

Text: Eccl. 1:1-11; Lam. 3:19-27; Ps. 40:1-3; 1 John 2:7-11

Title: "What's New?"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: Chicago, IL was the site of the much acclaimed World's Fair of 1933. The theme of the fair was "A Century of Progress," and the point was to celebrate the amazing progress that modern man had achieved. Futuristic exhibits such as the "Homes of Tomorrow" and the manufacturing process of Kraft's amazing new Miracle Whip® salad dressing were on display.

Less than ten years after the "Century of Progress" fair, the world faced the destruction and holocaust of WW2. The fair did not do a great job predicting the nature of the twentieth century. In addition, most of what was amazing and new in 1933 is old, or even obsolete, now that we are at the beginning of 2024. Everything new then is old now. Even the recipe of Miracle Whip® changed in 2006.

Nevertheless, there is something to celebrate in things that are new. The Bible recognizes this. The difference is that when the Bible tells us what is new, it refers to things that transcend the effects of time. Biblical new things never grow old.

As we think about the coming New Year this morning, I want us to ponder some Bible answers to the question, "What's New?" They are essentially two - (1) the world offers nothing that is lastingly new; and (2) the Lord offers everything lastingly new.

I. The world offers nothing that is lastingly new (Eccl. 1:1-11).

Illustration: In 1959 Julian Huxley (the grandson of Thomas Huxley, who is remembered as Darwin's "bulldog") spoke at the Centennial Celebration at the University of Chicago for the 100th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. The theme of his keynote address claimed that classical Darwinian evolution had made old-time religion obsolete. Two years earlier, in his book *Religion Without Revelation*, Huxley wrote: "The

supernatural is being swept out of the universe in the flood of *new knowledge* of what is natural. It will soon be as impossible for an intelligent, educated man or woman to believe in a god as it is now to believe the earth is flat, that flies can be spontaneously generated . . . or that death is always due to witchcraft. . . . The god hypothesis is no longer of any pragmatic value for the interpretation or comprehension of nature, and indeed often stands in the way of better and truer interpretation. Operationally, God is beginning to resemble not a ruler but the last fading smile of a cosmic Cheshire cat” (p. 58). Today, even the most dedicated evolutionists have abandoned the “new knowledge” of classical Darwinism, which gave Julian Huxley confidence to dispensed with his Creator in such blasphemous tones.

Application: In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon spoke of the world that Huxley envisioned, a world contemplated without the existence of God. He calls it life lived strictly *under the sun*, or under the assumption of naturalism, the belief that all reality is nature or natural. Many who claim the authority of science as proof for their unscientific conclusions do so because of their faith in this dogma.

Solomon points out that if naturalism is true, then all is vain (v. 2); and all is vain in naturalism because nothing natural is lastingly new (vv. 9b-10). The search for new things in the decaying world of nature is vain, and this is consequential in two ways.

A. Because nothing in the world is lastingly new, nothing in the world truly satisfies (Eccl. 1:8).

Illustration: Many of us can list all the new stuff we got for Christmas this year, but we would have trouble enumerating the new things we got last year and the year before. Those things are somehow old now, and because they became old it took some new things this year to satisfy our Christmas expectations. Last year we were all excited to open those nicely wrapped presents, but this year those same presents would not give us the same excitement were they put under the tree again. None of the Christmas gifts we were given this year ends our desire for more gifts

next year. None of these things perpetually satisfy because none of them are lastingly new.

Application: The world often claims to offer a lot that is new and satisfying: new possessions, new fun-filled experiences, a new setting. We think these are solutions for discontentment. Solomon warns us that these offerings are deceptive. They are vain, unsatisfying, and transient. The world lies about this. When was the last time a TV commercial explained to you that the product advertised will grow old and ultimately not bring you true satisfaction? Imagine that electric car commercial showing all the stops you have to make to recharge to get anywhere.

By way of contrast, God always tells us the truth up front about what He offers. He never tries to make His will seem new and exciting when it is not. Notice how the Lord dealt with young Baruch, Jeremiah's assistant (Jer. 45:1-5). There are going to be aspects of the will of God for our lives that do not involve possessing more, having more fun, and launching off in a new direction. That should be ok for us, because seeking new things in this world will fail to satisfy.

So what, if anything, can satisfies in a lasting way? God can (Eccl. 12:13-14; Heb. 13:5-6, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' So that we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.'"). Satisfaction is available in Him.

B. Seeking new things in the world leads to idolatry (Acts 17:16-21).

Illustration: Also in 1933 John Dewey and 33 other humanist educators formulated 15 principles that they called the *Humanist Manifesto*. The seventh principle of the document defined *religion* as follows: "Religion consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant. Nothing human is alien to the religious. [Religion] includes labor, art, science,

philosophy, love, friendship, recreation -- all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living."

Application: Paul defines *idolatry* in much the same way. He does so in v. 29 of this passage. He says that idolatry is "an image formed by the art or thought of man." The *Humanist Manifesto* says religion is "labor, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship, recreation — all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living." What Paul calls *idolatry*, the world around us calls their *religion*.

And note that there was a connection in Athens between seeking new things in this world and its idolatry (vv. 16, 21). If we have the disposition that old things are bad and new things are good, we are going to become discontent with the true God who exists from eternity past and with His truth which is very ancient and never updated. We will long for newer gods to take His place.

This happened to the children of Israel (Deut. 32:15-18, "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee."). We need to be committed to the God of our fathers. We need to worship Him the way they worshipped Him. The search for something new will lead to strange new gods, to pagan idolatry. True Christianity is conservative and traditional in this sense.

