

Transformation: A Life and Death Situation

2 Corinthians 3:18 and Philippians 3:20-21

A Dedication

This chapel presentation is in dedication to my parents, Rev. Kenneth and Myrtle Jenkins, who together faithfully served God and the Church of the Nazarene for over fifty years.

A Life Story:

Kenneth was the 2nd of 8 children of the Alan and Lillie Jenkins family of Weldona County, Colorado

Myrtle was the 9th of 13 children of the Conrad and Emma Meyer family of Jasper County, Indiana.

Both from the farm—though very different farms, both saved in revival meeting, both called by God.

68 Years Ago

Myrtle and Kenneth Jenkins were joined in marriage on June 20, 1941. In my father's words:

They met when a group of Pasadena College students were conducting a mission service in downtown Los Angeles. The director of the mission

chose Kenneth and Myrtle to conduct a service in another location. This was the beginning of their joint service to God and His church. Obviously, a romantic relationship grew out of this experience. Kenneth couldn't preach and Myrtle couldn't play the piano well, but romance did not need either skill.

Service

Together Kenneth and Myrtle began four Nazarene churches plus leading other congregations.

Since the beginning of October, my mother has been in the process of dying. Every close experience I have had with dying up to this point in my life has been sudden and unexpected—traumatic and sad. That is probably unusual for someone of my age. The past month has brought me into intimate contact with in-home Hospice care. I have learned about caring for the dying, needs of the dying, stages of dying, and signs of actively dying—something that sounds very much like an oxymoron.

Robin Baker, states:

American culture (and Western culture generally) has a difficult time dealing with death and the dying. We often do not know how to interact with those who are terminally ill. In a culture that is all about this life,

consuming goods and living life to its fullest, death is the ultimate enemy. It is the voice we hear, but we wish to silence in our culture because its reality testifies that our efforts to stay young and to submerge ourselves in the pursuit of material wealth will end in a pine box or an urn. That is not good news

While we as Christians would like to think that we would not shy away from the topic of death, I am not sure that is true. Our generation and country has been able to move away from the topic of death where in previous generations it was unusual for mothers to have all their children live to adulthood. Despite our efforts, death will come to face all of us—for some suddenly, for others, a long process with ample time for reflection. And so, I have been, as have many others, reflecting on life and death.

Considering Life and Death

Abraham Lincoln once said: And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.

Carl Sandburg said: Life is like an onion: You peel it off one layer at a time, and sometimes you weep.

I have found this to be very true and will hopefully avoid it for the next few moments!

I am going to take you to two verses that speak to us about God's transforming power—

Transformation

There are two transformations, one in life and one in death.

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Defining Transformation

What is it that God does when he transforms us? Interestingly enough, the Miriam-Webster Dictionary provides us with a definition that encompasses the depth of God's transforming power.

Transformation can involve a change in composition or structure, a change the outward form or appearance, OR a change in character or condition—which includes the idea of conversion. As a math teacher, I had to leave the mathematical transformation in the list, but also it can include undergoing a genetic transformational change. In other words, God’s power can change us from the inside out.

Transformed vs. Transformed

Interestingly, the two verses we are looking at this evening cover this range of transformational changes. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, in the original language transform indicates a change in Character and refers, not to the external and transient, but to the inward and real. In Philippians 3:20-21 Transform indicates an actual change in form or to change the figure of. The first transformation is in life, while the second is in death.

Transformation in Life

If we look at 2 Corinthians 3:18 again, we see that this transformation is in character and conduct. Read with me again,

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Our earnest desire is for transformation. We long for it, we even sing for it!

Our Desire for Transformation

Last Sunday, as I was singing, I realized that what I was singing was my desire for transformation. The words to the chorus by Scott Underwood are on the screen:

(So) Take my heart and form it

Take my mind, transform it

Take my will, conform it

To Yours, to Yours, Oh Lord

Heart, mind, and will—we long to be transformed. What are we thinking is going to do that?

