

New Beginnings

This morning I'd like to talk to you about "new beginnings", after all, tomorrow night when the clock strikes twelve, millions of people the world over will cry out "Happy New Year", and make resolutions to live a better life, and that's a good thing. The trouble is the majority don't know where the source of power is for them to be able to actually follow through with their new year's resolutions. Some people may have a strong enough will to accomplish their goal, but far and away more will fail after just a few days or weeks.

There are only two times during the year when I like to preach a sermon in keeping with certain holidays. One is Thanksgiving, which is past and I didn't get it done, because as Christians we ought to be thankful to God. And the other one is New Years, because again, as Christians we should encourage the idea of making a new start, because normally new year's resolutions are related to health and moral issues, but they've got to be done in the right way to be successful.

And so, today we're going to talk about "new beginnings." Don't most of us like new things? Some of you may have received a Christmas gift from someone a few days ago, and how would you have felt if you had received a used gift of a hand-me-down item? Would you rather have a new car or an old clunker? As long as you don't have to pay for it. Would you rather have a new house or an old termite-infested one? Again, we're talking gifts here. Would you rather have a new suit of clothes or a ragged one? The teenagers today would probably like a ragged one, but that's beside the point. Would you rather have new shoes or worn out shoes? And the list could go on, but I think you get the idea.

I grew up in a home where new things were few and far between. And being the last of 5 children you can probably guess that I was the recipient of many a hand-me-down. But as I look back on it now, that wasn't all bad. One thing's for sure, I wasn't spoiled. I didn't grow up being discontent because I couldn't have what I wanted when I wanted it, as many children are today, and sad to say even some adults who haven't outgrown their selfishness. Even now, I really don't mind going to a second-hand store to get a bargain; in fact, I rather enjoy it. But you know, in the spiritual realm it's not that way. The God we serve is not the owner of a second-hand store. His mercies are new, how often? Every morning.

Notice what it says in **Lamentations 3:22, 23**, "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new (**or fresh**) every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

I looked up the word **NEW** in the dictionary and found 6 interesting definitions. The first one said, "not second hand." I heard an old-timer say to me one time, "God has no grandchildren, only children", and that's true, isn't it! None of us are going to get to heaven on someone else's religious experience, or on someone else's coat tails, as the saying goes. If we could, it would be a second-hand experience, wouldn't it? And that's not acceptable to God. Each one of us must have a new and personal experience with the Lord on a daily basis. Just as yesterday's food can't

give us continued strength for today, neither can yesterday's experience give us sufficient power to resist temptation today. What does that mean? It means we will be overcome by the enemy if we don't commune with God every day.

The second definition said, "Starting fresh." How often do we need a fresh start with Christ? Every day, every morning. And notice, the Scripture we read a few minutes ago doesn't say God's mercies are new every evening, but every morning. You're probably familiar with the next statement from ***Steps to Christ, page 70***, but I'll read it anyway, because we all need the reminder. Here's what it says, "Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ."

And isn't that what we want? To be molded more and more after the likeness of Christ should be what all of us are shooting for. Otherwise our religion is simply an exercise in futility. There's a song in the hymnal, I believe it's #39, and it goes like this, "Lord in the morning thou shalt hear my voice ascending high, to Thee will I direct my prayer, to Thee lift up mine eye."

We need to understand that committing our lives to God in the morning is the first step in the prescription for victory throughout the day. Many people today think conversion is a one-time experience, but that's not true! It's true that eternal life begins at conversion, but our salvation is not yet accomplished at conversion. If we have Christ we have life, but if we become disconnected we forfeit that life. Conversion is not complete till Christian character is perfected. Let me read you a couple inspired statements that will prove the point.

The first is from ***My Life Today, page 313***, "When souls are converted their salvation is not yet accomplished. They then have the race to run; the arduous struggle is before them to do, what? 'To fight the good fight of faith,' to press forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling which is in Christ Jesus. There is no release in this warfare; the battle is lifelong, and must be carried forward with determined energy proportionate to the value of the object you are in pursuit of, which is eternal life."

Friends, eternal life is worth the struggle, amen? It's worth it; in fact it's more than worth it, but we probably won't realize the full extent of it's worth until we get to heaven and then afterward get to experience the earth made new.

The second statement is from ***Volume 2 of the Testimonies, page 505***, "None are living Christians unless they have a daily experience in the things of God and daily practice self-denial, cheerfully bearing the cross and following Christ. Every living Christian will advance daily in the divine life. As he advances toward perfection, he experiences a conversion to God every day; and

this conversion is not completed until he attains to perfection of Christian character, a full preparation for the finishing touch of immortality.”

