

## The Great Change

2 Corinthians 5:17 (New American Standard Bible)

*<sup>17</sup> Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

### Introduction

The sermon title this morning is the Great Change. I am going to talk about change. Not just any change but a great change in you and me. All by God. Through Christ.

Please join me in reading together today's text [Read]. *<sup>17</sup> Therefore if anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

I brought one book with me today. "*William Wilberforce: a hero for humanity*" written by Kevin Belmonte. Most of us know about the civil rights movement in America but, in my opinion, it goes back to England almost 200 years. The movement started with one individual whose name was William Wilberforce. Here's the timeline of civil rights movement.

### Content

#### Timeline of Civil Rights Movement

- 1807: Slave Trade was banned in the British Empire. Wilberforce worked for this for 20 years. It was for new slave trades only. *Already slaves? You will stay that way for life.*
- 1833: 'Slavery Abolition Act' in the British Empire. A few days before Wilberforce's death. It emancipated all the slaves in the British Empire. Thirty years later, in America,
- 1863: Emancipation Proclamation by A. Lincoln.
- 1960s: spearheaded by Martin Luther King Jr., 'Civil Rights Act' in 1964 (L.B. Johnson).

### God the Change Agent

If I had to choose one word to summarize this book, I would choose the word: *Change.*

I love the word 'Change.' *Positive Change. Progress. Change for good. New and improved.* Did you know that God is in the business of change? Especially in the lives of His

children. He is specialized in changing us: from bad to good, from old to new, and from worst to best. He is the Master of it.

Change is part of our covenant with the LORD our God. As a faithful partner in the Covenant, God starts working on us from the day when we become His children. He is never satisfied nor stops working until He sees His goal achieved in us. Fully and completely. Such a Change Agent is our God.

Some of you may think that you are good enough that God doesn't have to change you, but God disagrees with you. He still changes you from good to better, and from better to best. Not according to what you think best, but according to His standards.

### **What God means to make of us:**

God is most interested in **new** you. Not necessarily physically, but definitely spiritually. He has in mind a complete transformation of you: from the old to the new, and from the lowly state to the highest you can reach, like a cocoon turns into a butterfly.

When God transforms you, it is a total make-up into new. Not just some patch-ups work here and there of the **old** you. Not something nice here and there, yet the majority of the old you is still there. No, the old is gone. Totally gone. God says, "I don't need the old you. I will make you a brand new one."

Let me borrow a parable from George MacDonald, a great Christian writer: *"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of---throwing a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself"* (p. 176, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis).

Once again, what does God have in His mind for you? A total transformation. He wants to form Christ in you. That is, for you to be like Jesus. He wants to transform you into a "little Christ." He wants you to partake in His very divine character which the Bible calls perfect. *Be ye perfect as Heavenly Father is* (Matthew 5:48). *Be ye holy, because I am holy* (Leviticus 11:45), God invites us.

*Resembling God in character. Repeating what God does in love and in truth. In words and actions. It is a hefty goal, you may think. To you definitely, but not to God. All things are possible with Him.*

By the way, when God does His work in us, He never rushes. In fact, He takes time, all the time He has, to finish His work in us. One area at a time. E.g. On our anger issue, patience, discipline, and self-control. You can surely count on His patience. To Him, *a thousand years are like one day* (2 Peter 3:8). He takes your entire lifetime to create Christ's image in you.

Furthermore, He is thorough. He is faithful. You can count on Him. He doesn't do a snow job. He doesn't stop until the job is completely done according to His perfect standards.

One of the people who benefited from such divine work was William Wilberforce.

## **Wilberforce**

Who is Wilberforce? He was an English reformer who was known as the instrument of abolition in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the British Empire. Later, his movement influenced the same movement in America.

Wilberforce started as a young man who was ambitious to make his name big in the world. He was elected to the British Parliament at 21. He stayed in politics for the next forty some years. In his first few years, he was a man of free spirit. All he was thinking about was to promote himself in politics, to enjoy his life, eating, drinking, socializing, playing cards, including gambling. All the world revolved around him. God was not in the picture at all.

God, however, finally reeled him in and turned him around completely. It happened in 1786. Wilberforce called his conversion experience *Great Change*. He repented of his past life and resolved to commit his future life and work to the service of God.

This great change didn't happen overnight. Rather, it gradually happened and culminated in when he was 27 years old. And, for the next 46 years until his death, God brought him home gradually through godly friends, godly readings, especially the Scripture, and through circumstances.

Whenever we talk about anyone's life change, I always look for the evidence. *The tree is known by its fruit* (Luke 6:44). I examined three areas of Wilberforce's life for the evidence of change.

*Individual:* he was a humble man of God. Days before his death, he had bouts of fainting and falling. In his rest, his last word was: "I am in a very distressed state." His youngest son, Henry, sought to comfort him, saying, "Yes, but you have your feet on the Rock" meaning that his salvation is secure in Christ. Wilberforce's last words were the ones of humility and hope. "I do not venture to speak so positively," he told his son. "But I hope I have." (p. 333, *William Wilberforce*, Kevin Belmonte). I believe he had the security in Christ.

*Family man:* consider his loving affection toward his family. "... Wilberforce and his wife had six children, and Wilberforce spent every Sunday at home with his family, playing

with the children inside and outside their home in Clapham. To us, this behavior sounds rather normal, but in his day it was not the fashion for fathers to spend much time with their children or to observe the Lord's Day as Wilberforce did. He sent a powerful cultural message that family was important, and being a good father and family man meant spending quality time with one's family." (p. 51, *7 Men*, Eric Metaxas)

Near the end of his pilgrimage, he spoke with a profound sense of gratitude for the blessings of home and hearth he had known for so many years. "I do declare," he said, "that the delight I have in feeling that the very highest I have in this world. What more could any man wish at the close of life, than to be attended by his own children, and his own wife, and all treating him with such uniform kindness and affection?" (*Wilberforce, op. cit.*, p. 273)

*Politician:* historians count his achievements in two areas: abolition and reformation of the manners ('morality') [for the poor, for the orphans, for prisoners, for the animals—he was instrumental for forming Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) in 1824]. His contribution to the reformation of English society prevented England from falling into bloody revolution like the one in France in 1789 and led it into the next 50 years of the Victorian Era.

## Closing

If God can change Wilberforce, He can change all of us. He will, and, in fact, He has already begun His good work in us. Some of you may think that you are too old for change. Think again: God called Moses when he was 80 years old.

To those folks who would like to work with God for the change in them, I would like to recommend the following three things. For the change to occur and for you to sustain it, please

- Get into the Word of God. Without it, no change.
- Have genuine heart to obey God. No reservation.
- Be aware of accountability and obligation to others [golden rule]. Wilberforce was once asked what the principle behind abolition was. He answered, Golden Rule.  
Amen.