Essentials for Transformation

Will it be more Bible Study, prayer, service, or worship? Or maybe ZAP! we are transformed! You know, kind of like the “Easy Button” The first part of the list is essential, but the last one very unlikely!

The Reality of Transformation

The reality of transformation is found in Romans 5:3-4

. . . We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Paul is saying that we need to rejoice in the fact that suffering will transform us. I

know that in my head, but my heart has not been feeling the joy these past few weeks. I know many students who have not been feeling the joy either, but the truth is that transformation comes through trials.

Transformation through Trials

1Peter 5:10 says:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

I have been advising and teaching college students for twenty-five years and

every picture on this slide has occurred to one of my students. The

transformation is not just a classroom experience. Life is your classroom. God is

the ultimate teacher and life is His classroom. Think about those He transformed:

Transformations

- Adam and Eve were transformed by leaving the garden
- Noah was transformed while building an ark
- Jonah was transformed in the belly of the whale
- Peter was transformed when he heard the cock crow
- Paul was transformed on the road to Damascus

And just when they thought that the transformation was over. . .

Continuing Transformations

A new phase of transformation began. There was never just one event that completed the transformation.

- Adam and Eve were transformed outside the garden through toil, child bearing. . .
- Noah was transformed while building an ark and gathering his family, and 40 days . . .
- Jonah was transformed in the belly of the whale and by preaching in Nineveh. . .
- Peter was transformed when he heard the cock crow and met Jesus on the shore. . .
- Paul was transformed on the road to Damascus and in the desert . . .

Some of you feel like you are on transformation overload! I understand!

As I was thinking about transformation overload, I realized that. . .

Transformation Process

- It is often in the process of trusting God to bring us through the overwhelming that we are transformed.

One of my students who also faced death in her family this term said in an email that sometimes normal life is not enough to change us. I wish that wasn't true, but I think she is right. It is a matter of trusting God during the overwhelming.

- Think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus was verbalizing his struggle to trust the Father. Was there any other way besides the crucifixion for the Father's plan to be fulfilled? If there is anything in the Bible that speaks to me about Jesus' humanity, it is this. Can't you hear us? God, is there any other way to be transformed??????

- What we face is small in comparison, but significant for us, and we continue to grow each time. "And we . . . are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory . . ."

The transformation is not without effort on our part. In every situation in which we find ourselves, we have a choice. Our choice will take us closer to Christlikeness, or further from it.

Transformation by Choice

In *Mere Christianity* C. S. Lewis writes:

“Every time you make a choice, you are turning the central part of you, the part that chooses, into something a little different from what was before...you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature...to be one kind of creature is heaven; that is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other.”

Slowly, choice by choice, we become more like Christ, but ultimately, we are awaiting our final transformation.

Transformation in Death

Philippians 3:20-21 says:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Amazingly enough, we do everything we can to avoid death. My father said, “All her life she has done everything in her power to stay alive and now she can’t figure out how to die.” So true! It is part of the human condition.

C.S. Lewis often wrote about death and as he neared death himself, he seemed to have it figured out—the final transformation was a glorious transformation to be viewed with anticipation.

In Life and Death

“Once close to the end, C.S. Lewis passed into a coma from which he was not expected to emerge. When he awoke, Lewis was rather disappointed because he, like Lazarus (raised by Jesus after four days dead), had his dying to do all over again.” (Dr. Art Lindsley, C. S. Lewis Institute)

My father understands this. Over ten years ago he almost died of cancer. He said he cannot explain it, and only describes what he felt as “the Glory”. He said he could have gone with the glory, but decided to stay because of my mother. As he was telling me this, he quoted Philippians 1: 19-25:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

We who remain here are being transformed and awaiting the final transformation which will surely be gain for us! No wonder C. S. Lewis was disappointed. No wonder Paul was conflicted. No wonder my father wanted to go with “the glory”.

Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

As the songwriter says, **“We can only imagine!”**