

THIS CHANGES LIVES PART 1: THE BASIS OF CHANGE

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We are starting our new series this morning called, "This Changes Lives." We are excited for this series for a couple reasons, the first being that we get to talk about a nice big word called: sanctification. This word simply means to be set apart, to become different. And in the context of Christianity, it means to become more like Christ. The second reason we are excited about this series is that it is time appropriate.

We are in the middle of New Year's Resolution season. As we sit eight days into the New Year some of you are eight days into a new Bible reading plan, eight days into a new work out program, a new diet, a new budget. And this is because a new year is a new start, it's a hard break between who we were, and who we want to be. Whether we make these resolutions or not, at our core we can all think of something inside of us we want to change. Something we want to better, or something we want to get rid of.

The problem of change though is that it's hard. A research study by one psychology professor concluded that over a two year period over less than 20% of people managed to keep their New Year resolutions.

Even if we do manage to keep some sort of change, we have to find a way to measure the effectiveness of that change. Because change simply for the sake of change isn't necessarily a good thing. This is why surgeons and nurses mark the bad body parts when you go into surgery. They could easily open up your healthy leg and change things, but helpful change only comes when we have a right view of what is wrong.

This idea is critically important for the way Christians think on change. If you consider yourself a Christian, you probably think of yourself as different. But I've noticed you probably fall into one of two camps. Camp one is the camp that says: I'm different, therefore I don't need to change. Perhaps this is you, and because you know that your salvation is tied on Jesus work, not your own work, you don't think you need to change much in your habits, affections or hobbies.

Then there is another camp: I'm different, therefore change is easy. If this is you, you have a keen awareness that when Jesus died for your sins, he disarmed and defeated sin. Yet when you try to change, and find that you still wrestle with sin, you become disheartened and frustrated.

What we want to do today is to make sure our change comes from a right understanding and a right effort. What we are going to look at today is this: **Because Jesus's righteousness says we are different, change is possible.** We don't want weak change, or temporary change, we don't want ineffective change, we want right and real change. This can only come through a proper understanding of how Christ changes us. Let's **Pray**.

If you have your Bibles today, we are going to be spending time in Galatians 3:21-29. And the first thing we are going to see in this text is that **Change Comes From Something**.

In the passage we are about to read we are going to hear Paul talking about "the law." And when he's talking about the law he is talking about what we just saw in the book of Exodus. God promised to make Israel his people, and to help them achieve that he gave them a list of laws, rules, and sacrifices that would help them live that way. And at this point in history, Paul is writing to a people group who still think that obedience to the law is the way to achieve God's promise of being his people, this is held in contrast with Christians who say that faith in Jesus is the way in which we become God's people.

Let's read together **Galatians 3:21-25**.

Now there are two things we want to see in this text we want to see what the people wanted, and we want to see how the people got what they wanted. This is how we view change right? We see something that we want, and then we make a plan to do that. We realize that if we want to be different, we need to find, eat, do, pursue something which helps us be different. This is the basis of change.

In this passage we see what the people want is life, and the promise of God. God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 17, that he was going to be his God, he was going to bless him, he was going to protect him, he was going to bring him joy, and he was going to be with him. This is what they wanted, peace, protection from harm, comfort, joy, and companionship. If you take these categories you can easily tease the source of almost all our resolutions. Except the Bible says we will only find these things when we have been found by God.

But Paul says that this kind of relationship with God cannot come from the works of the law. We cannot do enough things, work hard enough, or purify ourselves in order to merit the promises of God. And to a certain degree most people in here probably understand this.

If you have been in this church long enough we know that salvation is by grace through faith, not through works. But the law of the Old Testament wasn't only works. It also included sacrifices. The law had a means of grace, it took into account that no one would meet the perfect standards of the law, and it made provisions to help make up for that.

But Paul speaks here with a time perspective. He says that while those sacrifices atoned for sins, they have gone away. They were a guardian for a time, but now we have no need for a guardian. Why? Is it because we have outgrown it? No. It is because faith has come in the form of Jesus Christ. The law could never give life, because the law was never alive, but Christ can give life because Christ lived out the law perfectly.

Not only can you not earn your way to God by works, but Paul is saying that you can no longer rely on any sort of sacrifice outside of Jesus. I know many Christians who are wise enough to distance themselves from works based theology, but still wrestled with false sacrifices veiled in "religious" language. We hope that we will be changed because we have an affection for church, and affection for other believers, a desire to be community, a desire to even be changed. But look at what the author of Hebrews says: **Hebrews 10:12-14**.

Why is change such a pervasive and consistent mantra across all cultures? Because deep down everyone knows a change needs to happen.

The Bible says that each and every one of us has a need for change, because each and every one of us has a problem which we have no power to change. Paul says we are imprisoned, and held captive. We are outside of the life of God, we are separated from the promise of God. And the only way we are able to bridge the gap from eternal damnation to eternal life is by seeing and believing the truth that Jesus was the sacrifice for our sins. The grace of God cannot be found in anything other than Jesus.

Now if Jesus is the means of our change, if Jesus is the one who changes our imprisonment, the next logical question is how? This is our second point: **Change must change things**.

