with you.

A real good Fundamental man and lady switched churches recently. Both of them were models of character. They left here and they got into a church and were really working in the church. And for the final two or three months, they kind of got disenfranchised here because they knew they were moving and they were getting everything going. But what happened was they moved ... and I recommended a great church. And I called that church a year later. (So you never get rid of me fully even if you move.) But I called up the pastor to see if they were still going there. And he said, "No. They came for about two weeks."

And this church was a big church. It had a lot of ministries. It had much more to offer than we did, to be honest with you. And so I called them. I said, "I hear you guys aren't going to that church. Where are you going to church now?"

They said, "We just can't find a place like Victory." Now they didn't come to Victory for the last couple of months either. But what happened is that life changed and they were looking back at what they thought was an epiphany at Victory Baptist Church. And we've got problems because we've got people. We've got people with problems, but what happened was that they never adjusted to the change. *They* changed, rather. And this was a couple who had been faithful to church. They were a couple who I would have let do anything in the church. What happened is that they changed with change, but then *they* changed.

The Bible says that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). If I trust in Him and place my life in His care, He changeth not. I love Him, I serve Him, and He does that in my life which is conducive for me for His good and His glory,

and usually for my good also. When we change, we don't change our character and who we are.

The first thing we do is build an altar. An altar gives us a frame of reference. It gives us a boundary.

Now I'll go back to my boxing illustration. Now I kind of like boxing a bit, but two people beating the snot out of each other, it should probably be illegal, but until then ... Now you don't find verses about baseball and football, but you do find one where Paul says the man beateth in the air (1 Corinthians 9:26). That's shadow boxing. (Just stretching things to tease you a little!)

But anyway, there is a boxing ring. Years ago, I saw a big fellow and a little old fellow in a fight. Now this little old fellow was a lot quicker than the big fellow, but after a few good hits, the little fellow wasn't into the fight anymore. But what was amazing was that he always knew where those ropes were! And he'd see the big fellow coming and he was always duck-and-move, duck-and-move. But imagine if those ropes weren't there ... One hit and he would be out of the ring! The ropes are there to keep us in bounds.

And that's what the altar does. Change without change, or changing with change, but not changing who I am. The ropes are there as a boundary of who I am in Jesus Christ. I've dedicated my life to Him. I'm going to set up boundaries of do's and don'ts. You'd call it "standards," if you will. "This is who I am. This is what I'm going to do. And no matter what comes my way ... no matter what somebody says, no matter what the preacher does, no matter who says it, I'm going to serve the Lord."

Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him" (Job 13:15).

Joshua 24:15 says, "If it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve," (Joshua 24:15). "I'm going to serve God no matter what the circumstances may be, and I'm going to encourage you to do the same."

We should have boundaries. It's like a compass. With a compass, you always have a point of reference. As long as I can see that place, I'll never forget where God has brought me from. Now, I don't dwell on it or think about it a whole lot. I don't have to. I dwell on the greatness of God. I've never forgotten being called out of Virginia to go and preach the gospel. I've never forgotten.

"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

"Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Now either that's true, or it's not. We believe and know that it's true. And I have that point of reference, an altar, in the middle of my life that says, "This is who I am, what I'm doing, and where I'm going."

But what happens is we get beat up a little bit and we start stepping on some boundaries.

When we set our standards for boundaries, I want a little room to move. If I'm in a ring with some big, famous fellow, I don't want to be in a little area because I'm not getting away from that scoundrel. I want to be in a big room about the size of our church auditorium. That way, I'm a pretty good jogger. I'm going to wear him out just running around the ring.

And we need some room away from sin. The world just tries to get by: “I can read my Bible just a minute in the morning and pray a little prayer before my meals, then I’ll be okay.” But then you can fall over the line!

If I’m going to walk along the edge of the cliff, I want some distance because the Bible says the just man falleth seven times (Proverbs 24:16). And so we get an altar, a point of reference. And I was going to fight with someone who I’ve never fought before, but then he cancels and they put Mike Tyson in the ring with me, and my life changes. But, I’ve got some boundaries and I’m going to wear him out because I can still run faster than he can, amen?

When life throws you a curve ball, all you need is a bigger bat to knock it out of the stadium, amen? But if you’re skirting the line, all it takes is one good hit, and you’re down. There comes something you couldn’t see that was coming. And all of a sudden our life is turned into turmoil, and we wonder how it happened.

