

I. Intro: "Hey folks, I want to let you in on something: A new regime is coming & it's about time!" (idea courtesy of Paul Turley & Jana Norman in

Awaken: The Art of Imaginative Preaching, Logos Productions, 2011, pp. 9-10)

A. The old guard will be done away with ... the corrupt, entrenched system will be gone, and a new reality will be put into place, with a mandate for change!"

1. If that doesn't sound like typical sermon material from me, you're right ... but how you would respond to statements like that, depends hugely on the context where you find yourself now
2. 14 months ago, if you heard something like that on the news you would assume it came from the Trump presidential campaign & the only thing missing would have been the slogan, "Drain the swamp!"
 - a) But if you were a poor person in Honduras in the last week or so, such words about regime change would be very relevant right now ... Such words might get you protesting in the streets or risking getting shot
3. In fact, when any government has been in power facing strong opposition, something like this is what you're likely to hear: *"those leaders who got us into this mess are about to be swept away because a new regime is coming and things are going to change around here"*

B. This morning, when I say a new regime is coming, I'm not referring to contemporary politics ... I'm paraphrasing the message found in Isaiah 40

1. The prophet declares that the days of destruction, the days of long exile in a foreign land are over ... God's people have suffered enough already for their sins
2. The prophet says that now is a time for comfort & restoration, and the image that we're given is like that of a regime change, the coming of a new empire ... listen to how it is heralded:
 - a) "The new emperor is on his way ... Make the preparations!
 For this new regime, the very earth will be shaped to suit his arrival ... the royal caravan must not be impeded!"
 - b) This kind of language and fanfare was not unusual in the ancient world
 the Jews and many other people groups in the Near East had seen empire after conquering empire sweep thru their lands
 And all too often the people on the receiving end of these imperial campaigns were exploited, oppressed and trampled on like so

much grass

3. But Isaiah 40 tells of the arrival of a different empire

- a) The glory of this empire will be revealed, but this time it won't be just certain elite people ... won't be just one ethnic group that gets to see it and enjoy it ... This empire's glory will be seen by ALL people
- b) And while the landscape will have to change to prepare for this new regime, the changes will not come at the expense of the poor and the vulnerable

In this new kingdom, God himself will arrive with might and with a strong arm ...

Yet paradoxically, that strength will not be exercised by military force or coercion

Instead, that strength will be channeled into caring for the smallest and the most vulnerable in the kingdom

II. Friends, this is the vision we are given of God coming into this world and reshaping it

A. This arrival of God's regime calls for changing the landscape

1. We believe that did happen in a very unique way in history first with John the Baptist,
2. It happened especially with Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whose coming was foretold by John, by Isaiah and by other prophets

B. Another landscape change appears in our text in 2 Peter 3, when Peter is combatting some heretical teachers in the early church ... those teachers taught that this present world would continue forever, without end

1. 2 Peter 3 is meant to confirm the fact that the world as we know it and as God created it, will not last forever
2. In essence, 2 Peter 3 points to yet another cosmic-level regime change, where the landscape will literally change
 - a) This is because the heavens and the earth that we know will be replaced by a glorious new heaven & new earth,
 - b) and all of this will be heralded by the final return of Christ as ruler and Lord of the universe
 - c) This is the other Advent of J.C., the one that is yet to come

C. So in our Scripture passages today it seems like there are a lot of landscape changes going on in preparation for these God-arrivals

III. This leads me to ask, **How do landscapes change? How do valleys get raised & mountains made low?**

A. As I've traveled in the eastern U.S. I've marveled at the engineering required for our highways

1. How many of you have ever traveled on I-80 thru central PA, or through the tunnels on the PA turnpike?



- a) There are so many places where the road doesn't go all the way to the bottom of the valley but a lot of earth had to be moved to raise it up just so that we motorists wouldn't have dangerously steep descents
- b) I've marveled even more at the enormous portions of hillsides carved out so that the road's elevations didn't go up & down like a rollercoaster
- c) Last time I drove thru this area, I noticed the steep walls of rock just



above us, all so that we could keep traveling 70 mph

2. So when I hear Isa. 40 at Advent (or John the Baptist being described as its fulfillment), this year one image comes to my mind:

- a) giant earthmoving equipment ...



blasting equipment, bulldozers, front loaders, enormous dump trucks

- b) That's what pops in my head when I hear about valleys being raised up & mountains & hills made low
- c) Leveling is what's needed if we want high speed travel thru landscapes that have valleys and hills
- d) That leveling happens thru giant power equipment ... In today's world, that's how the physical transportation landscape changes

B. So how do spiritual landscapes get changed?

1. How do human lives change for the better, to be more in tune with God's purposes in our world?
2. There are multiple ways God uses for changing the spiritual landscape, but one of the biggest ways is simple:
 - a) It's a word we heard in 2 Peter, and the major word we associate with John the Baptist:
 - b) repentance
3. Repentance is one of the major "leveling tools" for changing our spiritual landscape ... you could say that repentance is "spiritual earthmoving"

