

# Behold, I Do a New Thing!

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**Isaiah 43:19–21 (NKJV) “Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.<sup>20</sup> The beast of the field will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen.<sup>21</sup> This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.”**

This text was the first passage preached at Grace Fellowship in its first service on Sunday, December 1, 1985. Its words highlighted the expectation we all felt. It reflected the meaning for our existence. It was evident to everyone there that God was doing a new thing!

That was thirty years ago and yet it seems like yesterday. On Sunday, December 6, Grace Fellowship will celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> Church Anniversary! What a testimony to God’s grace, especially in light of the fact that we often see existing churches close their doors and new churches begin and end. I am both humbled and amazed by God’s mercy and faithfulness. I am grateful that God allowed me to be a part, and humbled that He has allowed me to continue thus far. I also understand that God can remove the lampstand of this church if we depart from Him and His purpose. Like Israel, we have learned many things the hard way. We have had our share of disappointments, troubles and setbacks. However the blessings have far outweighed the troubles. Our testimony after all these years is that we are what we are by the grace of God. To Him alone be the glory! This year we celebrate more than a church anniversary; we celebrate our first church “Homecoming”. I have been here from the beginning. I have met a lot of people. Many people have come through these doors. Some have joined. Many others have been touched by the outreaches and expressions of God’s love through its members. On a personal level I have had the honor to officiate at many of your weddings. I have been at the hospital when you had children, helped lead them to the Lord, baptize them, watch them grow up, attend their graduations, see them leave for college, officiated at their weddings, and rejoiced as they too had children. In addition I have had the honor to officiate at the funerals of many of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Over the years we have prayed together, praised together, fellowshiped together, laughed together, rejoiced together, cried together, served together, labored together, stood together, forgave together, and grown together. Some have answered the call to ministry while others felt the tug of God into missions. Over the years Grace Fellowship has become a generational church, an extended family. That is why I say it is a “homecoming”!

Each generation has made its contribution to the success of this church. In some way each has invested their lives, their money, their sweat, their tears, their heart, their soul, their faith, their support, their talent, their friendship, their prayers, their praise, their attendance, their involvement, their service, and their ministry. Many lives have been saved, touched, healed, refreshed, and restored. No sacrifice made was in vain. Each investment made in Christ is still bearing fruit.

It is time to recognize and celebrate the contributions that former generations made to our success. It is time for the present generation to bless the former generations. It is time for former generations to bless the present generation. There is blessing for us all if we will. Blessing one another will restore an appreciation for our legacy and a faith-filled vision for the future. Together we all share in the inheritance of the kingdom of God in this house. All investments made here are still producing dividends. Each acceptable sacrifice is still producing a sweet aroma before the throne. Be encouraged! We will inherit the fruit of our labor if we will not faint, if we will not let go!

During these thirty years, some have moved up to glory, some have moved away, some have moved on, while some have continued on. It matters not what your status is today. God positioned each of you as stones in His mosaic and threads in His tapestry of revival.

God has a plan for East Texas. This is the reason I believe God sent me here. No I am not the only one and it didn't start with me. I discovered after I got here that God was at work before I came and is still at work today. All I know is that it was not my plan to move to East Texas. I wrestled with God over this decision. East Texas is a beautiful place to live with many good people. My family roots are in this area but I never expected to live here. I am here because of the burden of the Lord. God's desire to bring revival is bigger than any one church. However, God will work through His church.

I came to East Texas because of a burden for revival. That burden led to the formation of a church called Grace Fellowship. Grace Fellowship was birthed with a vision for revival. It was birthed with a passion to impact East Texas for Jesus. This church was not birthed to be just another church. Rusk did not need "another church". Grace Fellowship was not birthed to become a holy huddle called to lay low until He returns. I did not move to East Texas just to settle for church as usual. I did not pay the price that I paid to settle for being just another minister to establish another church. Those "pioneer" members who invested their lives in this work did not pay the price they did to settle for church as usual either. When the church in East Texas needs revival, settling is the wrong thing to do! The vision for revival still burns within me as it did when I first came. It is still my purpose, my prayer, my pursuit, and my passion. Have things worked out as I envisioned them and according to my time frame? No. I have learned to trust God and leave the details and timing to Him. While we have experienced measures of revival blessing, there is so much more to come. While our church has experienced seasons of revival, we are yet to see revival sweep across East Texas. Our job is to prepare the way. Only God can bring revival. We must build the altar and prepare the sacrifice. Only God can send the fire!