II. The Lord offers everything that is lastingly new (Lam. 3:19-27).

Illustration: After the tragedy of 9/11/2001, there were circulated a number of pictures of the scene of the attack in New York via email. One that I saved shows the rubble of the World Trade Center buildings all around a nearby flag pole that had the Stars and Stripes still flying proudly on it. A survivor of the attack is

standing bruised and beaten at attention gazing on the flag. The caption of the picture reads, "And our flag was still there."

Application: The book of Lamentations is named what it is because Jeremiah here laments the destruction of Jerusalem. The book is full of the prophet's mournful tears over this destruction sent by God to judge the sins of his nation. But amid the rubble of lamentation, the passage we just read flies unfurled like a beacon of hope at the heart of the book. Even in the midst of disaster, there are lastingly new things that cannot be destroyed. The Lord is their source. Life in the Lord offers everything that is lastingly new. Like Paul told the Corinthians: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away. All things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Notice 3 such new things.

A. God's compassion is lastingly new (Lam. 3:22-23).

Illustration: God's compassion is very different than human compassion in this regard. I wish my wife could say that my loving-kindnesses never cease and that my compassions never fail, but she cannot truthfully say that. I wish my kids could say so, but they know better. The love of humans grows weary and fails, but God's love never does. It is lastingly new. We never have to wake up in the morning and wonder whether God will love us today. Our love for Him may falter that day, but He loves us exactly as He should, and that love is new every morning.

Application: So what should our response be to the new compassions and great faithfulness of our God? The passage tells us: (1) humility (vv. 19-20), (2) hope (vv. 21, 24, 26), (3) patience (vv. 25-26), (4) seeking Him (v. 25), and (5) bearing the yoke of serving Him responsibly, even in our youth (v. 26).

B. The believer's song is lastingly new (Ps. 40:1-3).

Illustration: Not every believer can sing well, but every believer has a new song. I went to high school with a friend who truly sang monotone. When he wanted to sing higher notes, he got louder, not higher. And when he wanted to sing lower notes, he

got softer, not lower. But he still enjoyed singing the songs of the faith. David was a great musician, and his new song he sang about here is a blessing that every believer possesses. It is a gracious gift of our salvation conversion. Notice some features of this lastingly new song.

1. We are not born with this song (v. 3). It is not something that comes from our skills, gifts, or talents. It is not something we earn or deserve. Before God gave us this song, we were stuck in a horrible pit and miry clay (v. 1). All we could do was cry out to the Lord for salvation. But by God's love and grace, in sending His own Son to die for our sins, he heard our cry and changed that cry for help into a new song of salvation thanks.

2. The song is put into our mouths (v. 3). The new song is a song that many see. Notice that it is a song that God places not only in the heart and mind, but also in the mouth. It is therefore a song that others are to hear. When we sing the songs of our faith, we ought to sing with great energy and enough volume that others might hear us. We should encourage one another not to allow Satan to take away our song. We sing throughout the week, not just on Sunday mornings.

3. The song was sung by David (v. 3, "*my* mouth"). David sang the believer's song thousands of years ago. Changing styles may help for entertainment purposes, but our song is not supposed to entertain. It is supposed to help men and women fear God and trust in Him (v. 3b). We should be able to truly sing what David sang as his fellow believers, because his song is our song, something lastingly new. Using the styles of music to which the Psalms of David may be put is a good rule of thumb.

C. God's commandment is lastingly new (1 John 2:7-11).

Illustration: There is a sense in which the game of chess is both something old and something new. It is the same old board with the same number of squares on it, the same two colors – black vs. white, and the same set of pieces on each side. Yet every game of chess is new in the sense that, with rare exceptions, the moves

made in any given game you may play will be entirely different from the moves you made in any previous game.

Application: John tells us that there is a sense in which God's commandment that we love one another as Christian brothers and sisters is both something old and something new. He tells us that it is old because believers had it from the beginning in their Bibles (v. 7). The story of Cain and Abel certainly teaches the importance of loving our brothers (1 John 3:11-12).

But there is also a sense in which the command to love our brothers is a lastingly new commandment (v. 8). It is new because we are to love our brothers the way Christ loved His (John 13:34, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another"). This is a new commandment because we are now to love others the way Christ loved us. If we hate our brothers, the light of Christ is not in us. We are walking blind in darkness.

Have you been blinded with the darkness of hatred? Are you incurably angry over something that was done to you or some difficulty you had to endure because of a brother in Christ? The Bible says that we lack the light of Christ when this is true of us. He has given believers a new commandment, to love one another the way He loved us. We have the opportunity in His power to love our brothers with a love that never grows old, something lastingly new.

Conclusion: A red 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO Berlinetta, said to be one of only a handful, was snapped up for \$38.1 million in California, becoming at the time of the purchase the most expensive car ever sold at auction. The previous record was held by a 1954 Mercedes-Benz W196R Formula 1 model bought in Britain for \$30 million. Both of these cars were in mint condition. They were still like new, and they were valued by their buyers as a special exception to the normal course of things in the world in which we live. In a world where new things become old, these cars were valued highly for still being like new for just a few years.

How wonderful is it that we as believers do not need that kind of money to enter this new year of change and decay in possession of things that are eternally new. Our relationship with the Lord, His calling on our lives, His compassion available every morning, our salvation song, and His commandment that we truly love one another as Christ loved us are all lastingly new.

Have we valued these things correctly? Are we determined to live for things that never grow old in 2024?

If so, the Lord has promised, “Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:20-21).

1 John 2:15-17, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of the Lord abideth forever.” Forever new.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching