

- Thomas Kuhn, a philosopher of science, made some observations about how big changes—paradigmatic changes—were necessary for science to advance with creative breakthroughs rather than simply incremental additions to accepted ways.
- Incremental change, for the most part, is the tweaking of a old system based on an extant paradigm. Paradigmatic change leaves the old paradigm and jumps to a new understanding of the big picture.
- Kuhn once wrote that *"All significant breakthroughs in science are 'break-withs' old ways of thinking."* In other words, they are paradigm shifts not simply incremental adjustments.
- So, for example, traditionally, as we have come to understand it and accept it, it scientists takes from 5-10 years to produce a new vaccine for a new infection. Previously, the most quickly developed was the Mumps vaccine that took over 4 years in the 1960's.
- It took less that a year to develop and produce the vaccine now being distributed to fight the Covid 19 pandemic. To accomplish this, there had to be paradigm-breaking—*'break-withs.'* Not the least controversial of these was the use of "messenger RNA" as a component of the vaccine. If you have paid attention, you know how revolutionary—how *'break-with'*—how paradigm changing this part of the process is.
- Guess what? "Break-withs," like this one upset or even scare, most people. Maybe rightly so. I have joked that I might take the vaccine after many others have taken it and have gone many months without transforming into the *zombies* that are often part of so many postapocalyptic dystopian visions of a new reality.
- In other words, kidding aside, this was a big, paradigmatic change in the nature of vaccines that I do not easily trust.

- To make it worse, as with all "break-withs," moving us into new territory, no one can point to clear, previously existing evidence—examples, pictures, data from prior usage to assure me that all will be well if I join the wave of this big, paradigmatic, vaccine change.
- I will need to take a *leap of faith*—a step into a future that necessarily remains vague and uncertain—an unproven future.
- The human or natural flesh *tipping point* in such paradigm-changing situations is whether a person can believe that the potential benefits of stepping into the unknown are so necessary that they are worth the potential risks of trusting a new, unproven way.
- To put it negatively, paradigm change becomes necessary when it seems clear that the rejection of change would result in continuing to *rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic*. If that metaphor is too old, or too native, for you, it simply pictures continuing to make small incremental—even decorative—changes to fix a sinking ship that really will not matter at all to the life of a ship that will soon be lying uselessly on the ocean floor.
- Another writer on big change—paradigmatic innovations, named Everett Rogers studied the phenomena of these changes in groups of people—how innovations were accepted or rejected. He observed a consistent truth whether the changes were scientific, political, social or even religious. He concluded that we humans are generally trapped in our own ***solipsistic*** bubbles. I have found this observation often to be just as true for believers as for unbelievers.
- I had to look up that word, "***solipsistic***." It essentially is saying that we are all often trapped in *egocentric* thinking. We tend to view all of reality as defined by our own limited perspective.
- So, for example, some tend to view climate issues and produce their solutions as if *climate* never existed prior to the limited data they

possess. The assumption is that the earth must have always been as "I" experience it now.

- Often, evidence for macro-evolution, especially the dating within the process, depends on a consistency of the way the scientist is used to the world operating. *"It must have always been this way because I see it this way now."*
- BTW: not to distract you with another issue here, things in this creation have not always been as we observe them today. Everything has not always been consistent with my assumed viewpoint on the data. I am Fundamentalist enough to believe there have absolutely been gardens grown and protected by God, serpents who talk and tempt humans, flooding that likely impacted the consistency of the fossil record, and an ark-experience that impacted the diversity of the zoological genome, men and women who lived for centuries, a day when the sun didn't operate as it had and would again the next day, a star that moved out of its normal traverse to guide gazing-Magi, a baby that incarnated God, a man's death that paid the price for all sin for all human history, a church made up of fallible and sometimes sinful people like us that actually has an *eternally* impactful mission—and so on, and so on!
- I recognize, our flesh-brains tend to short out if we cannot sometimes operate on the false assumption that our perspective is the reality of how things have always been. But, please recognize with me in this moment that this is a convenient myth for the sake of our own comfort. Our reality does not define the limits of all reality.
- I doubt that the Scientist and author Everett Rogers was a Christian, but what he is describing as egocentric, is the "flesh." This is how the "flesh" sees things. It sees them selfishly in terms of what do I see in front of me and what do I want. What benefits me? What do I like?

What makes me comfortable, and keeps me feeling safe?

