

New Year's Resolutions probably provide more benefit to our economy than what they do for those who are **making** the resolutions:

- In the 1st week of January, gym memberships soar
- Dieting programs gain **lots** of new participants
- Nicotine supplements sell themselves

New Years is a time to make a commitment to make those long overdue changes, that we all feel we need to make in our lives.

New Year's – it's all about an opportunity for a new beginning. What a wonderful hope, hey??? A wonderful opportunity for a new beginning.

One of my sons (and you may be able to guess which one it is) can be rather blunt at times. And when we were talking about what I was going to be preaching on today, and that it's going to be about "new beginnings", because it's New Year's Day, he put on his preaching persona, and said "Has anybody here made any Yew Year's Resolutions?" ... "Well, If they're not about getting closer to God, then they're not worth having... And that's the end of the Sermon".

And I said "That's a good message. Do you want to preach it?" ... And the fact that I'm up here today, should give you the answer....

But even though that's blunt, that's a pretty good message isn't it???

If your new year's resolution isn't to do with your Christian walk, why isn't it???? What could be more important than that??? Does that mean that we're content with how we are with God???? I hope not. Because the Lord is **always** wanting to take us further:

- He wants to take what little faith we have, and make it bigger.
- He wants to take the talents we're already using, and give us more.
- He wants to give us more opportunities to share our faith.
- He wants to give us more opportunities to depend on His grace and provision
- He wants us to experience more freedom
- He wants to make us more holy
- He wants to give us more opportunities to serve
- He wants us to experience more, the love of our Christian brothers;
- And He wants us, to love them more.
- He wants us to grow in knowledge – to begin to plumb the depths of God and His purposes

Somebody once said, "If we're not moving forwards, we're going backwards. There is no standing still in the Christian faith."

And the Lord always wants to take us further.

I just want to share 2 stories today, of "New Beginnings".

The first, is the story of a woman caught in adultery.

John 8:3-11 (ESV)

³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."]]

Every one of us, at times, feels unworthy before God... We wouldn't be normal if we didn't. When we stand before a Holy God, how can we not be very aware of our sins...

And sometimes the devil plants a little lie in our mind – that lie that says "You can never be forgiven for that". That lie

that says “God doesn’t want you. You’re too evil. You’re too sinful. You’re too broken”....

It’s the lie that leaves us feeling “Dirty; unloved; unwanted; hopeless.

Well, we need to experience, that same forgiveness, that Jesus showed the woman caught in adultery. There is **no** stain of sin, that the grace of God cannot scrub away. Not one of us, is beyond redemption.

There once was a painter who was doing the dodgy. He was saving money by thinning the paint down. Anyway, he was the lowest quote, and won the contract to paint the local church. And sure enough, he used his thinned-down paint. And just as he was finishing off the last few brush-strokes, an enormous storm blew up. There was thunder and lightning, and the rain poured down.... The deluge washed the dodgy paint down into the ground.. And with an enormous clap of thunder, a bolt of lightning struck his trestle, and he fell the ground.

And he knew this had to be God’s judgment upon him for cheating the church with a dodgy product... and he cried out “Lord, what should I do?” ... And the booming voice came from heaven “Repaint. Repaint. And thin no more.”

In Jesus Christ, there is a new beginning, away from a life of sin. There is no sin, that cannot be removed. And when we confess our sins, Jesus says: **“Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”**

It’s a new beginning.

The second story I want to share, is Peter, after his denial of Jesus.

On the night before Jesus was crucified, Jesus said to Peter, "You're going to deny me 3 times before morning" ... "No! I wouldn't do that. I'd go to the death with you."

But twice, Peter did deny Jesus.

Matthew 26:⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "**Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.**" And he went out and wept bitterly.

Can you imagine how Peter felt? I reckon most of us probably can. We've **all** failed Jesus. We've **all** let Him down. Christ has given everything for us. And yet, I know I've failed Him. You know you've failed Him...

And sometimes I feel so terrible – I've failed Him again... But we need to be reminded that our God is the God of new beginnings.

After Jesus was raised from the dead, Jesus met Peter on the beach. And he said:

John 21:¹⁵, "**Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?**" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "**Feed my lambs.**"

¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep."
¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."

Something we may not pick up on in that reading – there’s something really deep going on here. This wasn’t just about Peter denying Jesus 3 times, and so Jesus gave him 3 opportunities to profess his love – there’s more to it than that. Professions of love and commitment can be empty – just like Peter’s profession of commitment, the night before Jesus was crucified.

We’ve talked before about the different types of love in the Greek language. And there’s 2 different Greek words used here, for “love”.

Jesus said: **"Simon, son of John, do you [agape] me more than these?"**

Now, "agape" love, is a self-sacrificing, sacrificial love. It's not so much a feeling, as it is an act of the will. And it's like Jesus is asking "Peter, do you love me with this self-sacrificial love, that's going to cost you dearly???"

And there's something very honest about Peter's reply. **"Yes, Lord; you know that I [phileo] you."**

That means "I love you like a brother".

So, Jesus is asking of him, for one type of love, And Peter is only willing to give him another

So, Jesus asks him again, **"Simon, son of John, do you [agape] me?"**

Do you love me with a love, that always gives of itself, and will put me before yourself?

And Peter honestly replies again: **"Yes, Lord; you know that I [phileo] you."** I'm affectionate towards you, like I am towards a brother.

And on the third time, Jesus says: **"Simon, son of John, do you [phileo] me?"**

Do you love me like a brother???

Ahhh.... Yes Jesus, you've got it. You do understand. I love you like a brother...

Do you see what's happening here?

Peter wimped out. And he felt terrible that he'd let Jesus down. And Jesus is asking him for this Agape love – the kind of love that wouldn't let him down again. But Peter wasn't sure that he could do that, and all he could offer Him was affection....

And can't we be exactly the same as that? Jesus is asking for our commitment – that we would even die for him... but because of our past failings, we're not sure we can honestly give Him that commitment... We'd like to think we could, but how do we know...

We've let Jesus down before. We'll probably let him down again...

And so all Peter could commit to, was “Jesus, I'm really affectionate towards you.”... And that was enough.

Jesus would do the rest. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon Peter, and gave him a courage and boldness, that he never had before. And eventually, Peter would be martyred for Jesus.

But there on the beach, he wasn't that man. He was weak, broken, and deeply ashamed of how he'd let Jesus down. And Jesus took him (in all of his weakness) and gave him a new beginning.

And when we stand before Jesus Christ, and confess, “Lord, I am weak. I’ve let you down. And I’m not sure I won’t do it again.... But I love you Lord...”

Jesus gives us a new beginning.

Let’s pray.....