Because of its vision for revival, Grace Fellowship was naturally called to be different. This was not a matter of pride but of necessity. The difference to which we were called was to avoid conforming to manmade traditions that formed religious ruts that stood in the way of the work of Christ and His Spirit to bring revival. Being different meant returning to New Testament purity, principles, patterns, and power. Granted, sometimes we have been different for the right reasons and sometimes in our immaturity we have been different for the wrong reasons. Sometimes we have been hypocritical rather than transparent or critical rather than redemptive. But God has been faithful to correct us, teach us, guide us, and make us into what He intends us to be. He is not finished with us and we are learning that it is best to cooperate! Our greatest temptation as a church is two-fold. The first is to conform to manmade traditions that quench the Holy Spirit and the second is to embrace faddish extremes that grieve the Holy Spirit. Wherever we have compromised, God has been faithful to shake us, wake us, and remind us that we are called to be a catalyst for the revival in the land! Only God can bring revival. But He has called His church to prepare the way. Revival will come to a prepared people. Therefore we must be prepared. Preparation means paying the price now for what God will do later. Unfortunately we often pay the price short term and then quit. Reaping the fruit of our preparation means staying prepared until God answers. Staying prepared for the long term requires resolve, patience, and perseverance.

In the early days of Grace Fellowship, there was a great price paid in prayer and preparation. There was a great price paid to promote revival and restore New Testament patterns and principles. There was a great price paid to minister to the needs of broken people and to love the outcasts that no one else wanted. There was a great price paid in personal inconvenience and sacrifice. But people paid this price with joy in their hearts and praise on their lips. They knew they were a part of something greater than themselves and dear to the heart of God.

Because the vision for revival requires this church to be different, an unforeseen price had to be paid in being misunderstood by some. Reaching those that no one else wanted earned the church a reputation of being full of misfits and riffraff. This reputation was as unavoidable as it was in the days of Jesus who reached out to the sinners and undesirables that the religious leaders despised and avoided.

Each one that God added to our family is a child of this vision for revival. This vision lives on in the way we think, pray, prepare, teach, preach, and minister to others. Although some are in other places, the seed of revival remains. It matters not that the seed is contained within the walls of this church. In God's sovereignty He has chosen to scatter the seed to the north, south, east, and west. At the moment the seed may lay

dormant, unattended, or fruitless, but by the life-giving breath of God's Spirit, that seed will come alive, grow, and bear much fruit for revival throughout East Texas.

I believe that what God began thirty years ago has not changed. The Lord said, *"Behold, I will do a new thing..."* This text still applies today! It still applies! God has not changed His mind. God is the God of the NOW. He is the "I AM". He is working today! Whatever disappointments and setbacks we have experienced are behind us. We cannot change them neither should we want to change them. These lessons of yesterday have prepared us for the opportunities of today. Our attitude toward the future should reflect the attitude of the apostle Paul who said in Philippians 3:12-14 (NKJV), *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."*<sup>13</sup> *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,*<sup>14</sup> *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* We must put the past under the blood of Jesus and run toward the finish line. Have you been hurt? It is time to forgive, it is time to forget, and it is time to let go. Mistakes? Failures? We have all made them. We have all offended and been offended. We have all hurt and been hurt. But we have all forgiven and been forgiven. Remember also that we have all loved and been loved! We have all given and have all received. We have all touched lives and been touched. We have all cared and received care. We have all rejoiced and been a cause for rejoicing. We have all grown and seen others grow. We all see things more clearly than we did before. It is part of maturity. God our Father has been bringing us all to maturity. It is part of growing as a "family".

How will God accomplish His determined purpose? It will not be through our own might or power but by His own Spirit and grace! Zechariah 4:6-7 (NKJV) says, *"So he answered and said to me: 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!''"*<sup>7</sup> *'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" ' "* The mountainous obstacles to revival will become a plain by the power of His grace! God will finish what He began! It is time to *forget* the past, *focus* on God's purpose, put our *faith* in Him, and *finish* the race that is set before us. It is time to look to Jesus. It is time to depend upon His Spirit and to rely upon His grace. It is time to live again! It is time to believe again! It is time to expect again! The need for revival is greater now than when we first began! It is time to put our hand to the plow and not look back. The fields of East Texas are before us. It is time to expect God to do a new thing all over again!

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