

## UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Fifteen years ago, a lady got up on the TV show ‘Britain’s Got Talent’ and she had a sass and a verve that didn’t fit in with her appearance. She told them her name was Susan Boyle, and that she wanted to be as famous as Elaine Paige, and everyone started laughing; not with her as much as at her. On what had been presented to them so far, what could this lady possibly do but make a fool of herself. So, with that sad part of our human nature which is quick to make judgements and finds entertainment in people making fools of themselves, they all sat back to be amused.

And then, she started to sing. The judges’ mouths dropped, the crowd was shocked into an amazed silence. Susan finished her song to a standing ovation as people were just totally amazed and blown away by the way their judgment had been so wrong. As one of the judges said, ‘this has been the biggest wakeup call for us ever’. As this footage was repeated again and again on TV and watched on YouTube around the world the one message kept on coming back; just how wrong we can be in our judgments when we judge people only by appearances. After Susan Boyle had sung, nobody would look at her in the same way ever again.

A few thousand years before this a similar thing happened among God’s people, the Israelites. For a number of years the people of Israel had been nagging God for a king. God kept telling them they didn’t need a king, they had Him. Still, they kept on; they wanted a king because they wanted to be like everyone else. Finally, God gave in. He gave them a king; a fine, strong, handsome man named Saul. But God warned them, whatever happens is now on your heads. As it turned out, Saul wasn’t a good king; he was arrogant and had a bad temper which affected his judgments. God then decided to replace Saul as king, and told His prophet Samuel to go to see a man named Jesse, one of whose sons would be the new king.

There was some excitement and much fear when the prophet Samuel came to town and asked Jesse to join him for a sacrifice. But not enough excitement, apparently, for Jesse to bring all his sons along to the event. His youngest, David, was left out looking after the sheep. Each of Jesse’s sons, beginning with the eldest, was brought before Samuel, who waited for God to tell him which one would be king. When Samuel

saw the first big fine strapping lad, he thought, 'This must be him'. But God said, 'No'. The same happened for the second, third, right through to the seventh son. Samuel then had to ask, 'do you have any more'. 'Well, yes', replied Jesse, 'there is young David out in the field. We didn't even bother to bring him in to see you'. And when David was sent for and came, God told Samuel to anoint him, because David would become the next king of the people of Israel. Samuel and Jesse had also judged wrongly. They had judged who should be the next king based on how they looked at that person, not how God looked at them.

After she sang publicly for the first time, Susan Boyle would never be looked at the same way again. As he was anointed as the future king young David's life would never be the same again. Like them, our lives have been changed also. Unlike Susan Boyle it's not because of anything we do or can do, our abilities don't come into it. But like David, our change is because of how God looks at us.

Like David, through God's work we are now 'Under new management'. Paul puts it like this in our reading, 'Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new. God has done it all!' Some of the language Paul uses here, like the word for 'belongs', has a bit of slave market feel to it. It suggests that we have been bought, and now we have a new Lord and master in our lives. And this is true. In our Old Testament reading David was changed when he was anointed with oil to be the new king; his life would never be the same again. In our lives, we are changed when we are anointed with water and the Holy Spirit in our Baptism. We are now new people. Not recycled. Not merely transformed. Through what God has done for us through Jesus we have been completely made new. We started as people who were in rebellion against God because of the sin we were born into. God knew we couldn't change this by ourselves, so He bought us, He made us His own, and the price He paid was the blood of Jesus on the cross. We are now in the process of this change, as, through the Holy Spirit in our lives, we start to live as who we are; people who belong to God, the old made new. Until, one day in glory, we will be completely transformed to be like Him; loving and glorifying God and loving one another perfectly.

We are, then, under new management. But what does that mean? Does it mean anything? When we see that sign on a business we expect to see a difference, don't we, that's why they put the sign up. The new

owners are saying that under them the business will be better than it was before, and they're encouraging us to come and check out the differences. As Christians, we are under new management, we have been bought. Again, Paul says that 'anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person'. As to what it means he writes, 'He sent Christ to make peace between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others', and a little earlier, 'We are ruled by Christ's love for us'. In other words, the difference in this new ownership is there to see. Having been made God's children, people will no longer look at us the same way ever again.

How does that work out in reality, though? In our lives, is that difference always seen so clearly? I know it is sometimes, but that's not what Paul is talking about here, is it? He says that we are 'ruled by Christ's love for us'. God, and love for God, comes first in everything we do. In the first place, it means we put God above everything else. We can ask ourselves, in every situation, am I controlled by God's love as shown in Jesus, or am I controlled by my love for something else? What priority does worship of God have in my life? Do I give time to reading and studying God's Word? Do I have time to talk to God in prayer, or does that get squeezed in when it will fit? Do I use the gifts, material and spiritual, I have been given in a way that glorifies God and serves other people? Looking at my life, is it clear who the new owner is?

And following on from that, we can ask ourselves, how do I go with reflecting this out to others? When we think about being ruled by Jesus' love for us a big part of that is forgiving others, but how often do we struggle with that? How many grudges and hurts do I hold against others, things which are damaging me and my relationships? Jesus was also selfless, yet how many times do I get impatient when people don't do things the way I want them done? How many people do I find it hard to tolerate and understand at my work or in other groups I am a part of? In my family, how many times does my selfishness overcome the selflessness I am called to show? In my church family, with my fellow Christians, how often do I struggle with showing all these things? We do get it right some of the time, but how do we go showing all of the time that we are now under the management of God?

Each week we begin our worship service by remembering our Baptism with the words, ‘in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’. As we do so, we remember that, despite our failings, we still do belong to God. When we come forward to receive Jesus’ body and blood, we are reminded that in Jesus’ death we have received both the forgiveness for these failings, and the strength to go and again try and live as those we are. In the Bible, again, and again, and again, as well as hearing these calls to live as those under God’s management, we hear the even louder call of how God loves each of us so much He freely forgives us through Jesus whenever we turn to Him. We are under new management, but each day we still need to look to the cross of Jesus, to there both see the forgiveness for when we fail to show this, as well as the strength to keep on trying.

The Susan Boyle story showed us that our judgments of people can often be wrong, and how people will never look at her in the same way ever again. The story of David, the shepherd boy who was anointed as king, shows us that God sees people not as we do, but as who we are through Him. Through Jesus, God sees us as people who are both loved and perfect. People who have been made new. Despite the strong language Paul uses here, he didn’t always live perfectly as someone under God’s management, he confesses that a number of times. But still, he knew that through the cross of Jesus he was still one of God’s dearly loved children, and nothing would change that. Living under God’s management, may we daily remember that we live in His forgiveness, and continue to ask for His help to live as those who belong to Him. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Have you ever had the experience of a business you knew well coming ‘Under New Management’? If so, did that make its service better, worse, or could you see no real difference?
- Think about what it means that, as Christians, we are now under new management because God has made us new through Jesus. What does this mean to you? What effect does it have on your life? How would you be different if this was not the case?
- Are there any areas of your life which you are struggling to let God’s new management come into? If so, pray about them, hand them over to God. Ask for God’s forgiveness where this is needed, and for His help and strength to put your whole life under Him.

Pray: thank God for sending Jesus to save us and putting us under Him. Ask Him to help us to live our lives as people who belong to Him.

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