We have seen that if we are to rely on God to change us we must rely on Jesus, but how does Jesus change us? My wife and I loved the podcast that came out a couple years ago called, "Serial." In this podcast they track a young man named Adnan who has been accused and imprisoned for the murder of his girlfriend. However, through interviews with Adnan in prison and research with lawyers, witnesses and evidence, this podcast makes the case that Adnan has been wrongfully accused. The evidence is compelling. They show is addicting.

My wife and I have had numerous conversations on whether we think he is innocent or not, but regardless of what Sarah and I come to think, it won't change anything. Despite all the compelling emotion and drama, the only thing which will really change Adnan's fate is a new verdict. A judge must look back at the evidence of the case and rule him to be innocent.

The same is true for us. We can build our lives in thousands of different ways but if we are still seen as sinners,

our status before God is unchanged. How does Christ make us different? Look back at **Galatians 3:24-26**.

There is an important word here, and that word is justified. Justified means to be declared just. If Adnan were to be justified, he would be declared righteous, innocent. He would be declared to be in the right. His positional standing before the justice system would immediately change.

And Paul is saying that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. When we respond in faith to Jesus, we receive Christ's righteousness. Though we are guilty, we receive the innocent verdict that Christ earned through his innocence. This is what Paul means in **Romans 8:3-4**. Christ met the demands of righteousness, and when we receive it, we are justified.

One of my favorite fiction books is Rudyard Kipling's the Jungle Books, which is drastically different than the movies. And in the books, Mowgli, who is a boy, must be granted access to the wolf pack in order to gain not only a family, but also safety from Sher Kan the Tiger who wants to kill him. However Mowgli is not by nature part of this pack, so in order for him to be granted acceptance as a wolf someone must speak in his favor, and someone must pay for his acceptance.

Baloo is the teacher of the Jungle Law, and he speaks up in Mowgli's defense, and Bageerah the wise panther offers to provide one fattened cow as his payment. Kipling then writes: "And that is how Mowgli was entered into the Seeonee Wolf Pack, for the price of a bull and on Baloo's good word."

As the story goes there is an incredible bond between Mowgli, Bageerah and Baloo. Why? Because when Mowgli was accepted into the pack, he wasn't transformed into a wolf. He was still very much a boy. If he was turned into a wolf, he wouldn't need someone to speak in his favor, because he would by nature be a wolf. But because of the actions of Bageerah and Baloo he was declared a wolf and given the ability to live like one. His whole life wasn't wrapped up in his ability to be something, but in the ones who allowed him to be declared as something.

When we are saved by Jesus Christ, we are not transformed into something righteous. For if we were made righteous we would have grounds to stand before God on our own value. But because we are declared righteous through the work of Jesus Christ, we know we cannot take one step, or utter one phrase of worship without being tethered to the one who granted us access.

When God declares us righteous in Jesus Christ, we are given the ability to live differently for the first time in our lives. We are no longer enslaved by our law, because we are freed through faith in Jesus Christ. Yet there is a burden with this: **Romans 8:10**

Christ has made us alive, but our body is still dead in sin. One day, one glorious day we will see Jesus face to face and in that day not only will our spirits be made new, but also our bodies. But until that point we live in this tension of righteousness being declared on us, but our flesh still wrestling with the burden of sin.

This means change is hard even for Christians. But change is always possible. Romans 8 continues with verse **11**. This is our final point: **Change is Essential and Available to Believers**.

Because we are alive in Christ, we have the power to begin to live differently. We have the ability to resist sin. More importantly look back at **Galatians 3:27-29**. We have put on Christ. We are literally clothed in his righteousness, and while that hasn't eliminated our propensity to sin, it has granted us access to a life where we should expect to look more like Christ than like sin.

Did you hear the bass line of this text? Galatians builds a symphony around the central chords of justification by faith: a promise given by faith, freed by a coming faith, through Christ justified by faith, sons of God through faith, heirs to the promise by faith.

Often we view positive additions like evangelism, discipleship and Christian community, and good exclusions

such as changing our crude humor, anger, or lust as things which are noble but really unrealistic.

But if you understand the thrust of faith, this should never be so. For if faith in Jesus is so powerful that it renders the deep reality of our own sin inadmissible in God's courtroom, then is that faith not also powerful enough to provide meaningful change in the lesser problems in life?

Look with me at **Ephesians 2:8-10**. You see we are not saved by our works, but we are saved for works. So often we let sin, poor habits, and unfaithful living sit too long in our life because we either don't think it needs to change, or we think it's not important enough to change.

But if we have put on Christ, let us take up his righteousness and do the tough sledding of resisting sin, of pursuing holiness. To demand holiness in our churches isn't to be legalistic, it is to be redeemed. To hold ourselves accountable to righteous living isn't prudish religion, but instead practical repentance.

I want you to ask yourself soberly: where does this kind of change show in your life? This takes time, but scripture makes it clear that it is to be expected. See the basis of our sanctification in the face of Jesus' righteousness provides hope for those who feel they can never change because in any change for the better, we realize it could have only come through the one who set aside our sin on the cross. Christ's righteous justification keeps us from becoming disheartened when we feel like change is impossible, because the promise of Jesus' sacrifice still stands and it beckons us to believe, repent, and get back up.

Each year we find fresh motivation to change our lives as a digit changes on a calendar. True change is hard, and we will have moments of failure, but we have something better than a new year, we have a new life, and a new hope: **Lamentations 3:22-24**