

God is the Author of New Beginnings!

January 7, 2018 Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

Over my lifetime I have heard people say, “My life is such a mess, I wish I could just start all over and have a second chance to make different decisions.” Where does that “wish come from?” That desire comes from the Lord Jesus Christ for He is the God of new beginnings. If you search the Old Testament, you will find many examples of God starting over again. Look at the first few verses of Genesis chapter 1. It reads like this: “In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was barren with no form of life. It was under a roaring ocean covered by darkness. But the Spirit of the Lord was moving over the water.” If you continue reading this chapter you will find that God spoke and the light started shining; God separated the light from darkness and called it day and night. That was the first day. God divided the segments of time into 24 hours in a day and the following morning is a new day. After seven days comes a new week. After four or five weeks, comes a new month and after 12 months starts a new year. There are four seasons and there are seasons of life. God divided our years into segments of childhood, youth, adulthood, middle age, and senior citizen years. We have an opportunity to start over when we gain the knowledge of what God’s plan is for our lives and we discover the treasures that our inheritance entails as born again Christians.

In Genesis chapter 6 we learn that the people that inhabited the earth were evil and disobedient to God. Everything they thought and planned was evil. He was sorry that he had created them. He decided that he would destroy all the people that he had created.

He considered destroying all people and animals that were on the face of the earth. In verse 8, God was pleased with one man named Noah. He was the only person who lived right before God and obeyed God. He had a wife and three sons named Shem, Ham and Japheth. God saw that all the other people on the earth were cruel, violent, and their thoughts were wicked. He saved Noah, his family and a remnant of all living creatures by instructing Noah to build an ark and to place provisions for his family and the animals into the ark. When Noah had completed the task, God caused the animals to go into the ark along with Noah and his family and God shut the door. Floods fell upon the earth and all who were on the outside of the ark were destroyed. Forty days and forty nights the rains fell and all human life, birds, animals, reptiles were destroyed except for the ones that God had preserved in the ark. 150 days later the waters began to recede.

Life began anew for inhabitants of the earth. The first thing Noah did was to build an altar of worship to the Lord. He sacrificed animals to the Lord and God was pleased. He made a promise never to destroy the earth with water again and also he said that as long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night. (See verse 22). The rainbow was placed in the sky to remind people of God’s promise never to destroy the earth’s inhabitants with water again.

God's mercy is new every morning. In Lamentations 3:8-33, the author writes concerning the hard trials he has had to face in life. He feels like his life is finished and he can't count on the Lord to deliver him out of his situations. He thinks about his wanderings and his troubles and how lonely he feels and how miserable his life is. That is all that he can think about and he gets depressed. Then he remembers something that fills his soul with hope. The LORD's kindness never fails! If he was not a merciful God, we would all be destroyed. The LORD can be trusted to show mercy every morning. Then the author says, "Deep in my heart I say, the LORD is all I need: I can depend on Him!" 1 Chronicles 16:34 tells us that God's steadfast love endures forever. If you read Psalms 1:36, you will understand how God's love never fails and by his word and power He sustains his creation and protects those who trust in him. The entire Psalm praises God for all of his goodness and loving care to his children.

Last week I spoke of Rahab and how God transformed her life from one of immorality and disobedience to a life of faith and redemption. This same work is done in each and every person who puts their trust and faith in the living God. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:17. This verse tells us that everyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything becomes new. God has done it all by sending Christ to make peace between himself and us and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others. Faith is an action word. God tells us to trust, obey and move forward and we don't always know exactly where his will and plan will take us. We don't need to understand; we need to read his word and obey it. Look at Joshua chapter 3. The Children of Israel were preparing for the victory God had promised them in taking over Jericho. The Bible said that the people left Acacia and went to the Jordan River and camped there for the night. Two days later their leaders went throughout the camp shouting, "When you see some of the priests carrying the ark, you will know it is time to cross to the other side. You have never been there before and you won't know the way unless you follow the ark. But keep some distance between you and the ark." Joshua told the people to prepare themselves for worship as the Lord was going to do some amazing things for them. The priests were sent ahead of the people and God told them to go to the River Jordan, step into the waters and stand there. Joshua told the people that God's enemies were on the other side of that river but as soon as the priests stepped into the water, it would stop flowing and pile up as if someone had built a dam across the river. The priests obeyed and as soon as they stepped into the water, the water dried up and the children of Israel crossed over on dry land. Faith is acting on God's word whether we understand why, how, when or where. Obey even when the path is unfamiliar to you, and it doesn't feel like it will work out for you. It means trusting God with the outcome of the path He is directing you to. Feelings cannot be trusted; faith is claiming the promise and claiming it. Naaman, the leper, would never have received his healing if he had not obeyed the command of the prophet, Elisha. He didn't want to dip in the dirty Jordan

River; he thought about all the clean rivers that were in Syria and wondered why that wouldn't be more suitable if dipping was going to cleanse his skin. He didn't understand that God was revealing to him his power, his mercy and love by tearing down the pride in Naaman's heart and causing him to act on faith for that which he desired of the Lord. Read 2 Kings Chapter 5 to learn about the new beginning in Naaman's life.

