

Life Changes

Wow, no matter what happens in this old world in which we live, one thing is for certain...life changes constantly and quickly. They say, you know, they...those people who say the things that often get repeated...anyways, they say, "The only two things in life that are a certainty are death and taxes." Well, I'm not one of those referred to as "they" cause I am rarely ever quoted, but I'd like to add one more certainty to the two certainties listed above. Not only are death and taxes a certainty, but change is a certainty as well. And like Toby Frost was referencing in his sermon Sunday as he spoke of life being like that proverbial box of chocolates, in reference to change, change makes life even more like a box of chocolates. For when change comes, one never knows what one is going to get until the change comes and rocks your world.

Very recently, one of our sister churches and our associational world was rocked by the death of a pastor and wife. You know by now that Winona Baptist Church's pastor, Stanley Fuller and his wife, Joyce, were tragically killed when their vehicle ran off the road on a stormy evening last week. When Bro. Richard Ashley called me late in the evening, I was shocked. Not just the pastor, but the pastor and wife, taken from a church in the twinkling of an eye. When the pastor dies you can comfort his widow. When the pastor's wife dies you can comfort your pastor. When both pass at the same time, there is no one to comfort, but yourselves. Healing becomes even more difficult for a church in this situation. And it was the first time in all my years of ministry that I can recall an event like this that touched my world in such a way.

But it is not the first time that change came about due to the death of a pastor. This weekend I was in the Ware Shoals area doing something for Turkey Creek Baptist when I decided, after the events of Stanley and Joyce's death, to ride down to the Saluda River to see the place where the beloved pastor of Calvary Baptist drowned saving his children so many years ago. One so young and whose ministry so promising, gave up his life to save those he loved more than himself. As I looked at the Shoals, my mind went back to that time and thought about all the change that came about that day. Even to this day, those thoughts sadden me as I struggle to make sense of them. But change comes, in an instant, and though life moves on, we are forever impacted by those life changing events.

Also, not far from my heart are the thoughts of the phone call I received when Phil McMinn, the pastor of South Main Street, died in a single car accident while returning home from White Oak Conference Center. How could it be, so young, so promising, much like Tim Bailey, and yet, in the twinkling of an eye, time seemed to stand still and life changed forever. And as with Stanley and Joyce, I was the first in the pulpit after Phil's death. I don't know what I said, I doubt anyone does, we just all knew we were there together trying to get through it together. Yep, change is an absolute guarantee in this old world, no doubt about it.

But not all changes are of the variety that stuns and brings heartache. The funny thing about life is that there are joys and

sorrows that are constantly balancing the other out. It's like God knows that his people, frail as we are, can only take so much. So in the midst of the struggles of life, there are always some joys that seemingly get us through the tough times.

I have experienced many of those times as well. When my beloved grandmother who lived with my family nearly my whole life died, it was tough. She was a rock! A Godly woman who separated us brothers during fights, cooked constantly for us, making the most awesome sweet potato biscuits and fried doughnuts you could ever imagine! But at 91 years of age she passed, only to have my brother's daughter, Brittany, born a month later, and Kim and I got married a month after that. Oh the ebb and flow of life. Much like the grass in the fields referenced in Scripture, "here today and gone tomorrow," yet in between those times of life and death, that grass will sway back and forth with every little breeze. Such are the joys and sorrows of life brought about so abruptly by change!

In fact, at the very instant that the funeral was being held for Stanley and Joyce at Fairview Baptist Church in Kinards last Wednesday, Zack and Katelyn were in the hospital giving birth to their third child. Katelyn gave birth at 1:05 to the next "Little" blessing in our family, Ellie Kate Little. Though I missed her arrival since I was at the funeral, a picture of Ellie sent to my phone reminded me that life changes, constantly and quickly, and somehow we need to learn to be at peace in whatever state we find ourselves, for in the next moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the next change can and will come. It might be one of great joy or of great sorrow, or anything in between. No wonder Paul said that he had learned to be content no matter his life's circumstances...and so should we.

And with the Southern Baptist Convention coming up very soon, there seems to be an uneasiness regarding the future of our denomination. There will always be those who want us to water it down, change it up, liberalize it, abandon it or just generally polarize it, just for the sake of it. So who knows what the next challenge facing our denomination will be? One thing is for certain, change is a'coming! Life is full of the challenges and quandaries that we find ourselves in from time to time. And as one seminary professor once said that changed my life, "It's not the crisis or the conflict or the change that affects your life the most...it is how you choose to deal with all those things that affect your life the most."

So when change comes, remember, it is supposed to, for the Bible itself has said that nothing ever stays the same, except the Word itself. The Word, God's Word, will outlive all of us and outlast the universe. Therefore when change is occurring all around us, perhaps we should cling to the changeless Word of an eternal God to anchor our lives. For therein is our hope, our joy, our reason, for pressing on. While life constantly changes, God's Word never does...and that friend, is something that we absolutely can live with, knowing that in a world of constant change, the only thing that will never change is the thing that is the most important thing of all...God Himself!