I want that finishing touch, don't you? We've got to have it or we will fail of realizing what God has prepared for those that love Him. Daily conversion is what sanctification, or living a life of holiness, is all about. We must die to self every moment of every day, and we must do this the rest of our lives. That is true Bible sanctification, and not that we get in one good day just before we die. It's a lifelong process.

I read a statement one time that said, “It takes more courage to live for Christ than to die for Him, because to die requires the courage of a moment, but to live for Him requires the daily sacrifice of self.” True Christianity is not for sissies friends, it requires a daily struggle. Our salvation is a battle and a march, and there's no stopping place this side of heaven, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. If you come to the conclusion that Jesus did it all for you and therefore requires no effort on your part, you will certainly fail of receiving everlasting life. And so, how serious is this?

Hebrews 2:18 says Jesus suffered being tempted. How did He suffer? By not giving in to His fallen sinful nature. And don't think that He didn't have one. He lived life the way we have to live it in order to be our Savior. He came down to the level of those He wished to save, and if we don't think so, we will surely come to the conclusion that God will have to save us in our sins when the Bible is very clear that Jesus came to save us from our sins.

You see, when we choose not to do what our carnal nature is prompting us to do, we cause it to suffer, because it wants to be satisfied, and when we deny it the thing it wants, it suffers, and because our sinful nature is a part of us, we feel it, don't we? And **1 Peter 4:1** tells us what the result of this suffering will be. Let's read it, because it's important for us to understand this. **1 Peter 4:1**, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh (**that's fallen flesh**), arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: (**now listen**) for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath (**done what?**) ceased from sin.” Do you get it? If we are not causing our sinful nature to suffer, that means we're giving in to sin, and if we're giving in to sin, how are we ever going to have victory over it? If we don't have victory over sin here in this life, we're not going to inhabit the new earth, because Jesus is not going to populate a perfect place with imperfect people. Does that make sense? I hope so.

We are deceiving ourselves if we think Christianity is an ease loving, accommodating, cross-less religion. Jesus says, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself (**and thereby cause his sinful nature to suffer**), and take up his cross, and follow Me.” That following requires causing our sinful nature to suffer by ceasing to sin. And if we don't suffer like Jesus suffered, we don't belong to Him. And if we don't belong to Him, we have no chance of becoming citizens in the earth made new.

The third definition of the word “NEW” that I found interesting is, “Connected with now.”

Something new cannot be something connected with yesterday or last year, but to now! We dare not be satisfied with yesterday's religious experience, or a conversion that took place 20 or 30 years ago, or whatever the case may be.

I cherish my conversion experience, it has helped me through the years to understand how one is saved, but just because I accepted Jesus as my Saviour 44 years ago does not mean I'm still in a saved condition today. I must continue to abide in Christ if I would be saved today and tomorrow and until the Lord comes, or should I have to rest in the grave until the first resurrection.

Notice what Jesus said in **John 15:1-8**, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. **(In other words, the Father is the farmer, or the One who works the land, or the soil of our hearts. That means that all three persons of the Godhead are involved in our salvation, and that should be an encouragement to us.)** Every branch in me **(Jesus said)** that bears not fruit he takes away: and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it **(or prunes it)**, that it may bring forth more fruit. **(This is not a very pleasant process most of the time, by the way, but it's necessary if we want to produce more fruit.)** Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch **(that's us)** cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be my disciples."

So, regardless of our conversion experience, unless we continue to abide in the vine, we are going to burn in the end. I know that's not very pleasant to think about, but I have to tell you the truth. We must maintain a vital connection to Christ, or the sap of the Holy Spirit will not flow into our little branch, and if that happens we are spiritually dead and no longer disciples of Christ, no matter what our profession.

The fourth definition of the word "NEW" is, "To come into being." Something that is new is something that just came into being. And again, if we are not born again every day, we are trying to live off an old experience. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, "If any man be in Christ he is **(what?)** a new creature." When we become connected to Jesus something new is brought into being. We are not the same person we used to be. Why? Because "old things are passed away." The chains of sinful habit have been broken. "Behold, **(how many things become new?)** all things become new." What does all this mean? Everything except this one cherished idol? All but this one favorite indulgence? NO! All means "totality." In **Jeremiah 29:13** God says, "And you shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart." If we haven't found God, it means we're holding something back.