ULTIMATELY... ***What makes me feel in control? OR, better...***

- ***What makes be LIKE God?*** That was how the temptation was first presented to Eve.
- We have seen from nearly the very beginning of *Genesis* that humans, having the freedom to choose, will very often choose what glorifies them—makes them into a "NAME," and gives them a sense of autonomous personal significance—significance apart from God.
- The way we view reality, our worldview, cannot escape at least some of this selfish, *solipsistic* influence of a fallen flesh—even as born again believers in Jesus still living in the flesh in a fallen world.
- Thus, when something—Oh...say a big change—potentially impacts our way of seeing and wanting things to be, we cannot help but be cautious, maybe afraid and maybe even antagonistic toward it. This is not necessarily based on the merits of the change or on any scientific evidence. It is often based on my eschewing the discomfort that the potential change might bring by being different from the world I have come to settle in—settle in comfortably--safely.
- So far, this is not biblical theology even though I think it is truth that aligns with Scripture. Now, let's begin to build a theological structure for the argument and point I am making. We will start with some more general ideas and move to more specific ideas and then specific application over the next weeks together, Lord willing.
- In the letter to the *Philippians*, do you recall the "***homeland***" the Apostle identified for the Philippians—that is, where they were actually "from" as Jesus' people? In *Philippians* 3:20 Paul wrote clearly...***But our citizenship is in heaven.*** The contrast here was with humans who were consumed by earthly matters—stuck to the

narrow focus of just this earth as if this earth and the life it can promise were their real home when it was not.

- In another place, the writer to the *Hebrews* in their "Hall of Faith" focus celebrated men and women, some named and some yet unnamed, who had lived life by trusting God rather than by what they could narrowly see and could make of this world as home.
- One well-known example of this sort of faith was Abraham. We are told he trusted God's promise of a homeland even though he could not see it and did not even know where he was going to find it. He had no idea where God might be taking him—no scientific proof.
- Why did he risk entering this new paradigm? *Hebrews 11:10* says because "***He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.***" He was not stuck in his own *solipsistic* bubble—his own limited way of seeing things from his personal perspective—at least not all the time.
- In other words, Abraham's *faith* is celebrated because he lived as a man believing this world and its humanly built towers of significance were not his true home and source of significance. He believed there was more than he could see and more than could be proven by means of his earthly flesh. He believed God was making a true home for him and he could only see that by faith.
- Later in *Hebrews* 13:14 we read a general address to believers, "***For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.***"
- I don't have time to connect all the dots on all the other contexts where this point is clearly made but let me give you some other verses that reinforce the truth that ***this world is not our home***. Thus, creating, and maintaining comfort, safety, happiness in terms of this world as our paradigm is never to be our goal as believers on God's mission.

- Jesus himself said in *John* 18:36, **"My kingdom is not of this world."**
- Because of what Jesus taught, in *1 John* 2:15-17 the disciple who was such a close friend with Jesus, John wrote, **"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."**
- In *1 Peter* 2:11 the Apostle Peter, having heard the same teaching wrote, **"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."** You can clearly see the ties here with *Philippians* and *Hebrews*. We are not **citizens** of this world. It is not our home country. We are, Peter says, **"sojourners and exiles."** Therefore, we are not to live in a paradigm produced from a narrow, worldly perspective even if it is comfortable and the idea of paradigm change makes us uncomfortable.
- As sojourners and exiles, we are not meant to **"put down roots"** in our success, comfort, safety and control of this world so that we can **"feel at home."** **We are NOT at home!**
- Let me take you to one more text in the epistle written by James. The half-brother of Jesus, James well knew how Jesus lived his life in this world. Throughout his letter, the *hard* theme summed up in *James* 4:4 is foundational to all he says in his letter. **"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."**

- If you want to live for God—if you want to be on his mission—you cannot live for what you see from only the narrow, worldly, personal perspective that this world can provide in terms of significance and control. You must live by faith in God that there is a whole other place that is our real home—a whole different paradigm for life.
- Contrary to the strawman argument that this theology is “pie in the sky by and by” theology that makes Christians useless in the now time, this theology makes Christians eternally useful right now!
- The people to whom James was writing tended to forget this. They sometimes attempted to live in two worlds as “home.” This left them ***double-minded***. Sometimes they were living by faith and other times, their faith was corrupted by their attraction to the things that seemed like gain from this world. This is a confusing, tiring and painful way of life for one who belongs to Jesus.
- At the start of his letter, James, writing with all this in mind, says in *James 1:2-8*, ***“² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*”**
- We live ***in*** this world but we are not ***of*** this world. We do not belong to it. It is not our home. It is not to be the source of our life, comfort, safety, control, success, significance or anything else. It is not to define our paradigm of the nature of life.

