

A NEW YEAR – A NEW YOU

New Years is a time that people often make resolutions. They decide that they are going to lose weight or quit smoking or be nice to their parents. They want to change. I want to talk about change as we enter into this new year. Not just change that we seek but true lasting transformation.

There is an old legend of a certain guide that lived in the desert and who never lost his way. He carried with him a homing pigeon with a very fine cord attached to one of its legs. When in doubt as to which path to take, he threw the bird into the air. The pigeon quickly strained at the cord to fly in the direction of home, and thus led the guide accurately to his goal. Because of this unique practice he was known as "the dove man." So, too, the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Dove, is willing and able to direct us in the way that leads to the more abundant life if we submit to His unerring supervision. The Holy Spirit desires to guide us in the way that we should go. As we submit ourselves to Him we will grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

Eph 5:15-20 Be very careful, then, how you live -- not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

As we enter a new year it is important that we be wise. This has been a difficult year, and as we enter a new one it is with a lot of uncertainty and apprehension. How can we prepare ourselves for whatever the coming year has? We need to be filled with the Spirit. What does that mean?

1 Samuel 10:1 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance? 2 When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"' 3 "Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine. 4 They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them. 5 "After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. 6 The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. 7 Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

In 1 Samuel 8 we see that the nation of Israel wanted a king. The prophet Samuel had been a great leader for the people but he was getting older and his children did not follow the Lord. In chapter 9 we see that Saul was chosen by God to be the first king of Israel. As Saul looked for a lost donkey he was led by God to Samuel. When God anointed Saul as King, he was anointed with oil which is a sign of the Holy Spirit. We see that 3 things happened immediately in the life of Saul;

1. The Spirit Directs

The first thing that Samuel tells Saul is that God was leading him.

1 Sam 10:2 When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, `The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"'

Saul and the servant went looking for the donkeys, and now others were looking for Saul. In reality, God is the one who had set this all up. God used this to get Saul to Samuel, and God had already directed Samuel as to what he was going to do when he saw him. From start to finish, God was directing this. It may have seemed like chance, but God was leading and God was in control.

Being filled with the Spirit means allowing God to lead you and direct you. It means listening for His voice. In a few weeks we are going to be hearing a lot more about hearing from God, but as we enter a new year let me ask you a simple question. In the past year have you been obedient to God's leading in your life?

Story of the Muslim man who came to the church office in Kuwait.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not really a question of how much of God's spirit do you have. You receive all you will ever get when you become a Christian. The real question is how much of your life does God's Spirit have? Have you given God permission to live and move in your life? Is the Holy Spirit controlling you?

I knew a young adult who was worship pastor in a church. A wealthy family from the church who had a big house on the lake were going away for a few years and asked if she would be interested in 'house sitting', living in their house and taking care of it while they were away. Of course she said yes. At first it was great. It was a huge and beautiful place. However, after a while it was not so great.

Imagine if you were invited to live in a big house but you could not change anything about the house while you lived in it because the house did not belong to you. You may find the color of the paint highly objectionable and not like the floor plan or the way the furniture was arranged but you could do nothing about it because the house would not be yours. The Holy Spirit is in the same position. He might not like a thousand different things we do, but there is nothing he will do about them until we give our lives completely to Jesus Christ. When you "sell out to Jesus" by turning your life completely over to Him and give Him total ownership, then He will make you like he wants you to be. Then both of you will like you better. You will truly be changed.

Does God have full control of your life? Have you told him that you will do anything, go anywhere, be anything that He asks you? God has anointed you for a purpose. Are you experiencing that anointing? The Spirit directs us.

2. The Spirit Equips

The second thing that the Spirit does is that He equips us. The second step or sign that Samuel told Saul was that, as he went out, he would meet 3 men who were each were carrying something. Saul was told to take whatever he was given.

1 Sam 10:3 "Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine. 4 They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them.