Many people's lives were transformed by coming in contact with Jesus Christ when He walked on this earth. Many more people's lives have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit through people being obedient and preaching and teaching the truth of God's word causing faith to grow in the hearts of men. The Bible calls it "the foolishness of preaching." See 1 Corinthians 1:21.

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus at night and asked him some questions. See John 3. The chapter starts out by saying that many Jews put their faith in Jesus Christ after the Passover because of the many miracles that he performed. Nicodemus told Jesus that the Jewish leaders knew that He had been sent by God to teach the people for He would not be able to do miracles unless God was with him.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth that you must be born again if you are going to see God's kingdom." Nicodemus asked how this could happen. Was Jesus suggesting that a man enter his mother's womb and be born a second time? Jesus explained that there are two births, a natural birth and a spiritual birth. "You must be born of water and of the spirit or you cannot enter the kingdom of God". Only God's spirit can change your heart and bring you into a right standing with God. God's spirit gives new life, eternal life. Jesus went on to explain that the story of Moses lifting the bronze serpent up before the people of Israel brought healing and life to them; even so the son of Man would also be lifted up on a cross to bring spiritual healing and salvation to a lost and dying world. (See also Numbers 21:9) The most familiar verse in the Bible is John 3:16 and here Jesus states it to Nicodemus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn the world but through faith in him, they could have redemption and a new beginning."

Oftentimes, Jesus warned those that he healed and delivered not to return to their old way of life. In John 5, Jesus healed a man who had been sick for 38 years. He was lying on a mat near the pool of Bethzatha. People came there once a year when an angel touched the waters and the first person who stepped into the water after the angel touched it would be healed. This man had come hoping year after year to be the first one into the water, but someone else always got there first. He had long given up any hope of healing until Jesus came by. Jesus asked him if he wanted to be healed and he told Jesus that he had no one to help him. Jesus told him to stand up and take up his bed and walk. Immediately he had the strength to obey and he began to walk away carrying his bed. The Jews were angry that he was carrying his bed on the Sabbath and they denounced Jesus for being

disrespectful of the Sabbath Day. When the Jewish leaders asked him who gave him the command to carry his bed, he didn't know who it was. Later Jesus met the man in the temple and told him, "You are now well. But don't sin anymore or something worse might happen to you." The religious people, upon learning that it was Jesus who healed him caused trouble for Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath Day.

In John 8, Jesus went into the temple, sat down and began teaching the people. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses brought in a woman who had been caught in adultery. They forced her to stand in the middle of the crowd and then they spoke to Jesus. "Teacher", they said, "This woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses teaches that a woman like this should be stoned to death! What do you say?"

The question was posed, not for learning; they were testing him and looking for ways to bring some charges against him. But Jesus simply bent over and started writing on the ground with his finger. They kept on asking Jesus about the woman. Finally he stood up and said, "If any of you have never sinned, then go ahead and throw the first stone at her!" Once again he bent over and began writing on the ground. The people left one by one, beginning with the oldest down to the youngest. Finally, Jesus and the woman were alone. Jesus stood up and asked her, "Where are your accusers? Isn't there anyone left to accuse you?" She answered, "No sir." Then Jesus told her, "Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more." Jesus gave her a new beginning and a chance to start over.

There is a notorious tax collector who was hated by the Jews because of his wealth that he gained by overcharging people on their taxes and pocketing the money. In Luke 19, Jesus was going through Jericho where Zacchaeus lived. Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus and he wanted to see him for himself. Because he was so short, he would never be able to look above the crowd so he decided to climb a sycamore tree where he could look down and see Jesus as he passed by. When Jesus got close to the tree where Zacchaeus was sitting, he stopped and looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down. I must abide in your house today." Zacchaeus hurried down and received Jesus joyfully at his house. People started grumbling about the fact that this man was a sinner man, yet Jesus chose to spend the day at his house that day. Later that day, Zacchaeus told Jesus that he was going to give half of his property to the poor and he would pay back four times as much to everyone that he had cheated. Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to your family so that you may be saved."

The common thread between all of these stories is that change was made when Jesus came to their rescue. He doesn't allow us to wallow in our sinful lifestyles or continue down the road of destruction; he delivers us from the miry clay and sets our feet on the king's highway. People who claim to be Christians and continue in their sinful habits have not obeyed the commandment of the Lord to abstain from evil, to forsake their sins that so easily attach themselves to us, and to imitate Christ and his teachings. We must be willing to forsake the world and its pleasures and dedicate our lives to building up his kingdom.