



Malvern Mashal Number 25

Responding to Change (iii)



Lord, the stars observe their courses,
but few other things remain so constant.
Your world is very different now to how it was when Jesus was alive,
and You know the changes that will come in our lives too.
Storms will come – and by Your mercy most will pass again,
before fresh waves break upon our shore.
Ebb tide, flood tide, the current of Your love moves on,
now with seeming slowness,
and now with swift swirling eddies,
and sudden forward shifts
of almost seismic strength and raging lavae flow.
You rarely call us to anchor very long,
but since we are not always able to hoist more sail
to escape the doldrums,
help us keep seeking You
when the longed for trade winds seem slow to come.
What joy when You send some comfort,
or give us the authority to resolve some deadlock,
but since many of the changes we desire most often come about
only because someone somewhere is willing to pray and obey Your leading,
grant us the aptitude to see where You are leading,
as it were, out of the corner of our eye,
and the determination to pray for mighty breakthroughs.

1. The best changes come about because God initiates them

John Newton owed his change of spiritual fortune to a ship that happened to pass at exactly the right time. Fifteen minutes earlier and he would have died in Africa, as he put it, as a “wretch”. That is what he testified to John Ryland in 1781,

“We are passengers in a ship in which the Lord’s cause and faithfulness are embarked with us, and therefore we need not fear sinking. The infallible pilot will guide us safely through the storms.”

Not all of us have quite such a dramatic testimony, but if we look back and recollect we can probably recall a goodly number of times when God has intervened to rescue us from highly unpromising situations that appeared to be completely blocked – and by opening them prepared the way for further blessings.

Think of some examples now from your own life. The memory of such deliverances can be a really useful “springboard of faith” to help us face the future.

2. When God initiates change, don’t hold back!

The two men [who were in fact angels] said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here-- sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished."

When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

There are times when the Lord commands us to do something. It may be to go somewhere or to abstain from some course of action. You can probably look back on various such commands, but we are going to consider this today in the light of how easy it is to hold back when God speaks, and allow human reasoning to cause us to miss out on what God has in mind for us.

It is easy for us at this distance to wonder why Lot held back. But although we know the men giving him this message were angels of the Most High, how was he to know? Neither was this a relatively simple command – like not to go and watch a particular football match. This was a call to give up his home, and all that he was familiar with – even such family members who hardened their hearts and refused to come with him.

Does God ask people to do such radical things? From time to time He does. He is not a *tame* lion, as the beavers in Narnia so rightly said of Aslan. When we hesitate, we give the devil room to maneuver.

Sometimes what the Lord shows us makes us tremble, for it requires a high level of faith and trust. I look back with no great joy on one particular episode in my life when someone had prophesied that I was approaching a time which would be like a steep rock face. They warned that I would encounter an overhanging crag, and would need the courage to swing out over the overhang, trusting that the Lord would get me up and over to the safe place he had in mind for me beyond it.

When that moment came, I lacked the courage to go by the extraordinarily steep way the Lord was, on reflection, asking me to take. In the long run, the 'safer' path I settled for actually brought me far more pain.

May the Lord make us prompter to obey – not in part but in full – and allow Him to show us the things that are out of balance in our lives.

It may be that God has to put His finger on our selfishness, envy, pride and anger. As William Law put it, "*There must be some kind of earthquake within us, something that must rend and shake us to the bottom.*" It often takes this before we realise how serious some things are, and how much we need to cry out to the Lord for help to overcome them.

We may never know the level of repentance we need to see real change come about unless we feel the power of these things, and cry out to God about them. It stands to reason that this most usually happens when the Lord withdraws His apparent presence and protection somewhat, to allow these things to surface. It is a kindness, therefore, when He stands aside in such ways – but we must be sure to respond. We may need, as it were, to change railway lines. All our desire may have been invested in some particular person or project.

Some of you who are reading this may need to give the Lord "permission" to change the points, and switch over to a new railway line if that is what is best for both Him and us. If we are unwilling to do this, we risk going round and round in circles, effectively keeping the Lord and His purposes at a distance.

3. Many changes come about because we are willing to pay the cost to pray and obey

John Wesley went so far as to claim that God does nothing except in answer to prayer. Intensive prayer has ever preceded every revival there has ever been. American Christians prayed in Charlotte in 1929 that sparks would start from there that would criss-cross the nation. Meetings were held there in 1934 in which a young boy was converted: a certain Billy Graham – who proved to be the biggest spark of them all!
(<http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/faq/13.htm>)

Are not many opportunities lost because we put our own comforts ahead of the Lord's direct leading? Remember Paul's exhortation to "preach the word in and out of season," (2 Tim 4:2), in other words whether it is convenient or not for us to do so. We never know what we are sowing, but the important thing is that we keep doing it. Both in our witness and in prayer it is as though we are giving God "ammunition" to work with.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “**Set apart** for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 18:2)

Just think of all that would not have happened had Paul not had the courage to leave the comforts and the security of the Jewish synagogues – not to mention the “mega” church that had formed at Antioch – and to reach out in new ways as God led him.

What challenges are you currently facing? And who could you be reaching out to? Just as the Lord is Lord of the marshalling yard He is also the Signalman Supreme. Are there any points on your tracks that we need to be willing to allow Him to switch?