I remember very clearly when I was a relatively new SDA and found out what the Spirit of Prophecy had to say about labor unions. I was working in a water heater factory in California and

I got a phone call one Sunday morning from my Sabbath School teacher, a very godly old gentleman, and I'm looking forward to seeing he and his wife in heaven, because they're both gone now, and after a few minutes of small talk he asked me if I was required to belong to a labor union to work at my place of employment, and I said, "yeah, why?" And he said, "Don't you know what the Spirit of Prophecy says about labor unions", and I said, "No." Then he said, "Do you have *Selected Messages*, book 2"? and I said, "No." Then he said, "If I lend you mine would you read it?" And I said, "Sure." So later that day he dropped it off and I read it, and I was so convicted by what I read that I gave my notice to the boss the following day that I would be quitting. And for the sake of time I won't go into any more detail about that, but I realized that if I was going to be a disciple of Christ I had to be willing to give up all in order to follow Him.

I had a family to support at the time and it wasn't an easy decision to make, but I made it, and God worked things out so that I got a better job and with more pay within just a couple days. But if I would have braced myself against the conviction of the Holy Spirit and chose to ignore divine counsel, would I have continued to abide in the Vine? No. And who knows where I'd be today.

And I can tell you that whatever it is in your life that you know you must do to stay connected to Christ, you better do it, and if you choose correctly, God will not abandon you; that I can tell you. If we don't give God all, we give Him nothing. **Proverbs 3:5, 6** says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." And that's a promise! If we don't trust and acknowledge Him, we can't expect Him to show us the right path to take when we find ourselves needing direction.

The next definition of the word "NEW" is, "Not before known." When we become Christians it becomes known to others that we have been with Jesus. Our friends and family members may not recognize the old us anymore, because the person we used to be is no more. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." You see, the object of the Christian life is for self to stay dead. That's where the daily struggle comes in.

Steps to Christ, page 43 says, "The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness."

And if we are willing to do that, God's promise is "that He is able to keep us from falling (back into sin), and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

The last definition of the word "NEW" is, "Never used before." When all things became new in my life, I began using things I had never used before. The Bible was something I'd never used before. Prayer was something I'd never used before. Christian fellowship was something I never had before. Healthy food was something I had never eaten before. Decent language was something I had never used before. Real patience was something I never exercised before, and

I'm sure some of you can relate to that.

Conversion is a 180° experience, not a 360. When a person is headed down the broad road to perdition and they encounter Jesus and accept Him as Lord and Saviour, they turn in the opposite direction and begin heading up the straight and narrow path that leads to life. Too many professed Christians today are caught in the 360° revolving door experience, serving God one minute, and the devil the next. Sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting and thinking everything is OK, or that it's impossible to stop going around in circles. Have you ever been caught in that revolving door and found yourself going around in circles? If you have, or if you are today caught in an experience like that and you cry out to God, He will stop the spinning; He will set your feet upon that narrow path, and once He has placed you there He won't push you, He'll lead you, but you have to follow. And if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus we're not going to fall off the path, because He will never leave that path. And how do we follow Jesus? By following His word! Not feeling; not impressions; not what a man thinks is right, but "It is written." Bring your life into harmony with its teachings. Educate your conscience with the Bible and then be careful not to violate your conscience, and know what you believe because you have studied it for yourself.

I heard someone tell a story one time about two ladies who were neighbors. One was a Catholic, the other a Protestant. The Protestant asked the Catholic lady what she believed about a certain teaching, and the Catholic's reply was that she had a brother who was a priest and was coming to visit soon, and "When he gets here, ask him, he'll tell you what I believe." And unfortunately this is the mind set of many Christians today. I've talked to several people over the years who didn't know how to respond during a Bible study and wanted me to talk to their pastor, but friends, we need to personally know how to give an answer to every man that asks about the hope that is within us with fear and trembling and not rely upon the arm of flesh. "My pastor said so" is not going to fly when our names come up in review before God during the judgment.

2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing (**or rightly interpreting**) the word of truth", making the Bible its own interpreter and not any human being. We are to study for ourselves because it is for ourselves that we must answer before God someday soon.

Notice what it says in ***The Great Controversy, page 598***, "It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God."

Oh how I wish everyone would follow this counsel; if they did we wouldn't have near the problems we have today with fanaticism and extremes, and every wind of doctrine blowing around to confuse people.

In *Testimonies for the Church, volume 4, page 616* it says, "The heart preoccupied with the word of God is fortified against Satan."

