



## THE STABILITY OF YOUR TIMES, PART 1

Isaiah 33:2-6

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<sup>1</sup>Ah, you destroyer,  
    who yourself have not been destroyed, you traitor,  
    whom none has betrayed!  
When you have ceased to destroy,  
    you will be destroyed;  
and when you have finished betraying,  
    they will betray you.

<sup>2</sup>O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you.  
    Be our arm every morning,  
    our salvation in the time of trouble.

<sup>3</sup>At the tumultuous noise peoples flee;  
    when you lift yourself up, nations are scattered,

<sup>4</sup>and your spoil is gathered as the caterpillar gathers;  
    as locusts leap, it is leapt upon.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high;  
    he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness,

<sup>6</sup>and he will be the stability of your times,  
    abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge;  
    the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure.

### Introduction – Change Is Hard

Our church is changing. Calvary is changing. Today's announcement is a clear indication of that. There's been a change to some of the programs and ministries; new ones have started, old ones have stopped. There's been a change in some of our ministry strategies and priorities; we're talking about new initiatives. There's been a change in the church staff; new faces have joined the ministry team, while familiar faces have transitioned on. There's been a change in the preaching, a new preacher with a different style and emphases and, admittedly, his own idiosyncrasies. There's even been a change in the pulpit itself. Did anyone notice there's no more Plexiglas? Now, there's a Roman column, that started out bright white, but now is some interesting shade of cream, I guess.

Now, a few of you are change-junkies. You believe the more change, the better. And some of you have been wanting change for a long time. You're glad to see things happening. But most of you, I suspect, find change to be hard. You like the way things are at Calvary. That is, after all, why you're here. And, frankly, you'd prefer things not change, or at least not change very much.

That's very understandable, especially in an establish church like ours. That's why change is hard.

However, it's critical that you and I—that we as a congregation—know *how to respond to change*. It's critical because change is not only *a fact of life—it's also a fact of church life*. The ancient Greek's had a good way of making this point about the constancy of change. They said you can never put your foot in the same river twice. Dip your foot in, take it out. Thirty seconds later, put your foot back in, and it's a different river. All the water's moved downstream. It's no longer the same.

You could say the same thing about the church. You can never attend the same church twice. Visit one Sunday, and go home. Come back a week later, and it's a different church. Think about it: if you were to take into view all of our lives, how many thousands of changes would have taken place just this week?

It's also critical to know how to respond to change because *change is necessary if we as a church are going to be who God is calling us to be*. The early church wrestled intensely with change. Read the Book of Acts if you'd like proof of that fact. But they needed to change, in order to be who God was calling them to be. Jesus talked about this principle in terms of new wineskins for new wine.

Change is a fact of life—and the life of the church. And it's a necessary thing if we're going to be all that God wants us to be. It's critical, then, that you and I know how to respond to it in a way that's both wise and biblical.

## How Do I Approach Making Changes?

But before we look at how you should respond to change, I want to reflect briefly with you on a question that may be on your mind. And it's this: how do I as the Senior Pastor of this church approach making changes? More to the point: how did I approach the change announced just now? That's a good question. It's also an important question to have an answer to, when significant changes are made.

Let me describe my approach to making change by describing for you a few of the perspectives and principles I keep in mind when thinking about or advocating for change at Calvary.

***First, I make changes with fear and trepidation, not casually or over-confidently.*** You see, leading a larger and established church like Calvary is a lot like flying an airplane. You know you need to make repairs to keep the plane in the air. But you don't have the luxury of landing it and working on the engine. You've got to keep it in the air at thirty-thousand feet.

As a result, as the pilot of the church, you're left with the challenge of making changes to the plane without crashing it! That is, without harming any of the passengers! This forces me, then, to approach changes of significance with fear and trepidation, not casually or over-confidently, out of concern not to harm you.

***Second, I make changes to help Calvary live, not die.*** You need to know that I am driven by a desire to see Calvary live. Yet I know that every single day churches die. Somewhere right now in the United States there's a pastor at a church with no parishioners. And he's turning off the lights, locking the doors and going home because his church is dead.

Lights off, doors locked, a pastor without parishioners—that can happen at Calvary! Looking around the sanctuary on a Sunday morning could tempt you to think that’s impossible. But the reality is that every church is either in the process of living and growing, or in the process of stagnating and dying. If you imagine that all churches have life cycles, then a church is born, in the process of growing, reached its peak, in decline, or dead. It’s just that simple.

So let me ask you: Where is Calvary on this life cycle. We’re obviously not newly born, and we’ve also seen tremendous growth over the years. Have we reached our peak? Or have we moved beyond our peak and are now in decline? Is that the truth about the church you’re at right now? Is that the truth about the church I’ve come to pastor? Are our best days behind us? Have we already passed our prime? And are we now on that slow and steady decline to our death?