Each person had something different. One carried three goats (imagine carrying 3 goats), one had 3 loaves of bread, and the other had a skin of wine. I don't think we can put too much symbolism into these objects, other than to say they were all different. Saul did as he was told and accepted the 2 loaves of bread when it was given to him. Saul could have responded to the offer in many ways:

No thanks, I'm not hungry – I don't want anything you are offering
Why only 2 loaves, give me the third – I want more than you are offering
I don't like bread, how about some wine and a goat – I know what I need, I want to choose what I get

Saul accepted the gift that was offered to him. Likewise we must accept the gift the Holy Spirit gives us and use it for God's glory. We have to take and use what we have been given.

I don't know if anyone here saw the 2003 movie Paycheck. In the movie Ben Affleck creates a machine that sees into the future but then is made to forget everything he has done. All he has is an envelope filled with apparently unrelated items. Through the movie you understand that everything he has is for a purpose. Having foreseen what would happen he made sure he had everything he needed. In a way God has done the same for us. We have everything we need to fulfill the task God has for us.

Every believer has been given a gift. Some feel that the gift they have been given is not as important as another gift and wish they had something different. There are many gifts but one body and we must use whatever we are given to the glory of God. We need to accept God's gift and use it in the body of Christ. Each member of the body needs to function properly for the body to function well. Every person is essential. In the past year, have you faithfully used the gift that God has given you. As we enter 2021 I pray that God would fill us all and empower us anew.

The Spirit directs and the Spirit equips.

3. The Spirit Transforms

Samuel told Saul to go on to Gibeah and that he would meet a company of prophets.

1 Sam 10:5 "After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. 6 The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.

Notice here that Samuel told Saul that, after he would join in with them, he would "be changed into a different person". This is exactly what happened. As the prophets approached God's Spirit fell on Saul and he began to prophesy with them. What was the result?

1 Sam 10:11 When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Those who saw Saul and knew him could not believe the difference the Spirit made. They said to each other "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish?" I don't know about you but I want that to be said of me. I want people to see the difference that the Holy Spirit can make in a person's life – to hear people say "what has happened to you".

After Augustine's conversion, he was walking down the street in Milan, Italy. There he met a prostitute whom he had known intimately. She called to him but he would not answer. He kept right on walking. "Augustine," she called again. "It is I!" Without slowing down he called back, "Yes, but it is no longer I." His heart was now redirected and he was a changed man.

Lord, shine in me and so be in me that all with whom I come in contact may know thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus. -- John Henry Newman

That is my prayer for us in 2021. That the world would see Jesus in us. I pray for a church where people come, encounter God and then leave changed. People should see the difference in us when the Holy Spirit is set free and transforms us from within so that even those who know us will say "What has happened to them". When we hang around with the prophets we become prophets. We hear a lot about the negative influences of peer pressure but what about positive peer pressure. If you want to grow in your gifting find someone who has what you are looking for and follow them! When we move where the Holy Spirit is moving we are lead and transformed by God.

Are you experiencing that transformation in your own life? Are you different now than you were a few months ago? There is no greater joy as a pastor than to see lives changed by the goodness of God. This may not happen all at once, but it should be noticeable.

Last Sunday I mentioned the old hymn Have Thine Own Way Lord. It says "You are the potter, I am the clay". What type of clay do you feel you are this morning? Some clay is hard and cannot be shaped. Other clay is soft and can be made into whatever the potter desires. We choose the extent to which we will be molded. We can resist what God wants to do in our lives.

E.g. Miami airport.

The first step is giving God free reign in your heart. For some of us it's time to tell the Holy Spirit that He can stop house sitting and take ownership of your life. That means that you will have to do/change/receive whatever God wants to do in you. Perhaps this means for some you have to make the conscious decision to stop simply approaching God from an intellectual standpoint and engage your heart passionately in the area of worship.

It starts with recognizing who Jesus is and what God has already done for you.

Communion.