

Sermon for Sunday, February 6, 1972 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE 800th LIFETIME"

Text: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" John 14:23

Perhaps the most significant book that will be written in the decade of the 70's is Alvin Toffler's Future Shock. As David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd helped us understand the 50's and Michael Harrington's The Other America focused us in on the 60's, Future Shock will shape our perception for this decade and perhaps for the last three decades of this century. Toffler's book is about what happens to people when they are overwhelmed by change. It is his thesis that the incessant and increasing demand for change that characterizes our time brings people into an abrupt collision with the future. The result is what he calls "future shock." He illustrates this by comparing it with "culture shock." Suppose you took a native from darkest Africa who had never been outside the province of his own village and set him down in the midst of New York City. The culture would be foreign to him--the dress, the language, the customs--everything--would be foreign to him and he would suffer from a disorientation called culture shock. Many of our young people who have gone into the Peace Corps have experienced this. But culture shock is different from future shock in this respect: Our Peace Corps youth have had the comforting knowledge that the culture they left behind will be there to return to. Future shock is having the future arrive with such rapidity that the arriving new culture is superimposed over the old. But in future shock there is no comforting knowledge that the culture left behind can be returned to. Mr. Toffler writes:

Take an individual out of his own culture and set him down suddenly in an environment sharply different from his own, with a different set of cues to react to--different concepts of time, space, work, love, religion, sex, and everything else--then cut him off from any hope of retreat to a more familiar social landscape, and the dislocation he suffers is doubly severe. Moreover, if this new culture is itself in constant turmoil, and if--worse yet--its values are incessantly changing, the sense of disorientation will be still further intensified. Given few clues as to what kind of behavior is rational under the radically new circumstances, the victim may well become a hazard to himself and others.

The rate of change can be illustrated this way. Suppose we take the last 50,000 years of man's existence and divide it into equal lifetimes of 62 years. We would then have 800 lifetimes. 650 of those were spent in caves. Only during the past 70 lifetimes has it been possible to communicate effectively between lifetimes through writing. The ordinary man never saw a printed word until the last six lifetimes. Time has not been measured with precision until the last four. An electric motor has been used only in the last two. Almost all of the material goods we use daily have been developed with the present, the 800th lifetime.

The 800th lifetime is different from all others. It is different because we have radically altered the rate--the pace--of change. For example, look at population. In 1850 there were only four cities with a population of a million or more. Fifty years later in 1900 there were still only 19. But by 1960 there were 141 and the urban population of the world is doubling within 11 years now. Another example is the out-put of goods. When a child born today reaches 70, he will be surrounded by 32 times as much as when he was born. Ratio is being transformed in a flick of time.

Or look at the speed of travel. 8,000 years ago in 6,000 B.C. the fastest rate of travel was eight miles per hour by camel caravan. In 1600 B.C. with the invention of the chariot, the rate was upped to 20 miles per hour. 3,500 years later when the first mail coach was introduced in England, it could muster an average of only 10 miles per hour. It was less than a hundred years ago--about 1880-- that the steam engine enabled man to exceed 100 miles per hour. But by 1938 man was cracking 400 mph with his airplane, twenty years later he was doubling that speed with his jets and by 1960 with his rockets he was hitting 18,000 mph as he circled the globe. Technology feeds on itself. That means that technology creates more technology and 90 percent of all scientists who ever lived are alive at this moment.

This accelerating rate of change--this future shock--has increasing implications for us as human beings. The rate of change disturbs our inner equilibrium, altering the very way in which life is experienced. I think all of us are aware that things are moving faster. We have a vague uneasiness that change is out of control and that society, like a snake swallowing its tale, is destroying itself. It is not by accident that a smash hit musical was entitled, "Stop the World-I Want to Get Off." Older people especially feel the difference and more and more we are developing places for them where the pace of life can be controlled. This accelerated pace of change is responsible for the so-called generation gap and for the groping, searching restlessness of the young.

In a world that is already suffering from future shock--and at a rate that is steadily accelerating--man is desperately grasping for some reference point, some stable position, some place to stand. He will not find that place to stand in the changing world about him. His only hope is to find some reference point within himself. Inside his own soul he must discover some stability, some reference point that is unchanging.

