

NOTHING IS THE SAME ANYMORE

"No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles." Mark 2:21-22.

Twenty-eight centuries before Christ was born a self-appointed Assyrian prophet chiseled on a stone these words: "The earth is degenerating It is evident that the end of the world is speedily approaching." More than twenty centuries ago a Greek philosopher looked at the world around him and said, "Everything is in a state of change." As far as old Herachitus could see, the only thing in this world that doesn't change is the fact of change itself. Nothing is permanent, except the continual process of change which keeps going on and on. In the first century the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Corinth in which he said, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: . . . for the fashion of this world passeth away" (I Corinthians 7:29, 31).

In spite of the lack of faith that men have had with reference to the future of the world in which they live, it continues to exist. We are likely to have to live in it and with it for a long time yet. The point of real interest lies in the over-all, long-range direction of life. Is our present desperate world situation a temporary eddy in the stream of progress? Or does it forecast a permanent blackout of the good life?

It is not surprising to hear people complaining that "Nothing is the same anymore." Of course, it isn't! One generation is never quite like another. The older generation is always troubled by what is happening to the young people, because young people are always different. They are never quite like their elders.

Many people are saying, "Nothing is the same anymore." What they are bemoaning is the passing of the days when they were active in business, the days when they were married, the days when they were children, the days when they were helping to change things, and their elders were shaking their heads about them, and saying "Nothing is the same anymore."

When I was a boy, many people in the United States were still talking about the "old country." By that they meant the country in Europe from which either they or their parents had come to this country toward the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. They talked about the country which they left to come to the United States as if it were a land where older people were always kind and generous to their neighbors, and young people were always obedient and respectful toward their elders; where public officials were always models of correct and generous deportment, while private citizens were always decent and law-abiding. Looking back on all of that, these people frequently remarked, "Nothing is the same anymore."

What people failed to remember was that they had left the old country to come to the new country in order to seek a new life and a new land. It may not have been exactly what they expected, but it was new—with opportunity to escape many things which were not entirely to their liking.

If people in the first half of this century deplored the changes occurring all around them, they should see what is happening today. More changes have taken place in the last fifty years than in the previous five hundred years. More changes are likely to take place in

the next ten years than in the last fifty years, a time during which the world has seen some of the biggest changes in all of history. The mere fact that things have changed, of course, does not mean that they are all to the good. But nothing is solved, and nothing ever takes a turn for the better, when people simply stand or sit around shaking their heads and saying, "Nothing is the same anymore."

Changes are taking place over the entire front of American life — changes in our ideas, our habits, and our methods. The changed material aspects of life have already become commonplace—new and faster modes of transportation, modern home equipment and furnishings, the treatment of illness and disease, etc. Ours is the age of handy gadgets. Perhaps, the most significant social change is the almost complete disappearance of the traditional American home. Few indeed are the homes today that seriously seek to supply entertainment, intellectual stimulus, and spiritual culture. The present-day moral chaos reminds one of the scriptural description of the ancient days of the Judges when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." People now ask, "Is wrong for you necessarily wrong for me?"

Religion has not escaped the ravages of change. Some would discard it altogether because they just consider it an antiquated superstition. Others would place it in hothouses of respectability whence an occasional exotic plant may be exhibited to an admiring if not patronizing world. The church which was once at the center of the life of the typical American community has been pushed to its circumference. The church was once the dominant and controlling interest of the community; it is now merely one among many interests, and with many the least. For the masses of Americans in these days of prosperity, their church is more or less irrelevant.

Changes are clicking thick and fast about us. Changes are reaching into our individual lives. They are creating in each life the problem of change. One finds himself asking some questions. What attitude shall I take toward change? How far can I afford to adapt my life to change? Where shall I yield? Where shall I refuse to yield? Shall I resist all change? Shall I become fluid and yield to every change? What does Christianity have to say to me about my problem of change?

Christ Jesus never stood around shaking His head and saying, "Nothing is the same anymore." He was not a crepe-hanger or a prophet of doom. When He pronounced judgment upon the habits and ways of the people, it was not to call them back to the habits and ways of their forefathers.

When the disciples of John the Baptist came to Christ in perplexity and sincerity and asked, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?" In substance they were saying, you are evidently a religious man; fasting is certainly a religious performance; it has come to us stamped by the approval of the best men of the past and the present; why is it that you pass it by as though it were without any value?

Their question was positive proof that they had totally misunderstood both Christ and His mission. They thought He was just a reformer, that He had come to mend the religion of the Jews, and through this improved religion to mend human nature and this torn and rent world. But Christ proceeded to tell them that He had not come to reform, but to transform; that He had not come to improve men, but to remake them; that He had not come to correct certain evils in the world, but to make all things new. Some of us have not

yet realized that our Lord is here, not simply to mend, but to create new men, and through new men build a new social order; that He is here to enable us to know and to say with Paul: "Old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

You will observe, however, that Christ and His questioners did not differ in every particular. There was one point on which they were agreed. They were of one mind as to human need. Where they differed was as to how this need was to be met. Neither they nor Christ shut their eyes to the fact of man's need, a need which was born of man's tragic separation from God through sin. This conviction of need has been felt by all sorts and conditions of men. Even Judas Iscariot, with all his callousness, could not face the ghastly rent in his garment that he had made by betraying the Lord Jesus. From the burning shame of it he flung himself out of this world through suicide.