I certainly hope not. And, frankly, I don’t think so. In fact, I’ll come right out tell you what I’m convinced of: *we as a church have not even gotten close to reaching our prime in life.*

But what’s going to keep us on the upward slope of life rather than the downward descent to death? Life-giving change. Changes that infuse life into the life of this congregation, that’s what God will use to keep this church alive.

So, as I think about making changes, I’m always asking myself: how can we infuse life into the church, not deplete life from it. That’s one of the perspectives I bring to making changes at the church.

***Third, I make changes to help Calvary advance the Gospel, not to make my life better or your life more comfortable.*** The church of Jesus Christ is not a *country club*. It does not exist for the benefit of its membership as an end in itself. Nor is the church of Jesus Christ a *health club*. It does not exist for my own personal enhancement and development as its pastor; it’s not a place where I go four or five days a week, work up a good sweat, burn some calories, let off some steam, and then on the way out stare admiringly at myself in the mirror of your approval as a way of propping up my fragile ego.

No, the church of Jesus Christ is an outpost of the Kingdom of God. The church is the people of God with a mission from God—for the sake of the world. We are elect exiles, called out by God from the world, yet in the service of the world. And the church’s pastors, they’re servant-leaders of this missional people, helping to equip them for their sacrificial mission to the world—for the glory of God.

Now, you need to know that I’m committed to this view of the church and of the pastorate. Therefore, when I make changes, I’m not doing so to make my life better, as though Calvary were my own health club. Nor, frankly, am I doing so to make your life more comfortable, as though Calvary were your own country club. Instead, when I initiate change, I’m doing so because I’m convinced those changes will help you be *better equipped* to make Christ known in the world for the sake of the world.

***Fourth, I make changes in conversation with and in accountability to your elders, not in isolation.*** You may have heard these first two points about how I approach change and thought, that’s all well and good, but the guy’s young and inexperienced. Can I trust his judgment in making change? Furthermore, you may be thinking, I can tell he’s a Type-A personality who probably struggles with power and control and with using his authority to do things his way.

If you've sometimes been tempted to think those kinds of thoughts, then you need to know that you're right on track. I am young and relatively inexperienced as a pastor. I've not been around the proverbial block a dozen times. And I am a Type-A personality: a restless optimist, a visionary, ambitious, results-oriented, and I do like to be in charge. That's all true.

But the truth is, that's not all bad. It's only bad, or at least becomes bad, when I'm left to make decisions all by myself. But autonomous leadership is not the New Testament vision. Nor is it Calvary's vision. Instead, we believe in a *plurality of elders*, each of whom are elected *directly* by you, the congregation, and who *together* make decisions or initiate change that impact the life of the church.

As a result, every change of significance I initiate is made in conversation with and in submissive accountability to *twelve other men*. And, you should know, these men have a diversity of backgrounds and outlooks and styles and temperaments. In fact, they're an awful lot like you, the rest of the congregation.

They also represent hundreds of years of experience at Calvary. Between Spisiak, Boisse and Jahns, I think we've got at least two hundred years right there, and each of them are still only in their mid-forties!

Rest assured, as well, these twelve men are not a bunch of yes-men, either. No, I can tell you they've shut me down on more than one occasion. That's part of their job. And, frankly, on occasion I think they kind of like doing it!

So, you see, there's a *built in balance* to how decisions are made at Calvary. And that's a good thing, a very good thing: for you, for me, for the elders, and ultimately for others whose lives we'll be able to bless with the gospel.

***Fifth, I make changes with humility, patience and prayer, not with selfish ambition or vain conceit.*** "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit," the Bible says, "but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3). I remember memorizing that whole passage in college, and I've tried ever since to live my life, and now to lead this church, by this Scripture.

Of course, I don't do humility or patience or prayer perfectly. Nor am I entirely free from selfish ambition or vain conceit. But that puts us in good company, doesn't it? For I suspect you wrestle with these issues too, and I'm not any different than you in that regard. I have a different role in the life of our church, but the same struggles just as you do.

So, if you're worried about the changes you see me and the elders or ministry staff making, you ought to know how to attack us. You attack us not with Monday morning emails or by withholding your giving or resigning your membership. You want to know why? Because those aren't ultimately effective in causing me or anyone else to change.

Instead, you attack us, so to speak, *with your own* humility and patience and prayer. And you pray specifically for us, that we would have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, who though he had all authority at his disposal, did not use it for his own benefit, but in the service of others.

## **Conclusion**

Come back next week, and we will turn our attention to the critical question of how should you respond to change at the church. And in the meantime, between now and then, let me

encourage you to reflect upon the words of the Prophet Isaiah, words he spoke to the people of Israel many years ago, as they faced their own time of significant change:

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high;  
he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness,  
and he will be the stability of your times,  
abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge;  
the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure (33:5-6).

May we always remember that the LORD is indeed exalted above the fray of change. He will fill Calvary with good things: justice and righteousness. He is therefore, the stability of your times and mine. In Him alone is abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge.

May we all, therefore, fear the LORD, trusting in Him, for He is our only treasure.  
Amen.

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