The 800th lifetime has brought us to a fantastic inner crisis that can be described accurately only by calling it a spiritual crisis. At precisely the time mankind in his 800th lifetime needed the Church the most, the Church failed him. She failed him. She failed him because she was controlled by men who had lost their own inner conviction, their own inner stability, their own spiritual commitments, their own spiritual nerve. Peter Berger is perhaps America's foremost sociologist of religion. Ten years ago Dr. Berger became the darling of the liberals with the publication of his book The Noise of Solemn Assemblies. In that book he took the church to task for her secure, well-established, self-satisfied "culture Protestantism." But when the liberals asked him to speak recently at the annual meeting of the Consultation on Church Union he left them reeling under what I have laughingly called Berger-shock. He said to them, "It seems to me that, quite simple, it is time to say 'enough!' to the dance around the golden calves of modernity. For some 20 years now we have been fascinated by the question, what does modern man have to say to the church? I wouldn't be too hesitant to answer, probably not much more than he has said so far!" He went on to speak of the need for a religious renaissance and said, "...the leaders of this renaissance will not be the people who have been falling all over each other to be 'relevant to modern man.'" Dr. Berger said, "I have been impressed by a widespread and apparently deepening hunger for religious answers among people of many different sorts. Old convictions have been shattered, institutions are tottering, there is a widespread sense of what sociologists call anomie --a felling of rootlessness, of disorientation and of the basic meanings of life being threatened." Then Dr. Berger added, "Strong eruptions of religious faith have always been marked by the appearance of people with firm unapologetic and often uncompromising convictions." He went on to say, "Ages of faith are not marked by 'dialogue' but by proclamation." And he concluded his address by saying that the Christian community must regain its nerve and achieve a new stance of confidence in itself and its message.

Now, I have spent a great deal of time this morning talking about what two sociologists are saying. One of them is saying what change is doing to men and the other saying what the Church must do to meet man's need. With that in mind, let me draw your attention to our text for this morning. There Jesus says, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." Here we are offered the inner stability, the inner point of reference, the spiritual place on which we can stand. Dr. Berger says that there must be a new conviction and a new authority in the Christian community if the Church is to speak effectively to the world today which yearns to hear a word from the Lord.

Who will speak that word to man in his 800th lifetime? Jesus says that first of all it will be the man who loves him. Under the leadership of liberalism, the Church has sought to accommodate its faith to what modern man is willing to believe or what he wants to believe. The consequences have been disastrous. We have squeezed out of our theology any faith in the supernatural and instead of attracting the hearts and minds of men we find ourselves instead with a mess of theological pottage so thin that even men starving spiritually know that it has no nutritional value for them. The world desperately needs to hear a word of authority from those who love Jesus. It needs a word of authority which proclaims an unchanging God in a changing world. It yearns to hear of an authority of faith from those who have had a personal experience with Jesus as living Lord, and who are convinced--in spirit of however imperfect that experience might be--that they have come face to face with the supernatural, sovereign Lord of the universe. They need to hear a word of authority of a God who made the worlds and created man in his own image, who through the Virgin Mary broke dramatically into human history in the person of Jesus Christ, who on Calvary died for the sins of the world, who was literally raised from the dead as an indication of our own immortality, and who through the inner working of the Holy Spirit is a dynamically real and living presence in the hearts of believers today.

Yes, who will speak to mankind in his 800th lifetime with a word of authority? Jesus says it is the man who loves him, who believes in him, who has some deep and profound convictions about him. Second, in our text Jesus says that the man who has the inner presence of God, who has that inner security and inner point of reference is the man who keeps his word. In a time when the 800th man needed to hear of stable and positive moral certainties, a liberally dominated Church has given him situational ethics that goes no further than the desires of the moment. We negated eternal principles and repudiated the moral codes of an Eternal God. We unleashed a moral license that has left us spineless and desperate for eternal principles and guidelines on which we could build our lives and our actions. Moral anarchy has become the style of the day with desperate results in the lives of men. But Jesus says that He and the Father dwell with the man who keeps his word. The world needs to hear a "Thus saith the Lord.." that plants one foot on the Ten Commandments and the other on the moral certitudes of the New Testament.

Yes, the 800th man needs to hear God's Word. It is a word for which men have been willing to die; it is a word washed with the sweat and tears of martyrs; it is a word that is written with the blood of the saints. At heart the struggle in the church today is over the authority of scripture. Is it the Word of God or not? Those who believe it is need to speak with authority to a world that desperately wants to hear a word from the Lord, for it is the man who keeps that word who has the inner presence of God.

Finally, our text says that it is the man who loves Jesus, who keeps His word, who then knows what it is like to have the presence of God in his life. The 800th man

will not listen to any more theories. He will not listen to any more speculations. But he is desperately eager to hear of spiritual realities from a man who can say, "this is what happened to me," who can share what it is like to know the inner presence of God. Only a man who has a deep, personal relationship to Jesus can speak to today's man with such compelling authority that he will hear and believe.

Our closing hymn will have these words in it, "Change and decay in all around I see. O Thou who changest not, Abide with me." The desperate cry of mankind in his 800th lifetime is a cry for someone unchanging to come and abide with him. Jesus says, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." That is precisely the word that the 800th man wants to hear. Who is there to speak that word to him? Will it be Central? Will it be I? Will it be you? You see, only the man who truly knows Jesus that way can speak with authority to the 800th lifetime.