Do you know what the word "Preoccupied" means? It means, "Already occupied or completely absorbed." In other words, when Satan comes with his suggestions and temptations and our minds are already occupied with the things of God, they won't have near the impact. We need to be so completely absorbed with God and His word that we don't have time for Satan; so when he comes knocking at our door we can ignore him.

I remember reading a story about Martin Luther when he was hiding out from the papacy that very much wanted to kill him. One night as he was sleeping he was awakened by some very scary sounds, and when he opened his eyes, there was Satan standing at the foot of his bed, and as he looked at him he said, "Oh, it's just you", and then he rolled over and went back to sleep. Martin Luther was able to disrespect the devil that way, because he was preoccupied with the things of God, and if we ever have to experience something similar, I hope we will be able to respond the same way.

I'd like to finish up by taking a look at some "NEW" verses of scripture. **Ezekiel 36:24-26**. These verses are spoken to Israel, but they apply to us as well. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

God has a new heart and a new spirit to give to every individual who will accept it. Israel of old didn't understand that without divine grace and a change of heart, they couldn't render acceptable obedience to God's law. Like many people today, they understood that obedience was necessary, but they would really rather indulge in sin. But when we have a "NEW" heart and a "NEW" spirit, then we will be enabled to obey God and like it, and not just because we think we're supposed to. We talked about heart obedience last month, so we should already know how important it is to obey God out of a heart of love for the sacrifice that was made upon the cross of Calvary.

In **John 13:34** Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

What was **NEW** about this commandment? Didn't the disciples already know they were to love one another? Yes! But did they love one another as Jesus had loved them? No! What Jesus did was give them a **NEW** demonstration of love. He said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a many lay down his life for his friends."

There have probably been many people throughout the history of this world who have sacrificed their lives in order to save someone else, don't you suppose? But I haven't heard of very many who were willing to die for their enemies, have you? I know of only two individuals in the Bible, beside Jesus, who were willing to be snuffed out of existence for eternity in order that others

might live for eternity; one is in the New Testament and one in the Old. In **Romans 9:2, 3** Paul said, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." And in **Exodus 32:32** Moses asked God to blot him out of the book of life if He couldn't forgive the sins of his brethren. That's the kind of love Jesus demonstrated, but unfortunately the people of Moses' day didn't understand it; the people of Paul's day didn't understand it; and the people of Jesus' day didn't understand it. And sad to say, most of the people in the world today don't understand that kind of love, but that's what Jesus did for you while you were yet His enemy.

According to **Galatians 6:15**, there's only one thing that really matters. It's not race, or riches, or material goods, or worldly education, or a number of other things. Paul said, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision, but **(what?)** a new creature." That's what matters.

The spiritual significance of circumcision was that Israel was to be different from all the heathen nations around them. It represented the cutting away of sin from the life. Outward forms and ceremonies, like circumcision, couldn't do it then and it can't do it now! It has to be a totally **new** creation and the right kind of fruit.

Ephesians 4:23, 24, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

The thing we need to realize here is that when we become NEW men and women in Christ Jesus, it's not just a renovation of the old, but a new life altogether. It's not just a cover-up job. When someone renovates an existing house, they don't bulldoze it over and start from scratch; they merely fix up what's already there. Not so with the new birth. The old must die completely and the new must live.

2 Peter 3:13, 14, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

Are you looking forward to being citizens of the new earth? If so, then we must be new creatures here, "Without spot, and blameless." When we think of it that way, we really need a Saviour, don't we? Not the kind of Saviour that will put a clean robe over dirty clothes, but the kind that will make us "righteous even as He is righteous."

I'd like to close by rereading the first Scripture we started with, **Lamentations 3:22, 23**. The word LAMENTATION means to "cry out in grief." Jeremiah was weeping over the fact that his people had chosen a second hand experience. They thought their salvation was secure because they were Abraham's seed, regardless of how wicked they were inside, but Jeremiah knew that God was willing to give them a new beginning and a Happy New Year. At the time they were written, these words applied to an entire nation, but now to individuals who are willing to follow Jesus.

Lamentations 3:22, 23, "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

Before we pray I'd like to read "*A New Year's Poem for Christians*" by Mary Fairchild. I don't know who she is, but truer words were never spoken. She writes,

Instead of making a New Year's resolution.
Consider committing to a biblical solution.
Your promises are easily broken.
Empty words, though earnestly spoken.

But God's Word transforms the soul,
by His Holy Spirit making you whole.
As you spend time alone with Him,
He will change you from within.

If that's what you want this morning, I would ask you to bow your heads with me as we commit our souls to the One who loved us and gave His life that we might enjoy face to face communion with God and not be consumed.