See, I want to prepare us for change. There have been a lot of changes that happened in our church. But it’s only been an ember of the change that is going to happen. The Bible says that there’s going to be persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

But you know what’s happened is that you used to know that a place was a church, but now it looks like a rock concert going on. You used to be able to look down the street and tell by how someone dressed and how they talked and how they carried themselves, you could look and say, “Well, that’s a Christian right there.” But today you can’t tell the difference. It’s because we have changed with the world.

The world was a distance away and we were preaching against it. We were preaching against old Elvis the shaky hips, and now we take him into church and sanctify him and make him some sort of model to the church. Today, what we preached against fifty years ago has been sanctified and glorified for God. The church is getting more worldly instead of more righteous. We’ll walk on a crack instead of staying on the course with God.

Now, with boundaries, it’s like marriage. You go to an altar and say, “till death do us part, this is who I am, this is where I’m going. I take you from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or health, and to cherish from this day forward, till death do us part.” You say, “This is the missions statement of our marriage.”

We need to make a missions statement of our life in Jesus Christ. “This is who I am. This is what I’m going to do and *nothing*, I say **NOTHING** is going to take me away from what God has called me to do!”

I like the movie, *Roots*. Many of you have seen it. I *love* it!

They say to a man, “Your name is Toby.”

He says, “No, it’s not, it’s TOO-Bay.”

They say again, “Your name is Toby.”

He says, “No, it’s not it’s TOO-Bay.”

And I don’t care what Satan tells me, I don’t care what my circumstances tell me, I don’t care what my wallet says ... My name is JERRY JOE CHRISTIAN, and it’s not of the Devil! Amen?

And the Devil tries to slip us a counterfeit: “**NO**, Satan, I’ve dedicated myself to the Lord. **This** is where I stand as a Christian, and no matter **what** you bring my way, no

matter what test comes my way, I'm going to serve God for me and my house, and we're going to serve God!"

We have boundaries, and if I go out, I'm going out on a stretcher, but I like, "Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). If you kill me, I write the last chapter. I've read the end of the book, amen?

Our last point now is to STAY FLEXIBLE. Paul is a great example of this in Philippians 4:11-13, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

The Bible says in Psalm 37:24, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."

"Though he fall ..." Satan throws us a curve and we make a bad decision. 90% of our problems we cause ourselves, amen? Suddenly I'm beyond the boundaries and the roaring lion is trying to devour me. God says, "It's okay, Jerry. Get back up here! Get up and fight!"

You see someone getting hit by the Rocky Balboa type and the coach says, "Hit 'im! Hit 'im again!"

And I think, "How would YOU like to have the snot beat out of you?" It's easier said than done, as they say. But God knows, "You can do it, buddy. Cast your burden upon Me, for I careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). God is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3), and God says, "You can do it!"

Psalm 37:24 says, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with His hand." I may get knocked down, but I'm not gonna be knocked out.

Proverbs 24:16 says, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief." Every one of us has fallen probably seven times seventy times. And you'll probably fall again. But what is the end result? You get back up again!

You build an altar, set up boundaries, and stay fresh on your feet by studying the Word of God. Keep a fresh relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do you stay fresh in your marriage? What causes divorce? You quit talking to one another. The greatest barrier in having God work on our behalf is to not talk to Him. We only talk to Him when we get knocked down.

I don't know about you, but when I get hit not walking with the Lord, it **HURTS!**

But if I'm walking with the Lord, the Bible talks about resisting the devil so that he'll flee from you (James 4:7). When I'm walking with a close relationship to the Lord, I'll only get a glancing-hit, rather than a thud-hit.

As a final illustration, there was a goat that got lost. A son and a father looked everywhere for this goat, but couldn't find him. But finally, there was an old, dried-up abandoned well. They yelled down into it and the goat, way down inside, made a noise for help. They made all sorts of attempts to get him out, but it was just too deep. So, after a few days, they just figured that the goat was dead. So they decided to at least fill the hole in and give him a proper burial. They filled and filled until suddenly beside them was the goat! They asked, "How in the world did he do that?"

What had happened was that every time the dirt hit him, he shook it off until it was under his feet. Next thing you know, he came up out of that hole.

So for us Christians today, no matter what comes our way, let's just shake it off our backs. Let's say, "I know who I am, I know where I'm going, I know what my life and my purpose is, and I'm going to that place."