IV. But what exactly are we talking about?

A. Repentance is not a very popular word

1. Today we tend to prefer words like "renewal" "transformation" or "regeneration"
2. We sometimes think of repentance as feeling sorry for our sins ... Wallowing in sorrow, guilt or shame is not what most of us enjoy

B. In the Bible, repentance means "turning", so we naturally think of it as turning away from our sins, our failures, our shortcomings ... & that is true

1. Romans 3:23 tells us that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ... the lament we heard last week in Isa. 64 reminded us that there is no one who fully & consistently calls on

Repentance – Turning from ...

Isaiah 64:5

We are constant sinners; how can people like us be saved? (NLT)

Romans 3:23

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (NRSV)

God's name

2. If we want to be in loving relationship with God, then turning 180° from our sins is exactly what is needed, thru the prompting of the Holy Spirit

3. Jesus came into this world to share flesh & blood with us, to show us what the new regime of God looks like and to remove our separation from God

- a) But if we're completely full of ourselves, then there's no room for that Christ child to enter our hearts
- b) Before we can expect God to come to us in Jesus ... repentance from sin is necessary

C. But turning away from something bad is only half the meaning of the word repentance

1. It's not enough to turn from something bad unless you also turn toward something good ... The prophet Amos told God's people,

Repentance – Turning toward ...

Amos 5:4

Now this is what the LORD says to the family of Israel:

"Come back to me and live!"

(NLT)

"Turn to me and live"

2. In repentance we not only turn from our selfishness, our frailty & unfaithfulness ... we also turn toward the grace of God that is extended our way in J.C.

3. We see both of these meanings of repentance in 2 Peter 3, when it describes how God has not yet brought the current world to its end because God is patient ...

- a) God doesn't want anyone to perish but wants everyone to come to repentance
- b) God gives us more time to repent & turn away from the sin that would ultimately lead to our perishing,
- c) Yet the Scripture also tells us we are to be leading positive lives of holiness & godliness while we are waiting for this final God-arrival
- d) This, too, is repentance, when we turn deliberately toward a life of following our Master, Jesus Christ. This is our spiritual earthmoving



D. How long has it been since you deliberately entered into the dual action of repentance?

1. When was the last time you honestly named something wrong, some sinful attitude or action in your life, confessed it to God, and resolved to turn away from it?
2. Equally important, when was the last time you also committed yourself to turning toward the light of God's patient love in order to help you live more faithfully to God's call in your life?
3. Repentance is an action we can do any time, any place, but I want to give you that chance briefly right here this morning

V. Repentance exercise

A. This morning you received with your bulletins a coloring sheet that we've been providing this Advent season, & markers or colored pencils were made available

1. I know many of you have been diligently working on yours, even while I'm speaking ...
 - a) Today I invite you to use this coloring sheet in a particular way, as a reflection tool
 - b) For the next few minutes, while Josh plays softly, I urge you to humbly & honestly reflect on your life and anything you might change that stands between you and God ...
2. On the blank side of the paper please write, "*This Christmas I*

turn from ..." Then whatever it is that the Holy Spirit is saying you need to turn away from, write or color that there

3. While we're still silent, please flip your paper over & let the coloring side be your expression of what you wish to specifically turn toward during this Christmas time

4. If it helps you to write in that space, "*This Christmas, I turn toward*



..." then go ahead & do that.

B. You're still free to turn these coloring sheets in to be displayed with those of others as we'll do each week

1. But as personal as each of our acts of repentance is, I also invite you to keep them & take them home, heading toward Xmas
2. Let's enter a time of reflection and repentance before God (2 minutes)

VI. Conclusion

A. Jesus said, "Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37)

B. You have come before God in repentance, along with others desiring to prepare the way of the Lord ... now what will you do with this token of your repentance?

1. Let me make a few suggestions for how you might use this little paper in the next month as you prepare the way of the Lord yourself:
2. You could ...
 - a) Use it as a bookmark in your Bible or some other devotional book
 - b) Post it on your fridge or your bathroom mirror
 - c) Put it on a wall or bulletin board at work where you see it frequently
3. I encourage you to look at it twice a day from now thru Epiphany:
 - a) Maybe you can start out in the morning recalling what you're turning

Text: 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Isa. 40:1-11

(Advent 2)

8

FROM & asking God to help you let go of that behavior so that you can make more space for Christ to enter

b) Then later in your day, maybe at lunch or near supper, turn the paper over & recall what you're turning TOWARD & let that draw your behavior forward positively for the rest of your day

C. As a way to let the 2 directions of repentance dwell with us a little longer, let us sing "Slowly turning, ever turning"