- Yet, because we are still influenced by the flesh, which naturally loves the world, sometimes we trust the narrow feelings the world can give us instead of placing our faith in God that this is not our home.
- Our double-minded faith is corrupted, and weakened when we live this way.
- So, says James, ***God has a GRACIOUS and LOVING process to purify our faith***—to burn away the dross and leave pure gold. He *gifts* us with trials in our lives. These lovingly given, graciously provided trials present ***opportunities*** for us to consider or perspective—our paradigm for life and to trust God more *or* to continue to trust the world to give us life.
- I think most of us are familiar with James' theology of "having joy in trials." Therefore, few of us are likely committed to the precepts of (for example) "prosperity theology" that suggest James' theology of trials was just for "*back then*" in those *earlier* days of the church. They would say it is not theology for us *now* but instead we are to experience success and blessing in the narrow terms the world measures such things. I think this is biblically crazy and I doubt any of you buy into their arguments.
- So, we have this accepted biblical theology of trials coming to us from God as ***individuals*** to wake us up from double-mindedness—that is the gift of disruptive trials to make us make a choice.
- TODAY, I want to argue this is not simply a theology for *individuals* but for all of humanity—then again, not just for each of us individually as separate members of a church but for all of the church as a unified whole.
- Recently I have used the word "***reset***" two or three times in sermons. That word has been a "hot button" for some of you. I

understand that those you consider far leftwing, progressive, socialists have also used this word. They see the difficulties—***the trials***-- of our world these days as an opportunity to "***reset***" the values and long-held truths that most of us hold as dear as they want them to be.

- Still, I do think the Bible teaches the existence of individual ***and*** corporate "***resets***" and that they are indeed opportunities for change. Rather than being *innately* evil, they are gracious opportunities from God to stop, pay attention and make a choice. Having a choice means these other folks may choose the wrong, unbiblical option but it doesn't make the opportunity from God for "***resetting***" faith on a big scale any less valid. There are gracious "reset" opportunities from God in all sizes—tall, grande and venti.
- So, for example, If you have ever attended a funeral service or a memorial service, you have likely recognized that, as sad and painful as death is, each death presents the people in that service with an opportunity to "***reset***" how they think of life and God's part in it, if the funeral officiant is biblical and honest.
- So, just as James speaks of *trials* as opportunities from God for what we think of as individual ***resets***, there are bigger, worldwide *trials* that offer opportunities for the human world or sometimes for God's church to do some thinking and perhaps "resetting" of their too narrow perspective on reality and God's part in it.
- Before I push forward with the biblical theology here, I will tell you again as I have said since last February, ***I believe, our time is a day of reset given to us, the church, as a gift from God.***
- I do not believe we are to face the reset in our world today with safe, incremental changes that allow us to feel we can safely maintain what we are comfortable with doing as church.

- I believe we are being called to change—paradigmatic change—not incremental change of programs, but of our very way we have become accustomed and comfortable to thinking of as “church.”
- I have been saying and preaching this since day one here in FBC but now, God has given the opportunity of a **reset** to grab attention and make us ask especially, ***“In whom are we trusting and where are we making our true home as a church?”*** This is a heart matter not a matter of simple church logistics!
- As I considered this biblical theology of resets, a year ago, at the onset of Covid and then as the mob violence in our comfortable country began, I asked God if he was trying to get my attention individually and/or our attention collectively as his church.
- I asked, “Would God really work this way?” I quickly and easily identified more than 36 major resets described in the Bible for all creation and sometimes more specifically, for God’s people, graciously, even if often painfully, given to wake humans from the sleep of their narrow perspective of worldly reality and make them ask the right questions of their lives.
- As I also keep saying these days, at the time, I was focused on *Genesis* so many of the major patterns and events of reset I easily identified come from there. For example, the ***Sabbath*** itself, built by God into the fabric of creation, was meant to be a regular potential reset—a call to check ones paradigm of life.
- The Sabbath is a meta-pattern. God’s human creatures will spend much time working productively in the wonderful world God has provided so they can fulfill their purpose of being His imagers. This world will seem to be a big, marvelous place especially to us *little* human creatures. It can begin to seem, from a narrow, solipsistic, human perspective that the wonderful world has a power humans

can use to provide their own autonomous comfort and safety—it can be their happy home providing life without the necessity of God.