Believing that fidelity to the ceremonial laws were necessary to salvation, the Jews did not like it because Christ did not observe them "No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but the new wine must be put into new bottles."

Thus Christ compared the so-called righteousness of an unregenerated person to an old fragment of a garment. When man was innocent before the fall, his righteousness was a beautiful garment, but after he had become a sinner his righteousness was like a torn and rotten garment. There are those who would try to patch up their own unrighteousness with a part of Christ's righteousness, just as they would try to patch an old and worn garment with a new piece of goods, but Christ made it clear that this procedure would never be successful and satisfactory. Man's rotten and dirty robe of his own so-called righteousness renders him odious in the sight of God. To have a fragment of Christ's righteousness patched on the old self will not suffice.

Any woman who has had experience in sewing knows the wisdom with which Christ spoke in the words: "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth onto an old coat; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and leaves a bigger hole." Any wine merchant knows that our Lord was right when He said: "No one puts new wine into old wine-skins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and then wine and skins are both lost. Fresh skins for new wine!" Any nurse will tell you that you can't run a hospital today the way hospitals were run at the beginning of this century. Any businessman will tell you that you can't go back and operate business as it was done fifty years ago.

These things do not mean, of course, that everything has changed. We still have cloth, we still have wine, we still have sick people to care for, we still have principles of honesty to observe in business, and we still have problems to be solved on earth, as did the people before us. But changes have taken place, as they will; nothing will be solved, and nothing will be gained by standing around and lamenting: "Nothing is the same anymore."

In this world of change, whenever Christ is around, there are going to be more changes. Christ was telling His disciples to get with it, to quit wringing their hands, and to stop talking about the good old days. Confront the world, He said, with the Good News of God that brings about the greatest change of all—a change of heart. Christ has come; every-

thing is changed. Christ has died; everything is changed. Christ has risen from the dead; everything is changed. Because Christ lived, died, and rose again, life in our world is changed. You can't go on thinking that you are doing the right thing by doing the best you can. Don't imagine for one minute that God is going to be satisfied with those little achievements of yours in which you take such pride, those little generousities which interrupt the normal selfishness of your existence, those little acts of kindness which somehow are supposed to offset all the other occasions when you were less than kind. It won't work. All that self-proclaimed righteousness of yours is like an old coat, and it won't do to try to patch it up with some religion of your own. It is like an old shrunken wine-skin, which any man who knows the business will tell you is not capable of holding new wine with its own fermentive new life.

You can't tack the faith of Christ onto your old life and hope to get away with it because it won't work. Receiving Christ as your Saviour is not a matter of patching things up here and there, trimming things here and fixing up things there. When one receives Christ as his Saviour, he sets out on an entirely new way of life. Faith in Christ is not just something you add to the way you have always been doing things. Faith in Christ calls for a complete change. It means being born from above, becoming a new person, or a new creation. It means giving up the old ways of sin and following the way of Christ. It is not the matter of giving up a few bad habits, but of accepting a whole new way of life. It is not just a tune-up, but a complete overhaul. In Christ your sins are forgiven, and in Christ a new life awaits you. In Christ forget the old, and take hold of the new. You can enjoy a new life by trusting, knowing, and following Christ. The ideas of Christ about the dignity and worth of the individual as a child of God, and of love as the law of a brotherly society, have been resisted for two thousand years. The Christian faith has always forced changes against heavy resistance.

Christ is saying here that Christian living always proves to be the best manner of life. The orthodox Jews were satisfied with their system as it was. They protested this new spirit of vitality which Christ taught that cut across their accepted routines. Instead of condemning their faith, Christ proceeded to teach and to show them something far better. Christ always had been respectful of the old standards that were real and true. He did not believe in change merely for the sake of doing or having something different. But He did tell them that His way was far better than their ancient and lifeless ritualism. The Christian spirit frees the human spirit. It always finds new answers to old problems. It constantly finds solutions to modern problems. Christianity has survived all opposing philosophies. It will continue to do so. It is not afraid of the future. It is the key to the future. It helps shape new and better civilizations. It gives us a positive approach to the generations to come.

There is hope for you in Christ. Don't be afraid of the changes which He will bring about in your life when you accept Him as your Saviour and follow Him in your life. Christ is the fixed point. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He always forgives and gives new life to those who put their trust in Him. People whom Christ saves and controls are undismayed by change, and are always ready to say, not sadly but gladly: "It is truly wonderful to be a Christian. Nothing is the same anymore, except Christ. You can always depend on Him."