

Seasons

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 27th Sep 2009

Intro

- Children's Autumn song.
- Looking at the brown leaves, falling off the trees- the season is changing- Autumn and winter on its way- only 13 weeks left 'till Christmas!
- Our lives are full of change and although change can often be very welcome, sometimes the changes can seem scary, sad, confusing or frustrating to us. How does the Bible help us when we are trying to come to terms with difficult changes?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 -split congregation in 2 to read each part

Our lives are full of seasons- life is full of change

- At first the list is shocking- we think can't be all true, as they are opposites, and yet as we ponder it we realise it is. Even if we are a pacifist there are times we need to fight for what is right, even if not physically. There are times we need to kill, even if it means just pouring bleach down the toilet or taking an antibiotic.
- Christianity isn't life on permanent high with nothing going wrong, but there is a joy and a peace which is with us in the storm.
- Reaping and sowing. Be faithful in the tough seasons to get to the seasons of reaping. Saxon treasure this week- at least 1,350 items, includes 5 kilos of gold and 2.5 kilos of silver worth a 7 figure sum for the field owner and the metal detector, but the metal detector put in 14 years of searching for treasure.
- Financial- season has changed globally. Individually change happens- Paul understood this and learned secret of contentment, whether plenty or little- Phil 4:12
- Deal with 'grass is greener' mentality- it leads to going round in circles- wandering in wilderness. Make most of season you are in- single/courting/married, young/old- each season has its benefits and tests. Simeon-'when I'm older?', older people 'I wish was your age', anti-wrinkle ads mean nothing to youth, mutton dressed as lamb-'get old gracefully' apply this 'grace' aspect to all ages & circumstances. Me unemployed- got depressed quite quickly, but listened to many David Pawson tapes- studied & kept busy. Older people who suffer gracefully & others who winge about everything.

God understands what it is to go through seasons

- Jesus grew and was obedient to His parents. Worked hard as a carpenter.
- Jesus predicted the coming season of His suffering- 'darkness is coming when no man can work'
- Knew what it was to lose close friendships- rejection by the leaders, 'hard teaching', fleeing of the 12, betrayal by Judas, denial by Peter. Yet Jesus remained focussed and full of compassion and forgiveness.
- Talk to God about how you feel and ask for His strength to get through tough times.
- Choose to open up to others, just as Jesus did to the imperfect 11 at the last supper

Different seasons can run concurrently in our lives- life is not all bad or all good

- Rick Warren's wife ill at time of blessing (November 2004 issue of "Decision" magazine, she is now in remission after chemotherapy):

Life is a series of problems: either you are in one now, you're just coming out of one or you're getting ready to go into another one. The reason for this is that God is more interested in your character than your comfort. God is more interested in making your life holy than He is in making your life happy. We can be reasonably happy

here on earth, but that's not the goal of life. The goal is to grow in character, in Christlikeness.

This past year has been the greatest year of my life—but also the toughest, with my wife, Kay, getting cancer. I used to think that life was hills and valleys—you go through a dark time, then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I don't believe that anymore. Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it's kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life. No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for. You can focus on your purposes, or you can focus on your problems. If you focus on your problems, you're going into self-centeredness, which is my problems, my issues, my pain. But one of the easiest ways to get rid of pain is to get your focus off yourself and onto God and others...

...We discovered quickly that, in spite of the prayers of hundreds of thousands of people, God was not going to heal Kay or make it easy for her. It has been very difficult for her, and yet God has strengthened her character, given her a ministry of helping other people, given her a testimony, drawn her closer to Him and to people—all the five purposes we've been talking about.

You have to learn to deal with both the good and the bad of life. Actually, sometimes learning to deal with the good is harder. For instance, this past year, all of a sudden, when the book sold 15 million copies, it made me instantly very wealthy. It also brought a lot of notoriety that I had never had to deal with before.

I don't think God gives you money or notoriety for your own ego or for you to live a life of ease. So I began to ask God what He wanted me to do with this money, notoriety and influence. He gave me two different passages that helped us to decide what to do. First, He gave me 1 Corinthians 9. In that passage, Paul says those who preach the Gospel should make a living by the Gospel. But that he would not use this right, because he wanted to serve God for free so he would be a slave to no man. So we made four decisions. First, in spite of all the money coming in, we would not change our lifestyle one bit. We made no major purchases. Second, about midway through last year, I stopped taking a salary from the church. Third, we set up foundations to fund an initiative we call The Peace Plan—to plant churches, equip leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick and educate the next generation. Fourth, I added up all that the church had paid me in the 24 years since I started the church, and I gave it all back. It was liberating to be able to serve God for free.

- Cultivating a thankful heart will stand us in good stead during tough times in life-
Hab 3:17-19

Other people are often in different seasons to us

- Harmony happens when we appreciate this, and discord when we don't- Rom 12:15-Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep

God is the One that never changes

- The unchangeing one- immutability- Mal 3:6 Heb 13:8. God is consistently good (in Him there is no darkness).
- As we learn to trust Him as the Good Shepherd

Conclusion

- Life is full of changing seasons- although there may be seasons we would rather not go through God will never forsake us or abandon us, and shapes us through it all. We need to be in harmony with one another and support each other through difficult seasons as well as rejoicing in the joyful seasons of life.

Song: Even though I walk through the valley