- So, each week, God’s people were commanded to **reset** their lives (reset their perspective on reality) by ceasing from engaging the enticing world and remembering that faith in God is the only true source of life. True human **home** is only where God is!
- **The flood** is another big example of a reset. In Noah’s day humans collectively, once again, have decided they can live autonomous lives without God. They are building more and more false evidence of accomplishment that this can work even though it never truly can. “Marrying and giving in marriage” is the metaphor for life going on autonomously. They were expecting that they would use the world by their own power to maintain life from their own narrow perspective.
- So, God reset the creation and humans to raise the questions that might return them to trusting Him instead of their own abilities to bring life from the world being their own little, autonomous gods.
- Appointing the line of **Shem** to be the **NAME** bearers and dividing the tribes was a reset. The Babel Tower incident was a reset opportunity from God. Abram leaving Haran and leaving family behind is a reset. The whole matter of Abraham, Lot and Sodom is smaller a reset. Lot’s wife made the wrong choice when the reset presented the opportunity. Sending Hagar and Ishmael packing is a reset. The command to sacrifice Isaac was a reset from God—who (or in what) are you *really* trusting Abraham?
- Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord on the banks of the Jabbok River was a reset. Joseph going to Egypt and famine was a reset. Israel leaving Egypt—the *Exodus* was a reset. The giving of the strictures of the *Law* was a reset. The book of *Judges*, at a minimum,

shows 11 painful resets in cycles. The destruction and exile of the nation—first the north and then the south—is a reset. Later, returning from Babylon and Media Persia to a devastated temple and homeland is a reset.

- Skipping ahead, the coming of ***Jesus of Nazareth*** in the middle of human history was the greatest reset of all human history. Some could see it some couldn't. When faced with this historic reset, some painfully changed their perspective. Others for the comfort of the moment reinforced their narrow vision using *confirmation bias*.
- Some were faced with the reset and chose to continue living in their ***solipsistic*** bubbles of their own worldview that gave them comfort in the world they felt they controlled—that is, ruled as little gods. *"No. I like things as they are in my world and I believe God would want me to have them this way because they make me comfortable and happy."*
- Some chose to trust Jesus and then leave everything of this world behind. They, as it says in the Gospels and elsewhere, "lost this life to gain a better life." It required a humanly painful, paradigmatic change.
- His coming offered a "reset" of the way people had become used to thinking of the Messiah. It gave them an opportunity to think and ask questions about whom they really trusted and where was *really* home.
- ***The church in Jerusalem*** coming out of the Jewish Temple worship resulted from a painful reset for believers. Later, the persecution of Jesus' church in *Acts* was because of a reset from a nearly totally Jewish church to a worldwide church including Gentiles. The movement of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome—Jewish center to Gentile center was the result of a reset.

- The **return of Jesus** will be a reset of this world. The **Millennial reign** of Christ will be a reset. The **White Throne judgement** will be a reset. The **new heaven and the new earth** will be a reset.
- Throughout human history and until the end of that history God will graciously send resets that allow humans to think and ask in whom they are trusting and where is their real home?
- Yet, somehow, most generations of Jesus' church have concluded God would *never* send a reset opportunity to shakeup what they experience as church—what is comfortable and safe and significance for them—from a narrow *solipsistic* perspective.
- I would suggest...***There is no era of Jesus church that has not become solipsistic—self-centered—self-focused in its view of the church making it and holding on to it as the church they want it to be.***
- So, sometimes, God graciously sends a disruptive reset to cause them to ask the right questions and break out of the selfish bubble in which they are the church.
- ***Does the truth of God change?*** No! Emphasizing what doesn't ever change is a sermon for two weeks from today. Does reality as God sees it change? No! What changes is our limited and often self-centered perspective—our vision of what the church is meant to be. **AND THIS IS, ADMITTEDLY, TOUGH, INWARDLY PAINFUL CHANGE FOR HUMANS BEINGS STILL LIVING IN THE FLESH TO FACE!**
- Even philosophers of science and sociologists of change, who probably don't even know God, can study humans and conclude—this sort of paradigm change is frightening, and discomfoting. Therefore, people reject it as unnecessary or even mistaken. It is seen always as something to battle or fix not an opportunity to think.

Series: *May the Church Be the Church*

Sermon: "Resets"

Text: *James 1: 2-8; James 4:4; Hebrews 13:14; John 18:36; 1 John 2:15-17*

RGJR/FBCCS/1-17-21 **UNEDITED**

- Resets offer opportunities for change that requires faith in something or someone (that's the sermon for the next weeks as well).
- As painful and disconcerting as resets like Covid and national political and moral crises can be, I contend, God graciously sends these "resets" to ask us are you trusting me or your way of seeing me that just happens to make **this** world a nice place for you to call "home?"
- I contend he has done and still is graciously sending a reset for the world and especially for his people—Jesus' church, in our very day.
- In whom have we trusted? In whom are we trusting now as we are a church making changes?
- In which sphere of life have we made our true home as the church? Does our heavenly citizenship shape us as a church—our values, goals, our measurements—our methods or does our life in this world so that we do church the way it works for the world.
- Where have we placed our real roots from which we draw our life and our sense of success as the church of Jesus?
- How will we answer the questions I believe this reset raises?
- Or, then again, maybe I am just crazy and we should simply rearrange the deck chairs because there is no iceberg and everything is "just fine".