

Sermon, June 25, 2023
Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 10:24-39
“Ignited: New Life”
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How observant are you? I think most of us feel as if we are pretty observant. We notice things. We pay attention to details. At least that's what we like to tell ourselves. But many studies have shown that we aren't anywhere near as observant as we like to think we are. And certainly, some of that can be attributed to our tendency to get locked into a virtual world instead of seeing the world around us. And that's become so pervasive we can't say, well that's a certain generation issue. I see it all the time for people of all ages.

I have another theory as to why we don't always notice things. I think it also has to do with the fact that everything in life is in a constant state of change. Everything is changing, becoming improved or deteriorating. And I think we are just so used to things changing around us that we don't even notice them or appreciate them.

Everything in life is in a state of change, even you. I mean literally you. Every day you replace about 330 billion of your cells. Yes, 330 billion, which is roughly one percent of your cells. In 80 to 100 days, you will have replenished 30 trillion cells. The equivalent of a new you. So, if at any point you think, I just don't feel like my old self anymore, guess what? You aren't.

Ben Franklin once quoted “nothing in life is certain except death and taxes.” I’d add another one to that, *change*. Everything changes. We are all in the midst of a change as a church. Next week, you will have a new senior pastor. And it’s going to be a change. But guess what, you’re going to be fine. It’s a change for us, as well. Change is a part of life for us. It’s part of what it means to be alive.

The seasons change, your family changes, your job changes, our bodies change at an incredible rate. Would it be any surprise, then, that our spirits and souls are called to change, as well? We are finishing up today our Pentecost series we titled *Ignited*. We called it that because of the symbol of the Holy Spirit we have around us, of fire. And anytime you have fire or set fire to something, what do you have? You have change. The greater the fire, the greater the heat source, the greater the change.

That change, of course, can be surprising to us. I have shared the story before maybe here, but it’s my favorite story from Billy Graham. Or one of my favorites. Graham was really coming into his heyday in the late fifties doing crusades all over the world. Who knows How many people gave their lives to Jesus through his preaching ministry over the years?

But my favorite crusade story from Graham came from a crusade he preached in Chicago. Somehow a very infamous gangster found his way to the service. And he was moved by the Holy Spirit, he came down and gave his life to Christ that night. Later he asked to see Billy Graham. And probably through his connections, he got in to see him. He shared how he had sold drugs, guns, smuggled, did things I will not talk about in a church. *And now I have given my life to Jesus after I heard you last night.*

Graham is almost moved to tears. How amazing it is that this man came to Christ. And the man went on, I promised you Rev., I will be the best Christian gangster you have ever seen. Graham said, “excuse me.” “O yes, I’ll be the best Christian smuggler, drug dealer you have ever seen”. Graham explained to him that he couldn’t do that. That to follow Jesus meant having to leave everything else behind him. It never occurred to the gangster that he would have to change.

But before we get too down on him, or laugh too hard at him, isn’t that where many of us are? We want to have a relationship with Jesus. Going to heaven when we die seems a pretty good option. The idea of having the God of the universe looking out for us seems good, as well. But often it doesn’t seem to occur to us that if we really follow Jesus, if we allow the Holy Spirit to come into our lives, we are going to change. Down to the very spiritual molecular composition of who we are.

Let’s go back to Paul’s letter to the Romans we read just a few moments ago. Paul begins by telling the church the importance of being born again. Born Again. What does that mean to you? Sadly, I think for many of us when we hear you must be born again, we think of it as well, a do over. A reset. A bit like rebooting our computer. Our computer has a glitch, it’s not working right, and so we reboot it and we get a

do over. That's how many of us treat being born again. We have a glitch in our system, we sin, we rebel against God, and we ask Him to forgive us; we are asking for a bit of a do over, another chance.

But in this passage of Scripture, Paul says that is not what being born again is. Being Born Again is not about you getting a second or third or even fifth chance. It means an absolute change in our soul, in who we are spiritually. It is about letting the Holy Spirit get a hold of us and change us into a new creation. Just like your cells, regenerate God wants to bring the Holy Spirit into your life and make you new, change who you are. You can be born again.

So what does that mean, we are born again, we are renewed? What happens to us when the Holy Spirit gets hold of us and begins to burn? You will find that you can let go of your past. Because it has died and you have been made new, you don't have to be controlled by your past. Not your past mistakes, not your past hurts, not the past wrongs you have done or have been done to you. I can't tell you how many of us stay up at night haunted, almost controlled by our past. You don't have to be controlled by your past any longer, you can be made new and leave that old life behind for a new one.

The power of sin loses its strength. Wesley said as we are made new, we simply lose our taste, our desire, for sin. It loses its attractiveness for us. And we begin to hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God. If you are struggling with sin in your life, if you've been living a rebellious life away from God and you are miserable, you can have a new life. You don't have to struggle with that sin any longer. God isn't offering you a do over. He is offering you a brand-new life. Won't you take it?

You'll find your values change. As I have grown in Christ and been made new, this was one the most surprising things to me. God gives you in your new life new values. And you begin to see how the things that we often value make us miserable. CS Lewis once said Hell is a state where everyone is perpetually concerned with his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and everyone lives in the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance, and resentment.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if you didn't have to live in that type of hellish place? Do you remember the last time you weren't perpetually concerned with what others thought about you? When that didn't control your life? When didn't your happiness revolve around you getting ahead where it wasn't dependent on the praise of others?

Let me ask you this. When was the last time you didn't carry a grievance against someone? That can become a terrible burden to carry. Has envy stolen your joy because you only see what God does for others and you have become blind to your blessings? Can you remember a time when you didn't think about yourself? When was the last time you didn't carry resentment?

You can be born again, all of that can die with your old life, and you can be given a new one. A life where sin has no power, and holiness becomes your greatest desire. A new life where the past cannot haunt you. A life that isn't touched by the Hellish promise of grief, resentment, and self-importance.

This morning you can have a new life, not just a do over. You can be made new, you can be born again. Will you allow Jesus to give you a new life? Amen.